

In Search of Peace for Afghanistan

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Historical Letters of President Najibullah and Dr. M. Hassan Kakar

A Collection of Essays

Edited by

Jawan Shir Rasikh

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Cover illustration—President Najibullah's and M. Hassan Kakar's original letters in Dari (courtesy of Kakar's family).

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To Those Who Have Been Striving for Peace in Afghanistan

FOREWORD

Lakhdar Brahimi

*Former Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary General for Afghanistan,
1996-1997, and 2001-2004*

When the Soviet Union at long last agreed to withdraw its troops from Afghanistan in 1989 but was still supporting its government, President Najibullah had a plan for reconciliation for his country. He explained and defended it in the letters to Professor Hassan Kakar published in this volume. As an Afghan academic, having opposed Soviet military presence in his country from day one, Kakar suggested a fundamentally different plan.

Najibullah's plan made sense as long as Soviet support was available to him. When the Soviet Union ceased to exist, he was in trouble. The United Nations' plan submitted in 1992 by Benon Sevan, the then Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary General, contained elements from Najibullah's plan and ideas from the Mujahedin factions. It resembled the ideas put forward by Kakar. Najibullah accepted it readily. So did the Mujahedin factions and Pakistan at first. The United States and the Soviet Union had seemingly offered their support to Benon Sevan's plan. But the Soviet Union was fast disintegrating and the United States simply lost interest in Afghanistan. When Benon Sevan arrived in Kabul to take Najibullah away to India, as the first step in the implementation of his plan, he found that the Mujahedin had changed their minds and Najibullah had been betrayed by practically all of his supporters: he was not even allowed to reach the airport and leave with Benon Sevan in the middle of that fateful April 1992 night. That was the end of Najibullah's role in Afghanistan's affairs and the beginning of his personal tragedy.

When I suspended my first mission in Afghanistan, in 1997, I warned the Security Council that I was giving up in protest for their lack of interest in Afghanistan and the little support I was receiving from them. I also warned them that they were wrong to neglect Afghanistan in such a manner because it was far away, poor and of no great strategic importance to anyone. That was wrong, I said, because even a conflict in such an unimportant country may well spill over far and wide one of these days. As we know it did, on 11 September, 2001.

When the then United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan called me back immediately after that tragedy, there was, all of a sudden, a huge interest for Afghanistan. It was taken for granted that that would translate into strong and lasting support for the United Nations peace plan. The Bonn Conference was a success largely because of that level of international interest. It served Afghanistan and International Community well. We naturally were fully aware that each major power had come with its own agenda to Bonn and it was the duty of the United Nations to do its best to provide all of the support it could to the people of Afghanistan. And that is what we did as representatives of the United Nations and the international community.

In Bonn, I told the Afghan participants several times that they were not fully representative of the diversity of the people of Afghanistan. I also told them that if we do come up with a good agreement, and then you go back home and reach out to all those who are not represented here, nobody will remember that the participants did not represent all of the people of Afghanistan.

The Taliban were naturally not present in Bonn. They had not been invited and I believe that if they had been, they would have refused to come. Although they were controlling almost 95% of the country on the eve of 9/11, they had been routed by the might of the US War machine. Many were killed; some were detained; others crossed into Pakistan. But, the overwhelming majority were not accounted for; they just melted down back in the midst of their communities. To those who said that it could be very constructive to seek the Taliban out, both the new leadership in Afghanistan as well as the foreign powers represented in the country were unanimous: the Taliban are gone; they have been defeated; they do not exist anymore. And that was that.

I was told not long ago that Taliban leaders were open to and made peace overtures to the new Afghan government of President Hamid Karzai, although it is unclear if the efforts were pursued seriously and through trusted sources. It is clear though that the new Afghan government and its major international allies didn't prioritize peace with the Taliban at the beginning. Be that as it may, we know today that those who, in the early days of the implementation of the Bonn Agreement said the Taliban were not going to disappear and suggested - too timidly perhaps - to seek them out should have been heard. Perhaps the agreement's implementation could have been better - it had mechanisms to make the government more inclusive.

Despite all the work of so many people these past years, the country fell back into war. Lessons to learn from the past are many. The little I picked up during my personal involvement in peace making tells me that there is nowhere an exhaustive list, a check list of sorts, that would offer the perfect road map for resolving a conflict that does not exist. It is now well known that "no two conflicts are alike." The central requirement is, each time, a good, comprehensive understanding of the conflict - and that is easier said

than done. We know always much less than there is to know. There is an almost endless list of questions to answer to try to understand a particular conflict: what is this country, its past, its present? Who are the groups involved and their leaders? Who are the victims? Nor is it possible to stop at what is actually happening inside the country concerned. There invariably is a vitally important regional context and a wider, international context. Even the so-called international community will be different from one place to the other, from one conflict to the next. For Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran and India are more important than the whole of Europe, Africa and Latin America put together. For the Congo, little Burundi is more important than Japan, Indonesia and all of Eastern Europe.

In this connection, again in my personal experience, outsiders seem to find it difficult to resist the temptation of projecting their own likes and dislikes, their own prejudices, perhaps even their fantasies, into the equation. There is a tendency – natural perhaps, but on the whole rather negative – to pass hasty judgments and to rush to conclusions and even solutions that have little to do with the hard realities of the situation.

Contributors to this volume -Afghans and non-Afghans, academics and practitioners - bring an impressive amount of wisdom and experience to the literature on Afghanistan. Let us also take a close look at who is doing the analysis here: some internationals, yes, some veterans of Afghanistan's long wars – but mostly a new generation of Afghans, most of who were born around and or after 1990 when Najibullah and Hassan Kakar corresponded. They include Kakar's son, Kawun Kakar, a lawyer who worked for the United Nations Assistance Mission for Afghanistan after 2001, when I was the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in Kabul. There are so many others, men and women, who have studied in the world's best universities to search again peace for Afghanistan.

When people ask me how to work for peace, I say, there is no substitute to listening to the people. That is the ultimate test of the quality of what one has learned from experts, books, and reports. So I will stop talking and just suggest that we listen to other writers who study the various aspects of war making and peacemaking efforts in Afghanistan.

PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This volume is the result of dedicated, solid, and volunteering work put in by many people and institutions, both from inside and outside Afghanistan.

The project started first with a conversation in Kabul a year ago between Kawun Kakar, Janan Mosazai, Omar Sharifi, and Jawed Ludin, about Najibullah–Kakar letters exchanged in 1990 and the lessons they offer for peace in Afghanistan. The initial idea was to translate the letters from Dari into Pashto and English, and publish them for the public audience. At the end of that discussion, however, it was agreed to expand the initiative and have a wider call for papers based on the letters with the aim of a fresh and critical reflection on past and present of peacemaking efforts concerning Afghanistan. Not much later, Jawan Shir Rasikh was invited to join the conversation, and graciously accepted to lead the entire editing process.

As it is detailed in the introduction to this volume, the response from the contributors was overwhelmingly positive. We are immensely grateful to all of them for they made this volume possible. We also thank the Afghan participants of two pre-publication events held in late summer of 2020 in Kabul at Kakar History Foundation and Heart of Asia Society. Their insights on war and peace makings in Afghanistan were valuable for writing the introduction. We would like to take this opportunity to extend our collective gratitude also to author of the foreword to the volume, the always gracious Lakhdar Brahimi.

The production of such a volume requires extensive specialist and technical assistance that the following persons provided with dedication and patience: Maiwand Abbas, Mostafa Fata, Farhad Farhaad, Fabrizio Foschini, Baburzai Hiwaddust, Husna Jalal, Suleman Khplwak, Thomas Kraemer, Charlotte Maxwell-Jones, Sultan Sanjar Rasikh, Saifullah Sikandary, and Samiullah Zyar. We are grateful to all of them. In addition to the current English volume which is being translated into Pashto and Dari, a connected but separate independent volume with contributions in Dari and Pashto is simultaneously being published, with contributions by ten Afghan scholars and public intellectuals, including former and current members of Afghan Mujahedin and communist parties, civil society, and policy practitioners. We thank Zarin Anzoor and Khalilullah Afzali for overseeing the editing and translation of the Dari-Pashto volume.

We would like to extend our gratitude to several persons who also shared generously their time, expertise, and resources. Our thanks go to Ahmad Farid Tookhy whose inputs helped shape importantly the volume in the beginning. We also thank

Bashir Bakhshi, Faisal Chaudhary, Manizha Hakimi, Gran Hewad, Idrees Ilham, Abaceen Nasimi, Saman Nasser, Latif Salem, and Waheed Wafa for their generous time, either reading some version of the introduction to this volume, and or sharing their thoughtful views about it. Our gratitude also goes to Partha Chakrabartty for his superb copyediting of the essays. In a spirit of reflection, we thank Khwaga Kakar, Kawun's sister and the daughter of Dr. Hassan Kakar, for her personal and professional efforts, commitment, and labor to ensure that all goes well and efficiently with the publication of the volume, including its cover design. Last but not least, we are indebted to the Royal Government of Norway for their generous funding support for publication of this volume. In particular, we are grateful to Per Albert Ilsaas, the Norwegian Special Representative for Afghanistan, and Abdul Suboh Faizy, Senior Advisor to the Royal Norwegian Embassy in Kabul for their support.

We hope this volume proves a worthwhile contribution to the reflections, conversations, and debates on the current peace process concerning Afghanistan, and one to which, every Afghan woman and man looks at with utmost desire and hope for peace in their country, which we also believe is both more imperative and within reach now more than at any point over the past forty years.

Kawun Kakar, Jawed Ludin, Janan Mosazai, and Jawan Shir Rasikh

Kabul and Toronto, February 2021

PREFATORY NOTE

The contributors to this volume have used a variety of transliteration styles and spelling conventions in English from Arabic script based languages, such as Dari and Pashto. To make it easier for non-specialist readers, the editor has decided to standardize as necessary the use of non-Latin terms, such as ‘Hasan’ or ‘Hassan’ and or ‘Najib,’ ‘Najibullah,’ ‘Najeeb,’ or ‘Najeebullah.’ Diacritics have not been changed from individual essays when they were used. Common words, such as ‘mujahedin,’ are not italicized and translated. All translation and transliteration in the introduction to the volume are by Jawan Shir Rasikh and Kawun Kakar unless noted otherwise.



Map. Afghanistan; source: United Nations.

INTRODUCTION

Jawan Shir Rasikh, Kawun Kakar, and Janan Mosazai

‘If wars abound, so do peace efforts.’¹

The origin of this collection of essays lies in the discovery in 2019 of three letters of Afghanistan President Najibullah (1949–1996) and historian Mohammad Hassan Kakar (1929–2017).² The letters were exchanged in 1990, two years after the signing of the Geneva Accords of 1988, affirming the withdrawal of the Soviet forces from Afghanistan after ten years of conflict since the invasion of the country in 1979.³ In the correspondence, Najibullah and Kakar share a variety of views about the nature of ‘war and peace makings’⁴ in their country and the future of post-Soviet Afghanistan, in the context of Najibullah’s National Reconciliation Policy (NRP), and geopolitics of the then internationalized conflict in Afghanistan despite the Soviet withdrawal from the country a year earlier.⁵

¹ Kakar, *Soviet Invasion*, (1995), 106.

² The letters were found in early 2019 by Suleman Khplwak, a staff member of Kakar History Foundation, when the works, correspondence, and other historical materials of Kakar were being cataloged after being moved to Kabul from Concord, California, where he passed away in 2017. For more information on the Foundation, see www.kakarfoundation.com. For the original manuscript version of the letters in Dari (the Afghan Persian), see Appendix A to this volume; for their English translation, see Appendix B. Najibullah’s letters and Kakar’s letter are hereafter cited as NL and KL. All quotations from the letters in this introduction are based on the manuscript copy.

³ More later on the Geneva Accords and Soviet withdrawal.

⁴ In this introduction, ‘war and peace makings’ is used in plural as a heuristic for elucidating the simultaneity of war and peace in Afghanistan, meaning that while various types of wars (e.g., Soviet war, Mujahedin wars, Taliban wars, and ‘war on terror’) have been waged in Afghanistan during the past forty-plus years, there have been also a number of attempts to bring peace to the country, though unsuccessful yet.

⁵ The existing literature on war and peace makings in Afghanistan is taxing and in many languages. As of this writing (February 2021), a simple Google search in English, such as “wars in Afghanistan,” results in more than one million hits, while “peace in Afghanistan” results in close to three million hits; there are currently hundreds of active governmental, public, and private agencies, organizations, and programs dealing, often overlappingly, with matters of war and peace makings concerning Afghanistan both inside and outside the country. Only those works directly relied upon are cited.

Najibullah and Kakar exchanged a number of broad and specific ideas, including their collective recognition and emphasis on the possibility of making a lasting peace which “is in reality firstly the responsibility of every individual Afghan,” flaws of the NRP, the need for creation of an inclusive and self-determining governing national framework, and the future of millions of Afghan refugees and internally displaced persons. In addition to focusing on the domestic aspects of war and peace makings in Afghanistan, they recognize and emphasize the nature of foreign military and political interventions in Afghanistan, especially then by the Soviet Union and Pakistan (both countries “half” of the problem in Afghanistan as Kakar describes it), as impediments to peace.⁶ They both appreciate and emphasize that any resolution to the conflict in Afghanistan was also, as Kakar summarizes it, “in the end, in reality, beyond the power of Afghans, depended [rather] upon the foreign powers (*qudrat’ha-yi khariji*).”⁷ Moreover, while both Najibullah and Kakar agree that it was impossible to resolve the conflict in Afghanistan without foreign powers ceasing their interventions in the internal affairs of Afghans (*mauzu’at dakhili afghanha*), they concur that the Afghan people “could not wait for foreigners” to bring peace to their country, and that “it would also be a useless vanity not to seek the necessary assistance [to end] our national and human catastrophe,” which has become “nowadays a tragedy, to the extent that it appears irresolvable.”⁸

The three letters, two from Najibullah and one from Kakar, are together a total of forty pages in their original manuscript version. The first letter, which initiates this “dialogue” (*bahs*) as Najibullah calls his correspondence with Kakar, is dated Dalw 1368 (February 1990), and is five pages, while the second letter a “reply” as Kakar characterizes his letter to Najibullah, is dated June 12, 1990 (Jawza 22, 1369), and is twenty-nine pages. The third letter from Najibullah is six pages, and is dated Saratan 30, 1369 (July 21, 1990).⁹ However, after the second letter written as a response to Kakar in which Najibullah shows keen interest in the various ideas of the former, the correspondence thereafter ceases for reasons unknown.¹⁰

⁶ KL, 12-14.

⁷ KL, 4.

⁸ KL, 2.

⁹ To keep the calendric integrity of the letters, the mixed date system, namely the Afghan Hejri Shamsi and Gregorian calendars that Najibullah and Kakar use in their letters, has been followed. While it is now a standard practice in Afghan state internal and external legal and political affairs as well as across much of the Afghan society and public culture (e.g., local media) to use simultaneously a mixture of Islamic and Afghan Hejri Shamsi and Gregorian calendars, this was hardly the case in Afghanistan before the Soviet invasion of the country.

¹⁰ Kakar himself translated in 1990 into English Najibullah’s first original letter and his reply letter. Kakar’s translations of these two letters into English included to this volume were edited for corrections by Kawun Kakar and Jawan Shir Rasikh based on the original Dari manuscript copy of the letters also included to this volume. Najibullah’s second letter was translated into English by Ambassador Janan Mosazai.

The exchange of these letters, or even the discontinuation of the correspondence, might be best understood when put in the larger personal-political contexts in which these two elite but also socially and politically different persons—one a communist president presiding over a post-occupation battered country and another a non-party university professor residing in self-exile in the United States—had known each other prior to their correspondence. Indeed, both Najibullah and Kakar recognize in their letters, a “bitter past” (*guzasht-i talkh*)¹¹ “former times” (*sawabiq*)¹², and other past “roles of this and or that side” (*mas’uliyatha-yi ein ya antaraf*) in the lead up to and during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan,¹³ but they also say that it was time for them and all other Afghans to search for “a way out” (*rah-i birun raft*) to end the “bleeding crisis” (*buhran-i khunin*) in Afghanistan and, “pay attention towards building a fair, safe, and prosperous future for themselves and the future generations of [our] country” (*mutawajjih-i sakhtan-i yak ayenda-i ziba, masun wa murafah bara-yi khud wa naslha-yi ayenda-i kishwar*).¹⁴

Neither Najibullah nor Kakar point explicitly in these letters to any previous personal and political relations, although in the immediate years prior to their correspondence in 1990, they both knew each other in a number of specific contexts. One context was the years (1982-1987), when Kakar was a prisoner in Kabul and Najibullah, prior to becoming president, led KHAD, the intelligence security agency of Afghan communist governments, the main organ responsible for purging the People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA, the communist party of Afghanistan) of party and non-party opposition and critics, including the alleged arrest, torture, and killing of an unknown number of people across Afghanistan. Najibullah and Kakar do not mention in this correspondence their interaction in 1982 when Kakar and several other professors from Kabul University, then the first battleground for Afghan nationalist, internationalist, and other religious and secular elites, including Kakar and Najibullah, were imprisoned as “anti-regime” by KHAD.¹⁵ As such, it might not be a coincidence that KHAD is mentioned by Kakar ten times in different contexts in his letter to Najibullah, describing KHAD as “a must thing to be dismantled” (*bayad az bain birawad*) as part of his nationwide and global reconciliation efforts and outreach to his enemies and critics

¹¹ NL, 1.

¹² KL, 2.

¹³ NL, 1.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Kakar was arrested for his opposition to the Soviet invasion and sentenced in 1982 to eight years, meaning that he would have finished his term the same year (1990) that he and Najibullah exchanged their letters. Kakar’s arrest was condemned by international human rights groups, including the Amnesty International, which designated him a “prisoner of conscience.” For details of the arrest of Kakar and his colleagues from Kabul University, see Elmi, *Sovietization of Afghan Education*, (1987), 5-6, and 29; and Weintraub, “Afghan scholar,” (1988).

in order to achieve the goals of the NRP.¹⁶ We also know from Kakar himself as he talks about it elsewhere that it was in January 1987 that Najibullah announced publicly his NRP, and when he was released by Najibullah from prison as part of a group of professors. In his quest for peace, Najibullah then established the High Commission for National Reconciliation (*Kamisun-i Āli Musalihe-yi Milli*) and, as Kakar says in the same context, he was invited to become a member of it.¹⁷

Moreover, to put these three letters in the larger context of the time, while Kakar could be one of the well-known intellectual Afghans who responded to Najibullah's call for reconciliation and peace despite their bitter pasts and different personal and political backgrounds, he was not the only person with whom Najibullah exchanged letters as part of his broader reconciliation and peace efforts. As a matter of fact, Najibullah sends on the same year the same first letter that he sends to Kakar to Mohammad Jamil Hanifi, the Michigan-based Afghan-American anthropologist.¹⁸ As several contributors to this volume highlight, in addition to Afghan intellectual elites, Najibullah also wrote directly to the last king of Afghanistan (Zahir Shah, r. 1933-1973), Ahmad Shah Masoud, one of the leading Mujahedin commanders, and a number of other Afghan and non-Afghan elite figures at the time. While these letters might be collectively revealing in the sense that how individual and collective Afghan political and intellectual elites both inside and outside Afghanistan on opposite sides of the conflict back then communicated and interpreted and or simply made sense of the historical and political fallout of the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan and Najibullah's reconciliation and peace efforts, the larger point that needs emphasis here is that in addition to the personal and political contexts and interactions of Najibullah and Kakar that were briefly introduced here, these letters have other temporal, political, and related contexts, as well as epistolographic aesthetics, epistolary stylistic features, and various moral elements whose examination in detail are outside the purview of this introduction.¹⁹

After the discovery of the letters in 2019 and a preliminary assessment of their contents, namely dealing with various aspects of war and peace makings in contemporary Afghanistan and, more importantly, showing the various attempts by Afghans themselves

¹⁶ KL, 18-20.

¹⁷ Kakar says he declined the offer, and instead went to self-exile after his release in 1987, first to Pakistan and then to the US in 1989. For other details of Kakar's release and invitation to join the reconciliation commission, see Kakar, *Soviet Invasion*, 95.

¹⁸ For Najibullah-Hanifi exchange, see Hanifi, "*Du sand-i tarikhi*," (2015).

¹⁹ For example, all three letters exchanged between Kakar and Najibullah are written in Dari, except a one sentence Pashto saying and a two-line verse from the seventeenth century poet Khushal Khan Khattak that Kakar includes in his letter. Najibullah's letters are composed on government letterhead with government seals, although Najibullah addresses his ideas in both personal and party language. Najibullah's letters are also written on Soviet-imported typewriters, which were then popular in Afghanistan's complex scribal bureaucracy, while Kakar's letter is written by hand in Shikasta Nasta'liq style.

on different sides of the conflict searching then for peace for their country, a diverse group of specialist scholars, public intellectuals, commentators, policy practitioners, and members of the civil society, both from inside and outside Afghanistan, were invited to analyze the letters and juxtapose them with other contemporary materials, peace plans, and peace processes. Additionally, in the conception of the volume, several Afghanistan-based scholars, public intellectuals, government and policy practitioners, journalists, and members of the civil society (several of whom are contributors to this volume), were also invited to two pre-publication reading and discussion events of the letters, held in Kabul.

The objective in both contributions to the volume and the reading of the letters in person was for the participants to analyze, historically or otherwise, the letters based on their own fields of expertise. There were several goals for this. One objective was to use the letters as an example to revisit and understand the reasons for the ‘failure’ of Najibullah’s NRP and other peace plans and processes, and the historical lessons for the current war and peace making processes. Not necessarily limiting the focus to NRP, the contributors were also invited to provide fresh analyses and insights about the pending American withdrawal from Afghanistan, the intra-Afghan peace talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban, and the immediate or long-term implications to Afghan society of these two unfolding but uncertain processes of simultaneous war and peace makings. Speaking specifically of time, the essays in the volume cover two different but connected periods of war and peace makings in Afghanistan, 1987–1992, and 2001–2021.²⁰

In the first period, most specifically by February 15, 1989, the Soviet Union had completed its military withdrawal from Afghanistan as per the terms of the Geneva Accords. These accords were a number of bilateral agreements signed in Geneva, Switzerland, on April 14, 1988, between the then Republic of Afghanistan and the Islamic Republic of Pakistan on the one hand, and the United States and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics on the other hand, then the main regional and international parties involved in the war inside Afghanistan.²¹ Like the contributors to this volume, many scholars, especially political scientists and others from the sub-fields of diplomacy

²⁰ It is useful to note that an organized discussion of periodization of wars or correlation between time and conflict in Afghanistan is beyond the scope of this introduction. We can say, for example, that 1979, the year that the Soviets invaded Afghanistan and one year after President Daud Khan (1973–1978) was overthrown by Afghan communists, is a traditional point of departure in many works on the beginning of modern conflicts in Afghanistan. This type of periodization, however, ultimately has also its epistemic origins in how *inqilab-i saur* or The Saur Revolution (April 1978) as Afghan communists called it, has been interpreted. For instance, see Newell, “Revolution and Revolt,” (1979); Hyman, *Afghanistan*, (1984).

²¹ The United States and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics were signatories to the second accord (*Declaration on International Guarantees*) and third accord (*Agreement on the Interrelationships for the Settlement of the Situation Relating to Afghanistan*) as co-guarantors and witnesses of the accords.

and conflict studies, have heavily studied these accords from different perspectives.²² However, it is important to note that many of them were skeptical, even from day one when the accords were signed, that they would be sufficient to bring to a lasting end the then ‘internationalized war’ inside Afghanistan.²³

For example, one year later after the signing of the accords, a scholar in a final analysis wrote, that “[b]y avoiding provision for self-determination, the Accords simply remitted the Afghan conflict to the battlefield—possibly making little difference to Afghanistan’s long-term political future, but imposing immense short-term costs on the Afghan people. The continuation of ferocious military exchanges well after the Accords came into force grimly confirmed what was obvious from the day the Accords were published—that for many Afghans, they offered only the peace of the grave” (dashes in original).²⁴ Other scholars and independent observers have called the accords “meaningless with regard to peace in Afghanistan”²⁵ and “noble, thorough, and, in part, fictional.”²⁶ Kakar also called the Geneva Accords when they were signed an international “compromise” on Afghanistan, which did not “represent” the will of the Afghan people as the primary victims of the then conflict.²⁷ The accords, as Kakar later expanded his initial characterization elsewhere, “helped the Soviets avoid paying war indemnities. More to the point, the accords—from which the resistance leaders [mujahidin] had been excluded—had no provision to stop the war...the accords in effect increased the chances of war and the destruction of an already battered Afghanistan.”²⁸

The Geneva Accords have recently attracted renewed attention from new Cold War studies scholars. Using declassified sources from the Soviet archives and other sources, including new ethnographic evidence such as interviews with both Russian and global

²² For example, among others, see Maley, “The Geneva Accords of April 1988,” (1989), 12-28; Córdovez, *Out of Afghanistan*, (1992), 243-364.

²³ In this introduction ‘war’ is not approached as a definitive empirical category. It is used in a broad historical-ethnographic human sense to appreciate and elucidate the logic and connection of different modern wars both in the Soviet and post-Soviet Afghanistan. Human in the sense that we also rely for understanding and interpretation of wars in Afghanistan on our individual and generational experiences of growing up with them during the past four decades both inside and outside Afghanistan. While ‘war’ and ‘conflict’ here are used interchangeably, it is important to note the need to make concrete historical and theoretical distinctions between conflicts and wars in modern Afghanistan in order to get an organized historical and legal sense about the nature of war and peace makings in Afghanistan, not just a descriptively political sense.

²⁴ Maley, “the Geneva,” 25.

²⁵ Westad, *The Global Cold War*, (2007), 377.

²⁶ Corwin, *Doomed in Afghanistan*, (2003), 10.

²⁷ Kakar, (in Pashto), *Da Afghanistan pa Bab da Geno Jora*, (1988).

²⁸ Kakar, *Soviet Invasion*, 95. Since the literature on the Soviet withdrawal is vast, see, among others, the various essays in Saikal and Maley (ed.), *The Soviet Withdrawal from Afghanistan*, (1989). For a view of the withdrawal by Afghan communists, see Wakil, *Az Padshahi Mutlaqa ila Suqut-i jamhuri democratic-i Afghanistan*, Vol. 2, (1395/2017); Tookhi, “*doctor najib allah wa khuruj-i niruba-yi nizami shurawi*,” (2009). For a more recent analysis, see Kalinovsky, *A Long Goodbye*, (2011).

military and intelligence veterans of the Soviet-Afghan war, the new works show that the accords were a political and diplomatic success to the Soviet Union and especially to its then leader Mikhail Gorbachev. Although Gorbachev, when he became the leader of the Soviet Union in 1985, was against the withdrawal if it meant a “[dis]honorable” defeat, he steadfastly pursued the withdrawal plan both at personal and policy levels to stop the “bleeding wound” as such that he had described the Soviet imperial venture in Afghanistan.²⁹ This was why Gorbachev firmly supported the end of the Soviet war in Afghanistan through, in the words of one scholar, “old politics, new diplomacy” many rounds of coordinated talks in Geneva between the Soviet Union and the United States at an international level, and between the Soviet Union and Pakistan and Afghanistan at a regional level.³⁰ To achieve an agreement to disengage from Afghanistan as soon as possible and to implement the accords in a way that would be symbolically honorable to the Soviet Union, the Soviet military and diplomats, especially the then KGB chief and foreign minister Vladimir Kriuchkov and Eduard Shevardnadze, also negotiated directly with President Najibullah as the head of the internationally-recognized Afghan government in Kabul, and at the same time reached out to various Afghan Mujahedin armed groups as parties to the conflict.

While the Soviets achieved what they wanted (exit from Afghanistan), several things stand out, especially how the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan was generally translated from historical and political perspectives at a global level as part and beyond the ending of the Cold War. One is that the Soviet Union welcomed the “honorable” conclusion of the war insofar it allowed them to disengage from Afghanistan, not to mention the fact that they left behind a pro-Soviet regime in power in Kabul (then the PDPA-dominated government of Najibullah), and which it continued to support militarily and politically for as long it could. The support to Najibullah’s government was provided in spite of the terms of the Geneva Accords that had barred all parties to the conflict in Afghanistan from intervening in Afghanistan, meaning that they would also stop supplying weapons and other support to all sides of the conflict. Anti-Soviet states, especially the United States, translated symmetrically the continued military, economic, and political assistance of the Soviet Union to Najibullah as a justification to continue military and political backing of their Afghan and non-Afghan Islamist clients, namely, the Pakistan-based *Abzab-e Hafizana-e Mujahedin Afghan* (Seven Mujahedin Afghan Parties), and the so-called Arab Afghans (e.g., Osama Bin Laden).

In addition to Gorbachev and the Soviet public, those in the United States and elsewhere who ideologically opposed the Soviet Union celebrated the exit of the “evil empire” from Afghanistan. It has often been said that the so-called bleeders—anti-

²⁹ Westad, *The Global Cold War*, 372-387.

³⁰ Kalinovsky, “Old politics, New diplomacy,” (2008).

communism and anti-Soviet American hawks, who were deeply involved in the war campaign against the Soviets in Afghanistan—viewed the Soviet defeat in Afghanistan as “revenge” for Vietnam.³¹ This sense of revenge from the Soviets or triumph over communism in general among the American political, military, and scholarly hawks, is best embodied in the conclusion that Louis Dupree, arguably then the most famous American authority on Afghanistan, offered on the Soviet withdrawal. Dupree writes triumphantly in 1989—in the genre of the ‘end of history’ thesis that one of his American contemporaries was formulating around the same time at a theoretical global level³²—in the last paragraph of what it seems to have been his last publication on Afghanistan, in which he couples his longstanding anti-Russian but rather myopic views of Afghans and Afghanistan in a post-Cold War world: “The Afghans stopped six centuries of Russian aggression which began with the Principality of Muscovy. Now Moscow has no place to go, and so can look inward and work to achieve Gorbachev’s announced goals of *glasnost* and *perestroika*. I am convinced of two things: the Afghans will decide their own future; and outside interference from any source will be rejected. Influences are already in place, but outside interference will not be tolerated. Ask the Soviets.”³³ Nevertheless, after the Soviet withdrawal, Najibullah held on to power for three more years.

During the period, in order to keep his regime from falling immediately in the absence of Soviet troops as was commonly predicted, Najibullah relied generally on a twofold open-ended strategy of war and peace makings. On the one hand, he relied on an ‘as much as can’ use of defensive military strategy against his internationally armed and funded Mujahedin opposition who were rejecting his legitimacy as the president of Afghanistan and planning to overrun his government militarily. On the other hand, he pursued a strategy of peace making through reconciliation with his opponents and critics. Yet, the critics were skeptical of his intentions and suspected that his national and global political and diplomatic initiatives were designed so that he might rule post-Soviet Afghanistan as a kind of “democracy by decree” as one contributor to this volume characterizes it. Whether ruling by decree and or ruling by party (*hizb*) as Najibullah and other Afghan communist leaders claimed to have been doing, the last three years of Najibullah’s government is both a critical and a contested period in the contemporary

³¹ For the formation of a class of American political and military avengers of the Soviets in Afghanistan during the then American war involvement in the country, among others, see chapter seven of the book *What We Won* (2014) by Bruce Riedel, who himself was deeply involved in the then American ‘secret’ war in the country.

³² For the ‘end of history’ thesis, see Fukuyama, “The end of History?,” (1989).

³³ Dupree, “Post-Withdrawal Afghanistan,” (1989), 47. It is useful to note that Dupree was jailed and deported from Afghanistan by the Afghan communists in 1978, alleging ties with the US military and security agencies. Apart from his oft-cited monograph, *Afghanistan* (1973), for Dupree’s other dealings in and out of Afghanistan prior and during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, see Allison, “The Goat Caught in Bushkazi,” (2012).

history of war and peace makings in Afghanistan. Najibullah's period of ruling in Afghanistan or more appropriately the very person of Najibullah has become the subject of fierce political contestation in Afghanistan since 2001. Najibullah has turned into a sort of historical nationalist hero to his supporters both for his reconciliation and peace efforts and his historically correct prediction and indeed repeated personal and public warnings, documented heavily in hundreds of televised speeches and correspondence, about violence and destruction that would take place in Afghan society if Mujahedin factional groups refuse to make peace with his government and come to power by force.³⁴

Nevertheless, Najibullah stuck firmly both personally—as we know from his private correspondences—and publicly with his NRP agenda, but he was overwhelmed soon after the Soviet Union disintegrated towards the end of 1991, two years after the Soviet troops had left Afghanistan. Neither Najibullah's irregular military push back, such as the defeat of the Mujahedin in summer of 1989 in the Battle of Jalalabad, nor his policy of NRP, helped him to complete his seven-year term as president of Afghanistan.³⁵ By the beginning of 1992, Najibullah was overpowered by combined political, military, and economic forces from inside and outside Afghanistan. When the Soviet Union collapsed, and Najibullah was left without a patron to sustain his regime, he was privately and publicly singled out by senior members of his own party, such as his go-between foreign minister Abdul Wakil, as well as the Islamist Mujahedin groups, as the single obstacle against a peaceful resolution of the conflict in post-Soviet Afghanistan. In the subsequent political and rapid social deterioration in Afghanistan, especially during the first few months of 1992 when it became certain that Najibullah had to give up power to a new non-communist “pre-transition” government, dubbed also as Council of Impartials, which was being planned by the United Nations (more later), Najibullah was stamped as the single “obstacle against

³⁴ Since 2001 Najibullah's supporters have become a vocal group of political and civil society critics (made up mostly of his former PDPA-Watan comrades and independent individuals), making a new case with the current battered Afghan public that Najibullah's period was one of the “best periods” in the past forty plus years of Afghanistan. This new intellectual and political return (*bazgasht* as they call it) to a new type of historical politics, namely politics of opposition critical of both the current Afghan government and the Taliban as well as the American-led foreign military forces in the country, is however both inchoate and moot. For example, among others, see Akbari (ed.), *Siyasat-i musalib-i milli wa shakhsyat-i doctor najib allah*, (2003); and Wadan, *Musalibe-yi Milli*, (2013). Also see Ruttig and Adili, “The Ghost of Najibullah,” (2017); Wadan, “*mururi-i bar majmu'a-yi az abdul wakil*,” (2017); Akhbar-i Ruz, “*bazgasht-i doctor najibullah ba sabna-yi siyasi afghanistan*,” (1399/2020); and Andishmand, “*musalih-i milli doctor najib allah chura nafarjam mand?*” (1399/2020). For a general critique by ‘New Left’ in Afghanistan of the neoliberal post-conflict development state and society after 9/11 in Afghanistan in the context of Afghanistan modern history, see Atiq Arvand, *Az Rayat ba Shabruvand*, (2020).

³⁵ Najibullah was elected in a Loya Jirga or Grand Assembly in 1987 for seven years as President. On Loya Jirga and production of political legitimacy and hegemony in Afghanistan, see Hanifi, “Editing the past,” (2004).

peace” (*mān-i musaliha*).³⁶ As a matter of fact, the United Nations as an international mediating body and foreign countries, particularly Pakistan, were planning for a good while, at least since the signing of the Geneva Accords, on removing Najibullah from power.³⁷ Unable to resist anymore the combined pressures, Najibullah resigned in March of 1992 under the auspices of what was then a new United Nations peace plan after the original peace plan of the Ecuadorian diplomat and UN representative Diego Córdovez had dissipated in air after the completion of the Soviet withdrawal.³⁸

The new UN peace plan known also as Sevan’s Plan—named after the then Armenian-Cypriot UN representative to Afghanistan Benon Sevan who succeeded Córdovez after the latter did his job to get the Soviet troops out of Afghanistan—failed even more miserably when Sevan could not fulfil his promise to Najibullah to fly him to India after he resigned at his behest.³⁹ Sevan’s Plan and other subsequent regional and inter-Afghan plans and accords, namely the Peshawar Accords of 1992, Islamabad Accords of 1993, and several inter-Afghan party peace making arrangements and agreements inside and outside Afghanistan (e.g., Mujahedin leaders even took an oath in Mecca, Islam’s holiest city, to stop their infighting) did not however result in peace in Afghanistan.⁴⁰ As several contributors to this volume also highlight, on the contrary, these accords further internationalized factional conflicts, political chaos and disorder, and within less than two weeks after Najibullah left the office of presidency and a power vacuum was created, the Afghan state collapsed from both inside and outside when Mujahedin factions—guided and supported by their foreign backers—moved rapidly into Kabul towards the end of April in 1992.⁴¹

With the collapse of the Afghan state, Afghan people had to bear once again as they did during the Soviet war, the internationalized factional conflicts, first between

³⁶ Wadan, “*mururi*,” Corwin, *Doomed*, 13.

³⁷ When Najibullah came to power and during the much of Geneva negotiations, Pakistani delegation’s principal position was that Najibullah had to be removed from power to bring peace to Afghanistan. They dropped this demand at the request of the US after the latter came to an understanding with the Soviets towards the final round of talks in Geneva to not insist on the change of government in Kabul when the Soviets leave the country. See the footnote below.

³⁸ Córdovez, *Out of Afghanistan*, 368-70.

³⁹ For the specificities of Sevan’s Plan, its failure, and the fall of PDPA-Watan government, see, among others, Corwin, *Doomed*, 1-147. After the failure of his mission in Afghanistan, Sevan became infamous for taking bribes from Iraqi authorities, while working in the United Nations Oil-for-Food Program. See the final ‘Third Interim Report’ of Independent Inquiry Committee into the United Nations Oil-for-Food Program, (2005).

⁴⁰ Peshawar and Islamabad accords were agreed under pressure of the Pakistani and several other regional intelligence agency chiefs in Pakistan between infighting Mujahedin parties to divide power among their factions. For the role of these intelligence agencies in determining and shaping these accords, see Kakar, *Soviet Invasion*, 99-103.

⁴¹ Najibullah and his brother Shahpur were brutally killed when the Taliban captured Kabul, and their soulless bodies were publicly choreographed in one of the country’s most well-known and historical public squares, Charahi-yi Aryana.

the various Mujahedin factions and, subsequently, between the Taliban and other groups like United Front, known also as the Northern Alliance, essentially a coalition of former Mujahedin parties based in various Hindukush Mountain towns, valleys, and enclaves in northeastern and northwest-central Afghanistan. Afghan people in the years between 1992 and 2001 not only witnessed the infusion into their already battered society of a variety of non-state militant Islamist actors (e.g., al-Qaeda, etc.) with global political agendas and directly intensified political and military interventions by regional neighboring states (e.g., Pakistan, Iran, India, etc.), but they also witnessed shockingly the destruction of the basic foundation of their civic life as a result of internationalized factional infighting among a variety of local Afghan Islamist parties (e.g., Mujahedin, Taliban, etc.), while the conflict itself became politically and otherwise year after year more disastrous, more bloody, and more catastrophic for Afghan people themselves as the primary victims.⁴²

It is the members of these former Mujahedin and anti-Taliban alliances, old and new Western-educated technocrats, and other newly emerged post-2001 Afghan political, intellectual, and religious elites, who make up many of the current Afghan ruling classes in the ‘new Afghanistan’ that is brought about after American-led global military intervention in the country in 2001. However, since 2001 under the framework of the so-called global war on terror, after twenty years of continued conflict, hundreds if not thousands of yearly ‘special’ military operations,⁴³ and various campaigns of informational war⁴⁴ in and out of Afghanistan, there is no peace in the country. As the twenty-year global war on terror in Afghanistan has entered its third decade without peace in the country, similar to the ten-year war that the Soviets fought, some now argue that history is repeating itself.

As of this writing (February 2021), actually not only is there active conflict nationwide, but also recently daily assassinations of members of the Afghan civil and political societies—namely targeted killing of journalists, judges, prosecutors, educators, aid workers, civilian state employees, and other individuals—have become a reality of

⁴² Among others, see Maley, *The Afghanistan Wars*, (2002), 168-283; Kakar, *Soviet Invasion*, epilogue.

⁴³ For the latest raids in the past two years by American forces and their local Afghan government and non-government mercenaries, see Quilty, “The CIA’s Afghan Death Squads,” (2020).

⁴⁴ The information war in and of Afghan society after 9/11 is complex in which a variety of older and younger social scientists, anthropologists, and other men of knowledge—both Afghans and non-Afghans—have deeply infiltrated into Afghan peoples’ bodies and minds including those of the Taliban “the enemy” (e.g., *Taliban Poetry*) either in the name of “winning” their hearts and minds, and or making them known to the American and other global military strategists, personnel, and groups involved in the current war on terror. For example, see, among others, Singer, “Winning the War of Words” (2001), or the many works of Alex Strick Van Linschoten and Flex Kuehn, available on their website, <https://www.firstdraft-publishing.com>. For a critique of this body of knowledge, see Price, “Human Terrain Systems, Anthropologists and the War in Afghanistan,” (2009); Hanifi, “Vending distorted Afghanistan through patriotic ‘anthropology,’” (2011).

life in Afghan society. While the no-one-taking-responsibility assassination campaign against various state employees, media community, and members of civil society at large has ushered a new era of terror, in particular in the urban areas (e.g., Kabul), where anyone loosely connected with government and or civil and political societies, feels that he or she could be targeted next. The impact of these recent killings is already quite damaging: many have started self-censoring themselves and restricting their activities, while those who can are leaving the country. This new wave of violence has added more fear and uncertainty to the widely-held understanding, both among the Afghan public and the ‘expert’ community, whether peace will come to Afghanistan not because but in spite of the so-called Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan signed on February 2020 between the United States as the global party, and the Taliban as an Afghan militant opposition party to the current war.⁴⁵

The end result of this elusive agreement, which is understood to have secret annexes that are not made public by the US and the Taliban, is not clear. According to the published terms of the agreement, all American and foreign military forces are supposed to leave Afghanistan by May of 2021. However, the new Democratic administration of Joe Biden in the US has publicly stated that it is “reviewing” the agreement with the Taliban.⁴⁶ While it is unclear whether the US will withdraw its military and security personnel and infrastructure as per the terms of the current agreement, what is clear is that Joe Biden is said to be in favor of ending the so-called endless American wars in the Middle East and in Afghanistan in particular.

Several things stand out amid the currently pending American withdrawal from Afghanistan. It is unclear if Biden will become a sort of Gorbachev of a new America, and will firmly and decisively commit as Gorbachev did to disengage once and for all from the war in Afghanistan. It is also unclear whether the Biden Administration will insist on keeping some type of military presence in the country, and in that case whether the Taliban will continue the peace talks with the current Afghan government.

⁴⁵ US State Department, “Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan,” (2020); for waves of violent attacks and assassinations since the signing of the agreement with the US that the Afghan government blames the Taliban for, see reports of the various media and conflict-monitoring agencies on the country during the period, such as the latest quarterly report produced by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, available on <https://unama.unmissions.org/killing-human-rights-defenders-and-media-professionals-afghanistan—new-un-report>.

⁴⁶ The Afghan government and critics have questioned the agreement for its various defects. For example, William Maley, who as noted earlier had pointed out the defects of the Geneva Accords thirty years ago for overlooking the self-determination of Afghanistan and not prioritizing peace in general in the country, has commented on the US–Taliban agreement as follows: “As a Professor of Diplomacy, I’m hard-pressed to think of a more-defective agreement in the history of diplomatic engagement than the one signed on February 29 (2020). Maybe the September 1938 Munich Agreement; maybe the January 1973 Paris Accords on Vietnam. Not many others.” See William Maley, @williammaley1, twitter.

While the current foreign forces cannot remain forever in Afghanistan, the Afghan sides of the conflict themselves have not only failed to move forward from their currently start-to-stop talks to start to prioritize peace over war, such as making ceasefire, in the battered and traumatized Afghan society, but also the current ruling elites are still deeply divided along their factional, class, and political-ideological lines about what kind of post-American Afghanistan they want.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, while this is a make-or-break question of the current intra-Afghan talks that the Afghan parties to the current war and peace making processes will ultimately need to answer, as of now as this volume goes to press, neither Afghan government and Taliban as local parties, nor the American-led international forces as a global party to the war, have reached an 'agreement' to result in peace to Afghanistan after forty plus years of internationalized conflict in the country.

It is therefore unknown what a formal American disengagement from Afghanistan exactly will mean in the short or long-term to the country. The long-term ecological-human and political consequences to Afghanistan from the global war on terror fought in the country on a much greater scale, and, so far, twice the number of years that the Soviets fought in Afghanistan, cannot be known as of yet. As far as a lasting peace in Afghanistan is concerned, however, neither invasions of Afghanistan nor withdrawals from it by global powers have been historically as such about Afghanistan and or about resulting in peace in the country. As a matter of fact, the US political and military leaders have insisted that they have been fighting in Afghanistan for their own 'national interests,' not Afghanistan's even if they say that they would like to see the country in peace. To put it in big historical perspective, at least since the nineteenth century, when Afghanistan gradually came into existence as an independent modern geographical-political entity, the country has been periodically under various global economic and military pressures, interventions, occupations, and withdrawals, for national and global concerns of the invading global powers. The British empire, for instance, in the nineteenth century invaded, occupied, and then withdrew from Afghanistan twice in the name of defending its crown colony of India in the so-called Great Game against the then Russian empire, resulting both times in devastation of Afghan society itself, even if Afghans 'won' the two imperial colonial wars against the British Indian armies.⁴⁸

Similar to the British Indian colonial interventions, the Soviet invasion of and withdrawal from Afghanistan led to periods of internationalized conflict, political

⁴⁷ For an introduction to the state of disunity among current Afghan elites, see Hassan and Wardak, "A house divided," (2020).

⁴⁸ For the British Indian colonial intervention in Afghanistan and imperial-colonial impoverishment of the Afghan society argument in the nineteenth century historiography of Afghanistan and the importance to understand alternatively from the conventional narrative the various modern imperial interventions in Afghanistan and their effects on the Afghan society, see, for example, Hanifi, *Connecting Histories*, (2011). For a review of this argument, see Rasikh, "Connecting Histories," (2020).

violence, and human and societal devastation in the Afghan society, the extent of which was unprecedented in modern Afghanistan and anywhere else in the Soviet-occupied world.⁴⁹ As a result of the Soviet-Afghan war, millions of Afghan people died, became orphans and widows, and formed the largest modern refugee population in the world. Indeed, the political and societal fallout after Soviet intervention in the short and long-term, such as the eventual collapse of the Afghan state three years after the Soviet departure, the subsequent beginning of internationalized civil wars in the country, and the destruction of much of the civic life in post-Soviet Afghanistan, were humanely and politically consequential to 'Afghan people' as the primary victims of them. One of the legacies of the Soviet invasion and withdrawal from Afghanistan is that the country itself as a nation-state has been ever since associated persistently with empirical categories and expressions of 'failed state,' 'war-torn country,' 'opium nation,' 'anti-women,' and a host of other empirical and pejorative expressions in the various national, regional, and global political and historical discourses of modern war and peace makings in the world.

The post-2001 period, when a combined American-led global military force intervened in the country, is however also different in terms of time and actors from the Soviet period when Afghanistan was invaded. While a comparative introduction of the two periods is not the purpose here and thus it is beyond the scope of this introduction, we would like to quickly note that the two periods are different in the basic sense of time, in that as of now, the US-Taliban agreement and the expected foreign military withdrawal from the country in general, and indeed even the future direction of the currently pending intra-Afghan peace talks between the Taliban and Afghan government and or the very administration of President Ashraf Ghani (whether it will naturally follow the historical precedent of the last PDPA-Watan government of Najibullah), look more like a bargain made on paper than an 'agreement' to lead to the ending of the actual conflict that is going on in Afghan society.

That having been said, before we conclude that all past efforts towards bringing peace to Afghanistan have been anything but successful, as Lakhdar Brahimi with many decades of global peace making experiences, including in Afghanistan, also cautions in the foreword to this volume, we turn our attention in the following pages to the various analyses and perspectives that this collection of diverse essays offers, which are critical to understanding key questions in the past and present of war and peace makings, and state

⁴⁹ It is important to note that after World War II Afghanistan was the first major theater of war for the Soviets, one in which they also used their latest weapons of war, as has been arguably the case with the war on terror in Afghanistan, wherein the United States military used on April 14, 2017 the largest non-nuclear bomb ever used in a conflict after WWII, the so-called MOAB or 'Mother of all Bombs.' It has been reported recently by Afghan media that the local residents of Mohmand Dara village in Nangarhar province, where the US military dropped its bomb, have developed many unknown diseases and agricultural lands are not yielding crops. For example, see Omeri, "Mother of All Bombs' Caused Illness, Ruined Farmland," (2019).

and society relations in contemporary Afghanistan. Why is there no peace in Afghanistan after forty plus years of wars? What has been the quest for peace in Afghanistan during this period? How can we distinguish between actors and factors of war and peace makings in Afghanistan? Why in particular Afghanistan-Pakistan historical and political relationships matter most in war and peace makings in Afghanistan (this question is the direct subject of a new critique in the volume by the political and human rights activist Afrasiab Khattak from Pakistan).

While Pakistan comes up in several essays in this volume as a factor and actor in various aspects of war and peace makings in Afghanistan, other contributors focus on other public, institutional, and policy questions, such as what are the current policy orientations regarding war and peace makings in Afghanistan, or what are the basic ingredients of reconciliation and peace plans? What about Afghan sovereignty and the historical and political nature of the Afghan state, governance, publics, and development agenda? How could we envision what peace will look like in Afghanistan in a post-conflict, post-American Afghanistan? These are some questions that this single volume in twenty-two short essays engages with to locate the historical and political themes of war and peace makings, and society in Afghanistan. Rather than theoretically new, the volume is designed to be reflective and perspectivist, each contributor offering one, or a variety of, perspectives about aspects of war and peace makings in contemporary Afghanistan. The contributors are some academic scholars, some insiders of the war and peace making processes, some longtime commentators, and others government and policy practitioners, and members of civil society. They each approach the above and other similar questions from their own career specialist background and field of study, namely historical and cultural, political science and development studies, and the sub-fields of post-Cold War and post-9/11 conflict studies.

The essays have been divided into three sections. The nine essays in section one focus on the correspondence between Najibullah and Kakar, politics and policies of peace making, and the broader similarities and differences between the previous and current peace making processes, specifically comparing and contrasting the then Geneva Accords and Najibullah's NRP, with the US-Taliban Agreement of February 2020 and the intra-Afghan peace talks. This is followed by six essays in section two, which deal with themes of state-society relations in the contexts of previous and ongoing war and peace makings in Afghanistan, such as state formation, nation-building, party system and politics (e.g., 'new publics,' mediascape, street politics), and post-conflict society and development. The third section focuses on the global nature and regional issues of war and peace makings and different processes and phases of peace negotiation and conflict resolution as a whole. Altogether, the seven essays in this section deal with the role of non-Afghan, regional state and non-state actors and factors and the nature and role of

wider regional geopolitics, to processes of war and peace makings in the country, while also providing comparative examples of successful peace negotiations and best practices in international conflict resolution, namely in Cambodia and Northern Ireland.

Section one begins with a historian's view of the Najibullah-Kakar correspondence by Timothy Nunan, whose analyses of the letters center on various national, regional, and international contexts in which they were written. Nunan maintains that some important differences and similarities, especially two (the future presence in Afghanistan of US security personnel and infrastructures after its exit and the role of Pakistan, similar to the Soviet Union's post-withdrawal personnel and Pakistan's role that both Najibullah and Kakar emphasize in their correspondence), exist between the situation then when the Soviets left Afghanistan and now, as the United States seeks its way out of the country. In the next essay, Barnett Rubin, who has been involved for over thirty years in various intellectual, policy, and institutional aspects of war and peace makings in Afghanistan, relies both on the letters from Najibullah and Kakar and several conversations that he had in 1989 and later periods with Soviet and Afghan specialists, including Kakar and various Afghan Mujahedin. Rubin's principal argument is that the transition in Afghanistan from war to peace is not going to be easy and, as such, Afghan people themselves will not be able to make it if they are not assisted by the international community. Scott Smith also argues in his essay that a variety of continuities, such as Afghanistan's relationship with the rest of the world, the structure of the peace process, and post-conflict governance system that both Kakar and Najibullah focused on in their correspondence, define the current ongoing peace process as well.

Through a collective reading of the letters and similar materials from other Afghan scholars and statesmen contemporary to Kakar and Najibullah, such as Abdul Rahman Pazhwak, Barmak Pazhwak argues in his essay that there have been serious efforts by Afghans to bring peace to their country, which need to be given special attention in the current peacemaking efforts. Belquis Ahmadi and Makhfi Azizi argue in their co-authored essay that hope alone cannot resolve the conflict in Afghanistan; rather, by reading the letters and comparing the past and present peace processes, Ahmadi and Azizi argue that the current parties to the conflict need to demonstrate strategic vision and genuine commitment to social justice, law and order, and long-term development plans to bring peace to the country, which was not the case in the past, including in the Geneva Accords and NRP of Najibullah. Therefore, according to Ahmadi and Azizi, there are lessons to be learned by those who are in search of peace for Afghanistan.

Shaïda Mohammad Abdali's essay expands further this 'lessons to learn from history' *bahs* through a passionate and detailed reading of the letters from Najibullah and Kakar. Abdali suggests that any settlement of the conflict in Afghanistan will have dire consequences for both Afghanistan and the world if it falls short of learning from the

past blunders in previous peace making processes. Masih Khybari in his essay makes this *bahs* of ‘lessons to learn from history’ more contemporaneous by comparing and contrasting Najibullah’s peace and reconciliation efforts to ones that Ashraf Ghani is currently promoting as a scholar-president of the country. Khybari’s principal point is, however, that it is imperative to recognize reconciliation as a societal phenomenon rather than just a mere political accommodation, as it is also crucial for all parties in a successful peace process to have a collectively firm commitment to it, something that was absent in the previous and so far unseen in the current peace and reconciliation efforts concerning Afghanistan.

While genuine commitment to peace is central to making a lasting peace in Afghanistan, making a lasting peace is also a rare opportunity to take it seriously when different sides of a long chronic conflict like the one in Afghanistan come together around a table. This is an argument that Johnny Walsh makes in his essay. By analyzing comparatively the 1990 and 2020-2021 war and peace making efforts and highlighting that the current war in Afghanistan has run its course, Walsh maintains that the current parties, such as the United States, the Afghan government, and the Taliban, need to make “painful compromises” to not let the current opportunity to make a lasting peace in Afghanistan flee as it did during Najibullah’s time. This is a point with which Nasir Andisha also concludes his essay. Andisha analyzes the Najibullah-Kakar correspondence specifically in relation to domestic and foreign components of Najibullah’s NRP, such as demilitarization of Afghanistan and or permanent neutrality of the country in regional and global affairs, which Najibullah promoted as a way forward to establishing a lasting peace in Afghanistan, while Kakar rejects these ideas in his reply letter to Najibullah for various reasons, among which is that Afghanistan with its historically domestic and regional geographic and political vulnerabilities cannot afford to have such policies.

Section two of the volume begins with Thomas Ruttig’s essay, which situates both the Najibullah-Kakar correspondence and NRP in the context of Najibullah’s larger political reformist attempts to reshape the then PDPA-Watan dominated post-Soviet Afghan political system from a single to a multi-party-system of politics and governance. According to Ruttig, in doing so, the purpose was twofold for Najibullah. One objective was to lure into his new ‘controlled multiparty system’ the regime’s enemies and critics like Kakar and or the more powerful Mujahedin groups. Another goal was to shape the post-Soviet political system in Afghanistan in a way over which he will have the control. In Ruttig’s view, while this type of top-down approach to reconciliation and peace making could not bring peace to Afghanistan, it also could raise doubts as to whether Najibullah was honest in his reconciliation and peacemaking efforts.

The next contribution is by Dipali Mukhopadhyay. Approaching “reconciliation as state-building,” Mukhopadhyay maintains that the nature of Afghan state formation

and thus Afghan sovereignty, which both Kakar and Najibullah linked to reconciliation and lasting peace in Afghanistan, has fundamentally been paradoxical. As such, Afghan sovereignty is best understandable by its contradictions, including but not limited to gaps in the domestic sources of legitimacy for various Afghan states, while also foreign money, foreign influence, and foreign interventions have continuously shaped them, with the participation of the country's different rulers, regimes, and "many" of its people. The next essay, by Omar Sharifi, develops further the paradoxical notion of Afghan state formation that Mukhopadhyay formulates, by not only questioning the historical legitimacy of various Afghan states, but also by expounding the nature of interaction between the many Afghan states and the diverse populations they have been governing. According to Sharifi, while the Najibullah-Kakar correspondence might be a "rare" case in which an Afghan statesman and a private citizen discuss the past and future outlooks of their "imagining" historical nation, neither the many dynastic nor the non-dynastic Afghan states have historically been attached to their subjects and citizens and, as such, Afghanistan has been throughout its modern history a "dialogical project" of nation-making in progress, in which issues of state legitimacy, national identity, and nation as a whole are still classic problems of nation-building, despite the fact that there exists a strong sense of national attachment to Afghanistan among its inhabitants.

Section two concludes with three contributions. The first one is by Robert Crews, who reads the letters of Najibullah and Kakar, from the vantage point of global history, as a "revealing guide" to understanding the modern politics of Afghanistan and the wider region. Crews takes us beyond the analytics of Afghan state and nation-building into the understudied, in the case of Afghanistan, field of public culture and media, though as Crews notes this area of study is now changing with a number of exciting works by younger new scholars of Afghanistan. Crews' principal argument is here that despite the existence of extreme violence and poverty, Afghan politics and, thus, Afghan society, has been dramatically transformed since the Najibullah-Kakar exchange in 1990 by the emergence of a variety of diverse, discrete, and dynamic "new publics" with which those who are in search of an enduring peace settlement in Afghanistan must contend. The role of mediums, especially media (e.g., social media, twitter) and communication in general, is also addressed by Tanya Goudsouzian, though approached from a different angle. Comparing and contrasting how 'strategic communication' and public messaging in general were carried out by Najibullah and Afghan Mujahedin then, and Ashraf Ghani and the Taliban now, Goudsouzian shows that conflicts over power and influence in Afghanistan have not only been fought militarily in Afghanistan, but also in the airwaves of radios, in the pages and screens of newspapers and televisions, and in various propaganda rooms and networks of Afghan and non-Afghan intelligence agencies and spies, gauging and controlling the public and political opinions. In Goudsouzian's own

words, “nowhere in the world has the power of propaganda been more apparent in bringing down governments than in Afghanistan, where kings and presidents have been toppled through the clever use of tampered imagery and the spread of well-crafted lies.”

If the rationale—as this set of essays in this section considers—is that the way forward for an enduring peaceful settlement in Afghanistan is that the modern Afghan state and nation need to form some type of new public social contract in which multiple publics need to be appreciated and recognized for their individual and collective rights to rule amid and without violence and poverty, then Sayed Madadi in the last contribution in section two also argues that for such formulation to succeed and indeed even to survive in a post-conflict Afghan democratic society, diverse economic bases, beyond just creating employment opportunities, are required to be created and planned in any post-conflict development agenda for Afghanistan. This ranges from reform and development of the security and justice sectors in Afghanistan to long-term planning and realization of economic development and pluralistic public spaces beyond Kabul and few other urban centers.

The last section, section three, consists of seven essays. The first one by Dawood Azami, based on a number of sources including interviews with Taliban members, argues that the existing social science models in conflict studies—which often hypothesize and or worse prioritize one factor and actor over other—cannot explain all wars for modern conflicts by their current globalized nature, such as the one in Afghanistan, have become compounded by a variety of overlapping and competing actors and factors. Suggesting what Azami calls a “hybrid framework” to understand and overcome the challenges of modern conflicts, the current conflict in Afghanistan is best understood by taking into account its entire spectrum, namely the many local and regional-global actors and factors that shape it. The hybrid framework that Azami suggests is epitomized in the next essay by Afrasiab Khattak who offers an examination of Pakistan’s policy in different periods of war and peace making processes in Afghanistan. Khattak argues that the Pakistani military establishment has remained committed despite paradigm shifts in global and regional politics to its old geopolitical policy in pursuit of hegemony under the garb of ‘strategic depth’ in Afghanistan by supporting continuously various Afghan and non-Afghan armed proxies fighting in Afghanistan, even if this policy creates some troubles to Pakistan itself. Khattak breaks into four different phases the ‘Pak-Afghan’ historical and political relationship between 1947 and 2021, pointing to a variety of historical and political intricacies between Afghanistan and Pakistan, which must be addressed in the greater geopolitical context of the region than simply reducing them to fixed monolithic binary frameworks (e.g., ‘Af-Pak’). Khattak suggests that Afghanistan and Pakistan, and in fact the entire Southwest Asia region—by which Khattak means India-Pakistan-Afghanistan-Iran—needs a reset in their historical and political relationships to

'switch' from Cold War geostrategic contests to regional geoeconomics of competition and cooperation.

In addition to Azami and Khattak, Radha Kumar, Nilofar Sakhi, and Timor Sharan and Farkhondeh Akbari illustrate further in their individual and collective contributions the fundamentally multi-layered regional nature of war and peace makings in Afghanistan. By placing the Najibullah-Kakar correspondence in the context of the geopolitics of South Asia, Kumar maintains that Afghanistan at least since the 1970s has struggled "between competing great and regional powers on the one hand and competing local and regional factions on the other." Thus, any peace agreement for Afghanistan to last is dependent on a wider regional framework, as it has been true of settling other modern conflicts in the world, such as the ones in Northern Ireland, Bosnia, and Sudan. According to Kumar, Northern Ireland had the European Union as its regional framework, Bosnia got an economic compact leading to its membership in the EU, and the African Union functioned as a framework for Sudan. Unfortunately, according to Kumar, Afghanistan does not have such a regional framework, and the existing regional organizations and processes, such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, and the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process, have had either restricted and competing political agendas, and or have been fundamentally slow to impact the events in Afghanistan.

A wider regional framework for peace in Afghanistan is a point that Sharan and Farkhondeh also make in their co-authored essay. By analyzing Najibullah's National Reconciliation Policy and the peace settlement in Cambodia in 1991, Farkhondeh and Sharan draw three lessons, among which is that a consensus among non-Afghan regional and international actors is key to establishing peace in Afghanistan. Farkhondeh and Sharan argue that unlike post-Soviet Afghanistan, it was the change in the geopolitical interests of international actors, such as Soviet Union and China, that resulted in the withdrawal of political and resource support for the four local warring factions that, in return, resulted in meaningful peace negotiations and the enduring Paris Peace Agreements of 1991. Sakhi in her essay stresses that making peace is not an easy task, and it certainly has not been historically easy in Afghanistan due to various sophisticated political maneuvering by Afghan actors themselves. However, after discussing in detail a number of factors, such as lack of regional stability and cooperation among regional countries, that have prolonged the conflict in Afghanistan, Sakhi offers a compound national-regional perspective to consider to end—not to transform—the war in Afghanistan. One is, in Sakhi's own words, "no peace deal in Afghanistan will be sustainable if the interests of her regional neighbors, and in particular Pakistan, is not negotiated through a regional peace agreement;" and secondly, "peace will not be sustainable if Afghan political leaders do not have a plan for sustaining the state based on domestic revenues

to limit the international aid.”

If war by its historical and political nature has been going on in Afghanistan at a national-regional-global level as these essays argue from different perspectives and, as such, if peace also is only possible in Afghanistan when there is a national-regional-global peace agreement among Afghan and non-Afghan participants, then those who are in search of peace for Afghanistan may want to create a “visioning process” and “transform” their mindsets both in talks and actions both during and after peace negotiation processes. This is what Ben Acheson and Aref Dostyar argue in the last, but not least, two contributions in section three. By discussing the peace process in Northern Ireland and pre-imagining “what will peace look like in Afghanistan?,” Acheson argues that while no solution from Northern Ireland is automatically applicable to Afghanistan, what rival parties to the current war in the country need is a visioning process in which they would develop and commit to a shared vision that would be tangible and concrete, which was how the parties to the conflict in Northern Ireland envisioned the peace process, which led eventually to the successful peace accords of the Good Friday Agreement of 1998. Dostyar, in return, argues in his essay that this process could simply start for each party to the conflict in Afghanistan from transforming their mindsets. In Dostyar’s words, “mindset refers to how we view the peace process to ensure what we do is effective. The mindset question guides the manner in which we approach the content and process of negotiations, as well as the implementation of a potential peace. Our mindset towards peace talks has a direct impact on the substance, process, and outcomes of the negotiations.”

There is not one way to conclude this introduction, with one and or two ideas while twenty-two different perspectives are offered on different aspects of war and peace makings in contemporary Afghanistan, namely the multiple periods of military interventions in the country by two of the global hegemonic powers of the last century (the Soviet Union and the United States), different types of conflict and political violence committed by different Afghan and non-Afghan state and non-state actors, the existence of various politics and policies of reconciliation and peace plans, the notion of paradoxical and dialogical processes of state formation and nation-building, the emergence of various discrete and dynamic civil and political societies, the formulation of diverse agendas of state-building and development, and the enactment of a variety of envisioning and mindset of negotiations and peace makings. While we will leave that for readers to make for themselves from the individual or the collective essays, one basic takeaway we have from these diverse contributions is as follows: while the various past and present nature and aspects of war and peace makings in Afghanistan have been shaped and defined by a variety of historical and political contexts and actors and factors in and beyond Afghanistan, both in 1990 when the Soviet Union had just withdrawn its military forces

a year earlier after ten years of fighting without resulting in any peace in Afghan society and in 2021 as the United States-led NATO military forces are debating their expected withdrawal from the country after twenty years of 'war on terror' without ending either the 'terror' nor the 'terrorists' in the country, it is also time for those who are in search of peace not just to make the blunders of previous peace making processes, but also not to end the current globalized conflict in the country by starting new internationalized civil wars. As Najibullah and Kakar recognized and debated in their peace letters to each other thirty years ago, what is ultimately needed in the search for peace for Afghanistan is an inclusive, sustainable, and comprehensive peace agreement in which *establishing a lasting peace in Afghanistan* must be the first and last condition, as well as the first and last priority in any reconciliation and peacemaking efforts concerning the current national-regional-global war in the country, especially so in the currently pandemic-infected world in which no one could be immune not just from a natural disease that no one can see, but also from a human disease, namely war, without regards to where it occurs, where it not.

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PART ONE

The Najibullah-Kakar Correspondence in Perspectives

1

President Najibullah's Correspondence with Dr. M. Hassan Kakar: A Historian's Perspective

Timothy Nunan

Abstract

When Kawun Kakar, the Director of Kakar History Foundation (KHF), approached me to contribute to this project, I was immediately interested. The correspondence between President Najibullah (1947–1996) and Dr. M. Hassan Kakar (1929–2017) during a decisive turning point in the history of Afghanistan offered new documentary insight into how Najibullah and Kakar envisioned the future of their country. And while historians are often uncomfortable with drawing direct lessons from the past to apply to the present, the correspondence between Najibullah and Kakar offers a chance to set current dilemmas of intra-Afghan peace talks in historical relief. In what follows, I place the correspondence between Najibullah and Kakar in its international context, before concluding with a historian's view of possible parallels and disjunctions between 1990 and the Afghans' situation thirty years later.

Searching for Interlocutors: Najibullah's First Letter to Kakar

Before turning to the first document provided by the KHF—namely, Najibullah's letter to Kakar from Dalwa 1368 / February 1990—we might briefly recall the historical context in which Najibullah wrote the letter. On February 15, 1989, the Soviet Army completed its withdrawal from Afghanistan, in accordance with the Geneva Accords. Even so, the Accords left several issues unresolved. Both the Soviet Union as well as the United States and Pakistan continued to arm their Afghan clients—Najibullah in the case of the USSR, and the Pakistan-based mujahideen in the case of the latter. And because the Geneva Accords did not include the Afghan mujahideen themselves as a party, they left unresolved the possible framework for an intra-Afghan settlement. Following early expectations that Najibullah's regime would simply collapse sans Soviet support—something that Najibullah highlighted in his letter—the government in Kabul proved more robust than originally thought when it routed Pakistan-based mujahideen at the Battle of Jalalabad in the spring and summer of 1989.¹ All the same, Najibullah's regime faced tremendous challenges throughout the fall and winter of 1989. Moscow was increasingly occupied with the revolutions in Eastern Europe, and perestroika (economic reform) at home. Members of the Khalqi wing of the Watan Party, in particular Defense Minister Shahnawaz Tanai, were in bitter conflict with Najibullah, who used his influence in the Afghan intelligence ministry to arrest Tanai supporters in the officer corps. As if these internal problems were not enough, the regime still faced the challenge of the Pakistan-based mujahideen groups, who by and large rejected Najibullah's vision of "National Reconciliation."

It was in this context that Najibullah wrote the first letter included in the collection, in February 1990.² In it, Najibullah called for both a comprehensive peace process among Afghan factions themselves, as well as an international conference devoted to the demilitarization of Afghanistan and its permanent designation as a "non-aligned and non-military country." Domestically, he foresaw the appointment of a "leadership council" that would itself appoint a committee for the design of Afghanistan's new constitution and basic laws, and convene parliamentary elections. Internationally, Najibullah envisioned a large international conference that would involve, at a minimum, the Soviet Union, the United States, Pakistan, Iran, and China, along with the participation of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. Crucially, however, Najibullah neglected to discuss the status of the Afghan "power ministries" (defense, intelligence, police) during this interim period. And while he accepted an international election commission, this was a far cry from a

¹ Najibullah, Letter to Hassan Kakar (Dalw 1368 / February 1990).

² Najibullah, Letter to Hassan Kakar (Dalw 1368 / February 1990).

full internationalization of the Afghan government itself during this interim period. According to Najibullah's proposal, state intelligence and security institutions would exist throughout the transition, and a substantial amount of Soviet military aid would still continue to flow to the Afghan military.

These ideas were something of old wine in new bottles, reflecting proposals for national reconciliation that Najibullah had offered since 1987, or presented at international organizations. Yet most of these attempts had fallen flat. While a United Nations mission, UNGOMAP (United Nations Good Offices Mission in Afghanistan and Pakistan) oversaw the withdrawal of Soviet forces and, in theory, monitored violations of the Afghanistan–Pakistan border, a more robust peacekeeping mission was not forthcoming. UN General Secretary Javier Pérez de Cuéllar remained skeptical toward missions that would amount to interference in the domestic affairs of member countries.³ Following the Soviet withdrawal, Afghan Foreign Minister Abdul Wakil (b. 1945) participated in a Foreign Ministers' Conference of the NAM in Harare, Zimbabwe in May 1989 and, oddly, the Organization of African Unity's (OAU) conference in Addis Ababa in July 1989 as part of an attempt to garner support among postcolonial countries. But these efforts proved longer on symbolic gestures than meaningful aid. Robert Mugabe pledged his support for the Afghan peace process in Harare; PLO leader Yasser Arafat met with Abdul Wakil on the sidelines of the NAM Foreign Ministers' Conference, and the OAU even offered Afghanistan honorary membership.⁴ Yet Pakistan foiled Afghan attempts to involve the NAM at its conference in Belgrade in September 1989.⁵ Given the horizon of imagination for the United Nations that existed at the twilight of the Cold War, and the incoherence of the Non-Aligned Movement by the 1980s, Kabul's efforts toward internationalization fell flat.

Even as these proposals had already been exhausted, then, Najibullah had nothing to lose by reaching out to figures like Kakar. Yet in the time between Najibullah composing the letter and it being delivered to Kakar, important events took place in Afghanistan itself. Since the emergence of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan in 1965, the Party had in reality been divided into two factions, Khalq and Parcham, that drew on different social bases. While the Khalq faction of the party took the upper hand following the 1978 overthrow of Mohammad Daoud Khan, the Soviet invasion and subsequent appointment of Babrak Karmal (1929–1996) and, later, Najibullah as

³ Meeting between UN Secretary General and Zain Noorani, Foreign Minister of Pakistan, April 14, 1988, Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University, Pérez de Cuéllar Papers, Box 10, Folder 102. In Artemy Kalinovsky, *A Long Goodbye: The Soviet Withdrawal From Afghanistan* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 189.

⁴ 'Abdul Wakil, *Az Padshāhi-yi Muṭlaqeh ilā Suqūr-i Jumhūrī-yi Dimūkratīk-i Afghānistān* (Kabul, 2016), Volume 2, 696–98.

⁵ "NAM Rejects Najib's Proposal," *Muslim*, September 10, 1989, in Diego Cordovez Papers, Box 42, Folder 42.6.

PDPA General Secretary meant that the Parcham faction had the upper hand for much of the 1980s. Yet the history of internecine violence between the two factions, and the Soviet Union's strong support for the Parchamists, left bad feelings between the two wings of the party. Throughout the 1980s, Najibullah further sought to purge the Khalq wing of the Party—who generally favored a military solution to the conflict with the Pakistan-based opposition—from the ranks of the party as he promoted his policy of National Reconciliation. On March 6–7, 1990, Shahnawaz Tanai, Najibullah's defense minister and a member of the Khalq wing of the party, sought to topple Najibullah. Yet Najibullah and his allies managed to ward off the coup. Tanai fled to Pakistan. Though Najibullah's government remained isolated internationally, it had proven once more its resilience to external enemies and domestic coups.

Kakar's Response

It was in this context that Professor Kakar would have received and replied to Najibullah's letter. In his response to Najibullah, Kakar greeted the Afghan leader's proposals in spirit while also expressing severe doubt about their substance.⁶ Kakar praised Najibullah's emphasis on the need for a nonmilitary solution to the conflict (the intransigence of the Pakistan-based opposition notwithstanding). Yet, he still saw Najibullah as fundamentally dependent on the Soviet advising apparatus in Kabul, claiming that the Soviet Embassy housed hundreds of diplomats and that thousands of advisors remained present in Afghanistan. Kakar saw a total withdrawal of the Soviet advising apparatus and diplomatic presence in Kabul as a precondition for a domestic political settlement. Likewise, Kakar saw Najibullah's proposals to demilitarize Afghanistan as a pretext for further Soviet domination of the country. Kakar was similarly skeptical of the domestic aspects of Najibullah's proposal. Fearing the continued influence of the KhAD, the military, the police, and the judiciary during any interim rule by a leadership council, Kakar demanded the immediate appointment of a technocratic interim government that could, under the international supervision of a UN force, prepare the way for secret, general elections. In short, only through a full dissolution of the bases of Najibullah's regime—namely the Soviet advising apparatus and the Kh AD—and full internationalization of Afghanistan could a transition be possible.

Kakar made several important criticisms of Najibullah's plan, but he had unrealistic expectations regarding the appetite of international institutions like the United Nations to assume responsibility for Afghanistan. It is important to recall that peacekeeping was not even mentioned in the original United Nations Charter, and following the Congo

⁶ Hassan Kakar, Letter to Najibullah (22 Jawza 1369 / 12 June 1990).

Crisis in the early 1960s, Cold War tensions limited UN peacekeeping missions to the Suez Canal. Granted, peacekeeping enjoyed a second life in the late 1980s. The United Nations Peacekeeping Forces won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1988, and the end of the Cold War made it possible for the United Nations to assume greater responsibilities in conflict zones around the world. Cambodia—where the United Nations took over the administration of the entire country for a year—perhaps became the closest parallel to Kakar's vision for Afghanistan. Yet even that case highlights the complexities inherent in the “internationalization” of states that suffer from civil war. In Cambodia, the ultraleftist Khmer Rouge (“Red Khmer”) party had terrorized the country from 1975 to 1979, only to be expelled from power by Vietnam, which invaded the country and installed its own Cambodian client regime. The Khmer Rouge's own militias fled to Thailand, while the Vietnamese-backed Cambodians ruled the country from 1979 to 1989. When the United Nations took responsibility for Cambodia, it disarmed militias associated with the Vietnamese occupation regime but not the Khmer Rouge, and it failed to apprehend a single Khmer Rouge leader. While the Cambodian experiment in internationalization yielded elections, it also led to the Khmer Rouge rejecting their results and conducting guerrilla warfare for years. It is impossible to state whether Najibullah or mujahideen leaders like Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, the head of Hezb-i-Islami, would have accepted elections conducted under the auspices of the United Nations, but the course of events in 1990–1992 provides few grounds for optimism.

Najibullah's Response and Diplomatic Efforts

Najibullah's reply to Kakar did not substantively rebut the latter's concerns, but it does provide some insight into the former's thinking about the future of Afghanistan.⁷ Najibullah asserted that his proposed “leadership council” would assume full control over day-to-day governance, presumably including ministries such as defense and the KhAD. Returning to his idea of Afghanistan having a permanent status as a neutral, demilitarized country, Najibullah drew the parallel between his idea and the status of Switzerland, Finland, and Austria. Yet this parallel remained unelaborated. As Najibullah himself was aware, Afghanistan sat on the fault lines of multiple conflicts (USA–USSR, India–Pakistan, Iran–Saudi Arabia) that made any such vision of “neutralization” exceedingly complex. On this, as well as on the matter of Kakar's suggestion of the United Nations as an international monitoring force for Afghanistan, Najibullah deferred to the notion that Afghans themselves would have to decide on this, whether in the framework of the “leadership council” or through a postelection parliament.

⁷ Najibullah, Letter to Hassan Kakar (30 Saratan 1369 / 21 July 1990).

Najibullah's response to Kakar has to be seen in the broader context of US–Soviet negotiations that took place in the same time frame. After some initial dithering toward the PDPA before the Soviet invasion, the United States had backed Islamist mujahideen throughout the 1980s. Even after the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan in 1989, moreover, US diplomats had insisted that Najibullah would have to step down before any governmental transition began. Yet in February 1990, US Secretary of State James Baker “mentioned for the first time that the United States might stop insisting that Najibullah leave the scene before negotiations began.”⁸ Perhaps in connection with this, Najibullah began to speak of his desire for UN-monitored elections (something he had not explicitly mentioned in his first letter to Kakar) and reiterated his willingness to leave office in the event that he lost. Over the summer of 1990, the United States appeared to be moving closer to adopting a less harsh line toward the President of Afghanistan. The results of the Nicaraguan elections in February 1990—where the ruling Sandinista National Liberation Front stepped down—and growing American doubts about Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's politics beyond anti-communism appear to have informed these views. Given the general trend of US–Soviet negotiations, there was reason for Najibullah to believe that he could survive with Soviet military aid while waiting for the Americans to realize they had no better alternative than him in Afghanistan. Najibullah's motives perhaps cannot be reduced to maneuvering alone, but given his very limited room for action, declaring his willingness to submit to elections (ideally under the auspices of the “leadership council” rather than the UN) allowed Najibullah to appear like a credible interlocutor to Washington.

Following the exchange, Najibullah did not give up on his diplomatic efforts, but rather sought more earnestly to engage regional states like the Islamic Republic of Iran as allies against the “Wahhabi” mujahideen he decried in his letter. Iran's rhetoric of “export of the revolution” notwithstanding, leaders like Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, Ali Khamenei, and Mir-Hossein Mousavi had been more interested in removing the Soviet Union from Afghanistan than installing a pro-Iranian regime in Kabul. Between the attempted coup by Tanai (with whom Tehran had some contacts) and the prospects of Pakistan-based mujahideen overwhelming the regime, Tehran developed closer contacts with Najibullah throughout the late 1980s and early 1990s.⁹ Pakistani journalists writing at the time noted that Najibullah had made a point of funding Shi'a mosques in Kabul and participating in Shi'a rituals, while the small Iranian diplomatic corps in Kabul “regularly attend[ed] events arranged by the Kabul regime and the Soviet embassy.”¹⁰

⁸ Kalinovsky, *A Long Goodbye*, 192.

⁹ Ayub Arvin, “Dawlat-i Hāshemi ve jenāhā-yi siyāsi-yi Afghānistān: Āzmūn ve khatā-yi bifarjām,” *BBC Persian* (13 January 2017 / 24 Deh 1395), <https://www.bbc.com/persian/afghanistan-38594017>.

¹⁰ Afzal Mahmood, “Change in Iran's Afghan Policy,” *Dawn*, October 30, 1989, Diego Cordovez Papers, Box 42, Folder 42.7.

Following visits to Moscow and Geneva in November 1990, Najibullah made a short, unofficial visit to the Iranian city of Mashhad, where he and Iranian officials like Ali Jannati underscored their opposition to American militarism and Saudi Arabian influence in the region.¹¹ Given that Iran itself was still on its knees after eight years of grinding conflict with Saddam Hussein's Iraq, it could not provide any practical aid. Further, while Najibullah had consistently discussed the idea of regional states participating in a joint solution for the conflict in Afghanistan, Tehran was inconsistent about whether it could cooperate with Indian wishes. As with relations with Washington, however, Najibullah could use his weakness as a bargaining chip, presenting himself as the least bad alternative to Pakistan-based mujahideen.

As long as Soviet arms shipments continued to flow, then, Najibullah's best option was to present himself as an acceptable alternative to states in the region, maneuver for a favorable elections scheme, and hope that Soviet diplomacy would persuade the Americans to adopt Moscow's position of "negative symmetry plus"—that is, that the USA, the USSR, and third states like Pakistan would cease funding the mujahideen. Unfortunately, however, Najibullah's position was eroded by events in 1991. Gorbachev's emerging rival Boris Yeltsin had no preexisting relationship with the Afghan leader and was skeptical of continued involvement in the Afghan quagmire altogether. The fall of the city of Khost to mujahideen forces in April 1991 tarnished the appearance of stability that Najibullah had won through the Battle of Jalalabad in the spring of 1989 and his crushing of Tanai's coup attempt in February 1990. Yet it was the attempted August 1991 coup d'état in the Soviet Union that decisively undermined Najibullah's position. KGB Chairman Vladimir Kryuchkov—who led the abortive coup d'état in the USSR—had long sought to assure Najibullah that Moscow would not abandon him. Following the collapse of the coup, however, Kryuchkov was discredited and imprisoned. Within a month, the USSR signed an agreement with the United States that bound both sides (but not, crucially, third states) to halt arms supplies to Najibullah. With Najibullah's most powerful patron, the KGB, on the outs in Moscow, the Afghan President's days were numbered. The regime collapsed in the spring of 1992, and Najibullah was forced to flee to the United Nations compound in Kabul.

Conclusion

What might be the relevance of the Najibullah–Kakar correspondence for the Afghan peace process in 2021? Some important differences between now and the situation in

¹¹ Wahid Muzhda, *Rawābet-i siyāsi-yi Irān ve Afghānistān dar qarn-i bistom* (Kabul: Maiwand, 1389/2010), 295; quoted in Alavi, *Nāgoftehbā-yi jonbesh-i rushanfekri-yi Afghanistan*, 457.

1989–1992 are worth noting. Whereas the Soviet Union committed to removing its forces from Afghanistan through the international framework of the Geneva process (and with other states, not the Afghan opposition, as interlocutors), the United States signed the February 2020 conditional peace agreement with the Taliban directly. The government in Kabul, for its part, enjoys greater international recognition and legitimacy than did Najibullah's regime. External shocks similar to the August 1991 coup attempt in the Soviet Union are unlikely to be forthcoming, though Joe Biden's actions, and his fortunes, are yet to be known. Changes in international consciousness about human rights and conflict resolution also represent new complicating factors. Neither Najibullah nor Kakar envisioned war crimes tribunals as an element of an Afghan settlement, whereas cases brought against former members of the PDPA under universal jurisdiction and the ongoing International Criminal Court investigations into post-2003 war crimes reflect an awareness of the necessity of postconflict justice. Similarly, international outrage toward the Taliban's treatment of women from 1996–2001, and the growth of Afghan civil society since 2001, make it a commonsense assumption that representatives from women's rights organizations, media organizations, and human rights offices be included in organs for the peace process.

At the same time, the correspondence between Najibullah and Kakar does offer insights into the dilemmas of the intra-Afghan and international aspects of the peace process today. While historians are loath to draw loose parallels between the past and the present, I would highlight two issues. For one, the disagreement between Najibullah and Kakar over the extent of the Soviet advising presence in Kabul raises questions about the future of American special forces and intelligence assets in the country even after a withdrawal. As Kakar observed, the withdrawal of Soviet military forces did not necessarily result in a decline in Soviet advisors in key Afghan ministries. Similarly, while the February 2020 Doha agreement between the USA and the Taliban obliges Washington to "withdraw all military forces of the United States, its allies, and Coalition partners, including all non-diplomatic civilian personnel, private security contractors, trainers, advisors, and supporting services personnel" following the completion of intra-Afghan negotiations, analysts have questioned whether these terms will apply to American intelligence and CIA special forces in particular.¹² Even President-Elect Joe Biden is vague on this matter, with his foreign policy promising to "bring the vast majority of our troops home from Afghanistan and narrowly focus our mission on Al-Qaeda and ISIS."¹³ It remains unclear how Afghan desires for a total withdrawal of

¹² "Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan," February 29, 2020, English-language text: https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Agreement_for_Bringing_Peace_to_Afghanistan.

¹³ "American Leadership: The Power of America's Example: The Biden Plan for Leading the Democratic World to Meet the Challenges of the 21st Century," Joe Biden 2020 Campaign Website, <https://joebiden.com/americanleadership/>.

foreign troops can be reconciled with American claims to use Afghanistan as, in effect, a regional base for campaigns against jihadist groups (if not the Taliban itself).

Secondly, the international context surrounding the Najibullah–Kakar correspondence reminds us of the importance of Pakistani support for transnational armed actors as any part of an Afghan peace process. In spite of withdrawing its own forces from Afghanistan, the Soviet Union continued to supply Najibullah's government with extensive military aid from 1989–1991. More than an effort to prevent the regime from collapsing overnight, this fit into a Soviet diplomatic strategy of demanding “negative symmetry plus” from the United States—in other words, that Pakistan and Saudi Arabia cease supplying mujahideen forces as a condition for the USSR to cut its own aid to Kabul. While Najibullah's international position was weak, he could rely on this backing from the Soviet Union during the course of efforts to kickstart intra-Afghan negotiations via Kakar and other leading Afghan personalities. In contrast, the United States has applied little pressure on Pakistan to dismantle Afghan Taliban sanctuaries since the Doha agreement. Authors have pointed to this fact and the precedent of the continued flow of arms to both Najibullah and the mujahideen from 1988 to 1992 as grounds for skepticism today.¹⁴ Adding to their concern is the fact that the relationship between the Doha agreement and the Bilateral Security Agreement between Washington and Kabul remains unclear. As skeptics of the Taliban would see it, Taliban representatives have every incentive to reach an agreement in intra-Afghan talks, use this as leverage to demand a full US military withdrawal, and then resume offensives from their Pakistani sanctuaries. Whether the American political calendar or a Biden Administration will change the United States' position vis-à-vis Pakistani support for the Taliban—with its attendant effects on intra-Afghan talks—remains to be seen.

¹⁴ Farkhondeh Akbari and Timor Sharan, “The Key to Peace in Afghanistan? Eliminate Taliban Sanctuaries,” *Interpreter*, June 10, 2020, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/key-peace-afghanistan-eliminate-taliban-sanctuaries>.

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2

Reflections on the Difficult Transition to Peace

Barnett R. Rubin

Abstract

Afghanistan has had several attempts at peacemaking in the past, but transition to peace has been challenging. After the Soviet Union's withdrawal, United Nations envoy Benon Sevan devised a plan aiming at a peaceful transition of power through months of shuttle diplomacy. Afghans, too, were seeking ways to avoid the bloodshed in the face of the potential collapse of the government as the Soviet aid to Kabul was decreasing and the Mujahideen factions were closing in. Among them was Professor Hassan Kakar, an Afghan historian, who exchanged letters with President Najibullah on the issue of transition as early as three months after the fall of the Berlin Wall. In April 1992, due to internal and external pressures, President Najibullah resigned, which, according to Sevan's plan, would have allowed an interim government to oversee a transition, but it did not. Instead, the government collapsed, leading to civil war among militia and Mujahideen factions backed by foreign powers. This essay briefly comments on the events that led to the collapse of the 1990s peace process and the fall of Najibullah's government. Some events from the 1990s haunt the 2021 peace process, and this essay hopes to draw some lessons.

“Members of any significant family will relate stories of how their fathers or grandfathers or relations suffered at his hands. The period still arouses strong passions and is yet to become history.”

—Hassan Kakar, *Government and Society in Afghanistan*

On July 21, 1990, President Najibullah had a premonition. In a letter, dated June 12, 1990, Afghan historian Hassan Kakar had argued that the peace process that Najibullah had proposed in his February 1990 letter to Kakar unfairly advantaged the government he led as compared to groups like the Mujahideen who were at war against it. Najibullah's plan would leave his government in power until the conclusion of a national conference that would choose a transitional administration. Even after the formation of a transitional government, Kakar argued, "courts and the multi-pronged military forces, especially KhAD [the intelligence and secret police agency], which are made up of your loyal supporters, . . . the strongest pillars of the Kabul government," would still be in place "dominated by the KGB, with its past history of killing Afghans and favoring Soviets." Mindful of his agreement to abide by the statement in Najibullah's first letter, that "I don't think now is the time to talk about the faults and responsibilities of this side or the other," Kakar did not mention that Najibullah had been the founding director of KhAD. Kakar did, however, continue to use that name, declining to acknowledge Najibullah's attempt to break with that past in January 1986, when he renamed the agency as a step toward "national reconciliation."

In an epilogue to his 1995 book, *Afghanistan: The Soviet Invasion and the Afghan Response, 1979–1982*, Kakar wrote that KhAD "though now called WAD (*Wizarat-i Aminiyat-i Dawlati*, Ministry of State Security), was dominated by the same Parchamis, who still called themselves 'khadists, the true sons of comrade Dzerzhinsky,' the bloodthirsty prophet of the leftist revolutionaries."

Najibullah could never fully overcome the memories of Afghans who lived through the early 1980s, when KhAD under his leadership directed a reign of terror and torture against real and suspected opponents. In 1989, in a taxi in Washington, D.C., where no one could monitor our conversation, Yuri Gankovsky, the head of the Near Eastern Department of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Soviet Academy of Sciences and the USSR's leading specialist on Afghanistan, told me, "It is impossible for someone like Najibullah to remain in Afghanistan, because he is covered in blood from head to toe." Without mentioning names, Kakar reminded Najibullah of the repression of the early 1980s: "This plus the unprecedented destruction of the country brought about a total lack of [public] trust in Kabul government and a complete divorce of the latter from the people." Kakar recommended that before convening the peace conference, Najibullah's government should abolish KhAD and "submit power" to "an interim government . . . made up of neutral professional people" under the supervision of the United Nations. To that proposal, Najibullah answered in a letter dated July 21, 1990, that "the continuation of our government until the formation of the [transitional] government is a necessity that is affirmed by the dangerous consequences of the emergence of a political and military vacuum."

That premonition became a reality on the night of April 15–16, 1992, when a UN plane was to bring members of a neutral interim government from Islamabad to Kabul. Najibullah, who had announced his intention to resign, would transfer power to them at the airport and leave on the same plane. The interim government would then organize a peace conference to choose a transitional government. Sensing victory in the offing, however, the Mujahideen leaders in Pakistan, whose fighters were massing around the capital, retracted their agreement to the plan. In a meeting with the UN envoy Benon Sevan at the home of the Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, they demanded instead a Mujahideen government. Sevan told them to call him when they reached an agreement.¹ They never called. So, in the early hours of April 16, Sevan flew alone from Islamabad to keep his rendezvous with Najibullah in Kabul, only to find that his rivals in the ruling party had blocked the UN vehicle carrying Sevan's colleagues and Najibullah from reaching the airport. A coalition led by Abdul Rashid Dostum, including both regime militias like Dostum's and anti-government Mujahideen factions, which had already taken control of much of northern Afghanistan, had occupied the Kabul airport the previous day and blocked Najibullah from leaving.

Najibullah took refuge in the UN compound in Kabul. General Nabi Azimi, Najibullah's Deputy Defense Minister and Head of the Kabul Garrison, negotiated the handover of the Kabul garrison to Ahmad Shah Masoud, who led Mujahideen in Northeast Afghanistan. Hezb-i Islami leader Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, with the support of Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence directorate (ISI), together with Najibullah's rivals from the Khalq faction of the ruling party and Arab militants, launched the war against Masoud's forces that he would carry on for four more years. The vacuum that opened sucked in first Najibullah and then the whole nation. As rockets rained down on Kabul, and many parts of the city were destroyed or ethnically cleansed, Najibullah remained in the UN office until September 1996, when victorious Taliban forces accompanied by Pakistani ISI officers abducted and killed him.²

1989–1992: A Brief Interlude

Those events haunt today's peace process. On June 11, 2020, just one day short of the thirtieth anniversary of Kakar's letter, Afghan President Ashraf Ghani addressed a virtual meeting of the Atlantic Council in Washington, D.C. A Wall Street Journal reporter asked him to "share your thoughts on an interim government and whether you could see yourself stepping aside if this was a request made by the Taliban and the US." He

¹ Interview with Benon Sevan, August 20, 2020.

² Human Rights Watch 2005.

answered first by recalling that he was an elected president, and that “The key issue is not the president, but the republic.” After a pause, he interrupted the moderator, former US national security advisor Stephen Hadley, to ask him to “let me make a comment.” “Najibullah made the mistake of his life by announcing that he was going to resign,” Ghani said. “We have lived through a film—please don’t ask us to replay a film that we know well.”³

The plan Sevan was trying to implement closely resembled Kakar’s proposal. Kakar had called for the USSR to withdraw advisers from Afghanistan and act in accordance with normal state-to-state relations, for Najibullah to resign in favor of a neutral interim government, and for the UN to oversee the whole process. The USSR went beyond Kakar’s demand: it ceased to exist. Just before it did, the USSR agreed to the US demand that Najibullah should resign in favor of an interim government at the start of a process that would be overseen by the UN, a proposal that Kakar also emphasizes in his letter.

The correspondence between President Najibullah and Professor Kakar began three months after the fall of the Berlin Wall, which announced the end of the Cold War. Najibullah wrote his final letter in July 1990, a year and a month before a coup attempt in Moscow, in which hardliners placed Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev under house arrest, intending to oust him and end the reform process he had started. That coup quickly led to the collapse of both the USSR and the Communist Party that had ruled it. Gorbachev announced the dissolution of the USSR on Western Christmas Day (December 25) 1991. Less than four months later Najibullah too was gone.

That brief period, when the Cold War had ended but the USSR still existed, was a time of optimism about progress toward international order and the empowerment of the United Nations. Two events central to the building of what the leaders of both the US and the USSR called a “new world order” bracketed the correspondence between President Najibullah and Professor Kakar. In December 1989, Presidents Gorbachev and Bush met in Malta, where, a few weeks after the fall of the Berlin Wall, they began the work of fashioning a world order based on cooperation rather than confrontation between the two superpowers. In August 1990, Saddam Hussein invaded and annexed Kuwait. Rather than take opposing sides as during the Cold War, the US and the USSR formed a coalition to roll back Saddam’s aggression. After the war’s swift conclusion, in a speech to a Joint Session of US Congress on the premonitory date of September 11, 1990, President George H. W. Bush hailed US–Soviet cooperation in confronting Saddam Hussein and predicted:

Out of these troubled times, . . . —a new world order—can emerge: A new era—freer from the threat of terror, stronger in the pursuit of justice and more secure

³ Atlantic Council 2020.

in the quest for peace. An era in which the nations of the world, east and west, north and south, can prosper and live in harmony. . . . [T]oday that new world is struggling to be born. A world quite different from the one we've known. A world where the rule of law supplants the rule of the jungle. A world in which nations recognize the shared responsibility for freedom and justice. A world where the strong respect the rights of the weak.⁴

This is the context in which Kakar recommended UN oversight of the process of political transition. "The new optimistic atmosphere in the world," he wrote to Najibullah, "will hopefully have a positive influence on this process." Najibullah replied that he had omitted references to the UN only because "the nature of the role, composition and duties of the international monitoring commission and the United Nations . . . must be discussed and agreed in the framework of Afghans' negotiations." He assured Kakar that he had "full understanding about your view . . . regarding the active and effective role of the United Nations and the international community."

Peace Process to Civil War

In 2021, no one speaks of an Afghan peace process in these terms. The very need for such a process thirty years after the exchange between an Afghan president and a historian shows how completely that process had failed. I witnessed some stages of that failure first-hand. In January 1989, a year before Najibullah took up the pen to write to Hassan Kakar, I had ridden with a group of Mujahideen and Western journalists from Peshawar into Afghanistan through the Khyber Pass. While the completion of the Soviet military withdrawal from Afghanistan was still a month away, Soviet forces had already left eastern Afghanistan, and the Afghan army was consolidating its positions in Jalalabad. Speculation was rife that the government would fall within months if not weeks.

In Rawalpindi, Pakistan, under the watchful eyes of the ISI, Saudi Arabia's agents distributed cash to the participants in an Afghan shura. The shura named an "Afghan Interim Government" (AIG) to replace the failed "Interim Islamic Government of Afghanistan" formed the year before. Pakistan, the US, and Saudi Arabia agreed to sponsor an offensive by Pakistan-based Mujahideen in alliance with their Arab supporters, including Osama Bin Laden, to capture the city of Jalalabad, where, they hoped, the AIG would establish its interim capital. As I traveled around eastern Nangarhar, through areas dominated by the Pashtun Mohmand and Shinwari tribes, Mujahideen commanders complained that the ISI was pressuring them to attack Jalalabad instead of

⁴ George H. W. Bush, "Address to the UN General Assembly."

allowing them to negotiate a peaceful handover of the garrison.

Back in Peshawar, on February 11, I had dinner with Professor Kakar and his family at their home. I know the date, because it was the anniversary of the assassination in Peshawar of Kakar's university colleague and our mutual friend, Sayed Bahauddin Majrooh. That killing was just the best known of the repeated assassinations of Afghan nationalist intellectuals that finally forced Kakar to settle in the US. That night he described an event he later wrote about in his epilogue: In late 1988, seventy-four officers and soldiers of the regime submitted to the border authorities of Pakistan in Torkham, but they were said to have delivered them to a commander of the Hizb-e-Islami of Khalis. Later they were found dead on the Afghan side of the border. Visiting the area in January 1989, I saw the remains of some of them.⁵

This and other atrocities by the Mujahideen helped Najibullah demonstrate his staying power in the ensuing battle of Jalalabad. A year later he described the situation in his first letter to Kakar: The extremist opposition forces and the foreign circles who support them expected that the Republic of Afghanistan would collapse in a few days or, at a maximum, in a few weeks after the withdrawal of Soviet forces. Developments in the past year have proved convincingly that all this speculation was far from reality and that the imposition of a military solution on Afghanistan looks more impossible now than it ever did. . . . Although there have been major and significant changes in the structure of international relations resulting in the creation of a positive and hopeful atmosphere for a secure and sound future for all human beings, the situation in Afghanistan has not changed.⁶

A few years after Najibullah's last reply, I witnessed a reversal of circumstances. In January 1994, I entered Nangarhar again, by the same route, escorted by the same Afghans, members of the group led by Sufi spiritual and resistance leader Sayyid Ahmad Gailani. My colleagues and I had planned to fly to Kabul on a flight operated by the International Committee of the Red Cross, but in an outbreak of factional fighting as groups realigned against Masoud, the airport came under attack, and the flight was canceled. This time we were able to enter Jalalabad city, but our hosts forbade us from leaving our compound unescorted, out of concern for our security. Along the way we encountered masses of people fleeing violence. A group of Safi tribesmen had fled factional fighting in Tagab, northeast of Kabul. They had taken the road from Tagab to Sarobi, midway between Jalalabad and Kabul, but felt safe only when they reached the calmer area east of Jalalabad. Closer to Jalalabad we met a group of families who had fled clashes in the district of Deh Sabz between Sarobi and Kabul. As we reached Samarkhel, twelve kilometers from Jalalabad, we encountered bus after bus of traumatized people

⁵ Kakar, 1995.

⁶ Najibullah, First Letter to Dr. Kakar

who had fled the fighting in Kabul that had prevented us from flying there. They blamed Masoud's men for looting and firing on their neighborhoods. When asked who did it, I can still hear them shouting "Shura-e Nazar! Shura-e Nazar!"

I described this scene in the opening pages of *The Search for Peace in Afghanistan* (1995),⁷ but I omitted a conversation with a young man, evidently educated and wearing Western-style clothing, who pulled me aside and angrily told me in English, "This is the fault of Benon Sevan!" I did not report it, because I thought this was just an example of the venerable tradition of making the UN into a scapegoat for the failures of its member states. Sevan was carrying out a plan agreed by all Afghan power holders, the US, and, in its dying days, the USSR, which, had it still existed, might have been able to use its remaining leverage in Afghanistan to achieve a different outcome.

Was Kakar wrong to recommend such a path? How did Najibullah hold his forces together and defeat a full-on offensive supported by Pakistan, the US, and Saudi Arabia in early 1989, but fall from power in the face of internal mutinies and a UN peace plan three years later? How could Najibullah defeat an ISI-backed March 1990 coup attempt by the Khalqi Minister of Defense, Shahnawaz Tanai, who even bombarded the presidential palace in Kabul city, only to fall two years later when militias captured territory in the north and blocked roads in Kabul? The answer lies outside Afghanistan, in negotiations between Washington and Moscow and inside Moscow itself. The US and USSR were negotiating over an issue that neither Najibullah nor Kakar mentioned in their correspondence: external support for the Afghan state in the form of weapons, money, and essential commodities.

Asymmetries

In his letter Kakar returned repeatedly to the obstacles posed by the former presence of Soviet troops and, he believed, the continuing presence of Soviet advisors, but he never mentioned the material support on which Najibullah's government depended. External supply of weapons, however, was the issue that bedeviled the last rounds of negotiations over the Geneva Accords of April 1988. According to those accords, the US and USSR guaranteed that all Soviet troops would leave Afghanistan by February 15, 1989, and all "interference" (aid to the Mujahideen) would cease as of May 15, 1988, the date on which the Soviet withdrawal would start.⁸ When US President Ronald Reagan reviewed the agreement, he found it unacceptable that the US would stop supplying weapons to the Mujahideen, while the USSR could continue to arm Najibullah's government.

⁷ Rubin 1995.

⁸ United Nations 1988.

In subsequent talks with the USSR, the US took the position that the responsibilities of the guarantors had to be “symmetrical.” The US would cease military aid to the Mujahideen, as provided for in the Geneva Accords, only if the USSR also stopped military aid to the government. If the Soviet Union continued to deliver war matériel to the government, the US would likewise aid the resistance. The US called these arrangements, respectively, “negative” and “positive symmetry.”⁹

In his first letter, Najibullah referred to “positive symmetry,” though not by that name, describing it as a violation of the Geneva Accords: As you know, the last Soviet soldier returned to his country about a year ago. But the other agreements, especially those related to non-interference and non-intervention, are not only not implemented but parts of border cities of our country like Kandahar, Khost and Jalalabad came under a direct and severe offensive mounted by combined forces of the opposition, the Pakistani military and Saudi Wahabi mercenaries.¹⁰

Najibullah did not say what enabled him to defeat that “direct and severe offensive”: the complete backing of the USSR. As Kakar wrote in his Epilogue, “The Soviet Union took full advantage of this situation [after the withdrawal in 1989] by supplying abundant arms to Kabul and raising its fighting capability several times. The Soviet Union, until its dissolution in December 1991, is believed to have continued its delivery of weapons to Kabul at the same pace.” About the same time, I wrote in *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan*: As the Soviets departed, they agreed to upgrade the equipment of the Afghan military. In November 1988 the two governments signed a new protocol on military cooperation, under which Kabul received long-range SCUD missiles, as well as short-range missiles. These were supplemented with medium-range missiles in August 1989.¹¹

Beginning in March 1989, during the battle of Jalalabad, the Soviets conducted an airlift of weapons and other supplies to Kabul. As one Moscow diplomat said, “Arms, fuel, even the money for the army’s paychecks comes from [Moscow].”¹² While Najibullah was corresponding with Professor Kakar, in 1990 Moscow supplied Najibullah with 54 military airplanes, 380 tanks, 865 armored personnel carriers, 680 anti-aircraft guns, 150 R-17 [SCUD] rocket launchers, and thousands of tons of fuel. The weapons included over 500 SCUD missiles, estimated to cost \$1 million each. Western sources estimated the value of the aid at \$250-\$300 million per month, or at least \$3 billion per year.¹³ As Kakar recounted in his Epilogue, during the battle of Jalalabad, the government fired over 400 SCUD missiles, the most intensive use of the weapon in history, more than were used in the 1991 Gulf War or the Iran–Iraq War.

⁹ Rubin 1995.

¹⁰ Najibullah, First Letter to Dr. Kakar.

¹¹ Rubin 1995, 159.

¹² Rubin 1995, 149.

¹³ Rubin 1995, 149.

The USSR also assured the supply of food and other essential commodities. In March 1989, immediately after their troops' departure, as Mujahideen blocked roads around Kabul, the Soviets launched an emergency airlift of flour. In 1990, Western, Soviet, and Afghan sources reported that "The Soviets supplied an average of 250,000 tons of wheat per year, slightly more than the estimated consumption of the population of Kabul."¹⁴ They also supplied kerosene, tea, sugar, cooking oil, soap, and footwear.

In 1990, however, neither Najibullah nor Kakar referred to weapons supplies or financial and commodity assistance. Kakar noted that the Mujahideen, in order to fight the Soviet Union, became "dependent on foreign aid, especially arms and financial aid supplied by foreign powers," mainly Pakistan, and that "these powers used this situation to curb, with a view to their own national interests, the parties' freedom of action." He stipulated that a new professional and impartial intelligence agency should replace KhAD and that "Its budget should be paid by Afghans." Otherwise, however, he wrote as if during and after the peace process the Afghan state would have all the resources it had in 1990. Nowhere in his letter did he object to weapons deliveries or financial aid to the armed forces.

While the president and the historian corresponded, the US and USSR were negotiating over the conditions for implementing negative symmetry. Washington and Moscow agreed on forming a transitional government under UN supervision, but as long as hardliners remained powerful in the USSR, they differed over whether the implementation of negative symmetry and the departure of Najibullah should occur at the beginning or end of the process. The USSR still supported Najibullah's position, that "the continuation of our government until the formation of the [transitional] government is a necessity that is affirmed by the dangerous consequences of the emergence of a political and military vacuum."

The coup by Soviet hardliners failed on August 19, 2001. Less than a month later, on September 13, as Kakar wrote in *Afghanistan*, which he was already working on during his correspondence with Najibullah: Soviet Foreign Minister Boris Pankin and US Secretary of State James Baker agreed that, effective the beginning of the new year, their countries would cease to deliver "lethal materials and supplies" to the warring parties in Afghanistan. More serious, the regime lost its patron when, in December 1991, the Soviet Union broke up into fifteen constituent republics. The new Russian Republic, headed by Boris Yeltsin, was unwilling to help the Kabul regime.¹⁵

Baker and Pankin also outlined a road map to a political settlement virtually identical to Kakar's proposal. But Afghans were left on their own to implement it. To the extent that the regional powers were involved, as Kakar wrote, "the Afghans had now more

¹⁴ Rubin 1995, 149.

¹⁵ Kakar 1995.

than one 'Soviet Union' to deal with, and . . . , like Big Brothers in Islamic garb, the new Soviet Unions were bent on patronizing them as well."¹⁶

Origins of External Dependence

Why did Kakar omit the issue of aid to Kabul? He had to be aware of the very public debate about negative and positive symmetry.¹⁷ He described how positive symmetry "increased the chances of war and the destruction of an already battered Afghanistan," while negative symmetry (a term he never used) and the breakup of the USSR left a devastated Afghanistan prey to the ambitions of regional states.¹⁸

Kakar's historical writings documented the origins of the external dependence of the Afghan state. He did not publish *A Political and Diplomatic History of Afghanistan, 1863–1901* until 2006, but it was based on archival research he had done earlier, for his PhD dissertation, which he published in 1979 as *Government and Society in Afghanistan: The Reign of Amir Abd al-Rahman Khan*. That was the year when the USSR responded to the growing resistance in Afghanistan by sending its troops into the country.

That year was also the centennial of the 1879 Treaty of Gandamak between Amir Yaqub Khan (February–October 1879) and British India, a landmark in the history of the Afghan State's external dependence. In return for the amir's acceptance of the subordination of Afghanistan's foreign relations to British India, and to cede administrative control of some Afghan border territories to the British, the British Indian Government agreed "to pay to His Highness the Amir and to his successors an annual subsidy of six lakhs [600,000] of Rupees."¹⁹

In his *Political and Diplomatic History*, Kakar downplayed that as only a "small subsidy," but he also recounted how the British doubled it in 1883 and added an additional 50 percent in 1893: "The amir received from the British government a regular subsidy that started in July 1883 (one lakh a month) and was increased in November 1893 (one and a half lakh per month). Also, the British government offered additional grants in money and arms in emergencies in 1880, 1881, and 1887. The grants in cash amounted to over twenty-eight and a half million rupees during the entire course of the amir's reign."²⁰

¹⁶ Kakar 1995.

¹⁷ Lewis 1988.

¹⁸ Kakar 1995.

¹⁹ New York Times 1879.

²⁰ Kakar 2006.

The amir had been campaigning for this subsidy for several years, claiming that he needed it to “put Afghanistan in proper order as a barrier to Russian advance.”²¹ When the British finally agreed, the viceroy of India, Lord Ripon, wrote, “The internal disorders of Afghanistan were so largely due to our invasion of that country that we felt it to be our duty to aid him [the amir] in the establishment of a regular government.” “By the ‘establishment of a regular government’ ” Kakar commented, “Ripon meant the organization of a strong army, because the internal resources of Afghanistan for that purpose were insufficient.”

Two years after the publication of Kakar’s book on Abdul Rahman Khan, Ashraf Ghani was an Afghan graduate student at Columbia University. He was stranded in the US when Najibullah’s party seized power, imprisoned most of his family’s adult male members, and executed his uncle, a senior army general. Ghani cataloged the weaponry that the British supplied to the amir, under whom Ghani’s family had also suffered. It sounded like a precursor to the list, cited above, of the weapons the USSR supplied to Najibullah. Ghani wrote: “Abd-al-Rahman acquired his means of destruction through British grants as well as purchases on the open market. Between 1880 and 1895, he was presented with 80 guns [cannon], 17,342 shots and shells, 33,302 rifles, 3,200 carbines, and 21,308,000 cartridges. In 1899, purchases of the Afghan government going through India were so large that they became the subject of a special correspondence between the viceroy and the secretary of state for India. In that year, “Abd-al-Rahman had bought ‘2,000,000 cordite 33 bore cartridges, 2 ¾ tons Nordenfeldt and 9 tons Hotchkiss cases, besides several hundred thousand Lee-Metfords and Mauser ball cartridges.’ ”²²

These subsidies continued a process that had begun nearly a half century earlier, with the advance first of the Sikh empire of Ranjit Singh, who captured Peshawar in 1826, and then the British, who consolidated control over Punjab, depriving the Afghan monarch of his richest territories. In 1840, William Dalrymple recounted in *The Return of a King*:

As much as [Shah] Shuja [the British-supported ruler] wanted to control the new regiments and demonstrate his sovereignty, he was also painfully aware that he simply could not afford to maintain a sizeable army without British financial support. As ever in Afghanistan, it was a struggle to find the money to pay for the enormous army needed to secure so poor, fractured and uncontrollable a country. The army of the old Durrani Empire had been raised on taxes from the rich tributary regions such as Sindh and Kashmir. Since those areas had been lost, all Afghan rulers had struggled to pay their troops without imposing unacceptable

²¹ Kakar 2006, 170.

²² Rubin 2002, 48.

tax burdens on the relatively barren and unproductive regions that remained to them: "In the time of the Sadozais . . . the expenditure of the cavalry under them was provided from the revenues of the dependent countries of Punjab, Sindh, Cashmere and Moultan and part of Khoorasan," Shuja explained to Auckland. "Now . . . I cannot think of any remedy but to apply to Your Lordship for friendly assistance. . . . When I look upon the payment of the soldiers I find no other source than to rely on Your Lordship's favour."²³

That was in January 1840. Twenty months later, in August 1841, the East India Company's resident in Kabul, Macnaghten, received a dispatch informing him that "the financial breaking point had now been reached: the Company had been forced to take out a £5 million loan from Indian merchants at exorbitant rates of interest just to continue paying salaries." Behind the company was the newly elected Tory government of Sir Robert Peel, who regarded the venture in Afghanistan as one of his predecessors' "expensive and unnecessary Whig wars." Macnaghten tried to resist, echoing the lament of many Afghan rulers, "What can be done with a Kingdom whose net revenues are only fifteen Lakhs [1,500,000] of Rupees per annum?" He finally had no choice but to make the spending cuts, which he convinced himself were actually progressive reforms:

He called the Ghilzai and Khyber chieftains to a durbar in Kabul. There he told them that their subsidies were to be reduced by £8,000. . . . To Macnaghten it made perfect sense: . . . He was merely hastening the inevitable demise of the feudal system and calling the bluff of the more barbaric nomad tribes who had done little to deserve the protection money the Kabul government was in the habit of lavishing upon them. In the event, however, it proved to be the single biggest misjudgment of his entire career and within weeks it had brought the entire edifice of the occupation crashing down.²⁴

The tribes whose subsidy Macnaghten cut were the same ones that massacred the Army of the Indus in January 1842 as it tried to retreat through deep snow from Kabul to Jalalabad. In revenge, Governor General Ellenborough ordered a punitive expedition, which destroyed the Kabul bazaar and plundered the wooden gates of the shrine of Sultan Mahmud Ghaznavi in Ghazni, which Ellenborough mistakenly thought had been plundered from an Indian temple. In his masterwork, *Nawa-yi Maarik*, the Afghan writer and scholar Mirza 'Ata, who witnessed these events first hand, commented: "Ellenborough ordered the

²³ Dalrymple 2012, 231–32.

²⁴ Dalrymple 2012, 231–32.

gates to be sent to India, where they could be used to publicize the re-conquest of Khorasan and justify the huge expense of operations in a country which produced so little revenue. . . . A more lasting monument until today is the quantity of rotting corpses of the English troops that still block the highways and byways of Khorasan.”²⁵

The British learned the lesson of this experience, and after the Second Anglo-Afghan War, the combination of the annual subsidies in cash and weapons to the Afghan ruler and a 1907 treaty with Russia that formalized zones of influence in “Persia, Afghanistan, and Tibet,” left Afghanistan stable for nearly four decades. The price was repression and isolation. However, in 1919, the subsidies and weapons deliveries stopped when Abdul Rahman Khan’s grandson, Amanullah Khan, won the country’s independence from Britain in the Third Anglo-Afghan War. Amanullah declared the nation fully sovereign and set out to develop it and open it to the world. In those slow-moving times, it took just short of a decade before his opponents took advantage of his weak army to overthrow him. Events moved faster in 1992, but the logic was the same. As Kakar wrote in his epilogue: “[T]he underlying cause of all of this turmoil was the disintegration of the standing army of the former regime. The government lacked the power, the means, especially monetary, and the vision to integrate the warriors of the groups into a national army.”

Kakar had written to Najibullah that “I think people expect the end of war and the creation of an Islamic country which should not be under the influence of any foreign power. . . . In this process, it is vital that foreign powers actually and practically accept the principle of Afghan national sovereignty which they continually speak about.” But what does sovereignty mean for a state that lacks the means to exercise it? Perhaps Professor Kakar did not discuss negative symmetry because he could not answer that question. Perhaps he understood that negative symmetry was a euphemism for abandoning Afghanistan.

Geneva to Doha

The current attempt at a peace process based on the implementation of the US–Taliban Doha Agreement of February 29, 2020, has several features in common with the attempt after 1989 to extend the Geneva Accords of April 1988 into an internal Afghan peace process supported by an international consensus. An intervening great power is eager to move on to other priorities. An Islamist resistance movement demands to

²⁵ Dalrymple 2013, 231–32.

speak only to the “occupier” rather than the “puppet regime.” The government is even more dependent on foreign funding than were Najibullah or Abdul Rahman Khan. The government suffers from internal tensions that approach open conflict every few years. Its neighbors are at odds with the intervening great power, the resistance, the government, and each other.

It also has certain differences. Globalized terrorism in the form of Al Qaeda and the Islamic State have created some unity of purpose among states that, whatever their differences, have a common interest in the “stability” of the current system of nation states. No one today believes in the UN as a *deus ex machina* that can transcend the interests of its member states. The Trump administration touted “America First” and “great power competition” and regarded talk of a “new world order” as a malign conspiracy. The US was on a glide path to escalating conflict rather than rapprochement with both other great powers and some of Afghanistan’s most important neighbors. China and India have seen their economies take off, transforming the strategic stakes, geopolitical alignments, and capacities for action of the region. As important as the economic takeoff is the strategic takeoff: both India and Pakistan are now declared, rapidly maturing nuclear weapons states. Pakistan has a declared policy of first use of those weapons under certain conditions against a conventional Indian offensive. Pakistan has developed a wide range of battlefield nuclear weapons and apparently has decentralized their command and control to enable rapid use if under attack. These steps may increase deterrence, making war less likely. But if deterrence fails, nuclear weapons could be used early and often, thus making the next India–Pakistan war more destructive than any in human history.

Perhaps the most important difference is the views of the parties on what US officials call the “end state.” Najibullah had already abandoned communist ideology and organizational models—after all, the Soviet Union was abandoning them. He described the end state as a constitutional republic based on elections:

Then according to the new law, free and direct elections will be held in which balloting will be secret and everyone will participate equitably. Then in accord with the results of the election, a new government will be formed by a party or coalition of parties who have the majority in the parliament. That government will then rule the country according to the new constitution. (Najibullah, First Letter to Dr. Kakar)

Kakar differed from Najibullah only on the process of transition to the same end state. Kakar noted that Najibullah’s model was based on Nicaragua, where the incumbent government stayed in power through the transition. Such an incumbent-managed

transition is one of four models of provisional or interim government identified by Juan Linz and Yossi Shain, in a collection of essays to which I contributed the one on Afghanistan.²⁶ Kakar proposed one of the competing models, a neutral interim government. The others are a power-sharing arrangement in which government and opposition manage the transition together, and an international transitional administration, such as the UN established in Kosovo and East Timor. Since the latter option requires an international force with uncontested control of the territory, we can safely eliminate it from consideration in Afghanistan.

Each of these models has its own obstacles and risks, to which President Ghani alluded when he asked not to be forced to watch the same film again. In certain ways it is more difficult than the current peace process's differences on substance: the Taliban's Islamic Emirate and the government's Islamic Republic are seemingly in direct conflict over the end state. Even agreeing on a common name, such as the Islamic State of Afghanistan, would not resolve the question of sovereignty, or *Hakimyat*. In an Islamic Republic the "people" are sovereign through their representatives, whose decisions are constrained by Islam, whether it is identified as sharia, or "fundamental principles" of Islam, as in Afghanistan's 1964 constitution, or "the provisions and beliefs of the sacred religion of Islam," as in article 3 of the 2004 constitution of Afghanistan. Whatever name they use for the state, for the Taliban sovereignty belongs to God alone: his will is revealed in his word, the Holy Quran, and it is implemented as sharia developed by Islamic scholars (ulama) engaging in jurisprudence (fiqh). Sharia, however, does not prescribe any single method for choosing a ruler; even elections could be possible, as advocated by the Muslim Brotherhood; the most prominent Taliban supporters in Pakistan are political parties that participate in elections. With difficulty the gap over principles might be bridged through a hybrid system in which, as in Iran, there would be perpetual tension between the Islamic and representative components. But politics is not only about principles. It is also a struggle for power. That is the fundamental lesson of 1992: in a crisis where outcomes are violent and uncertain, actors discard principles and fight for power, if only the power to save their lives.

That is the film President Ghani does not want to watch again, especially as he would not be a spectator. The Taliban have stated that they do not wish to repeat 1992 and have made various statements saying they do not wish to repeat the events of 1996—the taking of power by force without international recognition. The closer Afghanistan slips to repeating 1992, the more likely it becomes that someone will act preemptively to repeat 1996.

²⁶ Shain et al. 1995.

Transition to What?

International political debate, unfortunately, often misunderstands the risks inherent in implementing a political settlement and potentially a transfer of power to a new Afghan government under these circumstances. In the US, the sole focus is virtually on how to prevent another 9/11. This is known in the trade as “fighting the last war.” To the extent that the debate cites other considerations, it talks about defending the democratic gains of the past twenty years, especially the rights of women.

As 1992 showed, however, before confronting the problem of how the new government will rule Afghanistan, we will have to assure that it has a government capable of ruling. The problem is the same as that identified by the fourth president of the US, James Madison, in *Federalist* 51. In framing a government, Madison wrote, “the great difficulty lies in this: you must first enable the government to control the governed; and in the next place oblige it to control itself.”²⁷

In 1992 the government lost the ability to control either the governed or itself. At the moment of transition, there was no command and control of the armed forces. In a functioning government the head of state assures the loyalty of the armed forces by appeals to: legitimacy, which include narratives about future expectations; material incentives, by paying their wages and living expenses; and by the threat of punishment by parallel forces, such as intelligence or police agencies. The dissolution of the USSR and the end of its financial and military support meant that the central government led by Najibullah lost the means to pay and support either the armed forces or the intelligence agencies and parallel militias, who had no commander-in-chief and did not know who would be their future commander-in-chief.

That degree of uncertainty about the future was a product not just of Najibullah’s resignation in favor of an interim government, but of the kind of interim government it was. Even after eliminating the alternatives of an incumbent-controlled transition (the “Nicaragua model”) or a UN interim government (the Kosovo or East Timor model), there is still a choice between a neutral interim government and a coalition interim government. In 1992 coalition government was impossible, because, as Kakar recounted in his letter, the Mujahideen leaders refused not just cooperation but even negotiation with the “communist regime.” Kakar quoted even the former king, Mohammad Zahir Shah, as rejecting the “imposed communist regime.” That left only the alternative of a neutral interim government. Furthermore, the pressure on Najibullah to resign because of his inability to pay the troops and the loss of all international backing, could not be coordinated with an agreement on the composition of an interim government by all the stakeholders, including those who hoped to form a new government themselves.

²⁷ Drexler, n.d.

Najibullah was supposed to transfer power he was losing to an interim government that did not exist.

Today, however, all the discussions of an interim government are about a government agreed to in direct negotiations between the Taliban and the representatives of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, who are expected to form a coalition that may also include a few unaffiliated people. Such an interim government would not create the same level of uncertainty. It would include leaders of the major armed and political groups in the country. Both the members of the Afghanistan National Defense and Security Forces and the Taliban fighters could still turn to many of the same leaders for assurances of their own security. They would not be left on their own as they were in 1992.

That interim government, however, could accomplish nothing if it did not receive the resources needed to keep the state functioning. Unfortunately, the debate in the US and Europe about the troop withdrawal and future assistance does not appear to be informed by an understanding of the actual consequences of terminating aid. It would not mean just fewer development projects. It would be a repetition of 1840, 1919, or 1992, only this time with nuclear weapons, international terrorism, a pandemic, and climate change. The definition of the US national interest in Afghanistan has been narrowed down to counterterrorism, or even to preventing a repetition of one particular act that was due to specific circumstances that will not recur. The definition of “values” in Afghanistan has narrowed down to supporting democratic institutions and human rights, especially of women, while hardly acknowledging the need to prevent mass bloodshed and the collapse of basic institutions of security, health, and education. Without that support, the “vacuum” of which Najibullah spoke may open up again, and, as before, it may swallow up more than Afghanistan.

“To be sure,” wrote Hassan Kakar in the conclusion to his history of the reign of Amir Abdul Rahman Khan, “in Afghanistan human life had been at no time sacred, and in every level of society life was lost for this or that reason.”²⁸ He also remarked that Afghans were “entering the iconoclastic period of their history for the first time.” When he published those lines in 1979, he could hardly have imagined how many more lives would be lost during the succeeding four decades of that “iconoclastic period.” If an agreement between the Taliban and the Islamic Republic provides even a small chance to put an end to that period and make human lives more secure, both interests and values dictate that the United States provide Afghans with the means to try to make all of us more secure.

²⁸ Kakar 1979, 240.

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Eminent Contemporaries: The Current Relevance of the Najibullah-Kakar Correspondence

Scott Smith

Abstract

The exchange of letters between President Najibullah and Professor Kakar comes to us from another century, but in many ways remains highly contemporary. The president and the historian discuss themes such as Afghanistan's relationship with the rest of the world, the structure of a potential peace process, and the future of an Afghanistan where its many diverse communities can live together. The author argues that despite the many changes that have occurred since this epistolary exchange, there are continuities that could inform the peace process that has just begun between representatives of the Afghan republic and the Taliban movement. In examining the historical circumstances at the time of the exchange of letters, the author notes how abruptly a change in historical circumstances removed the possibility of a negotiated peace, throwing the country back into several more decades of conflict in which Afghans have yet to find what Najibullah described as "sensible and realistic tools for a just political solution."

It is not unusual that Professor Hassan Kakar, a historian, would note in his reply to President Najibullah that “The past has a great impact on the solution of human problems.” There are many reasons for the intractability of the Afghan conflict. I wonder if one of them is the lack of “history.” I do not mean history in the sense of a sequence of events, for there have been many events, but in the sense of the availability of written sources that assess the importance of these events and make the sequences intelligible.

In thinking about how to address this issue of the lack of documented history, before turning to the letters themselves, I turned to Robert D. McChesney’s translation of the Hazara historian Fayz Mohammad “Katib”’s account of the 1929 uprising and the brief reign of Habibullah, sometimes known as “Kalakani” from the village where he was born.¹ Fayz Mohammad’s original account no longer exists and only comes to us via a Russian translation. It was written as a diary, but Fayz Mohammad was already a well-regarded historian. Both Emir Habibullah (1901–1919) and his son and successor, Aman Allah (1919–1929), had commissioned Fayz Mohammad to write histories of Afghanistan and their reigns. A government official, Mohammad copied into his histories tedious amounts of original documents: laws, orders, accounts, and so forth. Few of these exist. McChesney’s introductory essay is weighted with a sort of sadness about the number of these documents that have disappeared. I myself remember standing in the library of the University of Kabul during the mid-1990s, looking at the debris of books and documents that were used to fuel the stoves of the mujahideen faction that then occupied the university. War is not kind to paper.

War is not kind to intellectuals either. As Kakar wrote to Najibullah in his polite indictment of the Communist rule of the People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) and Soviet occupation: “among the dead and those who fled there were Afghans with great potential for leadership and authority in the country.” Kakar of course might have been one of them, but he was imprisoned and later exiled just as this long brutal era of Afghan history began. As a result, for a long time, much of Afghanistan’s history was written by foreigners, a situation which is now beginning to change. But in June 1990, when this epistolary exchange began, Kakar might have been able to provide a historian’s perspective to the political problem facing Afghanistan. As these letters show, however, he refused Najibullah’s invitation to return to Afghanistan.

¹ Robert D. McChesney, *Kabul Under Siege: Fayz Muhammad’s Account of the 1929 Uprising* (Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener, 1999).

Najibullah's Unusual Outreach

President Najibullah had decided to reach out to “leading Afghan exiles.” When writing to Kakar, was he consciously including historians? This was a poignant moment for Afghanistan and one that resonates today. The Soviet Union, after a decade of occupation, had just withdrawn its forces, though it continued to provide funding and equipment to Najibullah’s government. While backed by the Soviet Union, Najibullah’s regime had taken measures to downplay Marxism and had annulled many of the reforms committed in its name. His army had just withstood the mujahideen’s coordinated attacks on Kandahar, Khost, and Jalalabad without the support of the withdrawn Soviet troops. The failure of these attacks, particularly the one in Jalalabad, “proved convincingly”, Najibullah writes, that the regime would not collapse and that the “imposition of a military solution looks more impossible now than it ever did.” Afghanistan arrived at a rare moment of opportunity during the past four decades: without a foreign military presence, war-fatigued, and at a sort of hurting stalemate. Peace seemed possible. One can see why Najibullah would have launched his initiative of reaching out to prominent exiles to support a peace process.

Professor Kakar declined the invitation but entered into the correspondence that is the subject of this volume. Looking back, one is tempted to wonder what if he and others had accepted the invitation? Could such a gathering have helped end the conflict? Would Kakar have gone if he knew that the conflict otherwise would last decades more? Acting without this knowledge, Kakar explains his rejection in principled terms: that his return “could only be as part of [the] return by millions of Afghan refugees who have departed their homeland for obvious reasons.” In his invitation Najibullah anticipated a more pressing fear: “You should be completely assured that you will be protected politically and physically and that you can return to the country that you currently reside in.” Given both the historical pattern of Afghan politics, and the politics at the time of the exchange of letters, Kakar had many reasons not to trust Najibullah.

Professor Thomas Barfield refers to Afghanistan’s “court heritage of power” where the political focus is on a single ruler, and those outside government are “deemed rebels intent not on changing the ruler’s mind, but on replacing him with a choice of their own.”² One gets a sense of this zero-sum politics while reading about the internal machinations of the PDPA after (and even before) the 1978 coup. Even within the PDPA, being out of power was a possible political death sentence.³

² Thomas Barfield, “Afghanistan’s Political History: Prospects for Peaceful Opposition,” in *Incremental Peace in Afghanistan*, ed. Anna Larson and Alexander Ramsbotham, *Accord* 27 (June 2018).

³ Gregory Feifer, *The Great Gamble: The Soviet War in Afghanistan* (New York: Harper Collins, 1999). See, for example, pages 9–54.

There were specific trust issues with Najib himself. Heela Najibullah, one of his daughters, also points out that his intentions were mistrusted because “his previous position as head of the Afghan intelligence agency (KhAD) and his membership of PDPA more broadly was constantly manipulated in Cold War propaganda.”⁴ One can understand why this particular author treads lightly over Najibullah’s leadership of the KhAD and refers instead to Cold War propaganda. But the KhAD, under Najibullah, was notorious for its brutality, “reportedly ordering the arrests, tortures, and executions of tens of thousands of Afghan citizens.”⁵ In June 1990, during this exchange of letters, Kakar was not long removed from his six-year sentence at the notorious Pul-e Charkhi prison. He writes unsparingly of the role the KhAD played as an “agency of suppression” and of his own prison experience in his memoir, *Afghanistan: The Soviet Invasion and the Afghan Response*.⁶

He also refers to this in his letter to Najibullah, writing: “I would also like to add that since the coup of April 1978 until the end of the sixth year of the Soviet occupation, Afghans were totally deprived of their basic human rights. They had no freedom of speech and no freedom to assemble. Neither their persons nor their property were protected. They were not safe in their own homes which were searched over and over by security forces. . . . We cannot forget the unforgivable past of KhAD.”

One senses in these words both anger and restraint: Kakar cannot fail to mention this period, knowing full well the role of his correspondent in perpetuating these abuses, but at the same time seeking to honor their tacit agreement to not “talk about the faults and responsibilities of this side or the other.” There is a human, personal dimension to political reconciliation that is perhaps the hardest to overcome. Professor Kakar would not travel to Kabul but instead provided a detailed and fair-minded critique of the president’s proposal.

What was the proposal? Here, too, the history is revealing. Najibullah’s blueprint contains the DNA of political transitions that would be proposed several years after his government fell, and then proposed and implemented a decade later at the Bonn conference in 2001. As we face what is likely to be a long negotiation between the current Afghan government and the Taliban, it is remarkable to remember that the Bonn agreement was reached in ten days. That was perhaps in part because its shape was so familiar to the Afghan parties negotiating it. In essence Najibullah called for the

⁴ Heela Najibullah, “President Najibullah and the National Reconciliation Policy,” in *Incremental Peace in Afghanistan*.

⁵ Tom Lansford, ed., *Afghanistan at War From the 18th-Century Durrani Dynasty to the 21st Century* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2017), 306. See also Barnett R. Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002), 127.

⁶ Hassan Kakar, *Afghanistan: The Soviet Invasion and the Afghan Response, 1979–1982* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 153–68.

convening of a peace conference with all the warring factions as well as other stakeholders. The conference would agree to a six-month ceasefire and create a Leadership Council and an interim coalition government. It would also convene a commission for drafting “a new constitution and a new law for elections.” These would ultimately be approved by a Loya Jirga, elections would be held, and a new government would be formed.

For those who argue that the holding of elections in post-2001 Afghanistan was a Western imposition, it is interesting to note their inclusion in this early peace proposal. It is also interesting that Najibullah specifically mentions the need for the commission to draft an electoral law apart from the Constitution. This would have avoided the mistake made at Bonn, where too little time was allotted between the drafting of a constitution and the holding of elections, forcing a rushed process that did lasting damage to Afghanistan’s democratization process. Kakar was also skeptical of elections held for the sake of holding elections, writing to Najibullah that: One-sided Jirgahs and elections that have been held so far by both sides have not given legitimacy to either and won’t in the future either. Unless such Jirgahs and elections are held nationally and without interference and domination by foreigners, they will not represent the general will of the people.

This electoral parenthesis aside, Professor Kakar’s response to Najibullah’s plan touches on another complicated issue that has long been part of Afghanistan’s historical destiny: its relationships with its neighbors, its region, and the rest of the world. Calculations regarding these relationships factor more significantly in the tactics of Afghanistan’s political elites than is often recognized.

Afghanistan Eternally at the Center of the World

Throughout the exchange, both writers grapple with the paradox of Afghanistan’s patriotic resistance to outsiders as well as their practical accommodations with the meddling of outsiders. Najibullah writes unironically of “the strong sense of patriotism and spirit of freedom loving and chivalry of Afghans,” while many would argue that he was the principle agent of a regime that had deprived Afghans of their freedom and insulted their patriotism. He further observed that “every one of the major regional and global powers one way or another have tried to extend their influence and control over our country and use that for their own political, military and strategic interests.”

Afghanistan’s hesitant and sometimes paradoxical relationship with the rest of the world deserves a tome of its own. But for now, let us settle for this allegory provided by Afghanistan’s poet-diplomat Abdul Rahman Pazhwak. He wrote of Alexander the Great’s attempt to conquer Afghanistan, but from a characteristically Afghan perspective.

In Pazhwak's poem, Alexander's anxious mother, the Queen of Macedonia, wrote him to ask why he was dallying in the land of the Afghans instead of moving on to India to conquer the known world. Alexander replied that the answer was too complex for words—"not even Aristotle could understand." Instead he sent her five Afghan chieftains and, hidden beneath a saddle, a sack of Afghan soil. He told his mother to receive the Afghans on their first night as she would receive any king. She would find them courteous and honorable and knowledgeable on all the important subjects. Then he instructed her to convoke them again, on their second night, but this time to sprinkle some of the Afghan soil under the carpet before they arrived. The first meeting was "held with joy" and indeed the Afghan chieftains showed themselves to be men of culture, learning, and wisdom. According to Pazhwak, the second meeting was something else:

And when it was time for the second meeting
 The puzzling soil was scattered as instructed
 When the chieftains of Ariana,
 Those proud representatives of the Aryan race,
 Stepped up to the palace's gate
 They lost their normal state
 By sensing the smell of their motherland's soil
 Unsheathing their swords
 They clashed each other with Afghan valor
 Two or three of them fell in their own blood
 And as they collapsed, you might say
 The pinnacles of the sky collapsed
 Or columns broke and ceilings were demolished
 A thousand jars of wine cannot intoxicate the wine lovers
 As a particle of dust intoxicates the patriots!
 Oh what a commotion a handful of Afghan soil breeds
 What a tumult of passion it creates!⁷

This is on some level a disturbing parable of an irrational propensity to violence. It may be read, on another level, as an allegory for other observable (and observed!) traits: competition for foreign favor that can involve a willingness to sacrifice each other to impress the outside world. Finally there is the question of Alexander's invasion itself, the pride of Afghans in having defeated it, but perhaps also the pride of belonging to a country that others want to invade.

⁷ The translation was provided to me by an Afghan refugee professor in Peshawar in 1993. I am unaware of any published English translation.

Kakar shares this diagnosis. One of the central points of his critique of Najibullah's plan concerns the need for Afghanistan's sovereignty to be respected. This can only happen, he argues, "if foreign powers actually and practically accept the principal of Afghan sovereignty that they are constantly talking about." He devotes some time to arguing that part of this would require the de-Sovietization of the Najibullah administration. The reduction of the Soviet presence, he argues, would lead to a similar reduction of involvement by Pakistan as well as improve the legitimacy of Najibullah's own government. Najibullah was less confident about the likelihood of this Pakistani reaction and probably more correct: "As you know, Pakistan has used the Afghan issue as a tool to divert attention from its internal crises."

This section of the discussion feels particularly anachronistic and less relevant to our times—except in that we should always be prepared to expect the unexpected. The existence of the Soviet Union was a major factor at the time. Afghanistan's northern border was with the Soviet Union. As long as that shared border existed, the possibility of another invasion could never be ignored by Afghans. Neither writer could expect that within a year, the Soviet Union would collapse and the northern border would suddenly be shared with three new countries. The collapse of the Soviet Union would have a catastrophic effect on Najibullah's regime as it led to him losing his subsidies and other support. He had written to Kakar from what appeared to be a position of some strength, but it was crepuscular. In March 1990 he had survived a coup attempt by Shahnawaz Tanai, his minister of defense. Assam Akram argues that the coup was probably sanctioned by Moscow, which perhaps saw advantages in getting rid of Najibullah. This view is strengthened by the fact that Moscow allowed the return of the former PDPA president Taraki, a rival of Najibullah, and who many believed was involved in turning Najibullah's associates against him during his final days in power, leading to his ill-fated dash to the airport on April 15, 1992. But in 1990, Najibullah survived the coup and emerged strengthened from it, forcing Moscow to deal with him.⁸ His army had survived the unified mujahideen attacks the previous year. His National Reconciliation Policy appeared to be getting some results, and the intensity of fighting had gone down. He was in the process of "decommunizing" his government, having abolished the People's Democratic Party and replaced it with the *Hezb-e Watan*. His 1987 constitution declared Islam as the state religion and the political system as parliamentary democracy. These might have only been paper changes, but given the importance of propaganda in the Cold War, the clear rejection of an explicitly Communist government was no small matter. As William Maley points out, it "undermined the previously fundamental notion that the 'gains of socialism' were irreversible."⁹ Najibullah could not have known,

⁸ Assam Akram, *Histoire de la Guerre d'Afghanistan* (Paris: Editions Balland, 1996), 201–3.

⁹ William Maley, *The Afghanistan Wars* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 162.

however, that he was living on borrowed time.

As Kakar writes, “the solution of the Afghan issue is not totally within the power of Afghanistan.” Najibullah’s own fate had long been part of a debate in Moscow, as the Tanai coup demonstrated just months before Kakar wrote his letter. Moscow was worried that Najibullah’s regime would collapse, leaving on its southern border a country friendly to the United States, its Cold War archenemy. Certain figures in the Politburo, like Shevardnadze, who had recently been made foreign minister, also feared that anything short of Najibullah retaining full control would lead to a bloodbath in Kabul in which their patrons, with whom they had developed personal relations, would be massacred (an unfortunately contemporary concern voiced now and then by those who currently occupy power in Kabul).

Selig Harrison, citing a book published by former senior Soviet officials, described the debate between three options in the late 1980s: first, based on the assumption that Najibullah’s regime could not survive, a negotiation with the United States and Pakistan for a coalition government in which the PDPA had a minority position; second, on the assumption that Najibullah could prevail, continued support; third, a middle ground, where Najibullah remained the “non-partisan” head of a coalition government that included non-party political figures that had not opposed the regime.¹⁰

A similar debate now takes place in Washington between those who want to maintain the US military presence, those who favor a negotiation with the Taliban that would hopefully “preserve the gains” of the two-decade-long struggle, and those who advocate a complete withdrawal. There is a big difference between the debate in Moscow then and the one in Washington now. The land border meant that the Soviet Union could always theoretically reinvade, although practically this was unlikely to have been considered. The huge distance between the United States and Afghanistan means that, as a senior Afghan diplomat once told me, “once you leave you will never be able to come back.” (It was interesting that former president Trump, at a press conference on May 27, 2020, defending his position to withdraw immediately, said that “we can always go back if we have to.”)¹¹ Moscow ultimately opted for the “Najibullah option”—continuing to support him but giving him leeway to make compromises. In July 1987, Najibullah was summoned to Moscow by Gorbachev and told “you had better be ready in twelve months because we will be going whether you are ready or not. You must strengthen your political base.”¹² While this cannot have been a comfortable message to receive, it

¹⁰ Diego Cordovez and Selig S. Harrison, *Out of Afghanistan: The Inside Story of the Soviet Withdrawal* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 248–52.

¹¹ “Trump Says Wants Full Afghanistan Pullout But Hasn’t Set Target Date,” *US News and World Report*, May 26, 2020, <https://www.usnews.com/news/world/articles/2020-05-26/trump-says-wants-full-afghanistan-pullout-but-hasnt-set-target-date>.

¹² Cordovez and Harrison, *Out of Afghanistan*, 250.

did give Najibullah the green light to initiate the “de-communizing” measures already described, as well as the National Reconciliation Policy.

Not surprisingly, the American objective at the time was to prevent any government that included PDPA remnants. Harrison suggests that by ruling out power-sharing agreements that took into account Soviet fears of bloodbaths against their former clients, the United States and Pakistan forced Moscow toward the “Najibullah” option rather than a compromise. The Soviets had been willing to discuss the creation of a national unity government that would include mujahideen representatives and that would be linked to the Soviet withdrawal, but Washington found this premature. It is unlikely that the leaders of the seven mujahideen parties based in Peshawar—what Soviet vice-foreign minister Yuli Vorontsov referred to derisively as the “not-so-magnificent seven”¹³—would have consented to join such a coalition. Professor Kakar states this clearly in his letter: “The opposition, of course, at least the major part of it, for certain reasons, is not yet ready for negotiations with the Kabul government. . . . Mr. Sibghatullah Mojaddedi, president of the Afghan interim government, insists in clear words on the continuation of the military struggles, ‘We will never, under no conditions, come into coalition with the Khalq and Parcham.’ ”

The Difficult Art of Stepping Down

In 1987, the United Nations mediator, Diego Cordovez, an Ecuadoran diplomat, had proposed a vague plan whose central feature was to find some middle ground by having the former king, Zahir Shah, lead an interim government. But given the Soviet’s continued backing of Najibullah, Najibullah’s own reluctance to step down, and Washington and Islamabad’s continued backing of the Peshawar Seven, there were few political openings for the king. Zahir Shah, in any case, was reluctant to play a political role (“perhaps, in retrospect, he was wise” the Soviet ambassador to Kabul told Harrison.)¹⁴

The circumstances were established for what was assumed by Soviet leaders to be a lengthy stalemate in which Najibullah would hold on with their backing, while the United States and Pakistan calculated that Najibullah’s regime would quickly be overwhelmed by the Afghan resistance forces. After the failure of the 1989 Jalalabad operation, the Soviet reading appeared to be the correct one. But the failed August 1991 coup in Moscow shook the remaining foundations of the Soviet Union. More consequentially for Afghanistan, it removed some of the key supporters of the Najibullah option. Yeltsin, who emerged as the new leader, was opposed to sending supplies and

¹³ Akram, *Histoire de la Guerre d'Afghanistan*, 283.

¹⁴ Cordovez and Harrison, *Out of Afghanistan*, 252.

money to Najibullah. A resistance delegation led by Burhanuddin Rabbani (president of the mujahideen government between 1992 and 1996, and formally president until 2001) visited Moscow. Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, who had been up to that point implacably opposed to any deal with the PDPA, sent a message to Najibullah through Libyan leader Mu'ammarr Gaddhafi, hinting that they could cooperate.¹⁵ A month later the United States and the Soviet Union announced they would cease sending supplies to their proxies in Afghanistan. In early 1992, the Pakistani Army Chief of Staff, General Asif Nawaz Janjua, met with Zahir Shah's son-in-law and chief advisor. The Pakistani foreign minister stated he would support the Secretary-General's plan to "convene an assembly of Afghan leaders to decide on an interim government acceptable to the Afghans and to facilitate the convening of such an assembly."¹⁶ With these new realities, the conditions to implement Cordovez's plan began to emerge. But there was no time left. In January 1992, the Soviet Union ceased to exist. In March, Abdul Rashid Dostum and several other militia leaders who had been kept loyal to Najibullah by regular payments defected.

The collapse of the Soviet Union created a circumstance two years later in which Najibullah faced a situation he had warned against. Kakar had argued for the creation of an interim government composed of independent figures, as UN mediator Diego Cordovez had suggested. This implicitly would have required Najibullah to step down. Najibullah responded that: "the continuation of our government until the formation of the interim government is a necessity that is affirmed by the dangerous consequences of the emergence of a political and military vacuum." This was consistent with what he had told Cordovez in 1987 when the latter had presented the UN plan: "I will step down only for the sake of a negotiated solution, if adequate assurances are given to us that a Loya Jirga will be properly held, and that our participation is guaranteed."¹⁷ In March 1992, with Najibullah's support crumbling, Benon Sevan, who had replaced Cordovez as UN mediator, convinced him to step down and make place for a neutral interim administration. At the last minute, parties that had supported the UN plan withdrew from it, and mujahideen forces converged on Kabul. Here were the "dangerous consequences of the emergence of a political and military vacuum." Najibullah made his ill-fated dash for the airport where he was to be flown out by Sevan, only to find it taken over by Dostum's Junbish militia.

This is another point that resonates today. At a public event in June 2020 hosted by the United States Institute of Peace and the Atlantic Council, President Ghani was asked if he would be prepared to step down and allow an interim government to take

¹⁵ Maley, *Afghanistan Wars*, 187.

¹⁶ Maley, *Afghanistan Wars*, 190.

¹⁷ Cordovez and Harrison, *Out of Afghanistan*, 373

over if that would advance the peace process. He reminded the audience that the biggest mistake that Najibullah had made was to step down before an interim government had been properly formed. Ghani, according to this author's meetings with him, bears a huge grudge against Sevan for his role in this. But once Najibullah's militias began deserting him in April 1992, as well as his inner circle, Najibullah had few options. He had to cut whatever deal he could to get out of the country. In the end, it was too late, as his own allies turned against him before he could get to the airport.

A Discussion Postponed

This sketch of the historical circumstances surrounding this poignant correspondence prompts a final observation: Najibullah's instinct to contact prominent, noncombatant intellectual Afghans raises the key issue of who are the real parties to a peace agreement. A central criticism of the Geneva Accords was that it was negotiated between Afghanistan and Pakistan, and guaranteed by the two superpowers, but focused only on the Soviet withdrawal and not on governance arrangements in Afghanistan. In the same way that the Bonn agreement had excluded the Taliban, the Geneva Accords excluded the mujahideen parties. The current peace process framework is based on an agreement between the United States and the Taliban; it too covers only the withdrawal of international forces, though it includes an expectation of intra-Afghan negotiations. It has, however, to Kabul's great aggravation, excluded the government of the Republic of Afghanistan from the details of the terms of the international withdrawal. It seems that whatever is necessary is never sufficient when it comes to Afghan peace processes.

The point here is Najibullah's appeal to a community that was sidelined. As we noted in the beginning, Kakar in his letter pointed to the purge of intellectuals who might have been qualified to run the country. Subsequent history has shown that the mujahideen leaders have certainly not been so qualified. But there had been an attempt by Cordovez to leverage representatives of the Afghan community, particularly leaders among the refugee population in Pakistan, in the formation of a new government. Furthermore, Cordovez had come up with a list of some thirty "neutral" and qualified figures to run the transitional government that he proposed.

Córdovez had a dashing diplomatic style. When he visited Islamabad in the summer of 1987 as part of a regional tour to sell his transitional government plan, he told Pakistani officials that he would meet with the Peshawar Seven if they requested it, but he would not invite them to a meeting. He had met with representatives of the refugee community, which had been supportive of his plan. As usual, the Not-So-Magnificent Seven were divided and could not agree on requesting a meeting. Cordovez held his

ground, refused to reach out to the parties, and prepared to make his proposal public through the press. That Najibullah had not opposed his plan, even if it meant him stepping down, gave it added credibility. Cordovez describes holding a press conference at the Islamabad Holiday Inn to present his plan. He cites an article by Pakistani journalist Ahmad Rashid: “[W]hile Cordovez was in Islamabad, representatives of tribal chiefs, field commanders, and the *ullema* poured in to see him, bearing huge petitions filled with hundreds of signatures and thumb impressions of Afghan notables. ‘They all said that a jirga was the only way to prevent further bloodshed and stop Afghans killing Afghans,’ Cordovez said. ‘These are the voices of the silent majority who have not been heard throughout the war.’”¹⁸ These were dangerous voices, however, for the mujahideen leaders. A survey of several thousand refugees in Peshawar conducted by the Afghan Information Center revealed that around 70 percent supported the return of king Nadir Shah as head of state. Shortly afterwards, the head of the Center, former dean of Kabul University Bahauddin Majrooh, was assassinated at his office in Peshawar. Majrooh had been a university colleague of Kakar. The latter writes in his *Soviet Invasion and Afghan Response* that the assassination of Majrooh, along with several other moderates, prompted him to “seek refuge in the West.”¹⁹

President Najibullah’s effort to reach out to intellectuals rather than fighters was commendable, even if it was ultimately rejected. The moderates, the nonfighters, the victims of this long war, have for the most part been excluded from politics. The names we read of when we read the history of the period in which these letters were written are in many cases still active. Dostum, who abandoned Najib, took the Kabul airport, and airlifted in Jamiat forces is back in the northwest of Afghanistan, still a political player, still adroitly shifting sides. Hekmatyar, who backed Tanai’s coup, who rejected Cordovez’s plan, who was largely responsible for the destruction that was afterwards wreaked on Kabul, still sits in Kabul heading his political party. Abdul Rasul Sayyaf, another one of the Peshawar Seven, who also rejected the Cordovez plan, still rallies a constituency and is consulted on key issues.

There is an ongoing debate on whether or not it would have been possible, in 2002, at the height of US power in Afghanistan, to strip these figures of their power. At the time, the judgment by the international community was that they needed to be brought into the political fold. Some say that they could have been compelled to disarm and accept a new, more technical political elite. It is a tantalizing suggestion, an interesting thought experiment, and one that cannot be conducted without bringing to mind Kakar’s haunting statement that I have already referred to twice: “among the dead and those who fled there were Afghans with great potential for leadership and authority in the country.”

¹⁸ Cordovez and Harrison, *Out of Afghanistan*, 376.

¹⁹ Kakar, *Soviet Invasion*, 267.

Another thought experiment is to imagine what would have happened if Kakar and others who had been invited had gone to Kabul and met with Najib. These letters hint at the rich discussion that might have taken place. “Afghans,” Kakar wrote to Najibullah, “as a dynamic people with their own mores, traditions, and a very rich culture, are good at politics and show great skill in the solution of internal issues.”

At this writing we are at the threshold of another moment when there is the possibility of a political solution to the conflict. It is one that will require the suspension of distrust and the ability for deadly enemies to face each other. Many of the figures just listed, as well as a new generation raised in the post-2001 republican order, will need to negotiate with the Taliban, the executors of Najibullah. This “skill in the solution of internal issues” will be required.

Both Najibullah and Kakar wrote of how Afghans were tired of war, but in the three decades since there has only been war. “I have no doubt,” Najibullah wrote, “that in the not too distant future we will get our hands on sensible and realistic tools for a just political solution.” The sublimated emotions in this exchange of letters have only been amplified, deepened, and coarsened in the decades since they were written. But between the first and last draft of the writing of this particular essay, talks have convened in Doha between representatives of the Afghan republic and the Taliban movement. For the first time since 1979, the principal Afghan parties to the conflict face each other across a table to discuss how to end the violence and live together. Let us hope that the issues tentatively raised in these letters can finally be resolved.

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A Historical Perspective on Forty Years of Conflict in Afghanistan

Barmak Pazhwak

Abstract

After four decades of devastating conflict, the signing of the United States–Taliban agreement on February 29, 2020, marked the beginning of the latest intensive effort to end the war in Afghanistan.¹ This milestone in quest for peace and stability in Afghanistan entails both opportunity and danger with serious consequences for the Afghan people and the broader region. Despite all the odds, and oddly enough, the Taliban movement has increased its political leverage and legitimacy after the agreement, further sidelining the Afghan government and other Afghan political groups. The post-agreement period, implementation, and starting intra-Afghan talks are already proving to be treacherous and uncertain. Furthermore, the broader implications of US troop withdrawal and deep differences between the Afghan government, a fragmented Afghan polity, and a more assertive Taliban insurgency are seldom discussed or made clear. However, Afghan history in the past few decades evokes historical themes, issues, and debates that are relevant and significant to finding a just, organic, and sustainable resolution to forty years of exhausting conflict in Afghanistan. Studying and drawing lessons from exchanges and ideas for reconciliation offered by prominent Afghan scholars in the 1980s and 1990s could help in identifying and mitigating obstacles and distrust that are

¹ U.S. State Department, “Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan,” U.S. Government, 29 February 2020, <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Agreement-For-Bringing-Peace-to-Afghanistan-02.29.20.pdf>.

likely to afflict upcoming intra-Afghan talks. These historical documents lay out the root causes, cultural considerations, and political concerns in the way of conflict resolution that are uniquely Afghan, genuine, and therefore may be applicable. These documents provide insights into various issues facing key Afghan stakeholders in creating a unified and inclusive political system that addresses issues of peace and reconciliation, power politics, and legitimacy head on. Thus, their utility in informing and assisting a way forward minimizes the risk of overreach by the Taliban leadership or the Afghan government. Today, many Afghans and international observers are raising serious concerns that both the Taliban and Afghan government negotiating teams are not inclusive and independent, and that foreign powers are mostly shaping the agenda, process, and outcomes of negotiation at the expense of a genuinely Afghan-owned and Afghan-led process. The Afghan public continues to remain highly skeptical and questions the viability of the peace process and its promise of cessation of violence aimed at a political settlement through which the warring parties can share power and form a governing coalition.

The letters exchanged between Professor Hassan Kakar (1928–2016) and President Najibullah provide some insight into the context of the forty-year-old war in Afghanistan in 1990. The bloody coup and oppressive policies of the Afghan Communist regime after coming to power in 1978, followed by the Soviet Union's military invasion in 1979, imposed a brutal war on the people of Afghanistan that resulted in the maiming and killing of more than two million Afghans, the imprisonment of tens of thousands, and the forcing of millions of Afghans to flee their homeland and seek refuge in neighboring countries. Professor Kakar and many of his colleagues at the Kabul University were among those who spent many years of their precious lives in prison for their love of the country and firm belief in freedom and human dignity. This drained Afghan society of brain power and deeply polarized its population, particularly between pro-regime and resistance parties forming inside and outside Afghanistan.

Professor Kakar is frank and truthful in his letter in response to President Najibullah's initiative to solicit prominent Afghans for their views soon after the Soviet military withdrawal in 1989. He stresses the miseries and bloodshed caused by the Soviet invasion and the oppressive policies of its puppet regime in Afghanistan over several years. He takes issue with Dr. Najibullah's proposal on several matters, but particularly disagrees with him on the Communist regime's intent, conduct, and performance. He highlights the secrecy, injustice, and brutality of the regime's intelligence agency known

as KhAD, and recommends its dismantling. The level of suspicion in Kakar's response is understandable because decades of relative peace, harmony, and development in Afghanistan were disrupted by the same people who were now trying to get the country out of the mess which they had themselves created. Dr. Najibullah's letter was sent to prominent Afghans at a time when the regime's KGB trained intelligence agency (KhAD) continued to cultivate animosity and lasting mistrust among Afghans.

Professor Kakar agrees with Dr. Najibullah on two main points in his peace proposal: (1) A negotiated solution among warring parties to facilitate and manage peace and reconciliation; and (2) Restoring respect for the will of the Afghan people by paving the way for elections and consultation via traditional Afghan forums for conflict resolution such as *jirgas* and *shuras*. He is explicit in asserting the will of the Afghan people through a general and direct election.

Professor Kakar also touches upon the international dimensions of the Afghan crisis and the need for international engagement and support under the auspices of the United Nations in his letter to President Najibullah. He believes that if the superpowers, namely the United States and the Soviet Union, reach a consensus on a peaceful solution to the crisis, "Afghans, as a dynamic people with their own mores, traditions, and a very rich culture, are good at politics and show great skill in the solution of internal issues." He only laments the loss of integrity and independence of Afghan resistance parties subject to the influence of regional and international powers due to favoritism and the larger context of the Cold War. He states that, "these powers used this situation to curb, with a view to their own national interests, the parties' freedom of action." Once again, he invokes the supremacy of the will of the Afghan people and the imperative to reduce foreign intervention, and calls on the Afghan leaders to assume responsibility and take initiative for safeguarding their national interests.

UN-led Geneva Talks: Flawed Representation

The exchange of letters between Professor Kakar and Dr. Najibullah took place at the dusk of the "Cold War," when the United Nations still enjoyed a degree of clout and prestige as a global institution in settling international disputes and conflicts. It is within this context that we can understand Professor Kakar's emphasis on the role of the United Nations in Afghanistan. The UN-mediated Geneva Talks between the pro-Soviet government in Kabul, and Pakistan, represented a major effort for a political settlement in Afghanistan in the late 1980s. The UN-led effort particularly gained momentum after Mikhail Gorbachev's accession to power in the Soviet Union in 1985. Calling the

Soviet war in Afghanistan a “bleeding wound,”² Gorbachev indicated the Soviet Union’s willingness to consider withdrawing its troops from Afghanistan after certain political and military concessions from Pakistan and the United States. Despite serious flaws, the Geneva talks produced a political accord and the Soviets pulled out their combat troops from Afghanistan. The accord did not, however, end the war or remedy the political factionalism among Afghans inside or outside the country. This was due to a fundamental flaw in the Geneva talks that permitted Pakistan, a foreign government, and a Soviet-backed puppet Afghan government to negotiate on behalf of the Afghan nation. This arrangement sidelined the Afghan people and the Afghan freedom fighters, and their political parties, who represented much of the population. This arrangement of political convenience led to tragedy and Afghanistan’s descent into chaos in the early 1990s.

By excluding the Afghan nations and its legitimate representatives from the talks, the United Nations-sponsored negotiation effectively denied Afghans the right to self-determination. The architects of the Geneva talks also failed to include provisions that, following the Soviet withdrawal, would have addressed the internal dimensions of the conflict through a peace and reconciliation process among Afghans. Astonishingly, a similar mistake occurred some twenty years later when the architects of the Bonn Conference in 2001 failed to provide for an inclusive process among Afghans by excluding the Taliban. The consequences and costs of these mistakes are painfully obvious for the Afghan people and the international community.

Safeguarding Afghan National Sovereignty

The principles of Afghan national sovereignty, the will of the Afghan people and the right to self-determination, as prominently featured in Professor Kakar’s letter, still offer a viable solution to navigating the Afghan conflict. Particularly, if two main principles recommended by Professor Kakar are adhered to in any talks over the future of Afghanistan: (1) The imperative of intra-Afghan talks; and (2) The historical context and role of Afghan conventions, institutions, traditions, and its rich cultural heritage in helping move the negotiation forward. With this in mind, he, then, proposes a two-step process for lasting peace and reconciliation: (1) The formation of a transitional administration for building trust and confidence among the varying and warring Afghan parties through a United Nations-sponsored process; and (2) A constitutional government that will come to power through a free and fair national election based on

² Mikhail Gorbachev, “Statement Setting Forth Soviet Position on Afghan War,” *New York Times*, February 9, 1988.

the “principle of true national sovereignty.”

Professor Kakar is convinced that other details of foreign and domestic issues should be sorted out once the Afghan nation has determined its destiny. Hence, he strongly rebukes Dr. Najibullah’s idea of turning Afghanistan into a neutral and demilitarized country at the onset of the process. Professor Kakar assesses such a precondition as unacceptable and risky for Afghanistan’s security in a dangerous neighborhood. He particularly questions the logic behind the idea of calling an “international conference” to “guarantee and protect” Afghanistan’s status as a neutral and demilitarized country. He stresses on the fact that no foreign delegation or international conference has “the right and authority to talk about and decide such matters.” He suspected that this approach was a ploy by the Soviet Union to retain control over Afghanistan. He argues that “they [the Soviets] were not able to demilitarize Afghanistan by their military might and were not able to bring it under their domination. Now they want to achieve the same goal through international guarantees.”

Other contemporary Afghan scholars, notably Abdul Rahman Pazhwak (President of the UN General Assembly 1967 and the Afghan Ambassador to the United Nations) have also rejected the idea of “imposed” neutrality on Afghanistan when discussing ways and means of achieving a political settlement to the crisis. In his writings on the UN-sponsored Geneva Talks, Pazhwak states that any political arrangement is incomplete and irrelevant to lasting peace and national stability in Afghanistan if it does not guarantee universal human rights and dignity, including social justice, freedom of belief and expression, and an end to discrimination and inequality among Afghans. For Pazhwak, unity of effort and equal opportunity for all Afghans regardless of their ethnic, gender, sectarian, and religious identities are vital for national reconciliation, peace, and security.

Many Afghan scholars who opposed the Russian invasion of Afghanistan, such as Professor Kakar and Ambassador Pazhwak, believed that the Afghan war was a struggle for independence and a fight for freedom. They considered the Soviet invasion as an illegitimate use of force by a superpower against a smaller but independent, proud, and friendly neighbor. In an essay written in 1983, Pazhwak elaborates on the aspirations of Afghans for the future of their country stating that:

Afghans aspire to live in peace, friendship, and mutual respect and cooperation with other nations and states of the world. The source of this aspiration is their faith in God, and their strong belief in human dignity and human rights. This is an aspiration shared commonly among the people of the world, and therefore, Russian invasion of Afghanistan is a violation of the legitimate and shared rights of all peoples and nations as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The invasion to impose an authoritarian regime is the extension of the

atrocities that the tyrannical regime in Russia has committed in other countries and towards its other neighbors. (Pazhwak 1988)

Foreign Interference and the Rise of Political Islam

Afghan scholars were also highly concerned about the influence of foreign meddlers, particularly Pakistan and its Arab allies, in shaping the direction of the Afghan resistance that started as a war of liberation and gradually turned into a religious war. While an absolute majority of Afghans are faithful Muslims and have cherished their faith and belief in Islam throughout the last fourteen centuries, they have masterfully blended Islam with their rich cultural heritage through which an Islamic and Afghan identity has emerged. The blend of religion and traditional identity is intertwined in the deeds and thoughts of most Afghans. This blend of Islam and Afghanistan's cultural heritage was a key reason for there not being a single religiously motivated suicide bombing attack against the "Evil Empire"³ and the godless Soviets during the ten years of the occupation. Slowly but surely, Pakistani and Saudi Arabian intelligence agencies, in coalition with the United States intelligence apparatus, started promoting political Islam as a galvanizing force to bleed the Soviet Union and to attract human and financial capital from the Arab Gulf states, along with their Salafi, Wahhabi, and Takfiri preachers.

Subsequently, the traditional Islamic values of Afghans gave way to the new brands of politicized and militant Islam alien to Afghan traditions and worldviews. Afghanistan, and perhaps the world, would have been on a different trajectory if the so-called "free world" did not condition its support for the Afghan freedom fighters upon the excessive ambitions and approval of Pakistani Islamist generals and the Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), which ensured that the lion's share of international covert military and financial aid went to Islamist radical groups. As a result, the Afghan nation and its resistance groups were not the beneficiaries of the Soviet withdrawal and subsequent collapse, and proxy wars continued after the fall of the Afghan Communist regime in 1992 and led to civil war and a total collapse of law and order in Afghanistan. As Ambassador Pazhwak feared, "Afghans won on the battlefields but lost on the political front. A tragic repetition of Afghan history."⁴

After the rise of the Taliban, Afghanistan gradually fell into the hands of transnational Islamist fighters and their allies in the region. The fall of the Taliban and the Global War on Terror brought US-led international forces to Afghanistan. Initially, most Afghans

³ Ronald Reagan, "Evil Empire Speech," March 8, 1983, <https://voicesofdemocracy.umd.edu/reagan-evil-empire-speech-text/>.

⁴ Reagan.

were happy to see an end to the Taliban rule and their Al Qaeda associate's tyranny. The optimism ended quickly due to poor political choices and misconduct by military forces. The creation of a weak rentier state,⁵ the empowerment of the most notorious warlords through official positions and security contracts, and the lack of a clear vision and understanding of the Afghan mindset, soon led to disillusionment and grievances among Afghans resulting in the resurgence of a more latent and hardened Taliban. Global violent Islamist extremism also took hold outside of Afghanistan, threatening freedom, peace, and prosperity all over the world.

The repercussions of Professor Kakar and Ambassador Pazhwak's thoughts and warnings became evident as events unfolded following the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan. Their words and insights strongly reverberate and resonate in the present context of conflict and prospects for peace in Afghanistan. For a sustainable and dignified peace, the stress in their writings is on the rights of the Afghan people to self-determination with the belief that Afghans should have the absolute freedom to choose their system of government and its associated political, cultural, social, and economic institutions through fair and free elections without any foreign influence. These national scholars understood and served their nation. They embodied the best characteristics of Afghan identity and heritage, relentlessly advocating for Afghan aspirations and the country's highest potential. Unfortunately, their thoughts and themes are often ignored by the post-2001, foreign dominated analysis of Afghanistan. This is particularly astonishing.

In 1990, when Professor Kakar responded to Dr. Najibullah, a "Jihad" or religiously sanctioned war with a "Communist" regime backed by an "atheist" superpower, the USSR, still held much sway across Afghanistan. Yet, Professor Kakar only mentions "Islam" four times in his ten-page long letter. By contrast, the three-and-half page Doha peace agreement signed between the United States and the Taliban in 2020 mentions *Islam* or *Islamic* nineteen times, without any references to the very fundamental issues of "rights" and/or "justice" for those affected by the conflict. Worse still, another paper that attempts to provide a blueprint for a possible peace agreement with the Taliban refers to *Islam* and *Islamic* more than a hundred times. This is exactly what Professor Kakar and Ambassador Pazhwak and many more Afghans, including many who fought against the Godless Communists, were trying to avoid in order to let the people of Afghanistan choose their destiny freely. Yet, the emphasis on "Islam" and an "Islamic future" for Afghanistan is so intense by the foreign expert community that one is puzzled by their motives and understating—experts who predominately come from countries where

⁵ Kate Clark, "The Cost of Support to Afghanistan," *Afghan Analyst Network*, May 2020, <https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/en/special-reports/the-cost-of-support-to-afghanistan-new-special-report-considers-the-reasons-for-inequality-poverty-and-a-failing-democracy/>.

citizens' rights and the supremacy of laws are enshrined in secular constitutions with separation of religion and state firmly established!

Shades of Conflict

The conflict in Afghanistan has never been about religion. Religious belief and zeal were among the many values that drove Afghans to fight against the Communists, and perhaps is a driving factor for the rank and file of the Taliban in the current fight. Historically and today, the driving factors for Afghan resistance and insurgency have been an invasion of sovereignty, violations of their rights and human dignity, disrespect for their religion, use of brutal and of kinetic force, predatory government, and lack of justice and accountability.

Afghans can resolve internal issues as a "dynamic people." They possess the traditional mores and skills required to resolve their disputes, even with the Taliban. And most of the Taliban are Afghans who are willing and able to live in their country with full dignity and honor, if left alone. In the decades of war, many wrongs have been committed by those with guns protected by patronage networks and official government power. As the blurring of lines between Islam and politics proved very dangerous during the war with the Russians and poses dangers nowadays, the mixing of democracy and democratic values with predatory warlords who exploited the system has been a fatal mistake. Similarly, inclusive good governance and justice cannot be promoted by compromised, corrupt and incompetent leaders propped up by foreign powers.

These are issues that need to be addressed in any real peace negotiation that aims to settle the conflict in Afghanistan. Afghans are not fighting because they are a nation of warriors, nor because the country is a "graveyard of empires." The war is neither between Afghan ethnic groups nor a war that Pashtuns are fighting against non-Pashtuns for domination, as the Pakistan lobby in Washington often claims. They are at war because their basic human rights and dignity are violated by foreign powers and their proxies. They are at war because their diversity is not seen as a stimulus for common good but as a source for division and political gains. They are at war because brutal warlords and corrupt technocrats, acting on behalf of foreign meddlers, are imposed upon them. They are at war because of the "good enough for Afghans" mentality and assumptions. As any other nation does, the Afghans, too, have their linguistic and ethnic diversities. Yet there are more shared common cultural values and similarities in the towns and villages of Afghanistan than the perceived divisions and fissures. When talking about the people and topography of Afghanistan in his historical book, "Afghanistan," Dupree provides an interesting description of the country and its people:

A Spaniard, Sicilian, Greek, Turk, Arab, or Sephardic Jew would be physically at home in most of Afghanistan. Only distinctive tribal and ethnic clothing, language, religion, and other cultural impediments make the difference. Like the United States, and for a much longer period, Afghanistan has been a cultural, as well as physical, melting-pot: Persian, Central Asian, Sino-Siberian, European, Indian, Turkish, Arab and Mongol influences rose, fell, and blended. (Dupree 1980)

The Learning Curve

Thirty years have passed since the exchange of historic letters between Professor Kakar and Dr. Najibullah, yet few lessons have been learned. Had Afghans and the international community learned from the aftermaths of the Geneva talks and the Bonn conference, there would not have been a need for the last twenty years of bloodshed. The collapse of the Soviet Union provided a unique opportunity that was overlooked by post-Soviet US geopolitics. Nevertheless, the Soviet breakup created a power vacuum in the region that was quickly filled in by emerging regional powers, while a fragile Afghanistan drifted between malignant proxy forces. Unfortunately, Pakistan managed to take the former Soviet Union's place in Afghan politics through its proxies who talked openly about an "Islamic confederation" between Afghanistan and Pakistan.⁶ Not surprisingly, the Taliban at one time proposed a "demilitarized" Afghanistan as a condition for a peaceful settlement of the crisis. To many observers, this presented yet another attempt by Pakistan to achieve its goal of strategic depth and establishing control over Afghanistan.⁷

Afghans remain increasingly concerned about the United States–Taliban agreement and its implications for their future. While many Afghans neither trust the Taliban nor believe that the US–Taliban deal can produce peace and security, critical voices and analysis to reassess the US engagement in Afghanistan are ignored or pushed aside. The US administrations continue to struggle in defining their national interests and strategic objectives in Afghanistan and none has managed to remain consistent and clear-eyed beyond short-term annual reviews of the policy. America is blessed with enormous resources and generous people as a country. It can absorb the costs of its political and

⁶ Samiullah Doorandesh, "Hekmatyar Disappoints Again, Setback for Pakistan," Khaama Press Agency, December 29, 2019, <https://www.khaama.com/hekmatyar-disappoints-again-setback-for-pakistan-98760/>.

⁷ "Afghanistan President Slams Taliban Idea to Dissolve Afghan Army," Xinhua, February 3, 2019, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-02/03/c_137797447.htm; Omar, "Taliban's Disregard for Afghan Security Forces Sparks Outrage," *Salaam Times*, February 12, 2019, https://afghanistan.asia-news.com/en_GB/articles/cnmi_st/features/2019/02/12/feature-03.

military engagement and mistakes in Afghanistan and elsewhere and move on. On the other hand, the Afghans must be vigilant as their very survival is at stake with minimal resources at hand if the United States follows through with total withdrawal from Afghanistan and adheres to the agreement with the Taliban.

Strong doubts also persist on the viability of the US–Taliban agreement, and the Taliban willingness and ability to deliver on their part of the deal. While the Taliban has gained much-needed political legitimacy and recognition from the deal, it is unclear whether the United States can achieve its goals in Afghanistan and the broader region. Political Islam can nurture and mobilize an insurgency, but as we saw in the 1990s in Afghanistan, and later in Syria and Iraq or even Egypt, they can neither govern nor live up to their commitments.

The political turmoil in the United States under former President Trump was most unfortunate and has damaged its credibility and moral authority around the world as it failed to show respect for global rules of engagement and established diplomatic norms. The Afghan public and government are increasingly losing confidence in the United States' commitments to Afghanistan under the Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA) and other bilateral arrangements. A premature military retreat by the United States will encourage Afghan warlords and the many militia forces, armed and financed in the name of counterterrorism, toward hedging strategies in attempts to buy protection and space from the Taliban. Regionally, the United States has also largely failed to contain the Pakistani military, and Pakistan's double game allows it to provide sanctuary and support to proxies such as the Taliban's Haqqani network.⁸ With the rise of global power competition, specifically a more assertive China and Russia, America's retreat and haste may trigger renewed forms of hedging strategies that will prove detrimental for Afghanistan.⁹

Anxieties and Uncertainties Remain

As Afghanistan entered 2020, reaching a peace agreement with the Taliban ostensibly emerged as the best hope for ending the war and drawing down US military forces. It is hard to anticipate the turns and twists of the Afghan peace process as the neighboring countries and regional powers will reconfigure their hedging strategies to secure their

⁸ Adam Levine, "Pakistan Supports Haqqani Network, Adm. Mullen Tells Congress," CNN, September 22, 2011, <https://www.cnn.com/2011/09/22/us/mullen-security/index.html>: "The Haqqani network ... acts as a veritable arm of Pakistan's intelligence."

⁹ "Russia Secretly Offered Afghan Militants Bounties to Kill U.S. Troops, Intelligence Says," *New York Times*, June 26, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/26/us/politics/russia-afghanistan-bounties.html>.

interests in Afghanistan. Moving forward, the Afghan people are ready for peace and the Taliban hold the card to peace and stability, but questions surrounding what to expect from a political settlement through intra-Afghan negotiations remain a key source of anxiety and uncertainty.

It is unlikely that the Afghan people will be content with a peace deal reached through negotiations between an incompetent and corrupt government and an insurgent group with a dark past and no clear vision for the future. The ruling elites in Kabul are increasingly detached from the well-being of Afghanistan as a country and are mainly concerned about protecting their interests and patronage networks. Taliban, on the other hand, because of their dark past, have created a dangerous mistrust among Afghans. As with Dr. Najibullah's reconciliation efforts that failed due to a crisis of trust, the current peace talks with the Taliban can also fail if questions of accountability and justice are not addressed and a diverse and inclusive group of Afghans are not meaningfully included.

As is seen repeatedly, and as forewarned by Professor Kakar and Ambassador Pazhwak, bad deals have produced new wars in Afghanistan. The wars that engulf Afghanistan at the heart of Asia often spread in the rest of the region with unpredictable repercussions near and far. Understandably, achieving a just peace will take time and Afghans must assume responsibility for their country. As the process unfolds, let's bear in mind the issues and thoughts offered by Afghan scholars who embodied the best interests of their people and understood their pains and hopes for a better and more independent future. A real and meaningful peace based upon the independence and national sovereignty of the country, and social justice, civil and political liberties, human and civil rights, freedom of expression for all its citizens, and without any discrimination on whatever basis, is what they desire and rightly deserve.

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Afghanistan Peace Process: What Can Be Learned From Past Efforts?

Belquis Ahmadi and Makhfi Azizi

Abstract

A peaceful resolution of the ongoing war in Afghanistan has been a subject of discussion on and off since the mid-1980s. Past attempts in reaching a political settlement between the government and the warring factions have not produced a durable solution. The root causes of conflict—the role of the regional and international state and non-state actors, and challenges in state building—remain as sources of intense political controversy. A road map to peace was originally initiated by the UN in 1983 to bring an end to the war, and was instrumentalized by former President Najibullah. Since then, new players have come to the scene, old foes have become more vocal, and Afghanistan is the center of attention in the war against terrorism. After the signing of an agreement between the United States and the Taliban on February 29, 2020, there is hope for a peaceful resolution of the Afghan conflict. The US–Taliban agreement has paved the way for direct talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban, but there is no guarantee that the intra-Afghan negotiations will be successful. The conflict in Afghanistan has both regional and international dimensions, which require assurances and commitment by the non-Afghan actors that are involved in the country's conflict. Even though Najibullah's, and past attempts by the UN, have failed to end the war in the country, there are valuable lessons that can be learned from the past.

This year, 2021, marks 42 years since the beginning of political turmoil in Afghanistan, and while the ongoing peace talks have garnered much attention and have yielded varying degrees of optimism, there are lessons to be learned from failed attempts in the past. History tells us that leaders of the country have made similar extensive efforts to reach a political settlement and end the war in Afghanistan. Letters exchanged between the then President Najibullah between February and June of 1990, and the renowned historian, Professor Hassan Kakar, reveal efforts to bring an end to the conflict after the end of the Soviet invasion that began in December 1979. A reading of the three letters demonstrates uncanny similarities between the past and current peacemaking efforts. In this essay, the authors draw on these conversations to draw lessons from a comparison of these two efforts.¹

Among many issues discussed, Najib and Kakar debated the implications of foreign interference and intervention in Afghanistan affairs; negotiation and reconciliation among various Afghan political parties; the nature of the state; the rise of extremist groups; and people's continued hope for peace despite ongoing conflict. These are also the issues that are at the center of peace talks today, both inside and outside Afghanistan.

In his first letter of February 1990 to Kakar, Najib began with the role of "foreign elements" in exacerbating the crisis in Afghanistan. While foreign interference in Afghanistan affairs continues to be a threat to geopolitical stability extending beyond the greater South Asia region, it is important to note that it was an issue central to the peace talks back then, as it remains today. In the 1980s, the major players were the Soviet Union, the United States, and Pakistan, followed by rapidly increasing interference from Saudi Arabia and Iran. Today, the major player is the United States, along with unprecedented influence exerted by Pakistan and Iran. While some of Afghanistan's northern neighbors like Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan play diplomatic roles in offering to host, mediate, or provide technical advice, they largely remain unnoticed in comparison to the country's eastern and western neighbors, namely Pakistan and Iran. In the meantime, Russia's role in the region has evolved considerably in recent years, with the country embarking on a policy of *realpolitik* by shedding its relatively isolationist stance—since the collapse of the Soviet Union—in favor of an active role as an indispensable player on the world stage.

Despite the many similarities and setbacks in the past, there is hope for sustainable peace with this latest effort. However, hope alone will not resolve the conflict. Parties

¹ Prior to these letters and the effort by Najibullah, the UN had begun a series of talks with domestic, regional, and international actors. In January 1983, the UN Deputy Secretary General Diego Cordovez began direct talks with leaders in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iran to discuss solutions to the Afghan war. In 1991 the United Nations Secretary General, Javier Perez de Cuellar, issued a five-point proposal for a political settlement. When Najibullah took office, he accelerated the peace process as well.

involved in the conflict, as well as regional and international actors who have a stake in war and peace, will need to demonstrate strategic vision and genuine commitment to social justice, law and order, and long-term development plans, to bring peace to the country. We will elaborate on these similarities in the following section, and explore a new issue, the role of women, in the current peace process concerning Afghanistan.

Foreign Interference

The nature of foreign interference in the affairs of Afghanistan has not changed much. For example, Pakistan is not just still involved—its role has become even more prominent with their substantial support to the Taliban. What has changed is the roles the major players are playing, and the degree and type of their interference. The power dynamics have evolved with the US having taken the place of the Soviet Union as an occupying force, while the Russian Federation is believed to offer an extensive level of support to non-state armed actors, especially the Taliban.

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan changed world politics and security, an event for which Afghans paid a steep price. Millions were killed, maimed, disappeared, displaced, and a generation grew up in war. Afghans continue to pay a high price in the current conflict too. On the other hand, Pakistan and Iran continue to support groups that they believe serve their current and future interests in Afghanistan. On foreign interference, Najibullah blamed “foreign elements” for their role in deepening the crisis. “There is no doubt that foreign elements have had a larger role in increasing the crisis than internal elements.” He also recognized that “the presence of Soviet forces had undermined the government’s efforts for peace. . . . [T]o accomplish this great wish, it was necessary, more than anything else, to remove foreign elements from the scene.”² Following the 1988 Geneva Accords, the former Soviet Union agreed to withdraw its forces after nine years of occupation. The timeline was agreed upon during the negotiations, which began in February 1988, and ended in February 1989. Afghanistan was left in complete ruins after the withdrawal of the Soviet troops due to the long conflict.³

The Geneva Accords also called for an end to foreign intervention in the affairs of Afghanistan, and international guarantees, first to ensure “intervention would not be

² Najibullah’s 1st letter, February 1990.

³ The Geneva Accords were a set of agreements signed on April 14, 1988. The accords were being negotiated for nearly six years (1982–1988), led by the United Nations, between Afghanistan, Pakistan, the United States, and the Soviet Union. The negotiations began June 16, 1982. There were four agreements signed between Afghanistan and Pakistan, in which the US and the Soviet Union played the role of guarantors. One of the outcomes of the agreements was a timetable that the Soviet troops had to follow when withdrawing from Afghanistan.

continued or resumed,” and secondly to assure the return of refugees in a dignified way.⁴ While the withdrawal of the occupied forces and the return of the refugees occurred as planned, the regional and international actors did not honor their pledges. In defiance of their commitments, Pakistan continued interfering in the domestic affairs of the country, and together with the US, failed to fulfill their obligations.

The withdrawal of the foreign forces, especially the Soviet Union, a major player in the conflict, did not result in any improvement of the situation in the country as President Najibullah, the Chief UN mediator Diego Cordovez,⁵ and others had hoped. To the contrary, given the absence of continued support to Najibullah’s government, the stability of the country worsened in all aspects. The lack of will from many Afghan political leaders and mujahideen factions, and a vacuum of support to Najibullah created many hurdles in the formation of a stable and legitimate government accepted by all. This major vacuum led to decades of civil war, led by several mujahideen leaders and their factions. The civil war was followed by yet another unprecedented humanitarian crisis as millions were forced to take refuge in Pakistan and Iran, and thousands more were internally displaced. The destruction to life and property was uncountable; houses were looted, and innocent people killed. Torture and rape were used as tools to suppress opponents (Kakar 1995, 231–32).

Soon after the agreements were signed, Pakistan and the US stated that they were unprepared to abide by the text and spirit of the accord until the withdrawal of the Soviet troops. Both countries also declared the Afghan government, a party to the agreements, illegitimate and not worthy of diplomatic recognition. This took many by surprise and further revealed Pakistan’s interest in continued instability in Afghanistan.

While Afghan leaders were fighting over political power, the conflict soon became an issue of the Afghans alone. The international community, primarily the US, which was deeply invested in the defeat of the Soviet Union, turned a blind eye to the humanitarian crisis and post-Soviet Afghanistan. In addition to ignoring the Geneva Accords, the US also did not honor its guarantor role in holding Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and Iran responsible for continuing financial support and supply of arms to mujahideen factions. In his book, *Out of Afghanistan*, Diego Cordovez states, “[T]he fact that the U.S. tolerated or was unable to stop Islamabad’s support of fundamentalist factions has had ugly consequences.” (Cordovez 1995, 7)

Today, while the US remains a primary occupying force, Pakistan and Iran also play an influential role by supporting non-state actors and interfering in the affairs of Afghanistan. Pakistan’s support to the armed groups in Afghanistan was an open secret

⁴ Najibullah’s 1st letter.

⁵ UN Chief mediator Diego Cordovez was confident that the parties will abide by the agreements and did not expect a crisis following the Soviet troops’ withdrawal. He said, “Things will start changing now,” and that “[t]here will be a fundamental change of attitude among all the people.” (BBC 1988).

for decades until 2014, when Osama Bin Laden was found and killed in the suburbs of its capital, Islamabad.

Troop Withdrawal

Najibullah was wary of Pakistan's role and had repeatedly demanded that "international guarantors" oversee their noninterference in Afghanistan as well as a mechanism to monitor the agreements. In an interview in the *Los Angeles Times* on September 14, 1991, he said, "There should be an international guarantee to bring peace in the country through a cease-fire and a guarantee for the stoppage of delivery of weapons to and from all sides, not just from the US and the Soviet Union but from Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Iran." The crisis that followed after the Soviet withdrawal was, to some extent, predictable, but the complete lack of international assistance exacerbated the effects of the conflict.

Some journalists, intelligence officials, and diplomats had sounded many warnings about the chaos that unfolded, but no action was taken by those who were previously interested in Afghanistan. For example, US President Ronald Reagan, and his Secretary of State, George P. Shultz, acknowledged that the Soviet withdrawal will not resolve the fighting in Afghanistan. Days before the mujahideen took control of the capital, another US Department of State official, Margaret Tutwiler, in an interview with the *Tech* in April 1992, said "regime control is rapidly collapsing," warning that "if the rebel factions began fighting each other along ethnic lines, you could have chaos."

The Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan was hailed by some as Islam's victory over infidels through jihad,⁶ or the so-called holy war. That sense of victory emboldened extremist groups that gradually morphed into terrorist groups throughout the Muslim world.

The philosopher, George Santayana, has famously said that "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." The last time the US decided to step back from Afghanistan in the 1980s, the Afghan people ended up paying a tremendous price. By pulling back its support to Afghanistan, the US and the West left a vacuum

⁶ The word "jihad" was used as one of the propaganda tools by the mujahideen leaders and promoted by the US, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and others who supported the war in Afghanistan. The word jihad is Arabic and means "struggle." It was used to urge Afghan men to fight against the occupation of the Soviet forces in Afghanistan. The strategy worked well on Afghan men. However, the concept of jihad did not end with the collapse of the Soviet Union as propagated by the sponsors of the Afghan war. Although successful, this shortsighted policy in the propaganda against the Soviet Union is still being used in many parts of the world to fight against modernity and democratic values. The concept still remains prevalent in many Afghan households and has reached beyond the Afghan war and its borders.

that was then filled by destructive forces, such as Al-Qaeda and other neighboring states. With the lack of support from the international community at a time when support was critical to the Afghan refugees, Osama bin Laden and his sympathizers opened madrassas for refugee children, and not many years later the madrassa students emerged as the Taliban. Al-Qaeda had long been perceived a threat to the West and any modern civilization, but Osama bin Laden's group and affiliates were left to direct the Afghan problem. Afghanistan came into the spotlight only after Al-Qaeda coordinated the September 11 attack in 2001.

Today, Afghanistan faces a similar dilemma. Much emphasis has been laid on the withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan with little to no regard for the consequences of such a move. In the meantime, not much attention is being given to ensure strategic engagement and support to prevent the country from lawlessness, chaos, and another humanitarian crisis, just like the one the country endured after the withdrawal of the Soviet forces. It is, however, important to ask the question of how a hasty withdrawal of the US troops compares with that of the Soviet Union in the late 1980s?

Given the current situation, the withdrawal, as demanded by the Taliban, Pakistan, Iran, and other regional neighbors of Afghanistan, will once again create the vacuum that was left behind after the Soviet withdrawal. This is a deliberate strategy by the sponsors of the Taliban to test the Afghan government's stability and strength. For those reasons, it will not be a wise move to implement a complete withdrawal from Afghanistan in a short period of time. Indeed, if it happens, the Afghan government needs strong commitments from the international community regarding continued support in the development of Afghanistan, as well as ensuring noninterference by other countries.

Equally important, a rapid withdrawal of the US presence from Afghanistan, which currently only serves the Taliban, will most likely have consequences similar to that of the 1980s. Although relatively more stable than the 1980s, Afghanistan remains a fragile state. Many political leaders do not see eye to eye and continue to have deep political and ideological differences; the Afghan army needs substantial support and training; and the country needs long-term support for further economic development. All existing institutions need to further develop a strong base. Similar to the 1980s, there are several non-state armed groups that continue to terrorize people and engage in the daily destruction of lives, and public and private property in the country.

Afghanistan also continues to be the number one opium producing country in the world, and with no measures to curb the production, it will destroy the Afghan economy and the societies of all those, including the West, to which Afghan opium is being smuggled. In addition, the country and economy continue to suffer from a high unemployment rate, poor governance structures, and the lack of law enforcement. All of these issues will provide yet another opportunity to terrorist groups to further destroy the fabric of Afghan society.

“Interim Government”

Najibullah’s road map to peace also included the creation of a leadership council, the announcement of a six-month ceasefire, and establishment of a “broad-based interim coalition government to work under the administration of the leadership council.”⁷ The leadership of this transitional government was controversial during the 1980s peace process, and continues to be an important issue in the current conversation. In the current process, establishing an interim government has been one of the suggestions in creating an inclusive government post the peace agreement.

The disconnect between Najibullah’s road map to peace and the UN’s plan for peace in Afghanistan was revealed later in Cordovez’s book. Cordovez admitted to his efforts to persuade Najibullah to step down. From his talks with other Afghan leaders, he believed that his “efforts would be particularly useful” if he was “able to persuade Najibullah to step down.” He concluded that with this, “An intra-Afghan dialogue could start,” and that it would give all the “participants” an equal “footing.” The interim government, Cordovez believed, would have been also “perceived by all Afghans as legitimate” and would promote “national reconciliation required after so many years of war.” (Cordovez 1995, 368–69)

Kakar was skeptical of Najibullah’s proposal of the creation of an interim government. He viewed the plan as a deliberate attempt by Najibullah to ensure that his government would have an upper hand in the state formation process. In his reply to Najibullah, Kakar argued that, “the military forces . . . as well as the courts would be under your control. These forces would be in place even after the creation of the interim government . . . such a government would not be neutral concerning the formation of a future national structure and would not be able to bring about a government that is needed for the final solution to the crisis.” Alluding to Cordovez’s proposal requesting Najib to step down, Kakar continued, “There would be severe new tensions and new struggles. It is likely that very unhappy and unpredictable events would occur and affect the entire political process of decision making—possibly even destroying it. In order to prevent this outcome, it would be better that an interim government be created in the transitional period to reduce tension and confusion in accordance with the Cordovez proposal.”⁸

In reality, the plan for the interim government in accordance with the Cordovez plan was never fulfilled, and Afghan leaders failed to take advantage of the opportunities to serve the long-term national interest of their country. Instead, most leaders continued to fixate on their personal, tribal, or factional party interests at the risk of widening division among different ethnic groups. Rather than addressing the interethnic tension

⁷ Najibullah’s 1st letter, February 1990.

⁸ Kakar’s letter, June 1990.

and animosity that had developed over time as a result of social injustice and divisive policies, the mujahideen leaders deepened the division.

The tension and division among the country's ethnic groups continue to be instigated or otherwise exploited by political leaders. Intraethnic tension and distrust have severely affected the machinery of the government. The Afghan government has struggled for the past two years to put together a negotiation team that is inclusive and representative of the diversity of the country, often appeasing the jihadi leaders who believe they are still central to the political future of Afghanistan. Many of these leaders represented by their descendants are the men who fought against the Soviet Union and engaged in the inter-factional fighting that led to the civil war between 1992 and 1996. On March 16, President Ghani announced a 21-member negotiation team that included four women. Although politically diverse in composition, the team lacks full representation of Afghan civil society.

Future of the State

The form of the state was an important factor in the peace process during the 1980s and continues to be an issue today. The letters reveal that Kakar urged Najibullah to create an Islamic republic. Najibullah's proposed form of government was not recognized as purely Islamic, and Kakar's suggestions appear to have been made to appease the many jihadi leaders who believed that Islam had to play a central role in the governance of Afghanistan.

Kakar's recommendations on adopting an Islamic republic⁹ should not be compared to the current demands by the Taliban for an "Islamic country or Islamic system."¹⁰ There are major differences in the political imaginations of these different forms of government. The Taliban has not articulated whether their demand for an Islamic country will replicate the Islamic Emirate form of government that they had previously put in place. It is vital for Afghans as well as all others in the international community to make a clear distinction between the two proposed forms of government and demand a clear explanation from the Taliban on the meaning of "Islamic country or Islamic system." It is equally important for the international actors to convey to the Taliban that their group is one of many groups in Afghanistan and avoid giving the false impression

⁹ The Islamic republic system is a political system in which people elect their leaders and laws cannot be contradictory to Sharia, while in the emirate the country is ruled by an Amir from amongst religious scholars, selected by a council of religious scholars, and Sharia is the law of the land.

¹⁰ Islamic system on the other hand refers to a form of government that is based on Sharia. There are 23 Muslim countries with Islam as their official religion, of which 18 countries declare Islam or Sharia as a basis for law.

that the Taliban are the future rulers of the country.

As recommended by Kakar, an Islamic republic was indeed established by the mujahideen, but this form of government was not the solution to Afghan problems. It appeared soon that Islam was merely used as a tool to suppress Najibullah's road map to peace. Despite naming the country an "Islamic Republic," the jihadi leaders continued to fight for power, which resulted in absolute anarchy between 1992 and 1996, and resulted in a form of government in which power was only in the hands of a few, the mujahideen leaders, and later the leaders of the Taliban between 1996 and 2001.

Extremist Ideology

The rise of extremist ideologies and the use of violence in the name of religion to reach political goals is not new to the Afghan sociopolitical scene. It can easily be argued that religious extremism or the use of violence in the name of religion has existed for many generations. Religious actors have at times instigated violence to reach their ideological objectives. However, religious extremism entered the Afghan political scene more drastically during the 1980s in the fight against Soviet occupation. Even though the context in which extremist and violent groups emerged was in response to occupation, they did not automatically cease their operations after the withdrawal of Soviet presence and continued armed attacks on civilians and the government. Their goal was to hold power.

In the letter to Kakar, Najibullah writes of the mounting pressure in the southeastern part of the country, exerted by "Saudi Wahhabi mercenaries." Thirty years later, Afghanistan continues to be a thriving field for domestic, regional, and global terrorist groups. In addition to the already existing violent non-state actors, violent groups exploiting Islam have been flourishing in Afghanistan for the last two decades despite the presence of international forces. Several sources have estimated as many as 20 or 21 different extremist groups currently operating in Afghanistan. These groups, although violent and extremist in their action, justify their violence across the country based on narrow interpretations of Islamic teachings. Added to the dilemma of the existence of the past groups, transnational extremist groups and individuals who had taken part in the war against the Soviets feel obliged to continue their "jihad" against the US and the Afghan government, and to establish an Islamic structure free of western influence.

The dramatic rise in the number of extremist groups has become an enormous hurdle in the ongoing peace talks. It has often been a perplexing issue for Afghans to distinguish groups that may have an extremist yet nonviolent goal from the overwhelming number of violent and extremist groups. This has been a major challenge for many Afghan people irrespective of their locality being situated in relatively peaceful regions.

Women and Minorities

One major distinction, however, is the role of women in the current peace process. The issue of the rights of women and minorities, both ethnic and religious, has today emerged as one of the most contentious and critical, although it is also, at the same time, mostly sidelined. In the three letters exchanged between the two men, there is no mention of women and minorities. One wonders if there was no such resistance to women's rights and the rights of minorities to the level that exists today among the Taliban. Even then, it should have found a place in these conversations. Women were active during the fight against the Soviet Union and during Najib's presidency. Many who knew Najibullah from close quarters would agree that he was a progressive man and would have had no objection to the rights of women and minorities. Yet, women's role and the future of their status in Afghan politics did not make it into the letters to Kakar.

Research conducted by the United States Institute of Peace concluded that Afghan women played a pivotal role in the four decades of war as mobilizers, sympathizers, and informants. Afghan women have also played a critical role in providing logistical support to the warring factions. At family and tribal levels, women have mediated to prevent violence. During the Soviet occupation, Afghan women were combatants and played a significant role. Similarly, Afghan women also supported male members of their families in the fight against the Soviet forces. In some cases, women even accompanied the Afghan fighters in supportive roles, by providing food and carrying out other nonmilitary chores.

Women were both participants and victims in those years, and will continue to play this role in the years to come. As victims, they faced widespread violence in the form of imprisonment, sexual assault, and torture. However, issues surrounding women's rights and their existence in public life were not considered major issues in resolving the conflict. In 1981, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). Afghanistan was and remains a signatory to the convention. It is surprising that despite Afghanistan's ratification of the UN convention, women's rights were not part of the UN led negotiations at that time. Although women's rights did not make it into the peace process of the 1980s, it has become, rightly so, one of the most critical issues in the ongoing peace process. The change has occurred much to the credit of Afghan women's rights groups, Afghan civil society, and the much larger support of the international community to the rights of women and minorities. Today there are additional conventions and resolutions that protect and promote the rights of women during war and in the peace process. The UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security has been instrumental in strengthening the role of

women in conflict resolution, peace negotiations, peacebuilding, and peacekeeping. The resolution acknowledges the disproportionate impact of conflict on women and their equal participation in the maintenance and promotion of peace and security.

With the help of stronger international mechanisms to ensure their equal and meaningful participation, Afghan women have been emboldened to speak up for their rights in today's peace process. While their advocacy has centered around rights, they have also advocated for a just, practical, and sustainable peace process in which the rights of all are preserved. Women's groups have also been advocating for retaining the constitution of Afghanistan as it contains provisions to ensure equality of men and women, while at the same time adhering to Islamic values that guarantees a system of elections.

Conclusion

As examined in this essay, there are many parallels to be found in the major challenges and issues in the peace processes that have continued off and on over four decades. The continued differences among the Afghan political leaders, the interference of neighboring countries and major powers, the rise of extremist ideologies, the prospect of establishment of an interim government, and a significant increase in violence are the similarities. These issues are at the center of the current peace process. Despite the three decades of conflict since the peace efforts by Najibullah, Afghan leaders have not made concessions in their demands or compromises in order to move ahead in the peace process. So what can we learn from the letters, or more importantly, the failed peace process of the 1980s?

We can learn several things from the previous process, one of which is reconciliation. Reconciliation is a complex term where the root causes of conflict are not only based on ideological differences, but also on issues of identity. Reconciliation in Afghanistan is even more complex given the multigenerational conflict in which the vast majority of the population have either been victims or perpetrators during the past several regimes. Creating trust and understanding among the warring groups and between warring groups and civilians is challenging. However, without reconciliation, a just and sustainable peace will only remain a fond hope.

Reconciliation and addressing past grievances will pave the way for healing and reestablishing social cohesion. However, it cannot be imposed from outside. Reconciliation after four decades of a complex conflict in a context such as Afghanistan requires strategic planning and long-term investment. The parties in conflict, civil society, and human rights institutions must develop a reconciliation plan that is contextually relevant and does not disregard the rights of the victims of the decades of war.

Another lesson that can be learned is that signing peace agreements without firm commitment by the signing parties and monitoring by a credible neutral international body or bodies serves no purpose. Unfortunately, there are several examples from the past peace deals among Afghan leaders and the Afghan government and international actors, which have not lasted long due to a lack of enforcement mechanisms. Under Najibullah's National Reconciliation Policy of 1986, despite amnesty and cash being offered to local mujahideen commanders, the policy failed to secure political settlement.

The 1992 Peshawar Accord, that created the Afghan Interim Government, headed by Sibghatullah Mojaddedi, also failed to reconcile the mujahideen groups. After taking oath in the holy shrine of Mecca and signing the Islamabad Accord in 1993, that resulted in a power sharing arrangement between Burhanuddin Rabbani and Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, the two leaders not only failed to honor the agreement, but also further intensified the fighting. In 1995, the Nangarhar Shura facilitated the Mahipar Agreement, where the mujahideen leaders agreed to a political settlement, which was another failed attempt.

For the current peace process to result in a sustainable peace, the international community must provide a mechanism of monitoring. It must provide funding for the development of the economy, and security. Moreover, the troop withdrawal must be based on a reliable exit strategy that will promote lasting peace. In order to achieve a lasting peace, women and minorities, ethnic and religious, must be treated as equal citizens and that their rights and freedoms must be guaranteed. The Afghan leaders must put their differences aside and work together to forge a just and sustainable peace.

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Peacebuilding and Reconciliation: Lessons from the Najibullah–Kakar Correspondence

Shaida M. Abdali

Abstract

Afghanistan is on the brink of opening a new chapter in its history after nineteen years since the fall of the Taliban regime in 2001. Despite major achievements since 2001, Afghanistan's progress has been haunted by continued war and violence in the country with over 150,000 deaths of both military personnel and civilians,¹ including more than 3,000 coalition troops who were there as part of their peacekeeping mission. All this misery and destruction was caused due to various internal and external factors. However, one major factor seems to have been the exclusion of the Afghan Taliban from the political scene in the post-Bonn political setup in Afghanistan. After nineteen years of a military campaign against the Taliban, there is now a consensus at the national, regional, and global levels that the conflict in Afghanistan cannot be resolved through military means alone. Therefore, the world community, along with the Afghan government, has recently entered into negotiations with the Taliban. As a result, the US and the Taliban have signed a peace agreement in February 2020 in Doha, which promises a full withdrawal of foreign troops, paving the way for Intra-Afghan dialogue. The opening ceremony of Intra-Afghan dialogue on September 12, 2020, in Doha, was a historic occasion, one which might become a launching pad for this new chapter in Afghanistan. However, the dialogue process is perceived to be a long and complicated one,

¹ "Afghan Civilians," Costs of War, Watson Institute, page updated January 2020, <https://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/costs/human/civilians/afghan>.

as Afghanistan has already gone through some bitter experiences in the name of peace and national reconciliation in the past. For that reason, any future peace settlement needs to be conducted in view of past experiences and efforts, and must guard against falling back into the same dark era of the 1990s with dire consequences for Afghanistan, the region, and the world. Hence, in-depth research into and analysis of the past and the current situations is conducted here to find out what lessons could be learned, and how to negotiate a successful political settlement in Afghanistan now.

“National Reconciliation” is a term (*ashti-ye melli*) that has been used for decades now as a way out for the Afghan crisis, whose key cause lies in external interference and aggression. The process has become more relevant during particular phases of crisis. Despite various mechanisms and structures used in these periods, the process has not fulfilled its objectives. The process must have so far lacked in terms of sufficient and appropriate steps to reach its objectives. Examining different case studies might help in drawing lessons to apply for all future courses of action. In the present context, it is best to consider how the National Reconciliation Plan of Dr. Najibullah, the former president of Afghanistan (r. 1988–1992), was laid out on the eve of the Soviet troop withdrawal from Afghanistan in 1987. In order to draw lessons from the past, various documents and sources are examined.

This focuses on the three letters exchanged between Najibullah and Hassan Kakar in 1990 in the context of national reconciliation. These letters are crucial to examine in view of the current political and security situation in Afghanistan. The aim is to apply lessons learned in the aftermath of the exchanges between the former Afghan President Najibullah and Hassan Kakar in 1990. This study conducts a comprehensive examination of views and proposals raised in letters related to the national reconciliation process, aimed at ending the conflict in Afghanistan. Moreover, the study attempts to compare and contrast the demands/conditions of the Afghan Mujahideen in the 1990s to the demands and conditions of the Taliban to President Ghani’s government in the present. Finally, the study offers certain recommendations for consideration while the Intra-Afghan peace dialogue takes place in Doha, Qatar.

Mohammad Najibullah was born in 1947 in the city of Gardez, Afghanistan. He was a medical doctor by profession. He led the Afghan Intelligence Agency (a.k.a. “KhAD”) from 1980 to 1985 before he became the Afghan President in 1987. Mohammad Hassan Kakar was born in 1929 and was a renowned historian. He obtained a PhD in history from the University of London. Having obtained several academic achievements

such as becoming a professor at Kabul University's history department in 1981. It was around then that he became one of the key resisting scholars when the Soviets invaded Afghanistan in 1979. He was captured by the Soviets in 1982 and put in jail. Following his release, life became difficult in Kabul, as the repression of the Soviet troops against known personalities intensified. Hence Kakar was forced to migrate to Peshawar in Pakistan in 1987, and eventually settled in the United States by 1989, teaching at the University of California San Diego. Nevertheless, Kakar continued his struggle alongside other Afghans to free Afghanistan from foreign occupation. He believed in a political solution and urged the UN and the rest of world community to work for a peaceful political settlement in Afghanistan.

President Najibullah, who presided over Afghanistan for six years, was confronted by various Afghan Jihadi groups, who were backed by the US, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and a number of other countries within the region and beyond. His most successful military defense was against a large-scale attack on Jalalabad from Pakistan in 1989, a defense conducted without the aid of Soviet troops, who had completely withdrawn by that time.² Najibullah's government survived till 1992, at which point he surrendered power to the Mujahideen groups. As a result, civil war broke out between the various warring factions in Afghanistan until the Taliban captured Kabul. Soon after entering Kabul, the Taliban stormed the UN compound where Najibullah had taken shelter. They first killed him and then hanged him in public in 1996.

What the Letters Argued

When Najibullah's government was under intense military and political pressure, Najibullah wrote letters to prominent Afghan leaders and scholars including Professor Kakar, in February 1990, expressing his own views and seeking Kakar's help in resolving the Afghan situation. His first letter, dated June 12, 1990, mostly concentrated on the two dimensions of the Afghan conflict: external and internal. Externally, he referred to countries which backed the Afghan Mujahideen groups militarily, financially, and politically, mainly the US, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan. Internally, he referred to the various Afghan Jihadi groups which played into the hands of foreign countries, particularly Pakistan, destroying their own homeland. Kakar wrote a detailed account of the Afghan situation on June 12 and shared his views for a political settlement. Based on the reply, Najibullah wrote his second letter in June 1990 to clarify certain points Kakar had flagged in his first letter.

² John F. Burns, "After Jalalabad's Defense, Kabul Grows Confident," *New York Times*, April 30, 1989, <https://www.nytimes.com/1989/04/30/world/after-jalalabad-s-defense-kabul-grows-confident.html>.

Mohammad Najibullah, at the peak of war, declared a national reconciliation policy in the mid-1980s,³ calling on all Afghans, including the Mujahideen groups, to resolve the Afghan crisis politically. However, his plan did not receive a positive response primarily due to the large Soviet presence in the country. Most stakeholders in the Afghan conflict called for Soviet troops' withdrawal before any talks. The continued military resistance by the Afghan Mujahideen backed by outside powers compelled the Soviets to agree to withdraw their troops. This agreement was signed in Geneva in 1988,⁴ securing a number of commitments including an end to foreign interference in Afghan affairs, and repatriation of Afghan refugees back into Afghanistan. Despite the Geneva agreement, foreign interference, which fueled the deadly war, continued in Afghanistan.

Najibullah strongly believed that external factors contributed much more to the Afghan conflict than internal factors; however, he focused on both the internal and external factors of the Afghan problem. He called on the Afghan sides and the countries abroad to assist Afghanistan in peacebuilding efforts, and in forming an inclusive and broad-based Afghan government, presenting his own plan and seeking their views on the same.

Najibullah's plan included calling a broad-based and nationwide gathering to agree on a future system and constitution for Afghanistan, as well as an international conference to safeguard Afghanistan's sovereignty and independence. He proposed the formation of a Leadership Council, representing all sides, which would be given the tasks of ensuring a six-month ceasefire and an interim coalition government in Kabul, and the establishing of a commission to draft a new constitution and electoral law. He further proposed to convene a traditional Loya Jirga to endorse the new constitution and electoral law. Moreover, Najibullah suggested a parliamentary system where a party or a coalition of parties with a majority of seats forms the new government. He agreed to an international election observer body to supervise the election process impartially and independently.

To deal with the external dimension of the Afghan problem, he suggested that an international conference—comprising the OIC, the four parties to the Geneva agreement, and the countries of the Non-Aligned Movement—endorse a ceasefire. At the same time, no external state should send any arms to Afghanistan, recognizing Afghanistan's legal status as a neutral and disarmed state.

Hassan Kakar replied to Najibullah's call for national reconciliation in great detail. He highlighted that the complexity of the Afghan crisis derived from a number of internal and external elements. Internally, he referred particularly to the millions of

³ "Incremental Peace in Afghanistan," special issue, *Accord*, Issue 27 (June 2018), <https://www.c-r.org/accord/afghanistan/president-najibullah-and-national-reconciliation-policy>.

⁴ Dr. Farouq Azam, "The Geneva Accords on Afghanistan," Badloon, July 1993, <https://www.badloon.net/english/articles/pdf/THE%20GENEVA%20ACCORDS%20ON%20AFGHANISTAN.pdf>.

Afghans rendered refugees, and the millions more maimed or killed in the decades-long war. Furthermore, he referred to the great tragedy caused by the Soviet-backed Afghan intelligence agency that arrested, tortured, and killed scores of Afghans. Externally, he referred to the large number of Soviet advisors still staying in Afghanistan in support of the Afghan government.

In response to such a situation, the external support to the Afghan Mujahideen from Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Western powers, mainly the US, continued. He opined that the Afghan situation was out of the Afghans' control, and was more in the hands of external powers. However, he cited a Pashto proverb, which says that even "if the mountain is high, there is still a way over it." And a poem from Khushal Khan Khattak, which said, "if fate has pushed you into the mouth of a lion, don't lose your courage."

Kakar agreed on the overall proposal to resolve the Afghan crisis by involving all the internal and external stakeholders, establishing a national council, establishing an interim government, holding independent parliamentary elections, and drafting a new constitution so that a new government can be formed. However, he didn't agree to all this happening under the Soviet-backed Najibullah's regime, under the watch of his intelligence agency (KhAD) and the presence of hundreds of Russian advisors in Afghanistan. He referred to the position of all Afghan parties, rejecting any coalition with the communist regime in Kabul. Additionally, he referred to the position of outside powers almost equivalent to the position of the Afghan parties, including the Mujahideen.

Kakar suggested the formation of an Islamic government under the supervision of the United Nations or any other international body, to pave the way for ending foreign influence in Afghan affairs. He suggested that the reforms and the new government function under the supervision of the UN and world powers, while respecting the national sovereignty of Afghanistan—as had been stated by the UN earlier.

He believed that the Soviets had a larger role to play in facilitating such an environment by respecting the international borders of Afghanistan and keeping its diplomatic mission restricted as per international norms. He believed that such an action by the Russians would encourage all stakeholders, including Pakistan, to rethink their approach and act accordingly. He predicted that those who did not abide by such an approach might come under pressure from the US and Saudi Arabia to fall in line. He further suggested that in case such a scenario did not come to pass, the Soviets could make reciprocal actions taken by Pakistan a precondition to their own more complete withdrawal.

Kakar believed that as long as the Russians were involved in Afghanistan, Najibullah's regime would have no legitimacy. He suggested that the key to the Afghan solution would be the formation of an interim government as a transitional authority, comprising

all sides, including the opposition, so that the transition period did not come under the influence of Najibullah's regime and his allies. He particularly asked for the termination of the intelligence agency (KhAD), and the formation of a new agency under the interim government to be funded by Afghanistan itself.

Kakar also differed with the new legal status of Afghanistan as neutral and disarmed, to be declared thus by an international conference as suggested by Najibullah. He believed it was tantamount to national suicide and inimical to the national sovereignty of Afghanistan. Moreover, he believed that such a legal status would pave the way for foreign countries, including neighbors, to turn Afghanistan into a colony. In order for the process of reform and the formation of the interim government to move smoothly, he suggested supervision by an international force under the UN during the transitional government period.

Najibullah's second letter to Kakar was more an explanation of certain points raised in his first letter. He acknowledged that he had not claimed his proposal to be the only way out of the crisis in Afghanistan, but an initiative that could assist with getting a peace process started. However, he was of the view that his national reconciliation plan did not have many weaknesses, and that the real problem lay in the opposite side, that needed to change its behavior. He agreed with Hassan Kakar on a number of suggestions and proposals; however, he insisted that Afghanistan's future must be determined by Afghans, not by foreigners.

Najibullah believed that the influence and presence of Soviets as felt outside was an exaggeration, and that Afghanistan was being run by Afghans. He strongly believed that Pakistan would not change its position toward Afghanistan, as the country's behavior after the withdrawal of Soviet troops had made obvious. He believed that Pakistan used the Afghan conflict as a tool to deal with its internal crisis. He agreed that Soviets had undermined the legitimacy of the Afghan government, but asserted that the situation had changed, and that the Soviets were respecting all the international rules and regulations.

Najibullah agreed to sit with all internal stakeholders to discuss the formation of an interim government and the national council, but emphasized that unless all parties agreed on the new interim government, the continuation of his government was a must in order to avoid the dangerous consequences of a power vacuum. He assured that the process of reform and the new interim government would be fully supervised by the national council. He agreed that determining the legal status of Afghanistan was the authority of the Afghan national assembly, which also had the authority to endorse the new Afghan constitution.

On the question of neutrality and disarmament, Najibullah referred to the cases of Switzerland, Finland, and Austria, which preserved neutrality to safeguard against foreign interference and aggression. He believed that such a legal status could guarantee

respect for Afghan sovereignty and put an end to all kinds of foreign interference. In terms of disarmament, he clarified that it was related to the removal of illegal arms used by various groups to gain power. However, he reaffirmed that all such reforms were under the jurisdiction of the future elected assembly of Afghanistan. With regard to the role of the UN, he agreed that the role of the UN and an international observer body could be discussed in more detail, as each member of that body might have their own views. Overall, Najibullah had backed an active role for the UN in resolving the Afghan problem.

Lessons Learned

Afghanistan's national reconciliation process has been passed on to successive governments since the mid-1980s, without any success. It is critically important to find out the reasons behind such an impasse. Given the current situation, there is a striking similarity between the era of Soviet withdrawal and the American withdrawal: back then, it was the Mujahideen opposing the government; today, it is the Taliban opposing the government. President Najibullah declared his policy of national reconciliation and called on the Mujahideen to engage in the political process and join the government. Now, President Ashraf Ghani has declared his national reconciliation plan and called on the Taliban to join the political process and join the government. It is worth noting that both the opposing sides refused to recognize the Afghan government and seek a new system.

Another striking similarity is that the Mujahideen and their supporters insisted on the complete withdrawal of the Soviets, and the Taliban today also insists on the complete withdrawal of the Americans before a ceasefire and breakthrough. Both governments agreed on amendments to the constitution. Moreover, the Mujahideen did not agree to any kind of engagement under Najibullah and asked for an Islamic Government; likewise, the Taliban insists on the return of the Islamic Emirate. Both governments offered to form a national council representing all of Afghanistan to decide the future of Afghanistan. In the same way, both governments called on regional and international stakeholders for a consensus on peacebuilding efforts in Afghanistan. On both occasions, there have been divisions among the international and regional players.

What is striking to note is the consequence of a power vacuum without a prearranged political setup. Najibullah withstood the pressure to step down for a while, fearing bloodshed and civil war as a consequence of power vacuum. However, there were consistent calls from within and outside that national reconciliation could only succeed if Najibullah transferred power. Najibullah was proved right in terms of this, for as soon

as Najibullah left power, the Mujahideen entered Kabul in a chaotic manner and a civil war began and continued till the Taliban took over.

The biggest lesson to take away from Najibullah's era is to make sure that there is no power vacuum in Kabul, and that the Afghan governments, as well as Afghanistan's international allies, are not deceived again as the way they were in the 1990s. There must be a strong national consensus and a strong national peace council representing all Afghans to protect the national interests of Afghanistan. The women constituting half of our society must get their rightful representation in all peace-related processes. With necessary reforms, the hard-earned gains of the last nineteen years must be preserved, including the Republic that safeguards the democratic rights of all Afghans. Additionally, there must be strong regional and international guarantees that Afghanistan will not face the same fate as they did in the 1990s. Reciprocal steps must be taken from both sides, particularly the withdrawal of foreign troops being matched by a lasting ceasefire. Most important of all, Afghanistan must get guarantees from its neighbors that they would not continue interfering in Afghanistan and supporting proxy forces in the country. Finally, any future political setup must be the outcome of this process, not a precondition to the current political setup. In other words, the entire peace process must be completed under the leadership and ownership of an existing Afghan government.

The Afghans, as well as the international community, are tired of war. Much blood has been shed on all sides since the international intervention in Afghanistan in 2001. Therefore, peace and national reconciliation must be a top priority for both the Afghans and the international community. However, the complication of the Afghan crisis can be understood by its stretching across decades. Nationally, a rushed peace deal struck in the 1990s with its dire consequences of civil war and continued violence in Afghanistan is a clear lesson for Afghans. Internationally, the premature abandoning of Afghanistan by the international community, leading to the incident of September 11 and other incidents worldwide, is another lesson for the international community. Therefore, it requires an extra effort and strong diligence, both on the part of Afghans and on the part of the international community, before an acceptable and successful peace deal can be reached. Peace can't be brought by a single leader nor can it be brought overnight. This has to be a collective effort, and can only be built brick by brick over time. Most important of all, peacebuilding cannot grow in a power vacuum; it can only be built within an existing system that works under set conditions, gradually tending toward tranquility and national reconciliation, and which ultimately makes way for a popular, democratically elected government.

The Specter of Overture: Comparing 1986–1992 to the Present Intra-Afghan Peace Talks

Masih Khybari

Abstract

With the letters between President Najibullah and Dr. Hassan Kakar¹ in 1991 serving as a backdrop, this article reflects on the conception, strategy, and execution of the National Reconciliation Policy 1986–1992 (or Mosaleha-ye Melli or Ashti-ye-Melli) and provides a comparative historical analysis with the current intra-Afghan peace talks.

“An ancient land, Afghanistan has a long and eventful history.
Its neighbors have influenced its history as it has theirs.”

—Hassan Kakar, *The Soviet Invasion and the Afghan Response*

¹ Professor Hassan Kakar (1928–2017) was one of Afghanistan’s most renowned contemporary historians with a reputation of being a careful and perceptive reader of primary sources. He is known to be one of the finest and most tireless chroniclers of Afghan history and political developments. His works are based on solid empirical history, letting the sources speak for themselves. A prolific writer, his works cover a wide range of historical, social, political, and cultural themes and are considered as authoritative references.

In February 1990, President Najibullah personally contacted several influential members of the Afghan diaspora. He personally sought out former King Zahir Shah (r. 1933–1973), and former prime ministers and ministers in order to seek their counsel and support to end the conflict in Afghanistan. Simultaneously, several discreet meetings were held with leading exiled figures in Asia, Europe, and the United States. The central intention was to assemble a cross-section of political influence aligned with providing momentum to the national reconciliation process. After extensive contact with key segments of the armed opposition groups and political entities, President Najibullah came to the realization that opposition groups who sought to gain political power through military actions were coordinating with their proxies primarily in Pakistan and Iran, and were mired in their own strategic policy choices. These elements were reticent about reconciliation through an intra-Afghan process. To counteract these growing political and military forces, who sought militaristic agendas to take power in Kabul, President Najibullah considered it prudent to engage the diverse set of Afghan leaders he had identified.

President Najibullah's calculus was premised on the fact that the continuation of war was untenable, and that the National Reconciliation Policy was the most desirous strategy to end the conflict. The conception of this political strategy is best evidenced in the letters of President Najibullah to Afghan personalities and was part of the multipronged approach to engage and negotiate with opposition groups. In his letter to Dr. Hassan Kakar and other key figures,² he proposed to establish a framework to start consultation and negotiations between the government and all political forces inside and outside the country. He also proposed the convening of a comprehensive peace conference with the participation of all related groups and personalities to create a Leadership Council and announce a six-month ceasefire. In order to avoid any power vacuum, he proposed that the Leadership Council would agree on establishing a broad-based interim coalition government, which would be supervised by the Leadership Council. Critically, it was suggested that the Leadership Council would assign a commission to draft a new constitution and new law for elections. A Loya Jirga was proposed to approve the final constitution. It was envisaged that free and fair elections would be held under international supervision. To solve external aspects of the Afghanistan problem, President Najibullah proposed to hold an international conference with the participation of all states involved in the Afghan situation.

² It is noteworthy that some of these personalities were included in the list of the transition government proposed by the UN Secretary General's Personal Representative, Benon Sevan; see Abdul Wakil, *Az Padshahi Mutlaqa ila suqut-e jumburi democratic-e Afghanistan* [From kingdom absolute to fall democratic republic of Afghanistan], edited by Abdul Waheed Qaiyumi, volumes 1–2 (n.p.: Yousafzada, 1955).

On June 12, 1990, Dr. Hassan Kakar responded to President Najibullah's letter, reflecting views that were shared by many of his peers, as well as some other eminent Afghan patriotic personalities. In his reply, he acknowledged the gravity of the situation and the urgency of ending the war that had already resulted in atrocities, including serious infringements of the fundamental rights of Afghans. He identified that some foreign powers have instigated and used the conflict to pursue their own national interests. Dr. Kakar, in an earnest quest for peace and reconciliation in Afghanistan, expressed his optimism in engaging patriotic Afghans to find a solution, elegantly referencing the renowned Afghan poet and statesman Khushal Khan Khattak's aphorism: "if fate has pushed you into the mouth of a lion, don't lose your courage." He recognized that the declared National Reconciliation Policy could be a first step in the right direction to end the war and create a government acceptable to all Afghans. He noted that "peace and democracy cannot come without the engagement of the multiplicity of political parties and political pluralism," and called for "reconciliation and coalition between all Afghan forces."

Dr. Kakar, reflecting on the suggested mechanism toward peaceful transition, opined that the proposal may not be acceptable to all involved parties; nevertheless, he underpinned that the proposal should be given due consideration at a time when sixteen months had elapsed since the withdrawal of the Soviet forces from Afghanistan. He insisted that "it is vital that foreign powers actually and practically accept the principle of Afghan national sovereignty" and that Afghans should be allowed the right of self-determination."³ Dr. Kakar noted that "an unstable Afghanistan or an Afghanistan dependent" on foreign powers or "the prevalence of anarchy in Afghanistan will without doubt be dangerous" to regional and international peace and security. He underlined that those proxies who bank on existing differences and divisions among Afghans to "dominate Afghanistan through their surrogates" should note that "their surrogates will not be trusted by the Afghan people." He categorically insisted that the will of the Afghan people would only be honored if the peace and reconciliation process is owned by Afghans and is without foreign interference and domination.

The concept of reconciliation has increasingly been employed as a policy to address protracted conflict and end the vicious cycle of conflict in wartorn societies. While there is definitional diversity on reconciliation, it has acquired different meanings in different contexts. It is erroneous and futile if reconciliation is solely pursued as an agenda for political accommodation. Reconciliation is a societal process. It encompasses acknowledgment of past suffering; the identification of drivers of conflict; and, through dialogue, agreeing to end destructive attitudes for the common good, and build constructive relationships toward achieving durable societal concord and peace.

³ Dr. Hassan Kakar's reply to President Najibullah, June 12, 1991.

Paradoxes, tensions, and even contradictions are always present in reconciliation processes, and this should not deter genuine recourse to reconciliation to end the cycle of conflict. Reconciliation requires an acknowledgment of differences, but needs that the parties in a conflict endeavor to change their attitudes and believe in a common destiny.

The National Reconciliation Policy was aimed at ending the fratricidal war in Afghanistan, which also had its roots in foreign military intervention, and an undeclared war launched by proxies. Prevailing complexities dictated that, both internally and externally, the National Reconciliation Policy be a top-down approach. The National Reconciliation Policy can also be viewed as a strategic policy to address the crisis and the fragmentation of social cohesion. War had resulted in profound polarization and disorder in traditional social structures and customs. It is noteworthy that national reconciliation was aimed at reinstating the sovereignty of Afghanistan and the writ of the state throughout the territory. As Soviet troops had withdrawn from Afghanistan, the timing of the announcement of the National Reconciliation Policy was ripe. The NRP was a holistic approach aligned with Islamic and Afghan cultural and political traditions. The literature on the reconciliation policy in Afghanistan elucidates that this was both a mean and an end for developing a mutual conciliatory policy between antagonistic Afghan groups to end the conflict and establish peace. This policy very much reflected what Fisher states when he says that “reconciliation involves re-establishing harmony and co-operation between antagonists who have inflicted harm in either a one-sided or reciprocal manner.”⁴

In retrospect, if the National Reconciliation Policy and the UN Peace Plan of 1990 had succeeded, it would have pushed Afghanistan toward a new era marked by the cessation of the cycle of fratricidal conflict, including political changes that would have paved the way for the promotion of good governance in postconflict Afghan society.

Further, this would have helped to recalibrate relations between the postconflict Afghan state and the citizens (vertical reconciliation), and relations between individuals in the community (horizontal reconciliation) at large. It would have created conducive conditions to establish mechanisms for forgiveness, reparations, and reintegration of those engaged in serious offenses during the war.⁵ On January 15, 1987, while inaugurating the policy of National Reconciliation, President Najibullah invited political groups to a dialogue about the formation of a coalition government. He also invited leaders of opposition groups, but in their reply, the Jihadi groups reiterated “the continuation of armed jihad until the unconditional withdrawal of Soviet troops,

⁴ Ronald J. Fisher, “Social-Psychological Processes in Interactive Conflict Analysis and Reconciliation,” in Howon Jeong, ed., *The New Agenda for Peace Research* (Ashgate: Aldershot, 1999).

⁵ Angelika Rettberg and Juan E. Ugarizza, “Reconciliation: A Comprehensive Framework for Empirical Analysis,” *Security Dialogue* 47, no. 6 (December 2016): 517–40.

the overthrow of the atheistic regime, and the establishment of an independent, free and Islamic Afghanistan.”⁶ The proclamation of the National Reconciliation Policy was made at a time when the Soviet system was in crisis and disintegrating. Gorbachev in a 1986 statement had said that Afghanistan was a “bleeding wound.” The US, on the other hand, was looking beyond the Cold War containment of the Soviet system and reorienting its policy imperatives in the post–Cold War era. This was very much in line with what was the initial strategic purpose of the US engagement in Afghanistan after 1978. In January 1998, Zbigniew Brzezinski, the former National Security Adviser to US President Jimmy Carter, revealed that the US had secretly started supporting the Mujahideen as early as July 3, 1979, over nearly six months, which successfully provoked the Soviet military invasion.⁷

The National Reconciliation Policy was presented at a time when the then superpowers were winding up their engagement in their last Cold War battle of the 20th century in Afghanistan because of their own national security priorities and exigencies. The anomie in the governance system and the collapsing economy in the Soviet Union, as well as the failed attempts to pursue the rhetoric of national democratic reform in Afghanistan, had failed.⁸ In Afghanistan, the government took note of the entire spectrum of futility of old policies, and realized the urgency of the need to fundamentally change course. The National Reconciliation Policy was considered to be the best way to address the scourge of war in the country and create conditions for an inclusive intra-Afghan consultation process to restore peace.

The new constitution adopted by the Loya Jirga on June 28–29, 1989, abolished PDPA’s monopoly over power and opened the way for a multiparty system. It was announced that political parties other than the PDPA could be active in Afghanistan, and President Najibullah expressed willingness to meet with opposition parties. The Constitution reiterated that Afghanistan is an Islamic state. The official name of the country was changed from the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan to the Republic of Afghanistan, a name that was designated in the constitution adopted during the presidency of Mohammad Daoud Khan after the end of monarchy in 1973. In a

⁶ See Hassan Kakar, *Afghanistan: The Soviet Invasion and the Afghan Response, 1979–1982* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

⁷ When Carter signed the first directive for secret aid, Brzezinski explained to him “that in my opinion this aid was going to induce a Soviet military intervention.” Brzezinski further elaborated that “we didn’t push the Russians to intervene, but we knowingly increased the probability that they would.” Ref. Interview with Zbigniew Brzezinski, President Jimmy Carter’s National Security Adviser in *Le Nouvel Observateur* (France), Jan 15–21, 1998, 76. Translated by Bill Blum. Website: <http://illuminati-news.com/brzezinski-interview.htm>. See Zbigniew Brzezinski, memorandum to President Jimmy Carter, unclassified December 26, 1979, https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/carterbrzeznev/docs/intervention_in_afghanistan_and_the_fall_of_detente/doc73.pdf.

⁸ See “The Soviet Economy in 1988: Gorbachev Changes Course,” CIA and Defense Intelligence Agency, 14 April, 1989, https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/DOC_0000292349.pdf.

symbolic move driven by entente, the PDPA changed its name to the Watan Party. The elections for the bicameral (Wolasi Jirga and Sanna) parliament resulted in the abolishment of the Revolutionary Council, which was in place since the leftist military takeover on April 27, 1978.

The National Reconciliation Policy encountered challenges from within the PDPA, from some hardliners who wished to pursue the old political line and who critically viewed President Najibullah's reconciliation policy as a means to end war. An inclusive power structure, broad-based government, and a paradigm change in the political agenda and policy of the party was unacceptable for these groups within the PDPA. Paradoxically, similar sentiments were also voiced by extremist military elements opposing the government and their proxies. Faced with the dereliction of the Soviet state's foundations, the Soviet leadership was worried about an impending takeover of power by extremist Mujahideen groups in Afghanistan. Thus, they embarked on a perilous political and military maneuver to safeguard its extended borders with Afghanistan along the central Asian republics. To this end, by engaging its political proxies within the PDPA and its militias, they contemplated creating a "buffer" between the central Asian countries bordering northern Afghanistan and what they perceived as an imminent takeover of the southern territories in Afghanistan by the Islamic military-political Mujahideen groups based in neighboring countries, such as Pakistan.

Meanwhile, in Afghanistan, the National Reconciliation Policy was pursued with determination and with lofty aspirations of national concord, the resurrection of Afghan statehood, and defending the integrity and independence of Afghanistan. The most important challenge was to avoid the emergence of a political and military vacuum in any transitional arrangement. The government called upon all patriotic Afghans inside the country, and more so in the diaspora, to broaden and consolidate the basis for implementing the national reconciliation agenda. In order to pave the way for the broader acceptance of the National Reconciliation Policy, the government amended the constitution fundamentally to enact a change in the nature of the state.

The PDPA manifesto was revised in an attempt to reorient the ideologically leftist party line to a more democratic and patriotic political organization that was cognizant of Afghanistan's religious and cultural ethos. The changes did pave the way for the initiation and further expansion of intra-Afghan contacts that were undertaken between 1989 and 1992 when, based on the 1988 Geneva Accords,⁹ the Soviets had withdrawn from Afghanistan. With the completion of the withdrawal of the Soviet troops from Afghanistan, in a bold move, President Najibullah declared February 9 as National Salvation Day.

⁹ The Geneva Accords, signed in April 1988, initiated the withdrawal of Soviet troops from May 1988 to February 1989.

National reconciliation efforts were meant to complement and play a catalytical role in the pursuit of a political resolution of the external factors that had instigated the conflict inside Afghanistan. To this end, particularly during 1987–1991, diplomatic overtures were made to various countries, and particularly to Pakistan and Iran. Goodwill was shown toward the implementation of the 1988 Geneva Accords which, apart from the instrument on Soviet troop withdrawal from Afghanistan, did include the secession of hostilities, establishment of good neighborly relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan, and the beginning of negotiations on a framework agreement on the voluntary and dignified return of Afghan refugees from Pakistan and Iran.

Similarly, the government extensively engaged the UN Secretary-General, Javier Pérez de Cuéllar, to articulate the substantive elements of the peace plan, and was committed to implementing the 1991 Five Point Peace Plan¹⁰ which would have paved the way for an inclusive and broad-based government in Afghanistan. Regrettably, the UN plan was opposed just within a few weeks during a foreign ministerial meeting convened in Islamabad between Iran, Pakistan, and some Mujahideen groups. The UN Secretary General's Personal Representative in Afghanistan and Pakistan, Benon Sevan, was also invited to this meeting. The press communiqué after this meeting called for the replacement of the government in Afghanistan with an "Islamic government."

The deliberations and stated position of several of these prominent Afghan personalities reflected on the necessity of preserving Afghanistan's sovereignty, territorial integrity, political independence, and non-aligned and Islamic character.¹¹ These were some of the fundamental principles that were included in the UN Secretary General's Statement of May 21, 1991, which became the basis of the Five Point Peace Plan. Despite being fully cognizant of the attitude of some of the UN Security Council members, the Afghan government nevertheless engaged and explored the possibility of the deployment of UN peacekeeping forces to avoid a power vacuum in case of a transition, and to keep irreconcilable armed groups and their proxies at bay. The Afghan government was fully aware of the imperatives of not only building a broad constituency for reconciliation and peace among vast segments of Afghan society, but also of the need to build international and regional consensus to ensure durable peace. This was a daunting challenge as various Mujahideen groups and their proxies had already established multiple centers of power that adversely impacted the pursuit of reconciliation and peace in Afghanistan, resulting in an internal civil war and the collapse of state institutions in the country.

¹⁰ This plan was broadly articulated in the May 21, 1991 UN Statement of the Secretary General. Later, through negotiations in Kabul and New York, various aspects of the process were discussed and outlined. Similar negotiations were also undertaken by the UN with Iran, Pakistan, Russia, and the United States.

¹¹ These reflections are quite well articulated in the letter of Dr. Hassan Kakar to President Najibullah, dated June 12, 1991.

Multiple contacts with several prominent Afghans in the diaspora, who were not related to the Mujahideen groups, and moderate, pro-reconciliation Mujahideen factions revealed that even these groups were deterred from entering into comprehensive peace and reconciliation talks with the government.

After the fall of the government of President Najibullah due to internal and external intrigues in April 1992, and the failure of the UN peace initiative to instate an interim government made of independent Afghan personalities and politicians, Afghanistan turned into a theater of civil war between internal Mujahideen factions and their proxies. The Peshawar Agreement among Mujahideen factions, that was instrumentalized in Pakistan, failed to bring peace. No attempt was made to address the root causes of the conflict, and until 1996, short-lived policies of political accommodations between fighting factions were pursued to capture and maintain power at the center. Civil war continued unabated. The newly created Taliban group that emerged in 1994 continued to assert their military control over most parts of the country.

At the inception of its emergence, the Taliban had made vague overtures about supporting King Zahir Shah's plan to convene a Loya Jirga and instate a representative government to end the war, but once they were in power, they established a proto-state called the Islamic Emirate and governed the country without any meaningful state institutions. During the period 1996–2001, the Taliban did curtail the chiefdoms created by various Mujahideen groups fighting each other, and initially gained secret political and financial support from international oil companies who alleged that the Taliban would provide security for the pipeline connecting Caspian gas resources in Turkmenistan with a future overseas transport facility in the Gwadar Port on the Arabian Sea in the Baluchistan province, Pakistan. While they did spread their control over most of the Afghan territory, the Taliban leadership made no attempts to form an inclusive government or begin a process of conciliation with other political and or military entities.

In a military retaliation to Al Qaeda's terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, US military forces initiated an unprecedented aerial campaign against the Taliban regime and soon allied with the militias of some military strongmen based in northern Afghanistan to demolish the Taliban regime within two months. The UN mediated a political framework, the Bonn Agreement, signed in Bonn on December 5, 2001, though it was not a peace and reconciliation accord. This was at best an interim power-sharing accord deferring establishment of peace and reconciliation to later stages. The meeting did not include all the armed Mujahideen factions, and the absence of the Taliban was conspicuous.

The agreement had major deficiencies. The flawed architect of the Bonn Process, that was put hastily by foreign powers driven mainly by US policymakers, ultimately did not

address the fundamental imperatives that could culminate into national reconciliation. The protracted conflict with its internal and external dimensions continued unabated. In view of the nature of conflict in Afghanistan, the polarization of Afghan society, and the extent of the involvement of regional and international elements, reconciliation and peace efforts during 1986–1991 could not use a bottom-up approach. The complex geopolitical interests of the regional actors were quite effective in challenging the Afghan government's efforts to weed out internal and regional political and military opposition to building a broad-based constituency for peace and reconciliation.

President Ashraf Ghani made peace the central element of his presidency since his inauguration in 2014. He has intrinsically linked peace to development in Afghanistan. President Ghani's elaborate "Road Map for Achieving Peace,"¹² announced in Geneva on November 28, 2018, vividly captures the essence of the prerogatives of peace and reconciliation in Afghanistan.

This plan is a comprehensive attempt that provides the contours for institutionalizing durable peace and reconciliation in a democratic and inclusive society, and respecting the constitutional rights and obligations of all citizens. It takes into account the need to protect and preserve the Afghan national defense and security forces and civil service functions according to law. While addressing some other drivers of insecurity, the plan clearly underlines that the writ of the state would prevail, as well as the monopoly over the use of force would rest with the state and that no armed groups with ties to transnational terrorist networks or transnational criminal organizations, or with ties to state and non-state actors seeking influence in Afghanistan, would be allowed to join the political process.

The peace plan clearly recognizes the external drivers of conflict, and boldly underlines that peace and reconciliation will rest on safeguarding a sovereign and independent Afghanistan. In his "7-Point Peace and Reconciliation Plan" of October 2019, President Ghani acknowledged that "Afghanistan has its own unique drivers of conflict and they need to be identified and addressed."¹³ His government has initiated not only a top-down process, but also generated a bottom-up process to build a constituency for peace and to widen the involvement of various segments of the Afghan society so they can become stakeholders in the process.

President Ghani has offered the Taliban a rather comprehensive peace scheme, "without any preconditions for talks, but built-in preconditions which include a

¹² See Mohammad Ashraf Ghani, "Road Map for Achieving Peace: The Next Chapter in the Afghan-led Peace Process," Address on November 28, 2018, in Geneva, <https://smp.gov.af/sites/default/files/2019-07/Peace-Road-Map-English.pdf>.

¹³ Government of Afghanistan, "The 7-Point Peace and Reconciliation Plan," *Tolo News*, October 2019, <https://tolonews.com/afghanistan/ghani-proposes-7-point-%E2%80%98peace-plan%E2%80%99>.

ceasefire, and that the Taliban accept the state, its constitution and the government as well as human rights including women's rights."¹⁴ The US–Taliban Agreement, signed on February 29, 2020, was welcomed by most prominent groups and parties in Afghanistan, and created the conditions for the start of intra-Afghan negotiations.¹⁵

While there is too little clarity from the Taliban on the scope of these talks and the desired final outcome, President Ghani has been proactively pursuing building a national consensus for peace. In terms of a structural framework for peace talks, the government has already established, through a political agreement,¹⁶ the Presidency of the High Council for National Reconciliation, which is now chaired by Dr. Abdullah Abdullah of the Ministry of Peace, which serves as an executive arm for the negotiation team and the High Council for National Reconciliation.

President Ghani's efforts to have a bottom-up approach have created a constituency for peace within Afghanistan, who are now tagged as the defenders of "the Republic." The Taliban's stated policy has so far been that they defer the decision about the "Islamic Republic" or "Emirate" to intra-Afghan negotiations. While the intra-Afghan talks are not being termed as reconciliation, critical points of initial agreement will have to be related to modalities of a permanent and comprehensive ceasefire, agreed upon by all sides, including the external parties, on the joint implementation and verification mechanisms for ceasefire. Such a mechanism will not only allude to the sincerity of the parties involved, but also their long-term commitment to agreement on a political road map for Afghanistan.

Serious challenges remain that should be addressed during the talks between the government of Afghanistan and the Taliban. These include the issues related to the integration of Taliban fighters into the security structure of the government of Afghanistan, the amendment of the constitution, and modalities of incorporation of the amendments and changes in the constitution; and the safeguarding of the fundamental rights of the citizens, enshrined in the current constitution of Afghanistan, including the rights of women and children, the right to political and civil right to participation, the right to freedom of expression, the right to education, and rights of ethnic and religious minorities.

¹⁴ Government of Afghanistan, "7-Point Peace and Reconciliation Plan."

¹⁵ There are a number of peace plans tabled by various political groups and entities. Some of them include Jamiat-e Islami-ye Afghanistan, "A Comprehensive Peace Plan for Afghanistan: A Practical Concept Note for Sustainable Peace," 2020; Heart of Asia Society, "Draft Framework for Intra-Afghan Peace Negotiations between the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and Taleban Movement," January–February 2020; Mehwar-e Solh wa Nejat-e Afghanistan az Bohran [Axis for peace and salvation of Afghanistan from crisis], "Tarh-e Shura-ye Melli-ye Solh [Plan of the national council for peace]; Mehwar-e Mardom-e Afghanistan, "Position of Mehwar-e Mardom Afghanistan regarding Peace Negotiations," July 21, 2019; Hezb-e Islami-e Afghanistan, "Hezb-e Islami Peace Proposal," February 11, 2020.

¹⁶ A political agreement was signed between the leading candidates of the 2019 presidential election to put an end to the political crisis in the wake of the Presidential election.

Safeguarding these fundamental rights is in reality safeguarding and promoting reconciliation within Afghan society. The division and internal power struggles and the complex regional intrigues that prevented Afghan factions from embracing national reconciliation is always the looming threat that undermines the establishment of peace. As stated repeatedly by President Ghani, the government's capacity for leverage and control of the national armed forces should be maintained throughout the process, and it is imperative to maintain unity within the government. A power vacuum should be avoided in order to save the country from yet another collapse, similar to April 1991. The fragmentation of state structures and systems in Afghanistan should be the ultimate redline in any reconciliation and peace process.

The peace and reconciliation efforts from 1987–1991 painfully illustrated that commitment by all parties to the process is crucial. Reluctance, self-serving agendas, and unstructured and indiscriminate efforts will not yield results, nor lead to the reconciliation necessary to end the 42-year-old protracted conflict. Reconciliation is a societal phenomenon and should not be mistaken for political accommodation with a group of powerbrokers.

Merely rhetorical talk about reconciliation and peace will perpetuate the conflict, and further the interests of those who envisage benefits in the continuation of conflict in Afghanistan. Peace and reconciliation, a genuine desire of the Afghan nation, can best be ensured if it is an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned process that is inclusive and that protects and safeguards the rights of all people. All efforts should be toward ensuring transparency. Historically, it has been proven that any deal made behind closed doors without public knowledge, vigorous public outreach, and inclusion of all segments of Afghan society, including minorities, women, and a wide range of civil society actors is bound to fail. At this critical juncture, confidence-building measures should not be equated with appeasing forces that insist in instigating and perpetuating war.

Some regional powers may continue to adopt a hedging strategy that include support to the hardcore Taliban and their atomized groups, as well as other groups within the country. Within the context of regional engagement, Afghanistan has to insist on the fact that the notion of a weak Afghanistan will be a menace to peace, stability, and economic prosperity. History has repeatedly shown that external actors and drivers of conflict in Afghanistan can derail the process at any stage of the negotiation and reconciliation process. Thus, it is imperative that any settlement will need substantial assistance from a neutral third party. The UN and other regional and international organizations should be encouraged and engaged in using their good offices and be a part of the process.

Dr. Hassan Kakar presciently wrote, "the broad-based government formula has become a means for others to pressure the Afghans to set up a political system the way they think is fit. By so doing they tell the Afghans how to institute a political

system for themselves.”¹⁷ This is indeed an imposition and manipulation of affairs inside Afghanistan, which is the sovereign responsibility of Afghans and is a matter of their right to self-determination.

Over nearly the past half century, at each juncture of conflict, Afghans have witnessed recurrent failures to negotiate a lasting and durable reconciliation and political settlement. Afghans are quite clear that the conflict in Afghanistan has continued unabated because of regional rivalry and intervention. It is important to identify the intrinsically linked internal and external factors and drivers of conflict and deterrents to reconciliation. If the regional and international parties to the Afghan conflict continue to impose and instigate their proxies, this will only lead to continued instability and the threat of creating an incubator for terrorism in the region and a threat to international peace and security. Moreover, after nearly half a century, the regional and international powers must recognize that coopting Afghanistan into their geostrategic calculus may not be as fashionable as it used to be during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This age-old colonial reverie has faded away and proved to be an illusion.

¹⁷ See Hassan Kakar, “The Afghan Political Landscape,” presented at the International Symposium: A Prospective Review of the History and Archaeology of Afghanistan—From Glory to Plunder, California, October 15–16, 1999.

1990, 2021, And Fleeting Opportunities

Johnny Walsh

Abstract

Hassan Kakar and then-President Najibullah wrote at a moment of rare opportunity for peace in Afghanistan: the war seemed to have run its course, the international situation seemed to favor peace, and dramatic progress seemed possible. The ambitious proposals Kakar and Najibullah offer in their correspondence, though few were ultimately tested, suggest the possibilities of the moment. Another such moment exists in 2021, with a historic opportunity for peace in Afghanistan exceeding even that in Najibullah's final years. The challenge today is to avoid missing the opportunity as Najibullah and his mujahideen rivals did, with disastrous results for each. Peace this time will mean finding compromises to many of the same issues Kakar and Najibullah consider in their correspondence, notably the role of third-party mediation, the nature of a political transition to ease longtime rivals into a mutually acceptable governing arrangement, and the challenges of reforming or merging security forces. Unfortunately, the reasons for failure in 1990 are also present today. As in 1990, most leaders evince maximalist negotiating stances; the government shows little urgency despite growing uncertainty about its international support: and the insurgents have, for years, adamantly resisted direct talks with the government (a position to which the Taliban might well revert). To avoid another failure, the parties and their international allies must settle in for a long negotiation, with painful compromises necessary from all. If they collectively fail, we may look back on the diplomatic swirl of 2021 with the same wistfulness that one reads the letters of 1990—when the Afghan conflict seemed so near its natural conclusion, and yet had decades more to go.

The correspondence between historian Hassan Kakar and former Afghan President Najibullah (r. 1987–1992) captures a moment of opportunity in 1990. The Berlin Wall had fallen only a few months before Najibullah's first missive; the Red Army had left Afghanistan a year before; the war in Afghanistan seemed to have outlived its rightful time, and the Afghan communist government seemed eager to pivot to peace talks, while also having demonstrated enough battlefield strength to deny the mujahideen insurgency any obvious path to victory. The two correspondents may not have felt especially sanguine after twelve years of bloodshed in Afghanistan, but even in hindsight, their exchange coincided with one of modern Afghanistan's best chances to end long years of war, and finally move in another direction.

The moment, of course, did not last. Peace efforts stalled, the USSR collapsed in 1991, Najibullah followed in 1992, and the Taliban tortured him to death in 1996. Thirty years and immeasurable human suffering later, Afghanistan's war persists, with little respite for its victims. Such were the consequences of a missed moment. Writing in early 2021, a few parallels are obvious. A foreign army aspires after many years to disengage from Afghanistan. The government it supports retains reasonable public support and military strength, but is keen to end a raging insurgency that could existentially threaten it. On the battlefield, a "mutually hurting stalemate" seems to be settling in, and talk of peace and reconciliation dominates political discourse.

There are also contemporary parallels to the factors that proved the 1990 moment's undoing. The insurgency had, for years, resisted negotiating with a government it calls illegitimate, and—despite having at last started talks with that government in September 2020—believes it retains the option to outwait foreigners before retaking the country militarily. The insurgency thus negotiates with little compromise, expecting that on many points, its rivals will eventually relent. It craves a foreign troop withdrawal, which gives its rivals leverage, but many within the occupying nation are so tired of Afghanistan that they might withdraw with or without a deal.

There are also myriad differences between 1990 and 2021 in Afghanistan, but, on balance, both rank—for similar reasons, all present in Kakar's and Najibullah's correspondence—among the best openings for peace in Afghanistan since 1978. The key question, however, is how to avoid a similar fate this time. God forbid we should write sequels to this volume in 2050. That the solutions Kakar and Najibullah discussed did not pan out, that their ambitions for peace came to naught, does not mean they lacked merit. The correspondents' thinking was nuanced and advanced, including on issues that would likely still be central to a political settlement. Certainly, the core conversation Kakar and Najibullah were having—about a political end state acceptable to both the Afghan government and its armed opponents, and the specific steps necessary to get there—is urgently needed in the current moment.

Today's Afghanistan needs a political transition that the government and the insurgency can agree on; Kakar and Najibullah feel their way through a similar dilemma. It needs an accompanying ceasefire and plan to update the security sector; Kakar and Najibullah trade proposals that one could almost transplant into the present day. It needs a robust diplomatic process, which many argue must be led by a strong international mediator; Kakar hails United Nations (UN) efforts, while Najibullah attempts to jump-start the process himself.

Najibullah's stated proposals on each of these issues may or may not have been sincere; certainly he was a wily leader who survived by balancing diverse constituencies and interests. More immediately relevant to a 2021 analysis is to probe the issues currently at stake by drawing on the last comparably promising moment of diplomatic opportunity, when many similar issues were at stake. As such, this essay evaluates Najibullah's substantive proposals more or less on face value, without fully delving into the questions that were ultimately never tested—whether he meant them in earnest, and how far toward peace he might have gone.

On this basis, the substance of Najibullah's and Kakar's proposals—reflecting broader discussions in the air in 1990—were reasonable enough for a peace process to build on, had history allowed one. This very viability, though it proved moot when all sides waited too long, is the cautionary tale. Unless wiser and more urgent minds on all sides can expeditiously address the 2021 versions of these problems, and do the laborious work of hammering out compromises on each, the present moment could end as tragically as the 1990 moment did.

The Moment of Hope: Exploring Mediation, Transition, and Reform

From a 2021 vantage point, the breadth and import of issues that Kakar and Najibullah cover are remarkable. Their letters investigate three topics that have returned to particular relevance, all of which would benefit from much more consideration and public discussion: the use of third-party mediation, the prospect of a transitional period to ease the insurgency into the country's political system, and potential reforms to Afghanistan's security forces. Recognizing again that the space for compromise was never tested, as well as the possibility that the parties could never have reached a deal, analogs of the correspondents' respective proposals would largely hold up even today.

On the issue of third-party mediation, Kakar's letter puts considerable stock in the UN's ability to broker and oversee the implementation of a deal. UN mediators like Diego Cordovez and Benon Sevan helped keep a dialogue process alive through difficult moments in the late 1980s and early 1990s, achieving creditable if doomed milestones

like the 1988 Geneva Accords (intended to map the period after Soviet withdrawal), and the 1993 Islamabad Accords (intended to end the intra-mujahideen civil war).¹

Some have argued, then and now, that Afghans should be able to resolve their own conflict without outside mediation.² In some cases this is true. The actions Kakar attributes to Cordovez nonetheless hint at two contributions a mediator can make that anyone closely tied to a belligerent (in any conflict, not just Afghanistan's) would struggle to match: the ability to manage indirect talks when one party shuns the other, and the ability to issue proposals that are too sensitive for belligerents to issue themselves.

First, Cordovez maintained shuttle diplomacy to work around the mujahideen parties' refusal to meet with the government. In most peace processes this is an imperfect substitute, but even indirect negotiations sometimes yield agreements; the 1979 Camp David Accords, for example, resulted from intensive shuttling by US President Jimmy Carter and his team, and only limited face-to-face interactions between Egyptian President Sadat and Israeli Prime Minister Begin. Najibullah was wary of third-party mediation and attempted instead (to Kakar's disapproval) to initiate and lead the process himself, despite the continual refusal of insurgent leaders to meet. Presidents Hamid Karzai and Ashraf Ghani have also been wary of third-party intervention in peace negotiations. In today's Afghanistan, American diplomats play some semblance of Cordovez's role by shuttling between Ghani and the Taliban, but the United States' own political currents and obvious nonneutrality in the conflict limit its potential as a mediator. Qatar, Norway, Germany, and others have also performed elements of this function, but none enjoy the clear endorsement of the Afghan parties and international community to lead a peace initiative.

Second, Cordovez could float sensitive proposals that the belligerents themselves could not. Kakar notes that Cordovez had in 1988 designed a proposal for an interim government, including its composition and mandate, to succeed the communist regime. Few tasks could be more sensitive. Such a proposal from any Soviet, American, Pakistani, or politically aligned Afghan would have struggled to gain a hearing, no matter how credible, as any of their adversaries would tend to focus more on the messenger than the message. UN or other third-party mediators, however, are asked to float such proposals

¹ For details of the 1988 Geneva Accords, see Javier Perez de Cuellar, "Letter Dated 14 April 1988 from the Secretary General to the President of the Security Council," April 26, 1988, https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/AF_880414_AgreementsSettlementoftheSituationRelatingAfghanistan%28eng%29.pdf. For details of the 1993 Islamabad Accord, see "Afghan Peace Accord," https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/AF_930307_AfghanPeaceAccord%28en%29.pdf.

² See, for example, "NSA Mohib Insists on Afghan-Only Talks, No Mediator," *South Asia Monitor*, October 6, 2020, <https://southasiamonitor.org/afghanistan/nsa-mohib-insists-afghan-only-talks-no-mediator>; see also "Doha Talks Need Patience, Not Mediators: Taliban," *South Asia Monitor*, October 2, 2020, <https://southasiamonitor.org/afghanistan/doha-talks-need-patience-not-mediators-taliban>.

in conflicts all over the world. Rarely do they singlehandedly propose the solution to the conflict, but they might well put forward a draft plan credible enough for the parties to negotiate from. Kakar puts his finger on it: “the UN, through its very nature, has no special intention for Afghanistan.”³

By contrast, Najibullah’s proposal for political transition was likely dead on arrival, if only because it came from Najibullah. Its substance is reasonable and defensible, as Kakar is quick to acknowledge: open direct talks, implement a temporary ceasefire, agree on an interim government to draft a new Constitution and administer some form of disarmament, ratify that Constitution via Loya Jirga, and hold an election to establish Afghanistan’s more permanent government. Stated in those terms, the framework might eventually have been workable. Even in 2021, disparate Afghans close to the peace process float more or less the same sequence.

From the mujahideen perspective, it was still Najibullah’s proposition. Using Kakar as a loose proxy for Najibullah’s opposition (admittedly dangerous, given the diversity of that opposition and Kakar’s own likely disdain for many of its leaders), the proposal’s merits drown in Najibullah’s closeness to Moscow, the enduring role Najibullah envisions for himself, and the preconditions his opponents demand before serious discussion of the proposal can begin. They might have been right; as stated above, Najibullah was slippery and it is difficult to know now what he was sincere about. Either way, the right proposal from the wrong messenger—most especially, a messenger holding an obvious stake—is often stillborn.

International practice is full of similar instances. To cite but one example, Morocco in 2007 floated an autonomy plan for Western Sahara that foreign officials even today describe as “serious and credible.”⁴ A strictly neutral outsider attempting a reasonable first draft of a solution for Western Sahara might have issued something similar, if not on every detail. The proposal was nonetheless stillborn, endlessly touted by one side of the conflict and immediately rejected by the other. The messenger and the substance both matter.

Negotiations between the Afghan government and the Taliban have now opened with no one playing Cordovez’s role, at least for now. The US retains influence on the process, but should the talks turn to the core issues of Afghanistan’s political future, there is little chance the US can perform higher-order mediating functions like floating a draft peace agreement that the parties negotiate from. The reception to even the best such effort would be inseparable from each side’s jaundiced perception of American interests and intentions. Other parties like Qatar, Norway, or Germany enjoy greater

³ Kakar’s letter to Najibullah, June 1990.

⁴ See, for example, “Fourth Committee Taking Backward Steps on Western Sahara Question,” Meetings Coverage, United Nations, <https://www.un.org/press/en/2019/gaspd695.doc.htm>.

(if imperfect) neutrality and have indisputably helped the process along, but have never received the blessing of the two principal Afghan protagonists.

This absence might be felt more acutely were not the negotiations among Afghans still embryonic, with miles to go before a specific political transition is seriously up for debate. By most indications, the Afghan parties themselves resist intermediation—Afghan nationalism arguably militates against it; the argument that Afghans can solve their own problems does not entirely lack merit; and finding a mutually-trusted third party is easier said than done. Balanced intermediation, however, lies at the center of most recent peace agreements—Norway and Cuba in Colombia, the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development in South Sudan, the UN in conflicts large and small across the world. The belligerents in these conflicts accepted a third party not for want of nationalism compared to Afghans, but for the structural benefits the outsider brought.

The eventual value of both a mediator, and of seriously discussing a divisive political transition, is probably no less in Afghanistan. Eventually, someone outside the inner ring of the conflict will likely need to shepherd the process through inevitable ups and downs, float some functional equivalent of Cordovez's draft power-sharing arrangement, and help see the larger negotiation through.

Another issue at the center of many peace processes, likely to include Afghanistan's today, is what to do with the government security forces that have fought insurgents for years, and who now must coexist or even merge with them. In different peace agreements, parties have agreed variously to rebuild armies and police forces from scratch; leave them intact but let insurgents join; incentivize insurgents to find other lines of work; and/or divide up territory among forces, among other options. Discussion of an Afghan peace agreement today focuses less on these security issues than on questions of the political system and human rights. The future of the security forces will likely be no less important, however, given the huge number of Afghans under arms and the decades of blood that all armed actors have spilled.

In 1990, Kakar focused on abolishing KhAD, the communist-era intelligence service widely associated with egregious abuses. Najibullah himself had previously led it. Though many members of the Afghan security forces have been credibly linked to abuses, probably no single entity from the post-2001 period will live in the kind of infamy that KhAD has. Without therefore drawing any exact parallels, Kakar's basic critique of KhAD resonates in 2021: the service was deeply influenced by the foreign counterpart that trained it; the insurgency suspects no amount of reform can change this; years of mutual violence limit each side's ability to trust the other; and yet, the total abolition of a vital security force seems impossibly irresponsible. Perhaps it is little wonder that Najibullah responds meticulously to Kakar's most pointed attacks, but is silent on this one.

It is unclear what position the Taliban will take on security sector reform. Sher Abbas Stanikzai—then the Taliban’s lead negotiator, now its deputy lead—was quoted calling for the dissolution of the Afghan army in February 2019, but later walked the position back (claiming to have been misquoted). The question of abolishing this or that force may in any case miss the point; even under the current Afghan security forces, it seems all but inevitable that the incorporation of numerous Taliban members would be part of any successful package to transition the insurgency into mainstream Afghan life. This implies a substantial transformation under almost any scenario.

Afghans aligned with the government, and most concerned Americans, tend to envision that the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) might well absorb former Talibs, but will not change structurally. Even if this proposal gains purchase, there are thorny questions regarding how such an absorption might work. Will former Talibs only be allowed to join the force as individuals (like any other Afghan could), or in intact units, with the accompanying risk that they will remain more loyal to their Taliban leadership than to their formal chain of command? Will senior Taliban commanders be eligible for comparably senior security posts, or cut loose to fend for themselves? Will there be sharp limitations on accepting fighters linked to serious violence during the insurgency—something individuals on all sides are guilty of? For each question, there is an option that would clearly be preferable to most in the Afghan or US governments, but at risk of stating the obvious, an agreement depends on the acceptance of both sides.

And the Taliban, it must be said, might well go beyond questions of individual accountability to demand something more akin to Kakar’s position on KhAD—in other words, structural change to the current ANDSF. If they call to abolish entire entities, their target could conceivably be the NDS (the current government’s primary intelligence service, though not the same avatar of government cruelty that KhAD was); the Afghan Local Police (which the Taliban and others call militias, and often single out for condemnation); the Afghan Special Forces (the government’s most effective anti-Taliban tool); or simply entities with whom the Taliban have waged particularly vicious warfare, such as the Kandahar police force. This is by no means to endorse or normalize such demands in advance. It is merely to recall that the insurgency’s animus for government forces is no less acute than in 1990, and the realm of potential compromise is no more certain than it was then.

The Collapse: Cold Shoulders and Overconfidence

However hopeful the peace discussions swirling in the late Najibullah years were, it is difficult to evaluate their true potential, since an external event decided the issue—the collapse of the Soviet Union, which precipitated Najibullah’s own collapse. A substantive negotiation therefore never emerged to test the “trade space”; all we can say is that key parties were beginning to consider the weighty issues that a political settlement might have comprised.

Much the same is true as of 2021. The parties have begun formal negotiations, but have not made substantial progress on the difficult issues at the heart of the conflict, meaning the space for serious political compromise remains untested. No party has had to commit to anything regarding Afghanistan’s future, and if further delays arise, they may not need to explore major compromises for some time to come.

And yet, one notes that Najibullah’s fall came nearly two years after his first letter to Kakar, and five years after he launched his national reconciliation policy. The impasse that he and Kakar plainly recognize in 1990, whereby the mujahideen refuse to talk and Najibullah fails to entice them, persisted throughout this long period. In that sense, the delay itself destroyed him, as much as the event that eventually ended it. In light of the losses every mujahideen group would go on to suffer after Najibullah’s fall, the delay destroyed them all.

Why did this delay occur? It ultimately was not an impasse over substance, since Najibullah and the mujahideen never arrived at a substantive discussion in the first place. The Najibullah–Kakar letters, and many other sources, in any event suggest areas of substantive overlap. The main problem was the barrier to talking at all.

That the insurgency cold shouldered the proposals is most apparent. From the late Soviet years, through to Najibullah’s fall, mujahideen leaders consistently refused to speak directly with the communist government. They entertained UN envoys conducting shuttle diplomacy, hinted at future talks with the government, and were comfortable speaking to Moscow as the “real power” behind the PDPA, but could not bring themselves to sit with the government they so consistently tarred as illegitimate and foreign controlled. Even Kakar—otherwise sympathetic to much of the opposition worldview—hints at frustration with this position in the face of constructive, if flawed, overtures from Najibullah.

Few elements of 1990 have echoed so clearly through most of the current peace process. Since Taliban negotiators first surfaced in Qatar in 2010, nothing stymied the peace process more than the group’s persistent reluctance to sit with today’s Afghan government. For most of that decade, the Taliban were eager to meet with the US as the “real power” behind Kabul, or with essentially any other foreign power. The

objection has had little to do with who holds office in Kabul; the Taliban have met with Ghani during Karzai's presidency and Karzai during Ghani's presidency, but always refused formal contact with the sitting Administration. The principle is to reject the government's legitimacy; had anyone else won the presidency in 2014 or 2019, it seems safe to say this stance would not have changed. The US has nonetheless made Taliban engagement with the Afghan government its primary goal and condition for essentially every peace overture toward the Taliban throughout this period, as this author can attest to from personal State Department service. This long impasse finally ended with the opening of peace talks among Afghans in September 2020, but a decade has already been lost.

Najibullah bore his share of the blame for the earlier impasse, likely in part due to military overconfidence that reduced his sense of haste. His first letter hails his security forces' demonstrated battlefield strength: "Our armed forces are stronger than at any other time and they have proved in the past year that they have the capacity to independently defend against huge offensives," and "the imposition of a military solution on Afghanistan looks more impossible now than it ever did."⁵ Afghan forces had indeed exceeded expectations after the Red Army withdrew, and their victory in the punishing 1989 battle for Jalalabad upended many mujahideen leaders' own expectations—mirrored by many Taliban commanders today—that victory could come quickly after foreign withdrawal. Perhaps if foreign funding had continued indefinitely, Najibullah could have remained secure. It did not. The ultimate fragility of the PDPA edifice left Najibullah on borrowed time, even if he could not have known when the impasse would break against him. A greater sense of haste to reach a political settlement in 1989 or 1990 might, with luck, have saved him.

One detects a similar lack of haste in Kabul today. Afghan and western leaders confidently reiterate Najibullah's declaration that no military solution is possible, though it has never been clear the insurgency has shared this assessment, then or now. Few Kabul-based leaders oppose a peace process outright, but many have declared prohibitively high bars for entering talks; remain bogged down in process and symbolism; have launched fiery rhetoric about the Taliban and its backers; and/or have declared maximalist negotiating positions that make a deal more difficult. The effect has been even more delay before the start of negotiations, which themselves would likely be a years-long exercise. Had not the US military presence in Afghanistan proven so remarkably durable over the past decade, even over the reluctant instincts of successive US presidents and growing opposition across the American electorate, these years of delay would not have been viable.

⁵ Najibullah's first letter to Kakar, February 1990.

Some of the government's caution is well founded, springing from sincere concern about what peace with the Taliban could mean for Afghanistan's post-2001 advances, values, and power balance. Certainly no one should expect it to pursue a deal with the Taliban at any cost. Kabul's international allies are in no danger of collapse, and even a precipitous international drawdown would likely leave the Afghan state with a line of foreign cash to continue its battlefield struggle. At the same time, it is far from impossible that an abrupt decline in foreign support could eventually have some version of the impact on today's Republic that the fall of the Soviet Union did on the Afghan communist regime. A sense of haste, in effect to reach a tolerable political settlement before external events one day upend the stalemate in Afghanistan, seems warranted.

To be clear, the scenario of an abrupt withdrawal probably would be little better for the Taliban than for the government. Some Taliban leaders may share their mujahideen predecessors' faith that a foreign withdrawal will allow their own speedy victory. More likely is a bloody and lengthy mess, with all sides suffering punishing casualties, none enjoying any immediate path to victory, and the ever-present possibility that yet another actor will rise from the chaos—as the Taliban did in 1994—to render all today's combatants the losers. The long delay in getting to talks, born in both 1990 and 2020 from the government's confidence and the insurgents' refusal to begin talking, illustrates a common dynamic in peace processes by no means limited to these two Afghanistan examples—the parties are slow to negotiate for fear of the tactical compromises they might make, but lose far more as the war grinds on. In some cases, they eventually lose everything for having waited too long.

One must end on a note of optimism in early-2021, since formal Afghan peace negotiations have in fact opened and the opportunity for peace has never been greater. The US commitment to a timetable for troop withdrawal has at last broken through the insurgency's refusal to sit down with the government, and the Afghan parties have, by sitting down openly with each other, taken the step that mujahideen leaders always rejected. In a happy scenario, this will be enough, and the Taliban will follow through on years of pledges to address "internal" issues in good faith once the "external" issue of the troop presence has been resolved.

Even here, 1990 offers a note of caution. Though the Red Army was gone, Kakar argues—like many mujahideen at the time—that the government must also drastically reduce the remaining Soviet presence in the country for Najibullah's peace plan to have credibility. This implies mission creep; one wonders where the opposition's demand for separation from Moscow might have ended. The Taliban have not demanded an analogous condition from the Ghani government, but they plausibly might. This would further delay any peace agreement, and demonstrate that even a US troop withdrawal might not be enough, and perhaps reduce trust that a deal is possible.

Doing Better This Time

Arriving at today's hopeful moment is already, it must be said, an achievement. The February 2020 US–Taliban agreement, whatever its flaws, was a painstaking diplomatic accomplishment that broke through a decade of obstacles and made the current negotiations among Afghans possible. The Ghani Administration, though not party to that agreement, deserves its share of credit for this larger moment; Ghani's February 2018 peace offer to the Taliban, and June 2018 announcement of an Eid ceasefire, transformed the conversation around Afghan peace that seemed nearly hopeless throughout 2017. Immense obstacles nonetheless remain. Negotiations will at best be long and difficult, and the parties' positions are unclear (and perhaps underdeveloped) on the most difficult issues. How can they nonetheless succeed in 2021 where leaders in 1990 did not?

First, the parties must seize this moment to negotiate seriously, not stall for a more favorable moment. Delays and setbacks are inevitable, but every delay carries two inherent costs: more casualties (of which Afghanistan now produces more per day than any other global conflict), and the continual risk of an unexpected development that mires or torpedoed the process. The Afghan peace process has experienced many such disruptions; the disruption in 1992 arguably prevented peace for a generation. A second chance at the negotiating table is never guaranteed.

Second, the US must avoid causing the same effect, through conscious policy choices, that the Soviet Union's collapse once did. This is to say that it must not reduce military and financial commitments to Afghanistan so drastically that the entire edifice collapses before a peace agreement can give it new life. A complete cutoff would be disastrous for Afghanistan itself, but support for some version of this option increases every year on both sides of the American political spectrum. It is beyond the scope of this essay to rehearse the arguments over the appropriate American commitment in Afghanistan, but in weighing any given reduction, current and future US policymakers must keep the 1992 precedent in mind.

Third, the Afghan parties and their foreign allies need to be ready for painful sacrifices to reach an agreement. Today's Afghan insurgency is probably the largest in the world, has weathered the onslaught of a superpower, and commands enough support to continue the fight indefinitely. Today's Afghan government commands a sprawling security apparatus, widespread public support for the Republican system, and the consensus backing of nearly the whole international community. Neither side is therefore in a position to dictate terms.

It will take far more than these prescriptions to realize the promise of the 2021 process; they are merely a few needs, ones evoked by the Kakar–Najibullah letters.

Future analysts may look back on this time, and this essay, perhaps after a diplomatic failure and years more of bloodshed, and wonder how we saw a serious opening at all. Even today, serious observers can sneer at the proposition that the Taliban, Kabul, or Washington are serious about making peace, and cite legitimate supporting evidence.

In the end, it is immaterial how hopeful one assesses the moment to be. What matters is how well the key players exploit existing opportunities, so that decades hence, we do not look back on the diplomatic swirl of 2020-1 with the wistfulness through which one reads the letters of 1990—when the Afghan conflict seemed so near its natural conclusion, and yet had decades more to go.

Ingredients of Peacemaking in Afghanistan: Lessons from Najibullah's National Reconciliation Policy

Nasir Andisha

Abstract

Over the past two years, negotiations for a political settlement with the Taliban have been at the center of the discourse regarding the future of Afghanistan. In 2010, the United States and a few allied countries tried unsuccessfully to establish a framework for negotiation. However, the most recent round of talks spearheaded by Zalmay Khalilzad, the US Department of State's Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation, proved to be the most serious attempt to end the decades-long conflict. After eighteen months of secret negotiations and shuttle diplomacy, the talks culminated in a framework agreement signed between the US and Taliban representatives in Doha, Qatar on February 29, 2020. The agreement seeks to prepare for a significant drawdown of the remaining foreign troops in Afghanistan, and the launch of direct intra-Afghan peace negotiations. A gradual troops reduction is underway and direct talks between the delegations of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the Taliban movement began on September 12. The prevailing sentiment is that, once again, Afghanistan is at a critical juncture where, despite myriad domestic and external challenges, a narrow window of opportunity for achieving sustainable peace is emerging. In the contemporary history of Afghanistan, the closest parallel that can be drawn to the current political and security environment goes back to the situation surrounding the last years of President Najibullah's tenure and his attempt at achieving a negotiated settlement through what was called the National Reconciliation Policy (NRP).

Most of the recent analyses consider the resemblances between the two episodes, such as the dynamics of foreign troop withdrawals, intensity and spread of conflict, chaotic internal power politics and personal traits, and the political psychology of the leading players. In contrast, there has been hardly any study of the NRP's substance and its potential relevance to future peace negotiations. Drawing on the contents of recently-released letters exchanged between President Najibullah and Professor Hassan Kakar in February–June 1990,¹ as well as published materials and personal memoirs, this article focuses on the NRP's substantive policy dimensions in two areas: first, the domestic political structure; and second, in readjusting Afghanistan's foreign policy. These reform initiatives were the central ingredients of the NRP aimed at achieving national unity and transitioning from an externally dependent ideological state into a self-confident and self-reliant nation-state. There are lessons to be learned from both the initiative and its failure.

The process leading to a political settlement is often lengthy, complex, and multifaceted. Depending on the context, a constellation of factors must come together to produce a viable peace agreement and an enforcement mechanism. There is no perfect formula or peace recipe; however, according to the existing literature, the components for achieving a viable peace agreement can be classified under two broad categories:

1. Circumstances and “ripe” timing of a peace process: this includes a perception of a mutually hurting stalemate, a desire among belligerents to seek a way out of conflict,² a degree of consensus among external stakeholders, and conducive personal traits and political psychology of the leading players. Ripe moments appear naturally or are induced deliberately by conflicting parties or their external supporters. They often transpire when a conflict reaches a point of inflection, and a mutually hurting military stalemate develops. Alternatively, an abrupt but inconclusive defeat of one of the belligerents, or a significant major foreign intervention into or withdrawal out of the conflict zone can also create a ripe moment for peacemaking.

¹ President Najibullah wrote a series of letters to opposition figures and Afghan intellectuals in the diaspora soliciting support for his National Reconciliation Policy. Between February and June 1990, three letters were exchanged between Najibullah and Professor Hassan Kakar, a very well-known US-based Afghan historian. These letters were recently translated and released by the Kakar family through the Kakar History Foundation.

² William Zartman, “The Timing of Peace Initiatives: Hurting Stalemates and Ripe Moments,” in *Contemporary Peacemaking: Conflict, Violence and Peace Processes*, ed. J. Darby and R. Mac Ginty (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 19–29.

2. The ingredients and the substance of a peace agreement: including a new or modified structure of the state, and rules and procedures that define the roles and functions of domestic and external stakeholders in the post-settlement dispensation. Peace agreements, according to Ghani and Lockhart, “offer a mechanism for laying the foundation for a state-building process.”³

Each category and factor has its features and characteristics and can be further divided into subcategories depending on the depth of analysis one undertakes. Moreover, structure, methodology, and design of negotiations are also becoming significant elements of successful peace processes. This paper focuses on the substance of the National Reconciliation Policy. The NRP-led peace process did not meet the abovementioned ripeness conditions; however, it presented a rich and enduring perspective that demands to be highlighted and included in the agenda of the current peacemaking efforts in Afghanistan. Before exploring these substantive elements, a brief introduction to the NRP is in order.

National Reconciliation Policy

Najibullah’s National Reconciliation Policy was a package of several ambitious social and political reform initiatives. The policy envisaged creating a condition conducive to the orderly and face-saving withdrawal of Soviet military forces, establishing terms for an enduring political settlement with amenable opposition groups, and fostering a peace and nonaggression agreement between Afghanistan and Pakistan.⁴

The idea of national reconciliation was conceived of in early 1985. Moscow informed the administration of President Babrak Karmal (1979–1986) that Soviet troops would leave Afghanistan soon, and that Kabul must prepare to take up the responsibility of defending the country and reaching a political settlement with the insurgency. In a critical meeting between Presidents Mikhail Gorbachev (1985–1991) and Karmal in the Kremlin later that year, Soviet officials in the room noticed that Najibullah, then the head of the state intelligence agency (KhAD), was the only one in the Afghan delegation who seemed to agree with the idea of the withdrawal of Soviet forces and a national

³ Ashraf Ghani and Clare Lockhart, “Writing the History of the Future: Securing Stability through Peace Agreements,” *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding* 1 no. 3 (2007): 278.

⁴ Amin Saikal, *The Afghanistan Conflict: Gorbachev’s Options* (Canberra: Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, Research School of Pacific Studies, Australian National University, 1987), 54. Also see Heela Najibullah, “President Najibullah and the National Reconciliation Policy Objectives, Operations and Obstacles,” *Accord* 27 (June 2018): 30–34. https://rc-services-assets.s3.eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/8_Najibullah_Incremental-Peace-in-Afghanistan-31-35.pdf.

reconciliation initiative.⁵

Najibullah effectively volunteered to further develop and implement the NRP if promoted to the leadership position in Afghanistan. As the president, he owned, internalized, and energetically pursued the course of national reconciliation. He emphasized that NRP was an unfamiliar but necessary path and that only the policy of national reconciliation could take the country out of conflict and into a direction of harmony and national unity.⁶

The Substance of the NRP

The substance of the NRP can be divided into two broad themes: (1) forging a new political identity through the democratization and restructuring of the state; and (2) transitioning from overreliance on the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), and reorienting Afghanistan's foreign relations vis-à-vis the region.

As a significant step toward reconciliation, the NRP recognized the need for change in the structure of the government to make the political system more inclusive and legitimate. This step was aimed more at aligning the authoritarian one-party system of government with a democratic model, and attracting buy-in from the Afghan opposition and notable diaspora in the West. In his first letter to Hassan Kakar in February 1990, President Najibullah emphasized that "knowing that peace and democracy cannot occur without an increase in political pluralism, we have proposed conciliation among and a coalition of all Afghan factions."⁷ To achieve an inclusive and pluralistic state, the NRP recognized that orderly and consensus-based devolution could significantly reduce the avenues for the use of violence in the pursuit of political goals. The policy thus foresaw certain measures in pursuit of horizontal and vertical devolution of state authority and responsibilities.

On horizontal devolution, Najibullah envisaged a multi-party parliamentary democracy as an ideal form of government, where, he argued, "in accordance with the results of the election, a new government will be formed by a party or coalition of parties which form the majority in the parliament. That government will rule the country according to the new constitution." To guarantee the freedom and fairness of the election, Najibullah further assured Kakar that "we are ready to accept an international

⁵ Raymond L. Garthoff, *The Great Transition: American-Soviet Relations and the End of the Cold War* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1994), 728.

⁶ Najibullah, "Address to Opening Session of Extraordinary Commission of National Reconciliation in Afghanistan," accessed August 20, 2020, <http://catalog.acku.edu.af/>.

⁷ Najibullah, "First Letter to Professor Hasan Kakar, February 1990," Hassan Kakar Letter Collection (Kabul: Kakar History Foundation, 2020), 1.

commission to observe the election so that fraud can be prevented, and electoral fairness and legality assured.”⁸

The need for democratization, particularly the establishment of a parliamentary system of government, was one of the few reform suggestions on which Kakar concurred with Najibullah. Kakar doubted the fairness of any election as long as the regime held power in Kabul, but nonetheless stressed that “there is no doubt that political pluralism and a parliamentary system are needed for Afghanistan.”⁹

The NRP took an incremental approach toward the realization of vertical devolution. As a first step, Najibullah reinvigorated the dual executive system by appointing a technocratic prime minister with considerable executive powers, who was accountable to the parliament. This system was similar in many ways to the executive branch structure during the decade of democracy under King Zahir Shah (r. 1933–1973). As a next step, and to prepare for future democratic elections, Najibullah and his team reformed the status of their Marxist-Leninist leaning People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) to turn it into a center-left nationalist party akin to those of sister political parties in other post-Soviet satellite states. The PDPA was renamed as the *Hezb-e Watan* (Party of the Homeland). National reconciliation replaced the dictatorship of the proletariat as the central pillar of the manifesto of the reformed Watan ruling party.

On the vertical devolution side, recognizing the shift in the social, political, and economic conditions in Afghanistan, and looking at the experiences of similar demographically diverse nations around the world, Najibullah acknowledged that “the era of gaining victory for one line of thought through the suppression of other opinions is gone. Now we shall live together in peace. This is possible only through conciliation and understanding of the thoughts and views of all Afghans. In such a solution, all Afghans will benefit; no one will be defeated.”¹⁰

Guaranteeing the rights of all sections of Afghan society requires recognition of individual rights and the transfer of a series of decisions from the center to regional and local governments. Decentralization and devolution have always been contentious issues in the political history of Afghanistan where, for over a century, state-building has been presented as an effort to centralize at the expense of handing over authority to localized forms of governance.¹¹ However, the NRP took an unprecedented step toward

⁸ Najibullah, “First Letter,” 2.

⁹ Kakar, “Reply to Najibullah,” 12 June 1990, 2.

¹⁰ Najibullah, “First Letter,” 2.

¹¹ All major academic works on the history of state building in Afghanistan refer to forceful centralization of power. See Vartan Gregorian, *The Emergence of Modern Afghanistan: Politics of Reform and Modernization, 1880–1946* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1969); Barnett R. Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995); Amin Saikal, *Modern Afghanistan: A History of Struggle and Survival* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2005); Sadegh Farhang, *Afghanistan dar Panj Qarn-i Akhīr* [Afghanistan in the past five centuries], 2nd ed. (Tehran: Erfan,

recognizing national diversity and gradually strengthening regional and local bodies.

As an interim measure, the revised Constitution of the Republic of Afghanistan (1990), in its article 13, underscored that “the Republic of Afghanistan is a multi-national country.” Ensuring political, economic, social, and cultural equality among all ethnic groups, clans, and tribes, the document promised that “the state shall gradually prepare the grounds for the creation of administrative units based on national characteristics.”¹²

Fostering national sovereignty by recognizing and effectively managing national diversity is visibly discernible from discourses and documents of the NRP era. Najibullah appeared to see Afghanistan’s national sovereignty and independence as intrinsically linked to the national consensus of its people. For example, when in his reply Kakar repeatedly stressed on “national sovereignty” as a detached and standalone concept and put it to Najibullah that his policies were “clearly not in line with Afghan national sovereignty,”¹³ Najibullah responded that bolstering national sovereignty and national unity were the fundamental principles of his plan. However, he further underscored that the preservation of Afghanistan’s independence and sovereignty, whenever a war is imposed from outside, has always been attained at the cost of the blood of countless diverse peoples and communities of the land.¹⁴ Hence the recognition and better organization of Afghan diversity through institutional arrangements can preserve and strengthen national sovereignty in peacetime.

It is evident that the NRP not only recognized the need for horizontal and vertical devolution of authority and responsibilities as significant ingredients of a peace and reconciliation process, but also entailed legal and practical initial steps toward their realization. Moreover, these domestic reform initiatives were to be complemented by a careful reorientation of Afghanistan’s relations with neighboring and regional powers.

Afghanistan’s Foreign Policy; Reestablishing Permanent Neutrality

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, and indeed the subsequent American-led military and financial support to Afghan resistance groups in Pakistan once again demonstrated the maxim that conflict in Afghanistan is primarily driven by competing

1992); G. M. Ghubar, *Afghanistan dar Masir-i Tarikh, Jeld-i Dovum* [Afghanistan in the path of history, second volume] (Herndon: American Speedy Press, 1999); M. N. Shahrani, “Afghanistan’s Alternatives for Peace, Governance and Development: Transforming Subjects to Citizens and Rulers to Civil Servants,” *Afghanistan Papers* 2 (August 2009).

¹² Afghanistan, “Constitution of Republic of Afghanistan (1990),” 2007, Digitized Afghanistan Materials in English from the Arthur Paul Afghanistan Collection, 14, <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/afghanenglish/14>.

¹³ Kakar, “Reply,” 1.

¹⁴ Najibullah, “Second Letter,” 1.

interests of regional and extraregional powers. The invasion disrupted a delicate power equilibrium in the region and placed Afghanistan at the center of active East–West hostility, triggering a cycle of violence and conflict in the country.¹⁵ Many policymakers and scholars at the time suggested that Afghanistan’s return to neutrality would restore stability and tranquility.¹⁶

As part of his NRP, President Najibullah attempted to turn Afghanistan into a permanently neutral state. Najibullah called on the then Secretary-General of the UN, Javier Pérez de Cuéllar, to hold an international conference on Afghanistan to discuss the reinstatement and confirmation of Afghanistan’s permanent neutrality, and to work out a program of international aid in support of his national reconciliation policy.¹⁷ On the domestic level, Najibullah instructed Afghanistan’s Academy of Sciences to study the feasibility of adopting a policy of demilitarized permanent neutrality (Andisha 2015). A year later, in May 1990, the constitution was amended to reflect the regime’s desire for neutralization and demilitarization. An entirely new chapter in the amended constitution was dedicated to foreign policy, and for the first time in the country’s history, the term “permanent neutrality” featured in its constitution.¹⁸

In his first letter, Najibullah briefly mentioned his plan for Afghanistan to be declared and guaranteed a permanently-neutral status through an international conference. When Kakar rebuffed his proposition on neutrality on the ground that it was “clearly not in line with Afghan national sovereignty” and called it “suicidal and perhaps a Russian plot,” Najibullah found it incumbent to clarify his position by offering a thorough explanation:

I advise that you read the plans in the light of historical examples from Switzerland, Finland, and Austria. Our goal is the permanent cutting off of foreign hands from the internal affairs of Afghanistan and launching a positive competition among foreign powers for the socio-economic development of our country. Permanent neutrality can be credible only when it is recognized by all relevant countries, which explicitly means continuous and unblemished respect for the national sovereignty, territorial integrity, and independence of our country by

¹⁵ Abdul Samad Ghaus, *The Fall of Afghanistan: An Insider’s Account* (London: Brassey’s, 1988), 209. See also Thomas Barfield, *Afghanistan: A Cultural and Political History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), 238, and Robert O. Freedman, *Moscow and the Middle East: Soviet Policy since the Invasion of Afghanistan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

¹⁶ Nasir A. Andisha, “Neutrality in Afghanistan’s Foreign Policy,” USIP Special Report, March 2015, <http://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/SR360-Neutrality-in-Afghanistan's-Foreign-Policy.pdf>.

¹⁷ “Permanent Neutrality and Disarmament of Afghanistan,” Collection of Articles from a Seminar held by the Academy of Science of Afghanistan, Government Publication, 1989, 3.

¹⁸ The preamble reads, “creating favourable conditions for determining the legal status of permanent neutrality of Afghanistan and its demilitarization.” See *The Constitution of Afghanistan 1990*, accessed on November 24, 2020, <https://www.afghan-web.com/history/afghanistan-constitution-of-1990/>.

all signatories to the final document of the international conference, including great powers and Afghanistan's neighbors. The principle of respect and guarantee for Afghanistan's position of permanent neutrality in itself negates all types of interference and aggression against our country. (Najibullah, Second Letter to Hassan Kakar, June 12, 1990)

The downfall of the bipolar world order and declining Soviet power meant that Afghanistan's foreign policy had to be reoriented toward emerging regional realities, and improving the country's relationship with the neighborhood and the surrounding region became a top priority. Hence, building on the relative success of Afghanistan's traditional neutrality, a declaration of Afghanistan's permanent neutrality in return for a regional nonaggression treaty enforced by an international guarantee was the most desirable course correction for Najibullah.

Notwithstanding their merits and initial domestic success, his initiatives hardly attracted any serious support at the regional and international levels. The Western capitals and the Afghan resistance forces, the Mujahideen, were predicting an imminent collapse of the Kabul regime soon after the withdrawal of the Soviet troops.¹⁹ They perceived the NRP initiative to simply be an attempt by the regime to assure its survival beyond the Soviet departure. Besides, at that juncture, when the Soviet Union was on the verge of collapse, neither Kabul nor Moscow had enough political capital to garner broader support for such an ambitious proposal.

The NRP as a Missed Opportunity

In hindsight, given the release of new materials, including the letters exchanged between Najibullah and Kakar, it is hard not to see this episode in the recent history of Afghanistan as a missed opportunity for reaching a durable political settlement. While the NRP-led peace process did not meet all necessary ripeness conditions, its substance was a fresh and enduring plan for a successful national reconciliation process. The most valuable lesson is that a meaningful structural change in favor of an inclusive and participatory political system, and the institutionalization of a regional balance of interests in foreign relations, remains the core ingredients of enduring peace in Afghanistan.

¹⁹ For example, the prevailing attitude of the US Government mirrored in the National Intelligence Estimate, dated March 1988, strongly argued that: "we judge that the Najibullah regime will not long survive the completion of Soviet withdrawal even with continued Soviet assistance. The regime may fall even before the withdrawal is complete." See "USSR: Withdrawal from Afghanistan," Director of Central Intelligence, Special National Intelligence Estimate, March 1988, 219, <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/document/0005564723>.

Afghanistan's effort at nation-building, including the institutions of the state (i.e., state building), during the first hundred years since the reclamation of its independence (1919–2019) can be best summarized as a period of trials and errors. At the dawn of the second century as an independent nation-state, Afghanistan once again is at a critical juncture. Either it succeeds in ending a decades-long bloody conflict through a national consensus and reconciliation, or it enters a new era of war and conflict.

Reconciliation begins with the recognition of social, economic, and political shifts in Afghanistan, and by avoiding a repeat of the politics and policies that have plainly failed in the past. This time the condition for both domestic and external stakeholders is likewise conducive to secure a durable peace for Afghanistan. It would add to the tragedy if the ongoing negotiations is condemned by the same failures as the NRP was, showing that history's lessons have not been learned. As a scholar of history, Kakar rightly lamented that "as experience has shown, past events have major implications for the resolution of human problems and that these implications are more serious when the concerning issues have assumed more complex and more painful dimensions."²⁰

As the maxim goes, "to make war is far easier than to make peace." Translating this rare opportunity into a durable peace is a solemn responsibility of all relevant stakeholders, including citizens of Afghanistan. Making the best of the moment, among other things, requires undertaking a critical, sober, and transparent review of past errors and missed opportunities to avoid repeating previous mistakes.

²⁰ Kakar, "Reply," 1.

PART TWO

State-Society Relations in War and Peace Making Contexts

Democracy by Decree? Najibullah's Controlled Multiparty System

Thomas Ruttig

Abstract

The policy of national reconciliation, designed under Soviet auspices to prepare Afghanistan for the withdrawal of the Soviet occupation forces in 1989, included measures for a reconstruction of the political system and an inclusion of the regime's enemies, the mujahideen. Being a one-party state at that point, the Soviets and President Najibullah (r. 1987–92) decided to "increase political pluralism," that is, allowing other political forces than the ruling People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) to become legally active in the country. At the same time, Najibullah intended to salvage as much control as possible for himself and his party. This was a policy copying the model that, at the time, existed in several Soviet-allied Eastern European countries. This approach could be described as enacting a limited and controlled pluralism, including a multiparty system and elections. The policy failed, as Najibullah allowed other political forces too little room to maneuver, and the major mujahideen groups refused to join hands with him and his party at all. Despite its failure, this experiment has some lessons for current Afghanistan and new "reconciliation" attempts, the major one being that power sharing must be real to be accepted by those outside that system thus far. Whether power sharing is beneficial for a majority of Afghans needs to be answered by Afghans themselves, in light of the given political situation. That Afghanistan is currently far from being a thriving democracy will make it more difficult for a democratic decision-making process to succeed in enacting any political solution to the forty years of wars.

In his Dalw 1368 (Hijri Shamsi; January/February 1990) letter to Afghan intellectuals, in this case to Hassan Kakar, President Najibullah (1947–96; r. 1987–92) laid out a new blueprint for how Afghanistan could move from a political system shaped by the Soviet occupation toward a legitimate government. In the letter, he envisaged several measures: holding “negotiations,” organizing a “peace conference,” forming a “leadership council” that would lead to an “interim coalition government,” which would convene a “Loya Jirga” and, finally, enacting party-based “free and direct elections.” This would require, as he put it, an “increase in political pluralism” in the country. Najibullah’s proposals came a year after the last Soviet soldier had left Afghanistan.¹

This new policy was the result of far-reaching changes in the Soviet Union. The new Communist Party leadership, under General Secretary Mikhail S. Gorbachev, had embarked on its own internal reform through the policies of Glasnost (transparency) and Perestroika (reconstruction). In order to implement these policies, it was decided to cut the losses from costly foreign interventions, such as the ten-year occupation of its southern neighbor, Afghanistan. Soviet leaders had started calling the intervention a “mistake” and a “festering wound” as it had not only exacted massive economic costs as well as human losses, but had also eroded its image as a supporter of the “third world” and “national liberation.” The decision to withdraw Soviet soldiers from Afghanistan was taken by Moscow alone. The Afghan leadership was confronted with a fait accompli.

Najibullah’s January/February 1990 letter further developed earlier proposals, laid out by him in his speeches on the occasion of the 11th anniversary of the “April Revolution” on April 29, 1989, and during the May 1989 Loya Jirga in Kabul. A few years earlier, at the Second Nationwide Party Conference of the Hezb-e Dimokratik-e Khalq-e Afghanistan (People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan, PDPA) in January 1987,² he had announced that the party leadership had contacted, among others, “intellectuals [sic] residing in Europe and the United States of America” with the purpose of initiating “political dialogue.”³

Najibullah, a former head of Afghanistan’s intelligence services known as KhAD (Khadamat-e Aetla’at-e Dawlati/State Information Service),⁴ replaced Babrak Karmal (1929–96; r. 1979–87) as PDPA leader in 1986, and as president of what became the Republic of Afghanistan in 1987. Karmal had been particularly tainted as he had lent credence to the Soviet military invasion in 1979, after which he became head of state.

¹ For comprehensive analyses of the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, refer to Diego Cordovez and Selig S. Harrison, *Out of Afghanistan: The Inside Story of the Soviet Withdrawal* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), or Artemy M. Kalinovsky, *A Long Goodbye: The Soviet Withdrawal from Afghanistan* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011).

² Until then, the PDPA had never held any party congress, apart from its (small) founding congress in 1965. In 1981, a first “nationwide party conference” had been held, which was not considered a full party congress. This would only happen in 1990.

³ *Documents of the Watan Party Congress* (Kabul: Alberuni, 1990), 91–92.

⁴ By then officially upgraded to a ministry, WAD (Wezarat-e ettela’at-e daulati).

Beginning in 1986, immediately after taking over the PDPA leadership but still in the presence of the withdrawing Soviet troops, Najibullah and his Soviet backers started pushing for a strategic reorientation of the Afghan state and his party. The aim was to engineer a power-sharing arrangement with what had been called the *dushmanan* or *ashrar* (“enemies”), but now was dubbed “the armed opposition.”⁵

As a key element, this policy included several measures for a gradual opening of Afghanistan’s political system.⁶ Najibullah’s and the Soviets’ political aim was to open up the political system sufficiently to attract the mujahideen “parties” (*tanzims*), or at least a sufficient number of them, called the “reconcilable” parts of “the armed opposition” (in contrast to the “irreconcilable” ones), to give up the armed struggle and instead choose a political path to power.⁷ He obviously hoped that the *tanzims* would assume that they would win any election, based on their self-perception as the real representatives of the Afghan people who had been legitimized by their struggle against the foreign occupants and a regime/party based on an “alien ideology” propped up by them.

The outlines of this new policy were published for the first time after a plenum of the party’s Central Committee in early 1986. This reflected that the party—not the government—was still the political driving force. The policy became known as the policy of national reconciliation (*siyasat-e ashti-ye melli*).

This new policy, however, did not take off. In early 1990, Najibullah started a new drive, contacting various Afghan intellectuals, often independent, but supporting the various mujahideen groups’ struggle against the PDPA/Watan regime.

Toward (Some) Political Pluralism

One of Najibullah’s initial measures toward political opening was the transition from a *de jure* one-party state to a multiparty system. The basis for this change was a new constitution adopted by a Loya Jirga held in November 1987. The same Loya Jirga elected Najibullah president, and changed the country’s official name to Republic of Afghanistan, dropping the attribute “democratic,” a reference to the Marxist concept of

⁵ The change from Karmal to Najibullah was also engineered by the Soviets, as one of the PDPA leaders, late Suleiman Laeq, has rendered. See: Thomas Ruttig, “AAN Obituary: PDPA leader and poet Sulaiman Layeq (1930–2020),” Afghanistan Analysts Network, August 19, 2020, <https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/en/reports/context-culture/aan-obituary-pdpa-leader-and-poet-sulaiman-layeq-1930-2020/>.

⁶ The Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan—based on the April 1988 Geneva Accords—started in May 1988 and ended in February 1989.

⁷ It is remarkable how similar this terminology, and the theoretical approaches, were to current political initiatives in finding a negotiated end to the still-ongoing war.

“national democracy.”⁸ Najibullah called on other Afghan political groups to enter into a dialogue with the government.

Other steps that Najibullah took included the legalization of political parties and the holding of parliamentary elections. For this, the prewar bicameral system—with the Meshrano Jirga (the upper house/senate) and the Wolusi Jirga (the lower house)—was revived, both together constituting the Shura-ye Melli (National Council).⁹ Elections for the Wolusi Jirga were announced, while the president would appoint the members of the senate. A similar (if not completely identical) system was reestablished after the fall of the Taliban regime in 2001.

Simultaneously, Najibullah’s new political course included an ideological reorientation of the ruling PDPA, including its renaming. This process was concluded in July 1990, at the first PDPA congress after its founding meeting in 1965. There, Najibullah declared that it had been “a historic mistake” to have come under “a specific ideology.” The party was renamed *Hezb-e Watan* (Homeland Party) which was meant to give it a less ideological and more patriotic outlook. It dropped the Marxist element of “people’s” or “popular democracy” from its name.¹⁰ Elements of Marxist character were also excised from the party’s program, which now committed the party to a “democracy based on a multi-party system.” In his speech at the 1990 party conference, Najibullah called the “question... Capitalism or Socialism? ... the theoretical formula of the strangers,” answerable “by the future generation,” and added that “the words of left or right for description [sic] of [the party’s] essence can no more be appropriate.” Najibullah called *Hezb-e Watan* now “the party of patriots and reformists of Afghanistan.”¹¹ Najibullah was elected the chairman of the new party.

According to the 1980 “Fundamental Principles [of the] Democratic Republic of Afghanistan,” which served as a provisional constitution, the ruling PDPA that had taken power by a military coup in April 1978 had been declared “the guiding and mobilising force of society and state.” The establishment of other political parties was

⁸ In Marxist theory, there were “three worldwide revolutionary forces”: the socialist countries and their ruling parties; the working class in the capitalist countries; and the countries of the global south, dubbed the “national liberation movement.” Countries of the global south could choose a “socialist orientation” on their way to become socialist countries. “National democracy” and “People’s democracy” were considered steps in this direction. The theoretical basis of these concepts came from the Soviet Union. See the 1982 book, *Sotsialističeskaya orientatsiya osvobodivšikhya stran* [The socialist orientation of developing countries], Moscow 1982. (It has no authors mentioned, so was assumed to be the official party line given from “above”). For an English-language source on this theory, see: Mai Palmberg (Ed.), *Problems of Socialist Orientation in Africa*, papers of a conference held in Uppsala (Sweden) on 16-17 August 1976 by the Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, <https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:280203/FULLTEXT01.pdf>.

⁹ In official Afghan documents, it is frequently translated as National Assembly.

¹⁰ *Documents of the Watan Party Congress*, 72–73.

¹¹ *Documents of the Watan Party Congress*, 72–73, 77, 95.

not enshrined in the principles, but “free and democratic elections” for a Loya Jirga were foreseen. Parliament had been suspended since Mohammad Daoud Khan’s 1973 coup, and with a Revolutionary Council functioning as the supreme legislative power since 1978.¹²

This provision—namely the claim to a monopoly of political power—was dropped after 1987.¹³ As a first step, Najibullah aimed at legalizing various political forces that were already existing, active semilegally in the country or from exile, who had supporters in the country, and at integrating them into the new, more open system. This was meant to broaden and strengthen the base of the regime before a deal with the mujahideen was sought.

The idea of an initially limited, controlled multiparty system was not only inspired by Gorbachev’s policy of opening, but also from existing, heavily controlled multiparty systems in some eastern European socialist states, such as Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Poland, and the German Democratic Republic (GDR, East Germany). This author was present at a meeting between Najibullah and a visiting GDR delegation in 1987 in which the head of the latter recommended that the Afghan leadership allowed the establishment of a similar party, one that would address religiously-minded people (similar to the GDR’s Christian-Democratic Union).¹⁴ In the socialist countries, noncommunist parties constitutionally worked under what was officially called “the leadership” of the ruling communist party in multiparty alliances, called the National Front in the GDR.

On July 6, 1987, a Law on Political Parties was passed by Afghanistan’s Revolutionary Council. It was based on the new constitution’s article 5, which allowed for political parties “not opposed to the provisions of the Constitution.”¹⁵ The first ones to register were two small leftist parties and two new ones, in November 1987.¹⁶ The larger and older of the two, Sazman-e Inqilabi-ye Zahmatkashan-e Afghanistan (SAZA, Revolutionary Organization of Afghanistan’s Toilers) was the main successor group of Settam-e Melli. This group was a faction that had left the PDPA in 1967, after its leader Tahir Badakhshi (1933–79), who had been a cofounder of the PDPA in 1965, parted ways to set up his own movement. It was mainly based among the non-Pashtun ethnic groups of the country. It prioritized the “ethnic” over the “social question.” This meant,

¹² *Fundamental Principles [of the] Democratic Republic of Afghanistan*, English version, (Kabul: Ministry of Information and Culture, 1980).

¹³ However, in his inauguration speech at the July 1990 Hezb-e Watan congress, Najibullah still claimed the party was “the only genuine heir of the freedom fighters of Afghanistan.” It can be assumed this referred to the pre-1978 constitutional and prodemocratic movements. *Documents of the Watan Party Congress*, 2.

¹⁴ In the GDR, these parties were called *Blockparteien* (block parties).

¹⁵ *Constitution of Republic of Afghanistan* (Kabul: State Printing House, 1987).

¹⁶ *Haqiqat-e Inqilab-e Saur* (Kabul), 28 November 1987.

in Marxist terms, that it deemed the suppression (*settām*) of the non-Pashtun ethnic groups by the dominating Pashtuns as Afghanistan's most important societal problem, and not the suppression of the working classes by the bourgeoisie, as in mainstream Marxist orthodoxy. Badakhshi was killed by the PDPA regime. SAZA's leader in 1987 was Mahbubullah Kushani (b. 1944).

SAZA played on both sides of the PDPA–mujahideen rift. Before its legalization, its members were already ruling authorities in some northeastern provinces, their stronghold. It maintained its own military structures, but it did not actively participate in the armed struggle against the Soviets.¹⁷ On the contrary, those independent structures had the backing of at least some Soviet officials.¹⁸ At the same time, SAZA maintained its links with mujahideen tanzims that were influential in the group's strongholds, mainly Jamiat-e Islami. Jamiat, like SAZA, had (and has) members with a strong anti-Pashtun hegemony position (some of them of formerly leftist leanings).

The second group, Sazman-e Zahmatkashan-e Afghanistan (SeZA, Organization of Afghanistan's Toilers), led by Hamdullah Gran, was the successor of other breakaway groups from the PDPA of the late 1970s. However, this was the only faction of many that had been recognized and, as its internal opponents claimed, was actually controlled by the government. The second faction, led by Zaman Gul Dehati and still underground, claimed that the PDPA-dominated intelligence service ministry (Wezarat-e Etelat-e Daulati/WAD) had infiltrated the party, caused an internal split, and had only legalized the regime-conformist faction.¹⁹

SAZA, the larger party, received a few cabinet posts. Party chief Kushani became Deputy Prime Minister, and also the justice ministry went to the party. The government was now called a "coalition government."²⁰

Mirroring the eastern European approach and the advice of leaders from there, two more parties were established and registered on the same day: Hezb-e Islami-ye Mardom-e Afghanistan (HAMA, People's Islamic Party of Afghanistan), led by Qari Abdulsattar Sirat,²¹ and Hezb-e Edalat-e Dehqanan-e Afghanistan (HADA, Peasants Justice Party of Afghanistan), led by Abdul Hakim Tawana. Both resembled eastern

¹⁷ Muhammad Ismail Akbar, *Fasl-e akher* (Peshawar, 1382 [2003]), 35.

¹⁸ It was not clear whether this was official policy or the result of personal preferences. It is known that many Soviet officials had an anti-Pashtun, and therefore anti-PDPA (anti-Najibullah) bias. Also, SAZA's contacts to Jamiat could have been useful for the Soviets who had tried, over many years, to negotiate ceasefires and possibly wider understandings with the group's main military commander, Ahmad Shah Masoud.

¹⁹ The KhAD then established a department collecting intelligence about political parties that exists until today under the National Intelligence Directorate. Author's interviews in Kabul, including with Dehati, in 1988/89.

²⁰ "SAZA Chief Suggests New Approach to Coalition," *Kabul Times*, September 5, 1988, 2.

²¹ Not to be confused with eponymous Rome group leader Abdulsattar Sirat who participated in the 2001 Bonn conference.

European block parties.²² HAMA described itself as “the party of the patriotic Muslims of Afghanistan.”²³ By July 1988, seven new parties, besides PDPA, had registered. Apart from SAZA, SeZA, HADA, and HAMA, there were Nohzat-e Hambastagi-ye Mardom-e Afghanistan—Fedayan (People’s Solidarity Movement of Afghanistan—Fedayan), led by Safar Muhammad Khadem; Ettehad-e Ansarullah (Ansarullah Union), led by Mir Sarwar Nuristani; and a Hezbollah-e Afghanistan, led by Maulawi Abdulhalim Raqim—a Shia party.²⁴

The number rose to ten in August 1989, with Sazman-e Kargaran-e Jawanan-e Afghanistan (Young Workers Organization of Afghanistan, KoJA), led by Sufi Shena, and Ettefaq-e Mubarezan-e Solh wa Taraqi-ye Afghanistan (Alliance of Peace and Progress Fighters of Afghanistan), led by Dehati, who had renamed his SeZA faction.

SAZA and SeZA joined PDPA in creating Ittehad-e Ahzab-e Chap Demokratik, or the Union of Left-Democratic Parties. Also HADA participated, but as an observer only. In 1988/89, KoJA and Ettefaq joined this alliance.²⁵

In September 1988, already, SAZA leader Kushan criticized the PDPA for practically keeping its monopoly over power, and demanded that there should be a “real division of political power and not [just] state seats” and, among other things, that the mass media should be “opened to pluralism.”²⁶ Additionally, some liberal-minded intellectuals coming back from exile also tried to use the newfound political space but escaped the PDPA/Hezb-e Watan’s domination. In 1986, already, they had founded Ettehad-e Melli bara-ye Azadi wa Demokrasi (National Union for Freedom and Democracy, NUFD)²⁷, initially led by Prof. Muhammad Asghar, a former president of Kabul University. After his death, Mir Muhammad Mahfuz Nedayi took over.²⁸ However, they were ultimately denied legalization.²⁹

²² See footnote 10.

²³ HAMA party programme, in the author’s archive.

²⁴ There were also several (Shia) mujahideen factions called Hezbollah in the 1980s, but it is not clear whether this group was (a splinter group of) one of them. Its leader claimed it had 3,000 fighters “in the central and northern provinces of Afghanistan” who had been observing a “ceasefire” since Najibullah’s proclamation of the national reconciliation policy and their “future activity” would depend “on the future negotiations under way between us and the government of the Republic of Afghanistan.” See: “We Would Fight for National Reconciliation: Mawlawi Raqim,” *Kabul Times*, March 27, 1988.

²⁵ The author was unable to find the exact date on which the alliance was founded.

²⁶ “SAZA Chief Suggests New Approach,” 2–3.

²⁷ Initially known as Hezb-e Rastagari-ye Melli-ye Afghanistan (National Resurrection Party of Afghanistan).

²⁸ Nedayi was one of two candidates who ran against Hamid Karzai (r. 2001–14) for the post of the head of the post-Bonn interim administration in the Emergency Loya Jirga in 2002.

²⁹ The author has never seen a formal reply (and doubts there was one) and can only deduct from the fact that these parties never became openly active.

Also the Afghan Millat Party was approached to join the new system by the government and apparently offered posts in it. The party is one of the oldest in the country, founded by the 1950s Kabul mayor, Ghulam Muhammad Farhad (1901–84), in March 1966. Its official name was Afghan Tolenpal Wuluswak Gund (Afghan Social Democrat Party). Afghan Millat was the name of the newspaper it published during 1963–73, the so-called “decade of democracy,” with the party only adopting it officially as its name in 2012. Initially, the party was known amongst Afghans mainly for its advocacy of a Greater Afghanistan (or Pashtunistan). Often labeled “Pashtunist” and “chauvinist,” even “fascist” by its critics, its leaders described it as a “third force, which is moderate, national and progressive.”³⁰ During the anti-Soviet struggle, it supported the mujahideen but was not officially recognized by the Pakistani government and therefore frozen out from receiving any financial or military support. In order to win Afghan Millat over, the Najibullah government released some of its imprisoned leaders from jail, who were received by Najibullah in October 1987.³¹ Ultimately, however, it rejected participation because it did not accept to work with the PDPA playing a “leading role.”

From April 6 to 15, 1988, parliamentary elections were held. A significant number of the seats, although a clear minority of them, in both houses of parliament, were kept open for the armed opposition. This number corresponded with districts recognized by the government as mujahideen-controlled. In the case of the Wolusi Jirga, these were sixty-one of the 234 seats.³²

The elections, however, were almost entirely a show. On election day, this author and a colleague looked in vain for any polling station or queues of voters in Kabul. There had been no public mobilization or campaign. The seats had been allocated in advance to secure a majority for the PDPA. It received 46, the PDPA-dominated National Fatherland Front 45,³³ and the other legal parties 25.³⁴ Interestingly, if the mujahideen had accepted this offer, they, together with those members of the Wolusi Jirga of no (or no open) PDPA/NFF/leftist affiliation, would have been in a majority.

³⁰ Editorial by Eng. Esteqlal, *Afghan Mellat* (Peshawar), January 5, 1988.

³¹ The delegation was led by later Secretary-General of the party, Abdulhamid Yaqin Yusufzai, who had been detained in 1983. Interview on Afghan State TV, late 1983 (personal note); “Dr. Najibullah Receives Afghan Millat Delegation,” *Kabul New Times*, October 29, 1987; see also: Hassan Kakar, *Afghanistan: The Soviet Invasion and the Afghan Response, 1979–1982* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 155, 261.

³² This figure is according to the author’s notes, who worked in Kabul at that time. The Interparliamentary Union, though, in a 1988 report, gave the number of fifty seats reserved for the mujahideen. https://web.archive.org/web/20130309031244/http://www.ipu.org/parline-e/reports/arc/AFGHANISTAN_1988_E.PDF.

³³ The National Fatherland Front (Jabha-ye Melli-ye Padarwatan) had been founded on June 15, 1981, as an umbrella for PDPA-led social organisations, such as the Democratic Youth Organisation of Afghanistan, the Democratic Women’s Organisation of Afghanistan, the trade union, and writers’ and other professional groups. Except the PDPA, no other parties were part of it.

³⁴ The Europa World Year Book 2003, vol. 2 (Milton, UK: Taylor & Francis, 2003), 400.

A new cabinet under the non-PDPA Prime Minister Muhammad Hassan Sharq (born 1925)³⁵ was formed in June of the same year, that included some SAZA and a number of nonparty ministers, some of whom were linked to monarchist circles abroad—a gesture toward the former King Mohammad Zahir Shah and his supporters. Former Khalqis were released from jail and also received high-ranking posts, while the remaining Karmalists were sidelined.³⁶

Effectively, the only real parties joining the new system were the small left-wing parties, apart from token or splinter (Islamic) groups, and the artificially created “block parties.” An Afghan political leader called the block parties “nothing more than PDPA departments.”³⁷ Apart from a very few dissidents, none of the major mujahideen parties took up Najibullah’s offer.

At the same time, Najibullah was not able to control his multiparty system as effectively as the Eastern European governments of the time did theirs. That created some space for independent political activity and dissenting views. For example, Maoist groups successfully infiltrated HADA, whose leader Tawana was a cadre of the Peykar group; HADA started creating political networks of their own. Some smaller groups had links to monarchist circles abroad, or likely constituted attempts by mujahideen parties (probably the predominantly Shia mujahideen Islamic Unity Party, Dari: Hezb-e Wahdat-e Islami, in particular) to get a foothold inside the changing political system. Other new groups probably simply wanted to use the government’s resources and set up what a researcher of post-2001 political parties called “vanity projects.”³⁸

Hezb-e Watan disintegrated when Najibullah’s regime broke down in 1992. Starting in the 1990s, there were several attempts to reunite those post-PDPA parties. The first one after the fall of the Taliban regime in 2001, with political parties legal in Afghanistan for the first time, was led by former PDPA general and Greater Kandahar regional governor Nur ul-Haq Ulumi (born 1941). This initiative led to the creation of Hezb-e Muttahed-e Melli-ye Afghanistan (National United Party of Afghanistan) in 2003, which was rejected by many post-PDPA groups as an attempt by Ulumi to unilaterally take over the leadership. Most of these groups later registered as separate parties. A second attempt, under the auspices of Nohzat-e Faragir-e Taraqi wa Demokrasi (Broad Movement for Progress and Democracy) failed in 2012 in the last moment, creating more fragmentation, but later attracting some groups who had participated in

³⁵ Sharq was no official member of the PDPA or Hezb-e Watan, but he was considered as a non-declared one by most Afghans.

³⁶ Mahmud Baryalai (1944–?), Karmal’s half-brother, lost his position as Deputy Chairman of the Council of Ministers. See Thomas Rüttig, “Ende eines Genesungsaufenthaltes: Porträt Babrak Karmals,” *Wochenzeitung die andere*, Berlin, 27/1991.

³⁷ Author’s interview in Kabul, 1988.

³⁸ Kit Spence, “Political Party Assessment Afghanistan,” (Kabul: National Democratic Institute for International Affairs, 2006).

earlier reunification attempts. It now operates as Hezb-e Melli-ye Taraqi-ye Mardom-e Afghanistan (Afghanistan National People's Progress Party). There are several more registered post-PDPA parties.

Also, a new Hezb-e Watan was founded in Kabul in 2017, led by Abdul Jabbar Qahraman, a former pro-PDPA militia leader and a post-2001 member of parliament, but it did not even get the support of Najibullah's family. (His wife Fatana and daughters still wield influence on former Najibist PDPA sympathizers.)³⁹ The party launch was rumored in Kabul to have had the support of the presidential palace, as President Muhammad Ashraf Ghani (b. 1949) had appointed Qahraman as special representative for security in Helmand in 2016, a post from which he resigned again in April 2017 amid differences of opinion. Qahraman was assassinated in October 2018 while campaigning for parliament again.⁴⁰

Conclusion

Najibullah's attempts to open the political system and attract at least a part of the opposition forces to join failed. None of the major mujahideen parties and no other significant opposition force took him up on his offer. They did not want to give legitimacy to a system that they had fought against. Despite some unofficial contacts, they also rejected to negotiate a peaceful political transition with Najibullah and his party, and were not ready to give them any role in a future political system. They preferred to completely dismantle the system, and this happened, prompted by intraregime tensions after Russia cut its economic aid in spring 1992. The PDPA/Hezb-e Watan disintegrated and fragmented. Najibullah's national reconciliation policy also did not bring about a functioning new political system. The outcome is known: new factional war; the destruction of even more of the country; the emergence of the Taliban; their alliance with al-Qaeda and the terrorist attacks of 9/11; a new international military intervention that, in consequence, revitalized the already defeated Taliban and its insurgency.

The current government is trying to negotiate a power sharing arrangement with its own armed opponents, the Taliban, who are unwilling to join the system represented

³⁹ See Thomas Ruttig and Ali Yawar Adili, "The Ghost of Najibullah: Hezb-e Watan announces (another) Relaunch," Afghanistan Analysts Network, August 21, 2017, <https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/en/reports/political-landscape/the-ghost-of-najibullah-hezb-e-watan-announces-another-relaunch/>.

⁴⁰ See Ruttig and Adili; and Michael Semple, "Not Everybody's Hero: The Assassinated Communist-Turned-Post-2001-Parliamentary Candidate Jabbar Qahraman," Afghanistan Analysts Network, October 31, 2018, <https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/en/reports/political-landscape/not-everybodys-hero-the-assassinated-communist-turned-post-2001-parliamentary-candidate-jabbar-qahraman/>.

by this government. While much of this situation looks like the one Najibullah faced in the late 1980s/early 1990s, the current government's international legitimacy is much stronger than Najibullah's. But, on the domestic level, this is not sufficient, as the ongoing controversies about the composition of the new government and the High Council for National Reconciliation reflect.⁴¹

On the practical side, it was unrealistic of Najibullah to expect that significant opposition forces would join a system and play to rules he had set, that were probably designed to play to his advantage. Najibullah of course had in mind the safeguarding of a political role for his party and himself in a future Afghanistan. Much of the detail laid out in the letter to Hassan Kakar should have been left open for the negotiations he envisaged. In this sense, the proposals in his letter to the intellectuals were too ambitious, and probably also not fully honest.

Of course, the mujahideen parties, if democratically minded, also could have seized the opportunity head-on and sailed to power through elections. But, of course, they were conscious of their own fragmentation, and as the events of the first half of the 1990s would demonstrate, not ready to share power fairly even among themselves. (They were also conscious of Professor Sayed Bahauddin Majrooh's (1928–88) polls in the refugee camps in Pakistan, which did not give much hope to the *tanzim* to come out of an election victoriously.)⁴²

The takeaways from Najibullah's experiment of top-down and limited (and controlled) democratization are of a general nature. Democratic systems—including democratic multiparty systems—grow organically and cannot be imposed from above. It also showed that the most complicated issue in any peace process is how to design interim mechanisms for a transition of power, and a possible reworking of state structures between parties that are not fully representative and have recourse to armed violence.

It was not so that Afghanistan did not have any structural basis on which pluralism and multiparty democracy could develop. The Afghan society is pluralistic, including politically. After World War II, during two phases of political opening (1947–52 and 1963–73), political forces sprang up and diversified, reformist, (royalist) conservatives, and Islamists. By the mid-1960s, three political camps had roughly taken shape in Afghanistan: a socialist left; the Islamists; and a moderate center, with ethnocentric

⁴¹ Ali Yawar Adili, "Peace Leadership: Power Struggles, Division and an Incomplete Council," Afghanistan Analysts Network, September 6, 2020, <https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/en/reports/political-landscape/peace-leadership-power-struggles-division-and-an-incomplete-council/>.

⁴² In April 1987, the Peshawar-based Afghanistan Information Centre published the results of a—not representative—survey conducted in half of Pakistan's Afghan refugee camps that showed that 72 per cent of respondents favoured the return of ex-King Zahir, 12.5 percent a "purely Islamic state," and only 0.45 percent any of the *tanzim* leaders as the country's leader. David B. Edwards, *Before Taliban: Genealogies of the Afghan Jihad* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 279–83.

elements across the board.⁴³ A number of political parties emerged from their ranks, many of which (including the PDPA, Afghan Millat and the successor tanzims of the Muslim Youth) consolidated themselves and survived for many decades. But King Muhammad Zahir's (r. 1933–73, 1914–2007) refusal to sign a law on political parties already passed by parliament during the decade of democracy (1963–73) blocked this development and pushed the more radical forces to look for ways to get to power through extralegal means as they were unable to take power through the vote. The war that started in 1978/79, however, militarized many of the political parties. In the long run, their focus on using violent, nondemocratic means to achieve or maintain power delegitimized them in the eyes of large parts of the population. Those parties who opted against taking up arms, or were barred from receiving military and financial aid during the Soviet occupation, were sidelined. This trend continued after 2001 when many new political parties, most of them civilian in outlook, emerged, but very few were able to establish deeper roots.

This signifies the importance of the demilitarization of the political arena in Afghanistan (including the parties) for the emergence of a genuinely democratic system, as laid out in the country's constitution. That parties cannot have links to militias is already law, but it has not been enforced. Influential political factions see demilitarization as a possible emasculation that could—if carried out unevenly—put them at their rivals' mercy. (A result of the unchanged post-2001 political culture that still considers the use or threat of violence if not legitimate, at least possible.) This has created a vicious circle. As the tanzims dominate the state, at the same time, there is no political will to implement this and other key provisions of the Political Parties Law, such as regularly holding congresses and democratically electing their respective leaderships.

One reason is that the task of implementing the law has been given to a branch of the government, the Ministry of Justice, which is not an impartial body and is neither equipped nor apparently willing to implement these stipulations. It rather has repeatedly been busy—through bureaucratic but not democratic means—in reducing the numbers of political parties registered in the country. This has been done, for example, through the requirement that parties must have a certain number of provincial offices and submit name lists of their members—all this in a situation of war where it is well known that many power-holders on the central and provincial level are hostile to any opposition.⁴⁴

⁴³ See my 2006 paper, "Islamists, Leftists—and a Void in the Center: Afghanistan's Political Parties and Where They Come From (1902–2006)," Konrad Adenauer Foundation, Kabul/Berlin, 2006, http://www.kas.de/wf/doc/kas_9674-544-2-30.pdf.

⁴⁴ For example, in 2013 (but also later), see: Thomas Ruttig, "Now 'Informal,' Soon Illegal? Political Parties' Existence Threatened Again," Afghanistan Analysts Network, April 16, 2013, <https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/en/reports/political-landscape/now-informal-soon-illegal-political-parties-existence-threatened-again-amended/>.

These hurdles for the growth of genuinely democratic parties have been created under the watch of the leading post-2001 intervening power, the US, who were interested in a centralized presidential system instead of one reflecting the political diversity of Afghan society. Thus, instead of a functioning pluralistic parliamentary democracy, other (often extraconstitutional) institutions have emerged and are emerging, including in the result of the power-sharing arrangement between current President of Afghanistan Ashraf Ghani and his main domestic political opponent during the 2019 presidential election, Abdullah Abdullah. Also, the increasing influx of money into elections—reflected by the presence of a large number of businessmen in parliament—is leading to less competition and variety. Finally, the current approach to the peace process favors such forces who claim their place at the negotiating table, and finally in a future government, using or threatening armed force. This might further strengthen nondemocratic structures in Afghanistan's state.

Revisiting Reconciliation as State-Building in Afghanistan

Dipali Mukhopadhyay

Abstract

Few scholars have captured the complexities of Afghanistan's internal politics as a function of its geopolitical liminality as thoughtfully as Hassan Kakar. It is of little surprise, then, that President Najibullah sought Kakar's advice on how to navigate his regime's way through one of the thorniest chapters in Afghan history after the Soviet withdrawal. In 1990, the president found himself at the helm of a government whose foundation was exceptionally brittle and whose future looked increasingly dim. Kakar acknowledged the disproportionate impact international agendas and actions continued to have on events inside Afghanistan, but urged the president and his countrymen not to give up on seeking solutions of their own. Kakar tied the projects of political accommodation and self-determination together, describing the persistence of Soviet involvement in Afghan affairs—and the consequent interference by other countries like Pakistan—as a key barrier to both. He argued, moreover, that the privileging of the current regime over the opposition would prove a nonstarter, as it would undermine the very notion of self-determination. Implicit in his prescription for an inclusive and expansive political project was Kakar's understanding of the relationship between warmaking and state-making, and the degree to which marginalized opposition leaders would fight for what they believed they deserved if they were not given a seat at the table. As it embarks on talks with the Taliban, in certain ways, the Ghani government of 2021 faces a less daunting task than that of the Najibullah government. Afghanistan's international partners will continue to impose their own agendas

on account of the power asymmetries that persist in twenty-first century international relations. But the current Afghan government now confronts its violent challengers bolstered by a national consensus in favor of peace and the preservation and expansion of the gains, however imperfect, made in the past two decades. Students of Afghan politics will look back and consider whether it proved able to uphold the state's delicate but resilient covenant, of which Kakar so poignantly wrote two decades ago.

It is impossible to study Afghan state formation without explicitly contextualizing it within the international system and, more specifically, without recognizing Afghanistan's position within that system. Afghanistan is commonly referred to as a buffer state. Since the time of King Abdur Rahman Khan (1880–1901), Afghanistan indeed has, quite literally, found itself caught between great power agendas—the Russians, the British, the Soviets, the Americans—but also multiple axes of contestation on the part of neighboring states.¹ To study modern Afghan state-building, then, is to consider the country's place in an international system marked by what political scientist Stephen Krasner called sovereignty as “organized hypocrisy.” As he wrote, “stronger states can pick and choose among different rules selecting the one that best suits their instrumental objectives,” while the less powerful have little choice but to accept international relations on others' terms.²

Few scholars have captured the complexities of Afghanistan's internal politics as a function of its geopolitical liminality as thoughtfully as Hassan Kakar. In *Political and Diplomatic History of Afghanistan, 1863–1901*, he included an excerpt from a letter, dated May 18, 1880, written by the Afghan ruler, Abdur Rahman Khan, to his future patron, the British government, in which the king sought to clarify the parameters of this new relationship: “When the British Government tells me what are to be the boundaries of Afghanistan; will Kandahar of old, be left in my kingdom or not? Will a European Envoy and a British Government remain within the boundaries of Afghanistan, after friendship is made between us two or not? What enemy of the British Government shall I be expected to repel, and what manner of assistance will the Government wish to give? And what benefits will the Government undertake to confer on me and on my countrymen?”³

¹ James Gervais Lyons, *Afghanistan: The Buffer State* (Madras: Higginbotham, 1910); Barnett R. Rubin, *The Search for Peace in Afghanistan: From Buffer State to Failed State* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995).

² Stephen Krasner, *Sovereignty: Organized Hypocrisy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 6.

³ M. Hassan Kakar, *A Political and Diplomatic History of Afghanistan, 1863–1901* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 41.

In quoting these sentences penned by Afghanistan's "Iron Amir," Kakar directed his readers to the key questions that have animated the relationship between Afghan state-building and foreign intervention from 1880 until the present day. What are the terms of exchange between foreign patron governments and domestic client regimes? How much influence over internal politics do interveners hold, and what value can Afghans extract from that control? And, ultimately, when contests erupt—over law, territory, or policy—can national rulers have any expectation of sovereign control over their resolution?

It is of little surprise, then, that, just over a century after the reign of Abdur Rahman Khan, President Najibullah sought Kakar's advice on how to navigate his own regime's way through one of the thorniest chapters in Afghan history. At the start of 1990, the president found himself at the helm of a government whose foundation was exceptionally brittle and whose future looked increasingly dim. Few understood the regime's dark legacy better than Kakar, who suffered gravely for five years at its hands, imprisoned on charges of "plotting to overthrow the government, being pro-West and anti-Soviet, editing a clandestine journal and organizing professors," among others.⁴

A request for advice from President Najibullah, former head of the very intelligence agency that had jailed him a few years earlier, urging the professor not to "hold back" his views must have landed with some irony. But Kakar graciously took up the invitation and offered an incisive set of critiques and recommendations worthy of consideration in their own context as well as for the lessons they offer the contemporary moment. In this essay, I will explore a few of the themes and dilemmas raised in the dialogue between these two men and reflect on their lessons for the post-2001 period and the present.

The Catch-22 of Afghan Sovereignty

In his overture to Kakar, Najibullah began by describing the outsized influence of foreign powers—and their military presence and actions—on Afghanistan, and the suffering that influence continued to inflict. He underscored the imperative to "find an Afghan and Islamic solution" to the political crisis at hand. For him, the requirement to "remove foreign elements from the scene," for "all foreign intervention in the affairs of Afghanistan [to] stop," seemed to be of paramount import. And, yet, we know, with the benefit of hindsight, that it was the retreat of international attention and support from the Afghan scene in the 1990s that played a serious role in his government's collapse. In fact, the government of Ashraf Ghani and its supporters today urge the United States

⁴ Richard M. Weintraub, "Afghan Scholar Recalls Years in Jail," *Washington Post*, January 9, 1988.

and its allies to avoid repeating that mistake of abandonment this time around.⁵

Afghan state formation has long unfolded within this paradox of a kind of dependent independence: unlike so many countries in the developing world, Afghanistan was never colonized. But the Afghan state, as per Abdur Rahman's 1880 communique, was also not truly independent. On the contrary, its capacity to govern was both enabled by foreign support, and hindered by foreign interests from the Second Anglo-Afghan War onwards.⁶ The 1978 communist government exemplified this paradox: its politics may have been inspired by a segment of the Afghan elite, but its sustenance and survival depended on foreign support and, eventually, on a Soviet military presence.⁷

Like Afghanistan, all modern states that developed with the overwhelming input of foreign aid and intervention bypassed a set of processes often recognized as fundamental to state-building and democratization. In his groundbreaking work in political sociology, Charles Tilly described the relationship between Western warmaking and state-making as one of mutual reinforcement. European princes made war with one another to defend and expand their writs and, in so doing, found themselves in need of greater access to coercion and capital. Their negotiations to accrue both unfolded with surrounding warlords, landlords, traders, and merchants. Those transactions produced a set of institutions that we now associate with the modern state, from the security sector to the bureaucracy of taxation. The subsequent evolution from "indirect" to "direct" rule took hundreds of years, as these governments marginalized or accommodated those who stood between them and their citizens.⁸

For the modern states of the developing world, various forms of (neo)imperial interference have consistently short-circuited those institution-building interactions between state and society. As Barnett Rubin explained with respect to the Afghan "enclave" state, it found protection from some forms of internal conflict as a result of outside support, but its capacity to establish robust social control was ultimately compromised. In his words: "the formation of the nation-state as an enclave, supported mainly by its links to the international system, deprived the state of most of the instruments through which other revolutionary leaderships have carried out social change and controlled the populations under their rule."⁹

⁵ Rod Nordland and Mujib Mashal, "With U.S. and Taliban in Talks, Afghans Fear They Could End Up Trampled," *New York Times*, January 28, 2019.

⁶ On the role of foreign revenue in Afghan state formation and governance, see Rubin, "Lineages of the State in Afghanistan," *Asian Survey* 28, no. 11 (November 1988): 1188–209.

⁷ On the relationship between political authority and foreign intervention in contemporary Afghanistan, see William Maley, "Political Legitimation in Contemporary Afghanistan," *Asian Survey* 27, no. 6 (June 1987): 705–25.

⁸ Charles Tilly, "War Making and State Making as Organized Crime," in Peter Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer, and Theda Skocpol, eds., *Bringing the State Back In* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985): 169–91.

⁹ Rubin (November 1988): 1190–91.

These same types of dependencies have persisted into the twenty-first century and cornered the post-2001 Afghan government in similarly challenging ways. The most recent incarnation of Western intervention came to Afghanistan uninvited after September 11, 2001, prompted by a set of attacks perpetrated across the world. Those attacks served as the justification for a campaign of forcible regime change, and they remained the driving force behind many of the key decisions that followed. Many of the same strongmen and militias that had stared down Najibullah's regime found American support (and legitimation) a decade later, as the US military joined forces with the Northern Alliance to unseat the Taliban regime.

Those commanders translated a swift victory into political leverage at the negotiating table, where they accrued enormous influence over the architecture and composition of the new government.¹⁰ At the same time, the remnants of the unseated Taliban regime were excluded, as the US government and its allies defined this new chapter in the Afghan state-building project as the means to their counterextremist ends. And, so, while the new Karzai and, then, Ghani governments, received tremendous support in the form of foreign military and material aid, it was not without a series of very real strings attached. In that sense, little had changed since the days of 1880 when the Iron Amir pondered the trade-offs of accepting the compromised sovereignty that came with buffer statehood.

The Legitimacy Gap

Professor Kakar, in his 1990 response to President Najibullah, acknowledged the disproportionate impact international agendas and actions continued to have on events inside Afghanistan, but urged the president and his countrymen not to give up on seeking out solutions of their own. While Najibullah attributed the key source of conflict to outside interference, a point Kakar did not dispute, the historian made clear that the regime's politics remained a serious sticking point as well. He quoted the words of the former king, Mohammad Zahir Shah (1933–1973), who described Najibullah's government as “the imposed communist regime,” a phrase that made clear the inextricable link between foreign influence and domestic illegitimacy.¹¹

In so doing, Kakar acknowledged Najibullah's national reconciliation policy as the outgrowth of an appropriate impulse on the leader's part, “the first steps in the right direction” even as he made clear that the president's proposal, “as it is, cannot be

¹⁰ On the implications, see Dipali Mukhopadhyay, *Warlords, Strongman Governors, and the State in Afghanistan* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Romain Malejacq, *Warlord Survival: The Delusion of State Building in Afghanistan* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2020).

¹¹ Letter from Hassan Kakar to President Najibullah (June 12, 1990), 3.

acceptable to all involved parties.” As his letter went on, Kakar grew more blunt, plainly stating:

It is certain that your government so far has not been regarded as valid or legitimate. The reason is obvious. It was set up after the Soviet invasion by force and military might. Afghans considered this against their basic rights as well as the right of national sovereignty . . . “National Reconciliation” measures, as you call them, have had some influence but have not helped much in the solution of the crisis, nor is it likely they will help much in the future. The reason for this is the past history of the government and the fact that the Soviet Union is not totally out of Afghanistan. (Kakar, letter to President Najibullah, June 12, 1990)

The country’s greatest living historian was reminding his interlocutor that history mattered. People would not so easily forget the crimes that had been committed by the People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan’s government. Conciliatory gestures would prove inadequate to assuage their concerns that the government served foreign interests more than their own. Ultimately, this caution proved prescient, as Najibullah would submit his resignation two years later to disastrous but perhaps inevitable effect. In the face of the regime’s legitimacy deficit—and encouraged by ongoing foreign military support—the Mujahideen opposition, having successfully repelled their Soviet occupiers, had little reason to negotiate. As Kakar put it, “they are clearly insistent on a military solution to the issue.”¹² He went on to quote the opposition leader, Sibghatullah Mojaddedi, who made this position clear: “We will never, under no conditions, come into coalition with the Khalq and Parcham. Through pressure and an intensification of the struggles, we will overthrow the communist regime.”¹³

Reconciliation as State-Building?

The Mujahideen factions remained convinced that the path to making a new state could be forged through war. That perspective fueled the violent carving up of the Afghan countryside into fiefdoms not dissimilar to those of Tilly’s medieval Europe. How might President Najibullah have prevented this descent into a new dark age? As per Kakar’s conclusion—“the differences in positions [were] fundamental”—this descent may well have been inevitable, especially when coupled with the other key variable of concern, “the intervention of foreign powers in the internal affairs of Afghanistan.”¹⁴

¹² Letter from Hassan Kakar to President Najibullah (June 12, 1990), 3.

¹³ Letter from Hassan Kakar to President Najibullah (June 12, 1990), 3.

¹⁴ Letter from Hassan Kakar to President Najibullah (June 12, 1990), 3.

Najibullah's plan to navigate this thorny context rested on his concept of reconciliation. In Kakar's view, a successful attempt at reconciliation-as-state-building required an exceptionally big tent. "The cooperation of all influential, involved, national groups and parties" would be necessary in order to establish a credibly sovereign Afghan nation-state. Kakar tied the projects of political accommodation and self-determination together in his letter, describing the persistence of Soviet involvement in Afghan affairs—and the consequent interference by other countries like Pakistan—as a key barrier to both. He argued, moreover, that the privileging of the current regime over the opposition would prove a nonstarter, as it would undermine the very notion of self-determination.

Implicit in his prescription for an inclusive and expansive political project was Kakar's understanding of the relationship between warmaking and state-making, and the degree to which marginalized opposition leaders would fight for what they believed they deserved if they were not given a seat at the table. As I have argued elsewhere, neither the Najibullah government nor the international community engaged these non-state armed actors to the degree they might have, and those failures set the stage for a violent civil conflict that, in turn, created an opportunity for the Taliban's rise to power.¹⁵

At the same time, Kakar recognized the volatility that would mark any genuinely multifactional attempt at creating an interim government, predicting "severe new tensions and new struggles" in the process. He proposed, instead, an interim administration staffed by technocratic professionals whose participation in this transitional arrangement would preclude them from having a seat in the next government, which would be formed through "general, secret and direct elections." Kakar remained clear-eyed on the likely destabilizing effect of the unwieldy negotiations he proposed. He identified neutral technocrats and international peacebuilders as potential midwives for what would be an inevitably messy birthing of a new political order.

Reconciliation Meets Realpolitik

To manage the security dilemmas that would undoubtedly arise during this interregnum, Kakar urged Najibullah to invite the United Nations in to mediate and keep the peace. He saw this multilateral organization's role in rehabilitating his war-torn nation as an obvious one on account of its ostensibly neutral posture ("no special intention for Afghanistan") and its mission ("an opportunity to take a major part in the next important Afghan issue which is the reconstruction of the country"). But the United Nations, during and after the Cold War, had to be understood as a collection of member

¹⁵ Dipali Mukhopadhyay, "The Slide from Withdrawal to War: The UN Secretary General's Failed Effort in Afghanistan, 1992," *International Negotiation* 17 no. 3 (2012): 485–517.

states, some of which had extraordinary privilege (military and diplomatic on account of the Security Council veto) in this community of ostensibly equal sovereign nations. Sustained, militarized interference by the world's two superpowers, and Afghanistan's neighbors, would make the quest for a peaceful political transition nearly impossible.

Although the Soviet Union withdrew its forces in 1989 from Afghanistan, the Soviets and the Americans did not adopt a posture of "negative symmetry" until 1991; in other words, both sides continued to arm their proxies for two years after the occupation ended, ensuring the capacity of those who remained on a war footing to keep up the fight. They also held fast to their own (incompatible) ideas about what the future government should and should not look like.¹⁶ When both eventually agreed to cease their contributions to the ongoing militarization of the conflict, the pendulum of "great power" engagement swung in the other direction toward neglect, and then, abandonment.

Just a decade later, many of the same Afghan powerbrokers sat around the table at Bonn, divvying up the spoils of their quick victory over the Taliban regime. They did so under the tutelage of the United Nations, this time staffed by a new Special Representative to the Secretary-General, Lakhdar Brahimi. Not unlike preceding peacemakers, Brahimi's "light footprint" approach would, ultimately, be overshadowed by the larger campaign driving the state-building effort in Afghanistan, that of the so-called Global War on Terror. That larger campaign not only emboldened strongmen and their militias for years to come, but also banished the Taliban so comprehensively as to make the eruption of a future insurgency a near inevitability. To return to Krasner's notion of sovereignty as "organized hypocrisy," in 1990, 2001, and 2021, all states are not created equal and the capacity of the most powerful to steer international relations in the directions they seek ought not to be underestimated.

The Afghan State as "a Covenant"

As it embarks on talks with the Taliban, in certain ways, the Ghani government of 2021 faces a less daunting task than that of the Najibullah government. The current administration's legitimacy deficit ought to be more manageable than that of the communist regime. Civilian institutions remain far from perfect, besmirched by persistent allegations of incompetence and abuse and the undeniable fact that they do not control large swathes of territory across the country.¹⁷ But the post-2001 political

¹⁶ Rubin, "Failure of Interim Government in Afghanistan," in Yossi Shain and Juan J. Linz (eds), *Between States: Interim Governments and Democratic Transitions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

¹⁷ For more on questions of governance in Afghanistan, see recent publications, including: Sahil

order is not the product of an ideology that sparked widespread popular rebellion: it is anchored in a new, flawed, but popular democratic tradition, and was not imposed on the public through the deliberate use of state violence. The Afghan National Army, far from the terrorizing PDPA's KhAD, is recognized as constituting one of the country's more robust public institutions, even as it remains heavily dependent on US support.¹⁸ And most Afghans did not perceive Western military intervention after 2001 as an unwelcome occupation of the kind the Soviet army inflicted.¹⁹

The Taliban depict the Afghan government as fundamentally illegitimate, but their core grievance has been with the US military presence, and they have succeeded at negotiating a conditional withdrawal. Other political players with serious access to forms of coercion and capital that could challenge the Afghan state have not done so in any fundamental sense. Many of the same Mujahideen leaders who cut their teeth fighting the PDPA now compete with one another for larger pieces of the political pie in Kabul and the provinces, but their commitment to the current order has been tested and proved resilient. Their livelihoods, to the disappointment of some, have transformed from active fighting to politicking and money making in terms that reflect a kind of reintegration Najibullah could have only imagined. In that sense, the government faces one formidable competitor, the Taliban, rather than the host of competitors Najibullah confronted.

Meddling neighbors in the region continue to create challenges for the state-building effort, providing succor and safe haven to the Taliban insurgency. But the great majority of surrounding countries recognize the value of a stable Afghanistan and fear the threat of the state's collapse, particularly as the US force presence shrinks. The challenge of dependent independence persists, as the Afghan government engages in talks with the Taliban structured on terms set by the Americans and the Taliban. Meanwhile, core state institutions—most importantly, the security sector—remain entirely dependent on Western support.

Afghan, "Living with the Taleban (1): Local Experiences in Andar District, Ghazni Province," Afghanistan Analysts Network, October 2020; Anna Larson and Noah Coburn, "Solidarity, Strength and Substance: Women's Political Participation in Afghanistan," Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, October 2020; Colin Cookman, "Assessing Afghanistan's 2019 Presidential Election," U.S. Institute of Peace, August 2020.

¹⁸ 59.6 percent of Afghans surveyed by the Asia Foundation in 2019 described the Afghan National Army as "honest and fair," while 53.4 strongly agreed with the notion that the army "helps to improve security," in *A Survey of the Afghan People: Afghanistan in 2019*, The Asia Foundation, 2019, 67.

¹⁹ This is not to suggest that what started as a welcome intervention did not produce tremendous frustration and resentment in subsequent years. On the complexities of Afghan attitudes toward the American military presence, see, for examples, Nushin Arbabszadah, "How Afghans See America: The Cowboy that Divided the Village," *Guardian*, November 21, 2013; Kate Clark, "How the Guests Became an Enemy: Afghan Attitudes Toward Westerners Since 2001," Middle East Institute, 2012.

Still, opportunities exist to assert the particular kind of self-determination to which Dr. Kakar referred when he expressed confidence in the capacity of the Afghan people to shape their own political destinies: “Afghans, as a dynamic people with their own mores, traditions, and a very rich culture, are good at politics and show great skill in the solution of internal issues, a skill they could use to create a new government. After all, the state (or government) is essentially the result of a covenant of the involved dynamic parties.”²⁰

This statement, true in 1990, is even more so the case in today’s Afghanistan. New spaces for peaceful political contestation, free expression, and popular participation have emerged in unprecedented form and number across the country since 2001. Connectivity, facilitated by technological advancements, has only deepened in recent years, enriched by the new ideas and opportunities that have come with the Afghan people’s renewed engagement with the rest of the world. The Afghan state remains the product of a kind of covenant between many different social forces, and the possibility to expand the terms of that covenant to include those affiliated with the Taliban movement now exists.

External Intervention Remains Unavoidable

Afghanistan’s international partners will continue to impose their own agendas on account of the power asymmetries that persist in twenty-first century international relations. The question of how much Western engagement in Afghanistan is too much versus too little remains a profoundly complex and challenging one. Sustained international attention has long been accompanied by the imposition of Western interests, but also an increasingly demanding set of norms about what “good” governance looks like and how it ought to be achieved. In Najibullah’s response to Kakar’s letter, he asserted that, while “great powers can have a role and impact in how the peace process develops . . . this role must in no way undermine our national sovereignty and ultimately Afghans themselves should decide their own preferred destiny.”²¹

A form of self-determination so unmitigated may be impossible in a context wherein the state’s very survival continues to depend on foreign support. But the current Afghan government now sits across the table from its violent challengers bolstered by a national consensus in favor of peace and the preservation and expansion of the gains, however imperfect, made in the past two decades.

²⁰ Letter from Hassan Kakar to President Najibullah (June 12, 1990), 6.

²¹ Letter from President Najibullah to Hassan Kakar (July 21, 1990), 1.

Students of Afghan politics will look back and consider whether it proved able to uphold the state's delicate but resilient covenant, of which Kakar so poignantly wrote three decades ago.

Imagining the Historical Nation: Afghanistan as a Dialogical Project of Nation-Making

Omar Sharifi

Abstract

The correspondence between Dr. Najibullah and Prof. Hassan Kakar regarding peace in Afghanistan in 1990 highlights a historical moment in a long and arduous journey of crafting national attachment between a government and its people in Afghanistan. Such exchanges are rare, if nonexistent, in the long history of conflict and state-building in Afghanistan. We have little evidence of such exchanges in the premodern and in most of the modern history of Afghanistan where the only commitment governments made in return for extracting resources was to maintain order. Nor did traditional dynastic rulers see a natural connection between themselves and the people they ruled, not even their own ethnic group. Only after declaring independence in 1919 did Durrani monarchs feel the need to convert this dynastic legitimacy into a nationalist legitimacy in which they and the people of Afghanistan were declared to be bound together in some intrinsic fashion. But the project of constructing a common national identity in a country that was home to so many different ethnic and linguistic groups, and where regional identities had far deeper roots than an Afghan nation state, was no simple task. It remained a work in progress as the country approached its centenary. Hassan Kakar's letters to the President Najibullah, the last president of the Communist regime in Afghanistan, represents the efforts of a scholar and an intellectual to address the social, political, and cultural complexities of Afghan society and the historical evolution of the Afghan state in the midst of a bloody ideological

civil war between the Mujahideen and Islamist forces on one side, and the leftist government on the other. This paper is an attempt to discuss the dialogical interactions between the state and citizens, and between the center and periphery, that helps explain how Afghanistan maintains a strong sense of national community despite the war and within a weak state.

The link between state formation, political stability, and governing legitimacy is well studied in political science and sociology. A number of scholars from various disciplines have wrestled with questions about the authority of the state in the Afghan context as well.¹ Afghanistan has always been a mosaic of different ethnic and linguistic groups, the major ones being the Pashtuns, Tajiks, Hazaras, and Uzbeks. Popular and scholarly concern about Afghanistan has long been characterized by how the actions of elite players, tribal politics, religious leaders, and state institutions jointly determine interethnic relations, communal relationships, and faith practices. The visibility of Islamic radicalism in Afghanistan, coupled with the overt ethnonationalism among many diaspora elites in the post-2001 government, as well as among certain Mujahideen leaders, have prompted some observers to portray the country as impossibly fragmented. The language of ethnic and sectarian conflict has thus shaped the dominant discourse in and about Afghanistan's contemporary social relations.

The primary objective of this paper is to unravel how a sense of national attachment emerged, maintained, and perpetuated itself against all odds. The more I studied the question, the more it became obvious to me that the answer lay not only (or even mostly) in the state's policies, nor in popular forms of political pragmatism or even shared religion, but also and especially in the ways that communities defined themselves through shared historical traditions.

As in many multiethnic and multilingual Central Asian contexts, the relationship between the state and society in Afghanistan has historically depended on a system of reciprocity that bound national leaders to the local elite, and the local elite to the government. Until the rise of Amir Abdur Rahman Khan (r. 1880–1901), Afghan monarchs made a point of respecting local traditions and cultivating ties with regional elites as a way of linking themselves with their subjects. Unlike the classical Persian model of absolute rule or the postcolonial, quasi-Westernized systems or military dictatorships

¹ Suhrke, "State-Building in Afghanistan"; Kakar, *Government and Society in Afghanistan*; Shahrani, "War, Factionalism, and the State in Afghanistan"; Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan*; Mukhopadhyay, *Warlords, Strongman Governors, and the State in Afghanistan*; Maley, "Political Legitimation in Contemporary Afghanistan"; Barfield, *Afghanistan*; Nawid, *Tarzi and the Emergence of Afghan Nationalism*.

in the rest of the region, Afghan leaders engaged in continuous negotiations as a way to build consensus between the central authorities and local elites.² Those that thought this unnecessary, such as King Amanullah in 1919–29, or the Khalqis (a faction within the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan) in 1978–79, soon found themselves unable to rule and were ousted from power.

The pattern was based on a historic solution to an old problem: how does an elite minority reach beyond its own small group to buttress its authority? For 700 years that regional minority was composed of conquerors of Turko-Mongolian descent who created a dualistic system in which the ruler combined men of the sword (Turks) with men of the pen (literate Persian speakers).³ The former provided the ruler with his coercive force, the latter with needed administrative capacity. When a Pashtun dynasty came to power in 1747, it adopted this model, with the Durrani Pashtuns and Turkic groups such as the Qizilbash now dominating the military, and Persian speakers filling their traditional administrative role.⁴

In this system, the government was not expected to provide services to the population, but was expected to prevent the emergence of *fitna* or chaos. In return for his protection, subjects were required to obey the ruler, but any replacement who could maintain the bargain was deemed legitimate should the incumbent fail. One restriction on this process of replacement, however, was that among the Turko-Mongolian people, only those born from aristocratic descent had the right to compete for power. This was very unlike the egalitarian Pashtun system in which a much wider range of notables could serve. Although Pashtun in origin, the Durrani dynasty that founded and ruled the Afghan state managed to graft this old Turkic aristocratic tradition onto their own royal house so that only members of certain Durrani clans were deemed eligible to compete for power. Different lines of descent within these Durrani groups regularly warred with one another: three different lines took power in the monarchy's 230-year history that lasted until 1978.

State Building under the Iron Amir

Amir Abdur Rahman Khan fundamentally changed the nature of the state that had existed

² The Persian model had a *shahanshah* or “king of kings,” but one who recognized the subsidiary solidarity despite the absolute rule of the shah. It allowed a top-down system to exert absolute sovereignty yet provide autonomy to the provinces where local elites could rule in their name as governors or even subsidiary kings (Barfield, *Afghanistan*, 74).

³ Notable exceptions are the Ghurid Dynasty of Afghanistan and North India (1148–1215) and the Kartids of Herat (1219–1389).

⁴ Barfield, *Afghanistan*, 67–77.

earlier and created a new model of governance that redefined the relationship between the state and local populations by imposing direct control over the entire country for the first time since the formation of the Afghan state in 1747. Unlike his predecessors, Amir Abdur Rahman Khan deliberately destroyed local autonomous governance structures, such as the Amirs of Qataghan and Andkhoy,⁵ often employing extreme violence, in every region and city across the country. He extinguished the autonomy of the Kohistani Tajik chiefs (1881–84), suppressed a Ghilzai revolt (1886–88) with a rapacity that was unprecedented in Afghan history, and then impoverished them through direct and extortionate taxation. After crushing these groups, which had played the most crucial role during the first and second Anglo–Afghan wars, he abolished the autonomy of Afghan Turkistan, defeating his cousin Ishaq Khan, the governor of Mazar-e Sharif, who had rejected his centralization policies.

Abdur Rahman Khan's next campaign (1891–93) was against the Shia Hazara areas of central Afghanistan, where his regular army and tribal levies broke the resistance of Hazaras, killing many, enslaving thousands, and forcing many more to flee to Baluchistan and Iran. The Hazaras were impoverished through sheer destruction of their property, enslavement, and the distribution of their pasturelands to Pashtun nomads. His last campaign was against the Kafirs (1895) who lived in the eastern Hindu Kush mountain region. In a short military operation, the region was conquered, renamed Nuristan (the land of light), and incorporated into modern Afghanistan. Unlike the brutal destruction of Hazaras, the Amir treated the newly converted Kafirs with leniency and recruited thousands of them into the army and administration.⁶

By destroying all regional elites and power structures, Amir Abdur Rahman Khan brought the different polities that had previously defined the diverse regions of Afghanistan into a single national state. His standardized taxation system, laws, single currency, and unitary administrative structure made all Afghans his subjects to be ruled from Kabul. His policies were not limited to removing the local governance structures; they also targeted the religious establishment. Before his rule, the ulema functioned as a polity independent from the government. He abolished their independence by bringing all *waqf* (religious endowments) under direct central government control by forcing them to pass government examinations and making them dependent on the government for their livelihood.⁷

Abdur Rahman Khan created a model of unitary state institutions that successive Afghan governments keenly followed and adopted in modified forms, often justifying them as means to preserve the national unity of Afghanistan. As Thomas Barfield has

⁵ Jonathan Lee, *Afghanistan: A History*, 198–204.

⁶ Kakar, *Government and Society in Afghanistan*, 42.

⁷ Kakar, *Government and Society in Afghanistan*, 45.

noted, “much as the establishment of the Durrani Empire by Ahmad Shah in 1747 is seen as the beginning of Afghan history, Amir Abdur Rahman’s reign is seen as the beginning of Afghanistan as a nation-state.”⁸ Afghanistan’s history in the twentieth century was shaped significantly by such policies and processes. Even when the time came to forge a new government after the fall of the Taliban in 2001, Afghanistan remained captive to Abdur Rahman’s legacy. Rather than reconfigure the structure of a political system that had collapsed twice in the preceding century in (1929 and 1992), the 2004 constitutional Loya Jirga (General Assembly) restored it by reinstituting a government with a rigid top-down decision-making process where the leader’s power had few checks or balances, and where decisions made in Kabul were deemed nonnegotiable. Abdur Rahman’s centralization had put so much power in the hands of the ruler that it left other government institutions weak and ineffective. His emphasis on making Kabul the only power center in the country also starved other regions of investment and human talent. And while the policy of sidelining regional elites increased Kabul’s power, it did not follow that the center alone could achieve political legitimacy, maintain stability, or promote national identity without them.

With the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, the trajectory of the state building project in the country entered a period of prolonged crisis. At this moment, the Afghan story departed from the Andersonian model; as Midgal would have it, the country’s social forces took hold of the nation-making project. Many observers conflated the profound failure, if not collapse, of the Afghan state with the demise of the Afghan nation. Throughout most of the 1980s and 1990s the country was fragmented along regional lines, a fragmentation interpreted by many as the beginning of its disintegration into ethnic and tribal enclaves. Even after 2001, many political analysts and Western diplomats argued that the “breakup of the country along the ethnic lines [held] real dangers.”⁹

With the collapse of the Afghan communist regime in 1992, various Mujahideen groups who fought the Russians, and later the Najibullah-led government, took control of the country. The Mujahideen Islamic State of Afghanistan [*Dawlat-e Islami Afghanistan*] that ruled Afghanistan from 1992–96 was divided into a number of competing factions. The Persian-speaking Tajiks dominated the *Jamiat-e Islami* party under the political leadership of Burhanuddin Rabbani, who served as the country’s president, and also the military leadership of Commander Ahmad Shah Masoud. It was opposed by the *Hezbi-i-Islami*, a predominantly Pashtun partly led by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, a favorite of Pakistan, who shelled Kabul from his bases just south and southeast of the city. A former

⁸ Barfield, *Afghanistan*, 160.

⁹ Glatzer, “Is Afghanistan on the Brink of Ethnic and Tribal Disintegration?”; see also Wilder and Lister, “State-Building at the Subnational Level in Afghanistan”; Rashid, *Descent into Chaos*.

communist general based in Mazar-e Sharif, Abdul Rashid Dostum, led an Uzbek party, *Junbish-e-Milli*, while the Hazaras were organized into the *Hezb-e Wahdat-Islami* led by Ali Mazari until his murder in 1995.

Mujahideen disunity and infighting opened the way for the Taliban, a Salafist religious group from Kandahar led by the one-eyed Mullah Omar, to take power. Drawing heavily on a southern Pashtun base of recruitment, the Taliban displaced Hekmatyar's *Hezb-i-Islami* in 1995. In 1996, they captured Kabul and installed their new Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (1996–2001). Once the Taliban took Kabul in 1996, they abandoned the notion of the Afghan *dawlat* and declared themselves to be an Islamic emirate, *D'Afghanistan Islami Emirat*, under the personal leadership of Mullah Omar as Commander of the Faithful. The Taliban, acting within a network of regional and local Islamist groups, had developed their own conception of political legitimacy, one that relied purely on a Salafi interpretation of Islam and a corresponding opposition to nationalism in its secular forms.

This opposition was strongly rooted in the notion of a political Islam that had emerged in Pakistan and South Asia more generally during the 1980s. The Taliban's political Islam aspired to introduce a more inclusive national identity based on religion that would include all ethnic groups. They existed, ideologically, outside the bounds of a historically grounded understanding of Afghanistan and the Afghan state, remaining perpetually linked to a transnational network of Islamists. Such links made many Afghans view the Taliban as an anti-Afghan phenomenon.¹⁰ As a religious movement led by Afghan Pashtuns who were trained in Deobandi madrasas across the border in Pakistan, they sought to banish anything they deemed "un-Islamic."

Under these circumstances, it is easy to see why observers, Afghan and foreign alike, might have feared the demise not only of the state-based political order but also the plural, historically grounded, and expansive conception of the Afghan nation as it had existed heretofore. From 1996–2001, the civil war pitted the Pashtun-dominated Taliban emirate against the United Front alliance of the abovementioned Tajik, Uzbek, and Hazara parties (also called the Northern Alliance). The United Front insisted that it was still the legitimate government of the continuing Islamic State of Afghanistan, a case buttressed by the Taliban's failure to garner international recognition beyond that of Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates even after they held 80 percent of the country.

And yet, in spite of the United Front's hostility to the Taliban, it does not appear that any of their component groups used anti-Pashtun rhetoric to mobilize their own people, mostly located in the non-Pashtun areas of northern and central Afghanistan. They rejected all allegations of representing an anti-Pashtun block and continued

¹⁰ Gopal and Strick van Linschoten, "Ideology in the Afghan Taliban."

to justify their war against Taliban as defending a legitimate Afghan government's sovereignty and independence from a usurping Taliban regime that was Pakistan's cat's paw. Similarly, the Taliban movement and its later emirate always asserted that it was a legitimate government that met accepted Islamic standards of inclusiveness. While the Taliban drew most of its supporters from the Pashtun areas of Afghanistan and certainly had a strong Pashtun tribal base, it continued and still continues to portray itself as a government that transcends ethnicity and region. And similarly, nonetheless, their declaration of Pashto as the language of government was neither an innovation, nor particularly radical. Previous monarchical regimes going back to the mid-nineteenth century had done the same with little success in a bureaucracy that continued to be run on a Persianate model of administration that had persevered for a thousand years.

Similarly, ethnic preferences and exclusions in government positions were more a byproduct of a traditional spoils system that rewarded supporters, mostly Pashtuns, and excluded perceived opponents, mostly non-Pashtuns. The result was an ethnic bias, but not one rooted in ethnic nationalism. The strongest evidence that the Taliban was a religious rather than an ethnonationalist movement could be seen in their policies that pitted a strict Salafist interpretation of Islamic sharia law against some of the core values embodied in the Pashtun code of honor, or *Pashtunwali*. For example, the Taliban outlawed the tradition of resolving blood feuds by the exchange of girls in marriage [*baad*] between the groups in conflict, although the effective enforcement of this law is still debated.¹¹ They also discouraged the use of traditional Pashtun tribal councils, *jirgas*, to solve disputes based on customary law in favor of the clerical (*ulema*) councils that employed *sharia* law. In this respect, ironically, the Taliban resembled the communist PDPA, as both sought to replace customary practices with their own universalistic laws enforced by the power of the state.

A closer examination of the civil war in the 1990s, and the current Taliban insurgency will show that no faction ever advocated secession from Afghanistan, even as a threat. Despite the active war between these factions, which led to many atrocities, no political group seemed to believe that breaking up a unitary Afghanistan would be beneficial to its cause. The narrow focus on the dangers of ethnic division as a recipe for state collapse became a kind of policy and academic "MacGuffin," a thesis that seemed of obvious and critical importance initially but one that proved less and less relevant when examined in the Afghan cultural context. In an era when many nation-states are being challenged by ethnic conflict and the fragmentation of previously unified multiethnic political communities, and others are undermined by transnational patterns of migration and wars, Afghanistan—despite its civil war, its political fragmentation in post-Soviet invasion, and a complete breakdown of the state system during the 1990s—never

¹¹ Dols, "Traditional Practices in Afghan Marriage, Responding to Women's Health Needs."

witnessed any separatist movement nor any secessionist tendencies. On the contrary, separatist tendencies were strongly rejected by all political and ethnic groups.

In fact, all Afghan factions in the 1990s sought to avoid the label of rebels, regional militias, or ethnically based movements. Each claimed to be a legitimate state (*dawlat*) that had the capacity to represent all ethnic groups and regions in the country and vehemently opposed any notion of ethnic exclusivity. It was always their enemies or political rivals who would label them otherwise. The United Front painted the Taliban as an exclusively Pashtun movement, while the Taliban denigrated their United Front rivals as a cabal of Tajik, Uzbek, or Hazara warlords. Each group's effort to claim a more plural constituency stood in stark contrast to an ethnonationalism that would consciously invoke a shared group history, language, and tradition to exclude nonmembers and unite its own. Such ethnonationalist movements saw the single ethnic polities as a necessity because otherwise they would not have a state to rule. While factions in Afghanistan during the 1990s derived their core supporters from one or another ethnic group, to define themselves that narrowly would undermine their claims as legitimate caretakers of the state.

In this period new forms of historical writings by some of the moderate Mujahideen and anti-Soviet authors actually privileged the much more diverse and regionally anchored history of Afghanistan, in their cases foregrounding the nation's historical, religious, and sociocultural ties to Islamic histories of the wider Central and South Asian regions. Furthermore, during the 1980 jihad against the Soviet Union, multiple historical chronicles and publications demonstrated the significations of, and the ways in which, nationalist discourses connected with the development of Islam in Afghanistan. These publications noted an expanding influence of Islamic discourse upon the formation of Afghanistan as a nation, and the emergence of a national state. Leading historians, poets, and writers in exile, such as Khalilullah Khalili (1907–1987), Abdur Rahman Pazhwak (1919–1995) and Bahauddin Majrooh (1928–1988) established the first literary and historical associations and educational institutions among Afghan refugees in Pakistan, where many Afghans were educated in the ideas of Afghan Islamic nationalism.

Unraveling the Ethnicity Knot

It is easy to label the core supporters of different factions with national ethnic labels, such as Pashtun, Tajik, Hazara, and or Uzbek. However, these are mostly descriptive. The term *qawm* used for ethnic groups in Afghanistan is remarkably slippery. For example, *qawm* can be used for both small numbers of people in a single mountain valley, such as Panjshiris in Panjshir, and national ethnic groups composed of millions of other similar

people, called Tajik. It also constitutes a nested segmentary identity in which people who share a *qawm* identity in one context can also agree that they are members of different *qawms* in another. Robert Canfield provided an excellent example when he quoted from an overheard conversation in which one Hazara migrant to Kabul complained that he could not find any fellow *qawm* members (*qawmi*) in his neighborhood and was chided by his companion, "In Kabul all Hazaras are your *qawmi*."¹²

The sense of unity grows weaker at each level of expansion—the national appellations of Tajiks or Pashtuns are almost always external because their groups have so many significant subdivisions that such a general term is rendered meaningless for all practical purposes. Pashtuns may be pitted against Tajiks as a category, but Durrani Pashtuns from the south see sharp distinctions between themselves and Ghilzai Pashtuns from the east, just as a Tajik from Herat has little in common with one from Panjshir other than a common language and religion. Some recent scholarly work on Afghanistan suggests that the lack of ethnic nationalism in Afghanistan, despite the history of violence and civil war, stems from strong subethnic identities and shifting networks of solidarity amidst the severe underdevelopment of the country.¹³

Any attempt at using ethnicity as a fixed category also faces a boundary problem because it is culturally rather than legally defined. The 2004 constitution recognizes fourteen named ethnic groups, plus "other tribes" (article 1, chapter 4) but nowhere are the criteria for membership specifically defined. These are left to classic category-making by means of self-definition and definition by others, where both criteria for membership and boundaries between one group and another are subject to change and manipulation.¹⁴ More significantly, ethnic groups in Afghanistan do not have exclusive control of specific territories, and Afghan history is replete with designations of once-powerful ethnic groups that later disappeared. Every part of Afghanistan is therefore better described by a diversity of the groups that inhabit them rather than by their internal uniformity. Even when groups can agree on a common definition, they split politically based on where the advantage lies.

The power of the state to define the nation remained limited and always in dialogue with the society as represented by elites, intellectuals, and ordinary Afghans. The historical conditions that characterized the development of the state and a sense of nation-ness in Afghanistan were in many ways unlike the ones Benedict Anderson described in his *Imagined Communities*. In particular, Afghan history unfolded under conditions in which state institutions served only sometimes as the key authors of the national narrative. Often, especially in recent history, they were either nonexistent or too weak

¹² Canfield, *Faction and Conversion in a Plural Society: Religious Alignments in the Hindu Kush*, 37.

¹³ Gopal, "Rents, Patronage, and Defection: State-Building and Insurgency in Afghanistan."

¹⁴ Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, 10.

to promote national ideas and values. And yet, despite competing ideologies, foreign infiltration, the destruction of infrastructure, the migration of millions of people, and the total absence of strong state institutions, ideas about the nation proved remarkably stable as Afghans continued to imagine themselves as a people located in a territorially and culturally determinate space.

The opening of Afghanistan to the world, the effects of international intrusions, and the return of millions of Afghan refugees not only gave people a renewed sense of national attachment to the country, but also gave them an opportunity to redefine “Afghan” more inclusively. This was reflected in the 2004 constitution where, besides naming Pashto and Persian Dari as the country’s official languages, many other languages (Uzbeki, Turkmeni, and Baluchi, among others) were also recognized, meaning that education could be conducted in them in their native regions. Fourteen specific ethnic groups were also listed, and Sunni and Shia legal systems were both given equal status for use in their respective communities.

Less well appreciated in the wrangling over the installation of the new government was the definitive end it represented to a quarter century of rule by ideological states in Afghanistan. The communist PDPA and the Islamist Mujahideen and their Taliban successors were all advocates of radical (if diametrically opposed) ideologies that they believed needed to be imposed on the Afghan people, by force if necessary. The new government had no overarching ideology that it sought to implement. However, while the post-2001 government did reflect many new aspects of unity and did not seek to impose a unitary ideology on a diverse country, there was a new political division between Afghans who had lived through the wars in the country or been refugees in Pakistan and Iran, and what many saw as a new ruling elite who had returned from the West after 2001. Because of their education, language skills, and familiarity with Western institutions, these people became the main partners of the international community in post-Taliban Afghanistan. Many were members of the old Kabuli elite, a predominantly Persianized group of elite Pashtuns, or came from professional classes who settled in the West after the Soviet invasion. Some of them returned to Afghanistan after the fall of the Taliban regime to either reclaim their property, or join the newly formed government. In 2018, they still held the majority of key government positions and remained the most dominant group in the Afghan government.

As a matter of fact, the influence of these returnees from the West had been critical even before the new government came to power in Kabul. Themselves proponents of the ethnic Macguffin, it was this returning elite that convinced the international community, with support from Pakistan, that only a Pashtun could lead Afghanistan, and that the non-Pashtuns who made up the United Front were too heavily represented

in the government and had to be sidelined where possible.¹⁵ For example, at the Bonn Conference in December 2001, the various Afghan political groups and parties had initially selected Abdul Satar Sirat, an Uzbek and close confidant of the former king Zahir Shah, as interim president. However, this Afghan selection was rejected by the international community, including its UN organizer Lakhdar Brahimi, on the grounds that the country had to be Pashtun-ruled. Thus, and instead of Satar, they pressed the Afghan delegation teams to install Hamid Karzai, who was not only a Pashtun but a Durrani Pashtun.

Despite efforts by some top Afghan political figures to ethnicize politics, this has not shaken the customary view of national attachment that takes pride in Afghanistan's long history as a unitary state. The Afghan example of national imagination makes clear that the sense of nation-ness does not necessarily proceed in a linear way, nor along a steady evolution based on previous conceptions of belonging. Instead, understandings of the nation find expression as they overlap with other solidarities. They are generated not only through state-led nation-building, but also through cultural practices and social and political interactions that exist beyond the grip of government. Ultimately, differences and conflicts about specifically imagined worlds are addressed, discussed, and disputed, through the combined work of state initiatives and cultural practices defined by their practitioners, elite and ordinary alike.

¹⁵ Gordon, "NATO after 11 September."

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New Publics and the Challenge of Peace in Afghanistan

Robert D. Crews

Abstract

This essay seeks to map some of the fundamental changes that have transformed Afghan society and politics since the Kakar–Najibullah exchange of 1990. It chronicles the emergence, in recent decades, of a political order defined by partial sovereignty and the appearance of multiple publics, and argues that the rise of an expansive mediascape, the politicization of Afghan youth, the resort to street politics, and popular mobilization in public places, as well as the proliferation of ethnic and other claims on behalf of various groups, and the emergence of new religious sensibilities and aesthetics, are all among the most striking developments that the architects of any peace settlement will have to consider. The pluralization of Afghan politics has yielded a dynamic, mobile, heterogeneous, diverse, and fundamentally modern political landscape with which any enduring political settlement must contend.

Some thirty years on, the Kakar–Najibullah exchange of 1990 remains a revealing guide to the politics of Afghanistan and the wider region. Nearly all of the issues raised in their dialogue are still relevant for thinking about the search for peace in Afghanistan. How to unify a divided society, how to reconcile competing political agendas, and how to restore and safeguard Afghan national sovereignty in the face of great power pressures and fraught relationships with neighboring states are among the most fundamental and enduring questions raised by Kakar and Najibullah. Seen from the vantage point of 2021, one is struck by the persistence of the challenges highlighted in their thoughtful exchange. Indeed, much of the terminology and even a number of the proposed steps toward peace have endured to the present.

These continuities reflect the political acumen of these historic figures, but their conversation also invites reflection on the many ways the solutions proposed in 1990 have been superseded by the dramatic transformations that have swept across Afghan society over the past three decades. Viewing this past through the lens of global history, one is struck by the vast differences that distinguish Afghan society of 1990 from that of 2021. Writing about Afghan politics and history from the outside, scholars have, of course, tended to focus on the persistence of tradition. For different reasons, Afghan politicians and other elites have also emphasized conservatism, whether to affirm it or to critique it (one thinks of Mīr Ghulām Muḥammad Ghubār's use of the categories "feudal" and "semi-feudal" to characterize Afghanistan during his lifetime).¹ The invocation of a "traditional" Afghanistan remains a salient political tool. However, as M. Hassan Kakar's meticulous scholarship demonstrated, the story of the Afghan past is one of perpetual metamorphosis.²

A deeper appreciation of the scale of social, cultural, and intellectual change in the country—and throughout its extensive diaspora—underscores the pluralization of Afghan politics and reveals a dynamic, mobile, heterogeneous, diverse, and fundamentally modern political landscape with which any enduring political settlement must contend.³ It is important to note that these transformations do not reflect a trajectory that we can usefully identify as "pathological," as is so often applied in both domestic and foreign

¹ Mīr Ghulām Muḥammad Ghubār, *Afghānistān dar masīr-i tārikh* (Qum: Payām-i Muhājir, 1359 [1980 or 1981]).

² See, for instance, his classic first book, Hassan Kakar, *Afghanistan: A Study in International Political Developments, 1880–1896* (Lahore: Punjab Educational Press, 1971). See, also, the revealing investigation of the last four decades of change in M. Nazif Shahrani, ed., *Modern Afghanistan: The Impact of 40 Years of War* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2018); and Niamatullah Ibrahim and William Maley, *Afghanistan: Politics and Economics in a Globalising State* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2020).

³ I take particular inspiration from scholars of the Latin American religion in exploring "pluralization" as a contingent set of historical processes. See Olga Odgers Ortiz, ed., *Pluralización religiosa de América Latina* (Tijuana: El Colegio de la Frontera Norte; Mexico, D.F.: Centro de Investigación y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social, 2011).

narratives of Afghan politics. Nor do they trace the lines of a teleology of progress. Many of these changes have taken shape since 2001 under the auspices of a contested political order perhaps best described, borrowing Achille Mbembe's memorable typology, as "a patchwork of overlapping and incomplete rights to rule . . . inextricably superimposed and tangled, in which different de facto juridical instances are geographically interwoven and plural allegiances, asymmetrical suzerainties, and enclaves abound."⁴ And although there are unique historical legacies and achievements that Afghans should celebrate, that does not mean that narratives of historical exceptionalism are useful in understanding the challenges that Afghans—or indeed the members of any modern nation-state—face today. The changes that have swept through Afghan society are a function of wider global processes, even if they have affected different parts of the country in distinct and often uneven ways under the constraints of violence and extreme poverty. As such, they are too numerous and momentous to be covered comprehensively here. The focus in what follows then is a partial account, selected through the lens of historical interpretation, of the novel and evolving forces arrayed against a narrow, exclusive, and elitist framing of political contestation that would likely impede a lasting peace settlement.

New Media, New Publics

Even allowing for the patchwork nature of competing and incomplete sovereignties that have marked Afghan politics in the last two decades, Afghanistan's sprawling mediascape represents the most potent of these transformations. Afghan media have facilitated the appearance of an arena of public scrutiny, a more or less autonomous "tribunal" of critical opinion, decoupled from state authority and any kind of exclusively localized horizons.⁵ One might extend this analysis to recognize, in fact, multiple "publics," that is, discrete but frequently overlapping communities who are at once agents, constituencies, and audiences—all attuned to political action in ways that have evolved over the course of Afghan history.⁶ In this sense, activists claiming to represent "civil society" make up one

⁴ Achille Mbembe, "Necropolitics," trans. Libby Meintjes, *Public Culture* 15, no. 1 (2003): 31. For numerous, concrete illustrations of this phenomenon of "limited statehood," see David Mansfield, *A State Built on Sand: How Opium Undermined Afghanistan* (London: Hurst, 2016). See, too, Astri Suhrke, *When More Is Less: The International Project in Afghanistan* (London: Hurst, 2011).

⁵ Here I have adapted the language of Jürgen Habermas and Roger Chartier for the Afghan context. See, especially, Chartier, *The Cultural Origins of the French Revolution* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991), 21–23.

⁶ Michael Warner has argued that "[T]he idea of a public, as distinct from both *the* public and any bounded totality of audience, has become part of the common repertoire of modern culture"—one that "exists by virtue of being addressed." See his *Publics and Counterpublics* (New York: Zone, 2002), 66–67. See, also, Harri Englund, "Introduction," in *Christianity and Public Culture in Africa*, ed. Harri Englund (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2011), 1–24; Felicitas Becker, Joel Cabrita, and Marie

kind of “public,” while the Taliban, for instance, constitute another, while those who assert the right to speak for Badakhshanis, to cite another example, form yet another. The post-2001 mediascape has provided a crucial space for the interplay of these competing, and sometimes allied, publics who simultaneously address domestic and international audiences to voice political demands for power, representation, and resources.

Diverse forms of oral communication, performance, and print media have a lengthy history in Afghanistan, of course, and radio was already having significant cultural effects well before the upheavals of the late 1970s, as Mejgan Massoumi’s research has shown.⁷ But following the collapse of the Taliban government in late 2001, the world of Afghan media expanded dramatically. Old newspapers were revived, and new ones launched. Radio was reinvigorated and expanded. Much of this activity took place on the internet and, with crucial foreign backing, quickly evolved into television as well as multimedia outlets that offered Afghan viewers, readers, and listeners diverse platforms featuring news, public service programming, and entertainment. Internet use in particular has increased on a remarkable scale. In 2006, only 1.1 percent of Afghans were thought to use the internet. By 2019, though, this number had increased to 17.6 percent, of whom some 70 percent commonly used social media such as Facebook.⁸

It is tempting to equate this heyday of intellectual and artistic expression as a signal turning point, as a kind of breakthrough that has overcome past regimes of censorship and propaganda. Of course, the story is more complicated. This narrative betrays a strong urban and Kabul-centric bias. As a reminder of the reality that Afghans have related to the proliferation of media in differing ways, Margaret Mills has recounted a joke she heard in Herat: “The Communists and the Taliban told the people, ‘You can have basic security, food, and shelter, but you just have to *shut up!*’ The present government says, ‘No security, no shelter, no food, but you can *say* anything you like!’”⁹ More important, Afghan media have, as Wazhmah Osman has shown, been vulnerable to far-reaching external pressures from foreign (especially American) donors

Rodet, eds., *Religion, Media, and Marginality in Modern Africa* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2018). For valuable insights on the emergence of other Afghan “publics,” especially on the basis of orality, in earlier periods, see James Caron, “Reading the Power of Printed Orality in Afghanistan: Popular Pashto Literature as Historical Evidence and Public Intervention,” *Journal of Social History* 45, no. 1 (2011): 172–94.

⁷ See her forthcoming work, “The Sounds of Kabul: Radio and the Politics of Popular Culture in Afghanistan, 1960–79,” PhD dissertation, Stanford University. See, also, Nile Green and Nushin Arbabzadah, eds., *Afghanistan in Ink: Literature between Diaspora and Nation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013); and Nushin Arbabzadah, “The Afghan Mediascape,” in *Under the Drones: Modern Lives in the Afghanistan–Pakistan Borderlands*, eds. Shahzad Bashir and Robert D. Crews (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 215–35.

⁸ Asia Foundation, *A Survey of the Afghan People: Afghanistan in 2019*, <https://asiafoundation.org/publication/afghanistan-in-2019-a-survey-of-the-afghan-people/>, December 2, 2019, 184–85.

⁹ Margaret A. Mills, “Gnomics: Proverbs, Aphorisms, Metaphors, Key Words and Epithets in Afghan Discourses of War and Instability,” in *Afghanistan in Ink*, 242.

and producers of media content.¹⁰ And, of course, various kinds of censorship persist. Journalists and writers have risked running afoul of government officials, militants, and a wide variety of powerful social actors, from businessmen to religious scholars. In 2019, the Committee to Protect Journalists ranked Afghanistan as the sixth most dangerous country for journalists (behind only Somalia, Syria, Iraq, South Sudan, and the Philippines).¹¹ Squeezed by profit seeking and the threat of violence, this has proved an imperfect arena for realizing a more pluralistic political and social order.

For all of these constraints, though, the Afghan mediascape has become an essential forum for political engagement, critique, and debate. Surveying Afghans' media preferences, Osman has pointed to "a direct correlation between being attuned to the democratic principles of diversity, inclusivity, and pluralism and the language of profit."¹² Diverse internet and social media outlets have created a space for Afghans, wherever their geographic location, to make political claims on Afghan and international institutions. Commenting on Afghan migrants' use of new media, Khadija Abbasi and Alessandro Monsutti have underscored how "[T]he cyberspace acquires a crucial importance for them, it is the realm where they can express themselves much more freely than in face-to-face relationships, address their dissatisfaction and magnify their aspirations."¹³ In a similar vein, Zuzanna Olszewska has analyzed the online publication in 2013 of a list tabulating the identities of some 11,000 victims of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan government. She concluded that "[T]he wide publicity given to the list, and the ability of people to verify the death of their loved ones for themselves and pass the news on quickly, marked a form of political immediacy that had not been possible in an earlier era."¹⁴

Attention to these varied uses of new and old media underscores the growing importance of Afghan youth, another force whose emergence future political arrangements must account for and address. Nearly 64% of Afghans are under the age of 25, and 46% of them are younger than 15 years old.¹⁵ Far from a monolithic bloc, young people have

¹⁰ Wazhmah Osman, "Brought to You by Foreigners, Warlords, and Local Activists," in *Modern Afghanistan*, 149–76; and Osman, *Television and the Afghan Culture Wars: Brought to You by Foreigners, Warlords, and Local Activists* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2020).

¹¹ Committee to Protect Journalists, Global Impunity Index 2019, October 29, 2019, <https://cpj.org/reports/2019/10/getting-away-with-murder-killed-justice/>.

¹² Osman, "Brought to You by Foreigners, Warlords, and Local Activists," 158; see, also, Wazhmah Osman, "On Media, Social Movements, and Uprisings: Lessons from Afghanistan, Its Neighbors, and Beyond," *Signs* 39, no. 4 (2014): 874–87.

¹³ Khadija Abbasi and Alessandro Monsutti, "There Is Death in Immobility," Refugee Outreach & Research Network, October 25, 2018, <http://www.ror-n.org/-blog/there-is-death-immobility>.

¹⁴ Zuzanna Olszewska, "Online Identities; Unfolding Realities," *Himal Southasian*, March 25, 2014, <https://www.himalmag.com/online-identities-unfolding-realities/>.

¹⁵ UNFPA Afghanistan Advocacy Brief 2019, accessed March 10, 2020, https://afghanistan.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/UNFPA_Advocacy_Brief_2019.pdf.

in the last decade or so been at the forefront of political mobilization in the name of ethnic and gender equality, democratization, secular values, and cultural expression. But young men and women have also initiated generational change by shaping new religious projects that reject secularism and democracy in the name of various Islamist agendas.¹⁶ Students have been crucial in valorizing a multiethnic Afghan national identity as well as in advancing sectarian politics. The point here is not that Afghan young people stand uniformly for a particular agenda—or that they are entirely untouched by existing power structures—but that, for many, their political and intellectual horizons are not reflected in the current political system or indeed in the prospective orders proposed by rival parties today.

The widespread sense that participation in the post-2001 political system is one “closed” to those excluded from inherited channels of authority has placed Afghan youth at the center of alternative forms of mobilization. In cities and large towns across the country, the streets have again and again become the site of political contestation, now partially organized and amplified by the remarkable growth of social media. From the late 1950s, Afghans have mounted protests in the name of various causes, but since 2001, demonstrations have taken place with far greater frequency and on a grander scale. Whether condemning the killing of civilians, electoral fraud, financial malfeasance, corruption, blasphemy, ethnic discrimination, educational inequalities, foreign interference, or violence against women, men and women have repeatedly joined public demonstrations to make their voices heard across a wide range of political concerns. To be sure, some of these mobilizations have served to amplify the influence of figures who are already fixtures of the establishment. And some have offered cover for violence, whether spontaneously or by design.

Yet some of the most consequential campaigns have become vehicles for marginalized groups to mount critiques of the establishment and draw domestic and international attention to their causes. Among many such protests, the funeral procession carrying the body of Farkhunda Malikzada, who was murdered by a crowd of men outside the Shah-e Du Shamshira shrine in March 2015, stands out. Breaking with conventional practice, women formed the procession and carried her coffin in defiance of a brutal act of misogynistic violence.¹⁷ Whereas Afghans gathered in numerous protests to condemn

¹⁶ Gran Hewad and Casey Garret Johnson, “A Rough Guide to Afghan Youth Politics,” US Institute of Peace, April 7, 2014, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2014/04/rough-guide-afghan-youth-politics>. See, also, Borhan Osman, “Bourgeois Jihad: Why Young, Middle-Class Afghans Join the Islamic State,” *Peaceworks* no. 162 (June 1, 2020), <https://www.usip.org/publications/2020/06/bourgeois-jihad-why-young-middle-class-afghans-join-islamic-state>; and Osman, “Beyond Jihad and Traditionalism: Afghanistan’s New Generation of Islamic Activists,” Afghanistan Analysts Network, June 2015, <http://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/AAN-Paper-012015-Borhan-Osman-.pdf>.

¹⁷ See the thorough analysis of Borhan Osman, “The Killing of Farkhunda (2): Mullahs, Feminists,

Farkhunda's murder as a symbol of the widespread mistreatment of women, the beheading by Taliban forces of seven Hazaras, including the nine-year-old Shukria Tabassum in Zabul province in August 2015, crystallized a campaign led by Hazara activists to demand security, civil rights, political inclusion, and development infrastructure. Highlighting this last demand—for the provision of electricity—and memorializing the young girl from Zabul, activists called their project the “Tabassum Enlightening Movement” (or sometimes simply “Enlightenment Movement”) and mobilized thousands of Hazara men and women, especially young people, in marches and demonstrations in multiple locales. In July 2016, their peaceful gathering at Deh Mazang square in Kabul became the target of a vicious bombing claimed by the Islamic State—Khurasan Province, an attack that claimed the lives of 80 people.¹⁸ Nearly two years later, in March 2018, another bombing, this time in Lashkargah in Helmand province, sparked a related movement—initiated by young people who donned head bands pleading “Enough War, We Want Peace”—addressing their demands to the government in Kabul as well as to the Taliban. Spreading from Lashkargah, peace activists erected tents to stage sit-ins in several provinces and ultimately organized a march from Helmand to the capital to publicize their calls for a ceasefire and peace negotiations.¹⁹ Rooted in Pashtun communities, these efforts soon coalesced into a “People's Peace Movement” (also frequently known as the “Helmand Peace Convoy”) that extended across the country, attracting Pashtuns and members of other groups alike.

None of these campaigns succeeded in realizing their goals in their entirety. However, they created a space in which Afghans could imagine themselves as political actors constituting—and engaging with—publics of different scales. Such engagement has emerged from a contested system that has failed to fulfill broad-based demands for political participation. Collective mobilization in public spaces has thus become an established mode of political contestation and another feature of the multiple publics with which a lasting peace settlement will have to contend.

The appearance of phenomena such as the “Enlightening Movement” and the “People's Peace Movement” highlights the significance of activists who have called for the recognition of novel forms of community, in effect, for new publics with a stake in the political arena. It has become commonplace to reduce Afghan actors to ready-made

and a Gap in the Debate,” Afghan Analysts Network, April 29, 2015, <https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/en/reports/rights-freedom/the-killing-of-farkhunda-2-mullahs-feminists-and-a-gap-in-the-debate/>.

¹⁸ Duktur Hafiz Allāh Shari‘ati, ed., *Tabassum-i rawshnāyi: Rūz'nivisht-i junbish-i tabassum va rawshnāyi* [Tabasum enlightening movement: The chronology of Tabasum enlightening movement] (Kabul: Tamaddun-i Sharq, 1395 [2016]).

¹⁹ Ali Mohammad Sabawoon, “Going Nationwide: The Helmand Peace March Initiative,” Afghan Analysts Network, April 23, 2018, <https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/en/reports/war-and-peace/going-nationwide-the-helmand-peace-march-initiative/>.

and unchanging blocs defined by ethnicity—a notion that remains for some a useful “mental map” offering compelling ways to make sense of politics and society. Yet one can also identify, since 2001, the proliferation of new sorts of activist claim-making by various leaders and organizations on the basis of ethnic or communal difference.²⁰ An instructive example can be found in Sayyid Muhammad ‘Alī Jāvid’s description of ‘Ashura commemorations in 2002. These were, of course, the first Muharram mourning ceremonies to take place following the flight of the Taliban and the first, by Jāvid’s account, to signal the arrival of an inclusive and pluralistic political order that would regularize a kind of tolerated status for Shi’i Afghans for the first time in the history of the country.²¹

The imperative of political legitimation via elections and different forms of representation in post-2001 politics created an opportunity for various actors to argue for recognition and inclusion on behalf of a number of minority groups. In addition to pointing to the enduring legacy of the 1987 PDPA constitution, which declared Afghanistan a “multinational country” (*kishvar-i kasir*), Lutz Rzehak has traced this process of claim-making on the basis of ethnicity through the work of intellectuals from among the Baloch and Gawar communities. The case of the former, Rzehak argues, “shows that ethnic alliances are far from being naturally grown units” and that “a common name can stand for a wide variety of different groups with differing concepts of being Baloch.”²²

Rzehak’s observation about the multiple possibilities of self-identification—the “differing concepts of being” affiliated with a particular group—could apply more broadly across Afghan society and could also productively apply to religious self-understandings. There is no question that Islam has retained a central place in Afghan public culture. But the institutions, vocabularies, and practices of Islam, now increasingly mediated by the same communication technologies that have had a tremendous impact on other aspects of Afghan political and social life, have over the past two decades arguably become more unsettled and variegated. Indeed, it is likely that antipathy toward Farkhunda reflected anxiety about her role as a new type of purveyor of Islamic knowledge—and a broader unease about the instability and malleability of religious authority in recent years. And

²⁰ See the important methodological reflections in Rogers Brubaker, *Ethnicity without Groups* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), in particular pp. 7–27.

²¹ Sayyid Muhammad ‘Alī Jāvid, *Khātirāt-i man: barāhah-yi hassāsī az tārikh* (Kabul: Nashr-i Nigar, 1395/2017), 721–725. See also Robert D. Crews, “Mourning Imam Husayn in Karbala and Kabul: The Political Meanings of ‘Ashura in Afghanistan,” *Afghanistan* 3, no. 2 (2020): 202–36.

²² Lutz Rzehak, “Ethnic Minorities in Search of Political Consolidation,” in *Under the Drones*, 136–52; and Rzehak, “Recalling the Past to Assert Ethnic Rights in the Present: The Case of the Gawars in Afghanistan,” *Asien* 129 (October 2013): 22–37. See also Omar Sadr, *Negotiating Cultural Diversity in Afghanistan* (London: Routledge, 2020); and Shah Mahmoud Hanifi, “Quandaries of the Afghan Nation,” and Thomas Ruttig, “How Tribal Are the Taliban?” in *Under the Drones* 83–101 and 102–35.

while the term *secularism* has meant different things to different people, a host of actors reflecting very different religious orientations have seized upon the idea as a fulcrum for mobilization.

Other examples of religious pluralism abound. To return to an earlier theme, ‘Ashura has become a normalized staple of the ritual calendar, even if it has become a highly securitized event. Meanwhile, Shi’i institutions have both become more numerous, differentiated, and, in some cases, oriented toward cultivating female experts to address the perceived inroads of secular feminism. At the same time, groups such as Jamiat-i Islah have prioritized a reformist agenda, also creating space for a women’s section devoted to proselytization and the reform of women’s roles in Afghan society.

As Borhan Osman has shown, young people have taken up a wide spectrum of Islamic commitments inspired by Salafists and others. One should add to this list efforts on the part of Hazara activists to disentangle “being Hazara” from “being Shia” and to recognize more eclectic identities that might include being Sunni—but also being, in some cases, secular, anticlerical, or even agnostic. Interactions among young people in the diaspora, where they have made choices influenced by observing religious life in Iran as well as in Europe and elsewhere, and between the diaspora and their family and friends still in Afghanistan have made debate, comparison, and criticism a crucial aspect of “being” Muslim—or “being” something else in a very dynamic way. The accommodation of this increasingly diverse and pluralistic religious landscape is likely to persist as a significant factor in sustaining a political settlement arising from peace negotiations.

A final category of change that merits highlighting in comparing the world of 1990 with that of 2021—and that will demand the attention of those seeking arrangements that might secure peace for Afghanistan—concerns the politics of aesthetics, that is, the infrastructure for cultural production that has evolved in the last two decades. Related to the transformations in media touched upon above, a cosmopolitan aesthetics of the built environment, of urban space, of art, literature, film, scholarship, consumption, personal styles, and so on, have been in flux. In the capital, in particular, but also in other cities, stark differences between the privileged and those left behind in the post-2001 order have been made visible not only in the statement-making “narcotecture” of the highly stylized compounds of elites, but also in the miles of concrete blastwalls, informal housing, and billboards broadcasting incessant capitalist advertising and electoral campaigning.

Critical voices have lamented, for example, that “[T]here are too many wedding halls and too few libraries in the new Kabul.”²³ But ‘Ali Karimi has noted that other changes

²³ Quoted in Thomas Rüttig, “Zwei Mal zu Fuß durch Kabul,” in *Begegnungen am Hindukusch*, Thomas Loy and Olaf Günther, eds. (Potsdam: edition tethys, 2015), 166.

in the urban setting have engendered positive affirmations of community and inclusion, namely the erection of a monument to the iconic Hazara leader ‘Abdul ‘Ali Mazari (1946–1995).²⁴ In Afghan letters and arts, too, enterprising figures have accumulated crucial cultural capital within and beyond the country’s borders to take up new subjects. Besides Atiq Rahimi and Khaled Hosseini, the writers Taqi Akhlaqi and Muhammad Asif Sultanzadah, the poet Parwana Fayyaz, the rapper Sonita Alizadeh, and the actor and filmmaker Basir Ahang, perhaps best known for his leading role in the 2017 film *Sembra mio figlio* [*Just Like My Son*], which thematizes Taliban persecution of the Hazaras and forced migration from Afghanistan, to name just a very few, have earned recognition as important contemporary artists on a global scale.²⁵ Here, too, in the realm of cultural production, Afghans have appropriated cosmopolitan sensibilities to create novel aesthetic forms that defy the disciplining of a narrowly constructed political order.²⁶

Concluding Remarks

This brief essay has tried to map, in a very limited way, some of the fundamental changes that have transformed key aspects of Afghan society and politics since Kakar and Najibullah exchanged their thoughts on creating peace in their shared country. Reflection upon their dialogue underscores the necessity of recognizing the emergence in recent decades simultaneously of a political order defined by partial sovereignty, and the appearance of multiple publics. The rise of an expansive mediascape, the politicization of Afghan youth, the resort to street politics and popular mobilization in public places, the proliferation of claims on behalf of various ethnic publics, and the emergence of new religious sensibilities and aesthetics are among the most striking changes that the architects of any peace settlement will have to consider. The pluralization of political, social, and cultural forms highlighted here has real limits, of course. Violence, poverty, corruption, and a political economy rooted in opium belong to this landscape as well. Most recently, violence and intimidation aimed at Afghan Sikhs and Hindus and

²⁴ Ali Karimi, “Die Straße,” in *Begegnungen am Hindukusch*, 117. See also Khalid Hodayun Nadiri and M. Farshid Alemi Hakimyar, “Lineages of the Urban State: Locating Continuity and Change in Post-2001 Kabul,” in *Modern Afghanistan*, 77–101.

²⁵ See Muhammad Āsif Sultān’zādah, *Asgar’guriz: dāstān’bā-yi kūtāh* (Tehran: Āgāh, 1385 [2006]); and Taqi Akhlaqi, *Aus heiterem Himmel: Erzählungen* (Potsdam: edition tethys, 2018). See also Faridullah Bezhan, *Women, War and Islamic Radicalisation in Maryam Mahboob’s Afghanistan* (Victoria: Monash University Publishing, 2016); and Zuzanna Olszewska, *The Pearl of Dari: Poetry and Personhood among Young Afghans in Iran* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015).

²⁶ On the theme of Afghan cosmopolitanism, see Robert D. Crews, *Afghan Modern: The History of a Global Nation* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2015).

their renewed emigration are painful reminders. At the same time, it is important to understand that, among these competing publics, some seek a monopoly, a point illustrated in a Taliban statement of 2015 asserting that: “corrupt ignorant governments can never be reformed through intermixing and activism in their established political framework; rather they must be uprooted and their remains discarded, so that upon the ruins new governments can be built on strong Islamic foundations and in the light of Islamic thought, because these systems will never accept reform or surrender to shari‘a.”²⁷

It may also be instructive to juxtapose such rigidity with the views of other Afghans who have come to embrace the messiness and imperfections of a hybrid system, at once aspirationally democratic and flawed. When asked by the BBC why she would participate, despite acknowledging many obstacles and difficulties, in the 2018 parliamentary elections, the deputy mayor of Kabul, Munira Yousufzada concluded her remarks by adapting the words of René Descartes to her understanding of electoral participation as a project of self-realization: “I vote, therefore I am.” In a similar spirit, a law student, ‘Ādilāh Āzād recognized the grave shortcomings of elections in Afghanistan but still insisted that it was the participatory and processual aspects of the enterprise that mattered most: “If we want to have a democratic order, or at least move in the direction of a good and democratic order, then we have to look at elections as the foundation of this democracy, even if these elections are full of fraud. Every one of us has the duty in the worst conditions to support democratic processes even if these processes don’t work properly.”²⁸ The challenge for policymakers and these rival publics is, of course, to reconcile these conflicting outlooks. Given the many changes charted here, the now well-established pluralism, complexity, and malleability of this society are all essential keys to mapping a lasting political settlement.

²⁷ Alex Strick Van Linschoten and Felix Kuehn, eds., *The Taliban Reader: War, Islam and Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 491.

²⁸ “Man va intikhābāt: nimī khvāham digarān barāyam namāyandāh intikhāb kunand,” BBC Persian, October 16, 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/persian/afghanistan-45743585>.

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Strategic Communications and Public Messaging: Lessons from the Najibullah–Kakar Letters

Tanya Goudsouzian

Abstract

During the post-Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan in 1989, a series of letters between President Najibullah and the eminent historian Dr. Hassan Kakar, recently made public by the Kakar History Foundation, sheds new light on the mindsets of Najibullah and of many exiled intellectuals. Going through the full cache of letters, one is struck by the rudimentary methods of communications in the 1990s when ideas were transmitted by regular post or courier, and the time taken to receive feedback on those letters was measured in months. If the correspondence between Najibullah and Kakar is testament to their era, it also shows how realities on the ground have changed. Along with a heightened political awareness, and the development of a mass of educated urban youth with an exposure to the world outside Afghanistan, a significant change is the battle for influence and strategic communications. Today's proliferation of both state-owned and private Afghan television news channels, publications, websites, and more than 170 FM radio stations has dramatically altered the communications battlespace, and all sides now compete for influence over the Afghan people, but also for international public opinion. The paper asks whether President Najibullah's efforts might have achieved a greater measure of success with a better communication infrastructure relying on a wider set of feedback mechanisms, not simply those of trusted friends and advisors. One also wonders if today's government has learned those lessons and can leverage modern strategic communications tools to better effect than Najibullah.

By 1990, Soviet troops had withdrawn from Afghanistan, but the country was gripped by civil war with the US-backed mujahideen fighting the Soviet-backed government of President Najibullah. His efforts to promote Afghan nationalism through a National Reconciliation Policy included a constitution which removed all references to communism, dropped the single-party system in favor of political pluralism, and declared Islam as the state religion. During this tumultuous period, a series of letters recently made public by the Kakar History Foundation between the president and eminent historian Hassan Kakar sheds new light on both the mood and the mindset of Najibullah and of many exiled intellectuals. "The era of gaining victory for one line of thought through the suppression of other opinions is gone," Najibullah wrote to Kakar in his first letter in 1990. "Now we shall live together in peace. This is possible only through conciliation and understanding of the thoughts and views of all Afghans." This understanding would only be possible through a broad strategic communications effort, yet that effort was hampered by the limited tools available in 1990.

The Differences Are as Salient as the Similarities

The many similarities between the 1989 Soviet troop withdrawal and today's state of affairs have spurred fatalistic predictions for the future of the Afghan republic once the US troops depart. However, if the correspondence between Najibullah and Kakar is testament to echoes from the past, it also shows how realities on the ground have changed. To offer a twist on the familiar idiom, the more things stayed the same, the more things have changed. Along with a heightened political awareness among average Afghans, the creation of a critical mass of educated urban youth and a general exposure to the world, one significant change is the battle for influence, and strategic communications as a coequal with military power. Strategic communications, as one Chatham House report argued,¹ is the "soft" power of persuasion and influence, which is as central to the achievement of national strategic goals as any "kinetic" effort. As Najibullah says in his letter to Kakar dated February 1990, "the imposition of a military solution on Afghanistan looks more impossible now than it ever did," but defeat can come as well through losing the communications battle.

Even in 1990, modern warfare was fought on the battlefield but also on the airwaves and in the news. Voice of America (VOA) began broadcasting to Afghanistan in Dari via shortwave for a limited number of hours in 1980, and then in Pashto starting July 1982. Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) began broadcasting to Afghanistan

¹ Chatham House, "Strategic Communications and National Strategy," Report, Chatham House, September 2011, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/r0911es%E2%80%9393stratcomms.pdf>.

in September 1985.² Then it was called “Winning Hearts and Minds.”³ Now it’s called “Strategic Communications.” While battles are fought with lethal weapons, they are also fought with messages of persuasion, information, and narrative. But the proliferation of both state-owned and private Afghan television news channels, publications, and websites, and more than 170 FM radio stations, has dramatically altered the battlespace, and all sides now compete for influence with the Afghan people, but also for international public opinion. The MOBY Group operates some of the most influential stations, including the most-watched network, TOLO.⁴

Yet, going through the cache of letters between President Najibullah and Kakar, one is struck by the rudimentary methods of communications in the 1990s when correspondence was still carried out by regular post or courier and feedback to those letters came over timescales measured in months. For example, in 1990, Najibullah invited Kakar to Kabul for “an exchange of views,” even urging him not to “hold back.” Najibullah begins his response to Kakar’s letter, “I received and read with care and interest your letter dated 12 June which you had written in response to my correspondence of the month of Dalwa 1368 [February 1990].”

Striking to the contemporary reader is both Kakar’s views and the time it took for Najibullah to receive them. As important as it was, it was feedback from merely one individual half a world away, and its delivery was measured in months. And, in those three months that it took for Najibullah’s first letter to reach Kakar, the Kabul government had foiled an attempted coup led by the then defense minister, General Shahnawaz Tanai.

One wonders whether the president’s efforts might have achieved a greater measure of success with an improved and global communication infrastructure relying on a wider set of inputs, not simply those of trusted friends and advisors, one providing near-real-time feedback. It is also important to ask if today’s government has learned those lessons and can leverage modern strategic communications tools to better effect than Najibullah.

² US State Department, “The Broadcasting Board of Governors’ Operations in and Broadcasting to Afghanistan,” Report No. ISP-IB-06-02, February 2006, <https://www.stateoig.gov/system/files/104128.pdf>.

³ Paul Dixon, “‘Hearts and Minds’? British Counter-Insurgency from Malaya to Iraq,” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 32, no. 3 (2009): 353–81, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01402390902928172>.

⁴ BBC, “Afghanistan Profile—Media,” BBC, August 27, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-south-asia-12013942>.

Gauging Public Opinion, Then and Now

It was clear that Najibullah did not capture the mood of his people. He says, “Although the war and armed aggression continue, the national reconciliation policy has captured the hearts and thoughts of millions of Afghans. It has brought about a major weakening in the militant and non-conciliatory forces of the extremists,” writes Najibullah with confidence, while betraying an astounding lack of awareness over varied sentiments and allegiances across the country. Kakar responds presciently, in his letter to Najibullah dated June 12, 1990, by pointing out what he senses is “a total lack of [public] trust in Kabul government and a complete divorcement of the latter from the people.”

As former head of KhAD, the Afghan equivalent of the KGB, Najibullah relied on feedback provided by his vast network of spies and informants rather than through journalism and polling data. His feedback may have been worthwhile as intelligence, but if Kakar is to be believed, it did not provide helpful popular feedback. Nor did Najibullah encourage an open press or polls. Kakar noted this in his letter and scolded him for it: “Since the Sawr coup [April 1978], Afghans were deprived from the most basic rights... They had neither freedom of speech nor freedom of assembly.” Without reliable feedback on the issues closest to the hearts of his people, Najibullah was half-blind on how to react.

Some might argue that freedom of speech was already curtailed during Daoud Khan’s republic (1973–1978). Independent newspapers were shut down and the slightest anti-Daoud comment would cause imprisonment and torture. But then again, Daoud Khan, too, was surprised by the Sawr coup of April 1978, probably because he was also relying solely on intelligence reports on opposition activities without the benefit of free press or polling data. While this was not the sole reason for the success of the April 1978 coup, one could argue that a free press could have contributed to making Daoud more aware of what was brewing. It might, perhaps, have given him some indication that his crackdown on pro-Soviet communists, far from eradicating their presence and influence, had only emboldened their resolve to overthrow his government.⁵ Daoud had achieved little of what he had set out to accomplish in 1973. The Afghan economy had not made any real progress and the Afghan standard of living had not improved. Daoud’s single party constitution in 1977 also garnered criticism and alienated many of his political supporters.⁶

⁵ Rehmatullah Afghan and Abubakar Siddique, “Afghanistan Still Facing Aftershocks of 1978 Coup,” *Gandhara*, April 27, 2020, <https://gandhara.rferl.org/a/afghanistan-still-facing-aftershocks-of-1978-communist-coup/29924804.html>.

⁶ Lumen Learning, “Rise of Anti-Soviet Sentiment,” *The Middle East after the Ottoman Empire*, Boundless World History Course, <https://courses.lumenlearning.com/suny-hccc-worldhistory2/chapter/rise-of-anti-soviet-sentiment/>.

Similarly, it might be surmised that if Najibullah had the availability of a free Afghan press, he might not have taken the route he took because he would have been better informed of ground realities from independent, third-party sources. Information from his sources may have been vulnerable to several factors. First, the intelligence services are usually more indoctrinated in party ideology than other sectors and fail to interpret data objectively. Second, the loyalty of a spy is always unknowable, especially near the end of a regime. Deliberate misinformation and double agency cannot be ruled out. The amount of information available today by a free press is incomparable to that time. In that way, Najibullah was at a huge disadvantage compared to President Ashraf Ghani.

Najibullah's sweeping statement about having captured the "hearts and thoughts of millions" reveals a certain degree of disconnect (or willful blindness) between the presidential palace and the country's population of 12 million or so at the time. Much of the population continued to harbor deep grudges against the Afghan communists in general, and Najibullah in particular. While the head of KhAD, he was responsible for the deaths of at least 11,000 people.⁷

The president also underestimated the propaganda campaign waged by the mujahideen. The evocative imagery in the posters⁸ disseminated by the mujahideen, promoting Islam and a sacred duty to free the Afghan nation from Soviet influence, successfully infiltrated even the ranks of Najibullah's own defense forces, lowering morale to such an extent that there were reports of front line soldiers deserting their posts.

When the last Soviet convoy left in February 1989, desertions exploded, forcing the regime to enact forced conscription. Military trucks would roam around Kabul picking up young men from the streets. After an insufficient round of training, they would be sent to the battlefield. Disappearances of young men prompted another wave of hatred and fear of the regime and forced a new wave of migration. Indeed, for all the military lessons from the Soviet military and its mastery of the art of propaganda and indoctrination, Najibullah would not or could not employ it to any great effect even when his nation was at threat from an Islamist takeover. Instead, he relied on his immense charisma to try to persuade Afghans, throughout the country, that he was a man with foresight who was ready to give up his own position in power to prevent further bloodshed and leave behind a legacy of peace against the backdrop of the imminent demise of the Soviet Union. And it is a question whether those tools would have made a difference in countering the widely held perceptions that he had hatched a deal with the United Nations to save himself while delivering the country to the mujahideen. Some

⁷ John F. Burns, "Afghans Disclose Deaths of 11,000," *New York Times*, November 9, 1989, <https://www.nytimes.com/1989/11/09/world/afghans-disclose-deaths-of-11000.html>.

⁸ "Afghanistan Taliban's Victory Against the USSR," Propaganda Poster, Jack me'hoff, Pinterest, <https://tr.pinterest.com/pin/302867143688706434/>.

argue⁹ it was this perception that sparked mass defections¹⁰ within the military and his party, and paved the way for the mujahideen to take over.

Ultimately, Najibullah failed to take control of the narrative. Already tainted by his association with the Soviets, the spy chief-turned-president had to compete with a campaign against him launched by Western media, as well as the propaganda of the mujahideen who were still getting mileage from holy war slogans, and their victory in ousting the Soviet troops. Promoting himself as a visionary leader in this context would have been a Sisyphean task in the best of conditions, but was rendered even more challenging by the ongoing war, the absence of a free press to inform and educate, and the power of social media to sway emotions and opinions.

The situation is very different in 2021. President Ashraf Ghani has merely to scroll down his Twitter feed, turn on his television, listen to the radio, or read the papers to gauge the mood across the country. As a feedback mechanism, media was a threat to Najibullah. For Ghani, it is an opportunity.

Yet, having the tools and using them in a meaningful way are quite different. A skilled orator, fluent in Dari and Pashto, Najibullah often made reference to BBC radio reports in his speeches, but mostly to deride these reports as “western propaganda.” The president did not have any method at his disposal to counter those reports in an effective way other than fiery speeches, which were not disseminated widely through independent media. And, as such, he largely failed to push back on accusations by his fiercest critics of pandering to a single ethnic group, tribe, and region.

According to a BBC policy briefing in 2012, “The transformation of Afghanistan’s media is seen as one of the success stories of the last ten years and a key element in the creation of a more plural and accountable society.”¹¹ The opening up of the press, free access to social media, and numerous television and radio outlets offers an almost infinite advantage to Ghani to both receive feedback and tailor information campaigns to influence and persuade. One would surmise that this would result in solid and useful feedback in a way unavailable to Najibullah. Undoubtedly, the same governments who helped set up the Afghan “information architecture”¹² are also providing cadres of experts to advise Kabul on how to collect feedback and tailor information, persuasion,

⁹ Steve Coll, “Afghan Leader Gives Up Power,” *Washington Post*, April 17, 1992, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1992/04/17/afghan-leader-gives-up-power/57151d03-2dfe-4f48-95eb-5e2bb6ffa57d/>.

¹⁰ Human Rights Watch, “II. Historical Background” in “Blood-Stained Hands: Past Atrocities in Kabul and Afghanistan’s Legacy of Impunity,” Report, July 2005, <https://www.hrw.org/reports/2005/afghanistan0605/3.htm>.

¹¹ BBC Media Briefing, “The Media of Afghanistan: The Challenges of Transition,” Policy Briefing, March 2012, <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/57a08a6440f0b64974000594/bbc-media-action-afghanistan-is-in-transition.pdf>.

¹² Not to mention the numerous young Afghans who in the past decade obtained MA degrees in Communications.

and influence campaigns.

Yet, for all of the modern advantages Ghani has over the Najibullah era, the results on the information battlefield seem equally weak. The main reason is that while Ghani has innumerable tools to derive feedback and tailor both the message and the delivery, he is faced with both opponents and enemies that, too, have these tools at hand, and are equally skilled at their employment—perhaps more so. It can be argued that the Taliban's strategic communications has far surpassed the skills of the Ghani administration, which I will highlight briefly below.

Enemies, Opponents and PR Games

Last February, the New York Times featured an op-ed by Sirajuddin Haqqani, deputy leader of the Taliban, entitled “What We the Taliban Want.”¹³ For a Taliban leader to offer his views in a widely-circulated and influential American newspaper would have been unthinkable in the past. Even so, it was considered controversial as the author is the leader of the Haqqani Network, a group designated by the United States as a terrorist organization in 2012.¹⁴

The Taliban have effectively extended the story from the battlefield into the realm of public relations. Since the beginning of the US–Taliban talks, the Taliban's own strategic communication activities have received Western propping up as well, particularly by the US media. Along with proving themselves shrewd negotiators, the Taliban are challenging their negative perception over the years by selling a public image of a more modern, less conservative movement ready to responsibly take over governance of Afghanistan. Often touted as “Taliban 2.0,” its emissaries have refined their public image and their public relations.¹⁵ Since the start of the US–Taliban talks in Doha, Taliban sympathizers in Kabul have been featured regularly on private Afghan TV as “independent analysts,” explaining the group's narrative to millions of Afghans.

Since the US-led intervention in 2001, the media coverage of the Afghan military operations and the Taliban have gone through multiple transformations. In 2001, the story was 9/11 and US intervention. In 2004, the Berlin Conference on Afghanistan. In 2009, Obama's “Surge.” In 2012, the Chicago Conference, and in 2020-1, the elusive

¹³ Sirajuddin Haqqani, “What We, the Taliban, Want,” *New York Times*, February 20, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/02/20/opinion/taliban-afghanistan-war-haqqani.html>.

¹⁴ National Counterterrorism Center, “Haqqani Network,” Counter Terrorism Guide, August 29, 2015, https://www.dni.gov/nctc/groups/haqqani_network.html.

¹⁵ Tanya Goudsouzian, “Yes, the Taliban Has Changed—It's Gotten Much Better at PR,” *Washington Post*, August 22, 2019, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2019/08/22/yes-taliban-has-changed-its-gotten-much-better-pr/>.

search for peace with a “transformed” Taliban. No longer *terrorists*, but *partners*. As goes the official narrative, they are “trusted interlocutors for peace” seeking a deal so the Americans can withdraw their troops from a war that former US President Donald Trump kept calling it “endless”¹⁶ and “ridiculous.”¹⁷

Today, journalists for respected international news outlets go “behind Taliban lines”¹⁸ to obtain reports that normalize the Taliban and show them in a more sympathetic light than ever before. They report on women working in clinics alongside children attending school (for now), uncovered midwives speaking to cameras operated by men—all things unheard of during the earlier Taliban rule. Other Western journalists enter villages that were formerly targets of the Afghan National Directorate of Security (NDS) raids, exposing “unjust” and “heavy-handed” practices conducted by CIA-backed paramilitary forces.¹⁹ Such reports are a turnaround from the early days when the media and the public might have turned a blind eye to methods used in the hunt for radicals and terrorists.

Western media have been partners, wittingly or unwittingly, to this Taliban “image offensive,”²⁰ reporting on young Taliban fighters playing cricket, hugging government security forces during religious festivals, and raising normal families. Urbane Afghan politicians meet with the Taliban and return astonished, some awed, at the sophistication of the negotiators. Afghan women who joined discussions in Doha²¹ expressed amazement that the Taliban sat across from them and engaged in direct dialogue, unthinkable in the recent past. They talked of receiving “swagger bags” of Arabian perfume reflecting traditional Afghan warmth and hospitality. Off the record discussions I’ve had with analysts at various think tanks have suggested that the Taliban’s recent denials of involvement in attacks, too, is a rebranding strategy, especially those attacks that target women and children.

The Taliban also seem to leverage social media better to their advantage. They skillfully target and manipulate the perceptions of both an Afghan audience and a wearied West. Their “Media and Culture Commission” employs Facebook and Twitter to broadcast messages in multiple languages. They use “handles” and “sites” to issue communiques and disinformation on WhatsApp, Viber, and Telegram. They reportedly

¹⁶ David Cohen and Quint Forgey, “Trump Slams ‘Ridiculous Endless Wars’ as He Defends Dramatic Shift in Syria Policy,” *Politico*, October 7, 2019, <https://www.politico.eu/article/donald-trump-slams-ridiculous-endless-wars-as-he-defends-dramatic-shift-in-syria-policy-turkey-erdogan-kurds-isis/>.

¹⁷ Cohen and Forgey, “Trump Slams ‘Ridiculous Endless Wars.’”

¹⁸ Jamie Doran, *Behind Taliban Lines*, Documentary, PBS, 2010, <https://www.amazon.com/Frontline-Behind-Taliban-Lines/dp/B003CP1SSI>.

¹⁹ Human Rights Watch, “They Have Shot Many Like This,” Report, October 31, 2019, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2019/10/31/theyve-shot-many/abusive-night-raids-cia-backed-afghan-strike-forces>.

²⁰ Goudsouzian, “Yes, the Taliban Has Changed.”

²¹ Masuda Sultan, “I Met the Taliban. Women Were the First to Speak,” *New York Times*, June 4, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/04/opinion/afghanistan-taliban-peace-talks.html>.

also use Twitter trolls to reinforce their narrative. In an interview last May with Reuters, Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said he has a team of writers who consult with fighters (who double as reporters) in thirty-four provinces across the country.²² They prepare press statements in five languages and gather footage and photographs shot on smartphones, a *modus operandi* no different from that of any international news service. They skillfully spin narratives (usually in the tone of a wise elder speaking to wayward youth), of the Western military as occupiers, the Afghan National Security Forces as “hirelings,” and of themselves as nationalists and patriots. On the centenary of Afghan independence on 19 August, they joined in the national celebrations by issuing a statement to the “Afghan Mujahid nation” about the “blessings of the Jihadi endeavors,” despite the centenary celebration honoring the emergence of a secular, constitutional monarchy.

The question of news dissemination in modern war reporting has taken on a different aspect in the age of social media, with various actors on the ground now bypassing journalists and accessing global audiences directly using methods that mirror those of standard media outlets. Why bother giving an interview to a foreign reporter who might distort your words or misrepresent your message when a government, opposition, or insurgent group can address the world via Twitter or Facebook? This is not a theoretical question; President Ashraf Ghani has over 700,000 followers on Twitter, and his vice-presidential running mate and former interior minister Amrullah Saleh has nearly 600,000. The Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid himself has more than 130,000 followers.

Yet the Ghani administration has miscalculated the efforts of the Taliban to rebrand themselves. Taking for granted their legitimacy as the elected government of Afghanistan, Afghan officials have been reluctant to be seen as “debasement themselves” to take measures such as demand the New York Times for an opportunity to respond to the Haqqani op-ed. This and other examples provide the foundation for a commonly held perception of an increasingly isolated government, out of touch with the realities outside of the capital, which cannot protect the population from the onslaught of radical terror groups. That this is the narrative peddled by the Taliban and other opponents, and the inability of the government to change that perception, is telling. These shortcomings should be easily remedied by a more sophisticated strategic communications campaign. Thus, like Najibullah, Ghani is a man with a plan, but the plan does not seem to be working.

²² Goudsouzian, “Yes, the Taliban Has Changed.”

Lessons Learned

Nowhere in the world has the power of propaganda been more apparent in bringing down governments than in Afghanistan, where kings and presidents have been toppled through the clever use of tampered imagery and the spread of well-crafted lies. King Amanullah famously lost his throne in 1929 when a former brigand-turned-revolutionary led a rebellion supported by British propaganda. The mujahideen leveraged their holy war narrative to oust a president with genuine plans for democratic reforms. The lessons are there in Afghanistan's modern history to learn from. So, inasmuch as ground realities have changed from the 1990s, there are some key lessons to be gleaned from Najibullah's experience for Ashraf Ghani's government.

First, the importance of engaging one's critics, or at least appearing to do so. Najibullah reached out to his opponents, or what he called "distinguished and patriotic" Afghans, to "seek their advice" and start meaningful dialogue for a "speedy road to peace," even if his own view of matters was so distorted from that of others. Amply illustrated by Kakar's letter in response, many of those whose advice Najibullah was seeking did not share his views, and outright disagreed with his interpretation of past events. Kakar himself went so far as to tell Najibullah that his reconciliation plan "obviously needs major changes" in his letter dated June 12, 1990.

While Ashraf Ghani, to his credit, has called for several consultative meetings to determine the will of the people and reach a consensus, his opponents have often derided those initiatives as echo chambers, and described Ghani as a man who is not interested in consulting any dissenters.

Second, while Najibullah had limited tools at his disposal, he made optimum use of those tools to push back on disadvantages, such as his former position at the helm of the much-feared KhAD and his association with the Soviets. Ghani, in contrast, has a full media arsenal and the advantage of operating from a position of legitimacy, as the elected government of Afghanistan, but it is debatable whether he has used these optimally.

Third, today's Afghan government may recognize that information warfare is as important, or more important than battlefield victories, but seems to be fighting that warfare to, at best, a draw. If Najibullah had to grapple with the holy war propaganda of the mujahideen of the late 1980s and early 1990s, Ghani today faces an emboldened Taliban with evolved strategic communications skills that have generated jokes about the radical extremists consulting a fancy New York firm. For all of the billions of dollars that have been poured into Afghanistan over the past nineteen years, it would appear that the government has been as unsuccessful on the airwaves as it has been on the physical battlefield. If the government does not "up its game" in the battle for hearts and minds, it will find itself in the same position as Najibullah in 1990.

Ghani's world is dramatically different from that of Najibullah. In many ways, Najibullah's era was far simpler. He could rule with an authoritarian hand, there were few media tools, his Soviet minders were experts at propaganda and deception (not to mention brutality and ruthlessness) and it was far easier to muzzle or manipulate the comparatively limited number of newspapers, and television and radio outlets. He had a free hand to control a pliant media and monopolize the message. By contrast, Ghani's job is far more difficult. He has to contend with an explosion of television, radio, and media outlets, and a virtually unlimited number of social media accounts. Liberal press laws, too, constrain his ability to regulate its output. Najibullah only had one adversary to contend with—the mujahideen and their external backers—while Ghani has to compete with the Taliban, numerous terrorist groups, external enemies and allies, and a strong political opposition. His ability to disseminate a clear, consistent message is hobbled by a cacophony of dissenting views from both enemies and allies, and it may be that legitimate political opposition within the system is more effective in influencing public opinion than enemy propaganda.

Despite those differences, the result for the two leaders is similar. Shaping public opinion is as important as winning on the battlefield and, unless approached in a complimentary and synergistic manner, it is unlikely that a status quo power can win against an insurrection. While Najibullah may not have fully understood the importance of the message and the media, this point is clearly recognized by Ghani, but the results are largely unsatisfactory. Both leaders underestimated the power of strategic communication; both relied on a military solution. Najibullah paid a high price for that error, but provided a template for Ghani to avoid that same fate.

Post-Conflict Development: Charting a New Agenda

Moh. Sayed Madadi

Abstract

Conflicts have complicated evolutionary trajectories. While their cessation could be made possible by reaching political settlements, to resolve them in the long run would require building infrastructures capable of sustaining a peaceful sociopolitical equilibrium. In Afghanistan, while the country's history of grappling with active violent conflict dates back to little more than four decades ago, the function of violent power as the foundational piece in any equilibrium is much older. The most recent evolution in the conflict that began by active international involvement since 2001 is understandably the most complicated episode in that decades-long trajectory. While the ongoing peace process aimed at reaching a political settlement with the Taliban has the potential to halt the bloodshed, mitigating fragility and building resilience for the longer future would demand much more. In particular, it would need the reestablishment of state authority as possessing a legitimate monopoly over violence; the expansion of a wide and diverse economic base, not just to provide jobs, but also to strengthen a middle-class imperative to the survival of any democratic society; and the diversification and decentralization of public debate in order to offer nonviolent paths for contributing to public discourse and influencing political power.

The Afghanistan peace process has been haunted since its beginning by unrealistic deadlines and matters too urgent to handle with ponderance. While many have compared the dynamics to America's Vietnam War in the late 1960s and early 1970s, there is a precedence much closer to home: President Najibullah's ultimately failed efforts at peace during the late 1980s after the withdrawal of Soviet forces. In a correspondence with Mohammad Najibullah in 1990, Afghan historian Hassan Kakar delicately points out the difficulties of that process. Three decades later, several points stand out from that exchange as relevant to Afghanistan's current circumstances and the dynamics of its peace process. One is the lack of understanding and incongruity in expectations between the two conflicting parties, the then Afghan government and Mujahideen factions. Two, the undeniably important role of foreign powers and their unwillingness to foster the environment for a process that could result in a sustainable peace. And three, the incredible damage that conflict has inflicted on Afghan society, beyond the destruction of physical infrastructure and the need for structural changes that would lay the foundations for a peaceful and prosperous future, one that could, among other things, offer a conducive environment for a vibrant civil society and a critical intelligentsia where the likes of Professor Kakar could meaningfully contribute to the development of their country.

In the current peace process, similar to the one President Najibullah had embarked on, the shrinkage of leverage, the shortage of time, and the desperateness of the state's chief patrons to reach an agreement has prevented a consideration of the more substantial and long-term aspects and implications of a potential deal. For instance, as expectations increase regarding the direct negotiations between the Islamic Republic and the Taliban insurgency, little attention has been paid to what would and should happen after a political settlement is reached. As it appears, no concerted effort has been undertaken by the Afghan government or the international community to develop plans and programs to ensure the sustainability of peace and mitigate the risks of further conflict over the long haul. There have been discussions in various circles in the government, in the donor community, and in international organizations about setting priorities for a postconflict Afghanistan, though none has been either comprehensive or coordinated enough. Thus, the question of postconflict development remains critical.

For decades, conflict has been the defining factor of life in Afghanistan. To think about postconflict development is to imagine a new sociopolitical and economic equilibrium that is not defined and/or controlled by violence. In so doing, it is vital to address the driving factors and root causes of the conflict, and how indigenous capacity could be built to mitigate fragility.

Drawing from the experience of Afghanistan in recent decades, this essay tries to chart an agenda for development after an agreement is reached, aiming to address some

of the structural issues that have haunted the country for the past four decades, some of which had been mentioned in the correspondence between President Najibullah and Professor Kakar. It identifies two key focus areas for the short run as measures to proliferate a conducive environment for two other, longer-term priorities. This would strengthen the state's legitimate authority beyond the capital and the few city centers, and would contribute to the sustainability of peace and the prevention of conflict.

Two key sectors and services should be at the center of recovery and development efforts in the short term, namely security and justice. Security and justice reforms would address some of the key issues at the center of the current conflict, would inevitably underpin reintegration efforts, and would establish legitimate state authority. This would contribute to an enabling environment to work on two other priorities in the long run: economic development and a pluralist public sphere in order to provide opportunities for beneficial occupation and meaningful public engagement.

Admittedly, a detailed discussion on all of these four issues would remain out of the scope of this work. What it aims at is directing attention to a subject that has received little substantial thought and stir thinking in that direction while there is time to debate multiple scenarios, engage various stakeholders, and locate resources for them.

Security and Justice; Historical Context

Since its inception in 1880 as a modern polity, Afghanistan has never had a strong state, let alone a strong central one. Delivery of services across the territory has not been the strongest suit of its ruling structure. Amir Abdur Rahman Khan (1880–1901), the Amir who demarcated the boundaries of what is today Afghanistan, went to the extent of establishing a centralized authority.¹ In so doing, he embarked on a multifaceted policy of what Amin Saikal has called “internal imperialism,” that included forced displacement, brutal oppression, and subjugation, all with the money he received from the British Empire in return for agreeing to receive a British permanent resident in Kabul, giving away control over his foreign relations, and signing the Durand Line agreement.² Since then, there has rarely been a credible threat to the central authority in Kabul from its peripheries. Taliban's ascent to power in the 1990s as a nonelite force is probably one of just two such instances, the other being the rebellion of Habibullah Kalakani in 1929.³ Other episodes of upheaval and political turmoil, including the 1978 communist coup, have all been internal clashes in a circle of the Kabul political elite.

¹ Saikal et al., *Modern Afghanistan*.

² Saikal et al.

³ Maizland and Laub, “What is the Taliban?”

The mujahideen's capture of state authority, or whatever remained of it by the time they did capture it, could best be characterized as the disintegration of state authority in the face of a countrywide public uprising—both urban and rural.

At the core of the existence of a central state authority since 1880 has been a public perception of the affiliation of that authority with two distinct but interconnected services as the embodiment of the state's legitimacy and power, namely security and justice. My 92-year-old grandfather recounts his memories of King Zahir Shah's reign (1933–1973) through anecdotal stories in which, in rare cases of complaints, a soldier would march solo from the district center and summon the entire village to the district chief's office for interrogation. The simplicity and safety with which people could travel is a major component of public perception of the strength of state power. This is a point reiteratively mentioned by foreign expatriates and adventurer travelers as part of their fond memories of the country's better days.⁴ With the minimum presence of state agencies outside Kabul and the main city hubs, it is questionable how credibly it could protect all its citizens and provide justice. The perception, however, exists nonetheless, which could be linked to a wide slew of socioeconomic and political factors, including the relationship between local non-state actors and the state authority, in which the former acted partly as state agents, as well as the widespread subsistence agrarian economy that did not leave a lot of resources for economic activity, controlling which could incentivize the use of violence.⁵ Alas, the perception of legitimate state authority has been closely affiliated with the absence of political violence.

The current episode of the conflict has also been mainly focused on security and justice. When the Taliban rose to power in the face of mujahideen infighting dividing the country into little chiefdoms, they claimed to bring security and a justice system inspired by the true teachings of Islam.⁶ No one expected them to invest in education, healthcare, or economic development. Nor did they claim to do so. Expectedly, during their rule, the only components of state function that they focused on in order to behave as a legitimate authority was to provide swift justice through draconian means, marked primarily by public executions and amputation without due process, which resulted in security and safety for the limited populations that had remained in the city centers. Schools and health clinics were widely under-resourced, and the public bureaucracy remained dysfunctional. The few educational and health centers that did remain open were mainly funded by international humanitarian organizations such as CARE International and the International Committee of the Red Cross.⁷

⁴ Podelco, "Afghanistan as It Once Was."

⁵ Barfield, *Afghanistan*.

⁶ Barfield.

⁷ International Committee of the Red Cross, "Fact Sheet."

After 2001, although the Taliban's reemergence started from an increasingly deadly campaign of bombings and later suicide attacks, their effort to challenge the new constitutional arrangement and fight for the control of territory inevitably boiled down to security and justice. Over the years, people across the country either suffered from the misuse of state authority by its agents without much access to justice, or found themselves trapped in the crossfire between the Taliban insurgency and the government or international forces. In the rural south and east, for example, the areas where security could be trusted to some degree came to be the districts fully in Taliban control, where the pro-government forces would not even try to fight for capture.⁸ The Taliban's justice system comprised in most cases a local commander on a motorcycle who would show up in the village to preside over a brief hearing, issue a verdict, and implement the ruling almost immediately.⁹ As medieval a practice as that sounds, compared to the overly bureaucratic, complicated, and corrupt official justice system that in many areas has been merely nonexistent, it was preferred by the rural populations who had little exposure to modern state functions and legal traditions. Weak territorial control, institutional incapability, and widespread corruption prevented the central state from enforcing authority in rural areas. With the conflict raging on and claiming lives, the expectations from life at the epicenter of conflict in the southern and eastern parts of the country were limited to basic survival. In such circumstances, the government and the international community's efforts to build infrastructure for development did not go far in establishing the state's presence, as the projects were mostly destroyed by Taliban bombings soon after their inauguration. Thus, when it came to projecting authority to the population, the Taliban focused on competing with the government only in offering security and justice, the two services that have traditionally represented the central state to the rural population.

Reestablishing Legitimate State Authority

In an environment where the state authority has almost completely disintegrated, and its legitimacy is shattered in the eyes of the public, the postconflict recovery must begin, first and foremost, from the expansion of state capacity to provide security and justice in order to establish the legitimate and credible authority of the state across its territory. Over the past two decades, the central authority has either been absent in rural Afghanistan or has been dysfunctional and corrupt, and thus has been considered illegitimate. Therefore, the public perception about the credible presence of the state

⁸ Jackson, "Life Under the Taliban Shadow Government."

⁹ BBC, "Four Days Behind the Taliban Frontline."

and its legitimate monopoly over the use of force must be restored, primarily through the provision of security and the expansion of the justice system. Improving security and justice would be a tangible breakaway from the conflict in the eyes of the local populations, who have come to see violence as an almost inseparable part of life. In order to deny non-state actors the space to claim authority, the state must fulfill its functions to the extent that neither a need nor a void should remain for non-state competitors. That is also critical for the full implementation of a settlement between the Islamic Republic and the Taliban insurgency. Without enhanced state capacity to control territory, incentives and opportunities for spoilers and violators remain high, and the positive role of the agreement in deescalating violence would be hindered as other groups would step up to fill the vacuum caused by the Taliban's military absence.¹⁰ How to exactly go about the expansion of state capacity to provide security and justice is beyond the scope of this essay. But thinking about some levels of decentralization and deconcentration with a keen eye on fighting corruption and misuse of state authority by its agents would be steps in the right direction.

One of the reasons security and justice play critical roles in representing state authority, and are thus important to focus on during the post-conflict recovery, is the impossibility of privatizing them. The modern state is defined by its monopoly over the legitimate use of force, which translates into providing security for the population and arbitrating disputes as the only legitimate authority to enforce punishments.¹¹ In rural areas, with a subsistence agrarian economy and a widely illiterate population, demands for education, health, and transportation have traditionally been less pressing. In recent years, private suppliers have chimed in to provide these services, often with less bureaucracy and higher quality. Security and justice, however, due to their nature as purely public goods, and their integral connection with the concept of the state, as well as the difficulty in their privatization due to the huge amount of resources required, have always been the foremost responsibilities of the state.¹² When the state does not or cannot provide security and administer a responsive justice system, people would immediately see the void of the state's authority. And in cases where other entities do attempt to provide those services, as the Taliban insurgency has for the past two decades, they compete directly with the state for being the legitimate authority. While the Taliban have also tried to tax agricultural harvest and trade, given the poor history of modern taxation in Afghanistan, only their role in providing security and justice is considered as mimicking a formal state authority.

¹⁰ Mashal, "As Taliban Talk Peace."

¹¹ Tilly, "War Making and State Making as Organized Crime."

¹² Axtmann, "The State of the State."

Another reason why it is imperative to work on security and justice once a political settlement is reached is because it would naturally be tied up with the implementation of the agreement. Demobilization of the Taliban ranks and reintegration of their foot soldiers into the Afghan national defense and security forces after proper background checks to ensure they will not pose any threat would be an important component of the implementation of any peace deal. While the Afghan government is reluctant to subject the fate of its security forces to any political discussion, it acknowledges the need for reforms in order to make them more representative, less political, and more unified.¹³ To develop reintegration programs as part of a broader package to improve security and governance across the country would be more effective and efficient. The successful reintegration of former Taliban fighters and enhanced security would help fill the vacuum of state authority in rural areas that has thus far been filled by the Taliban insurgency. This also means that security forces would be able to focus more on curbing the threats from terrorist groups and criminal networks in order to further enhance legitimate state authority. Similarly, the expansion of the justice sector and reforms to make it less political and more independent would directly improve governance with tangible implications for the legitimacy of state authority. Justice reforms would directly translate into more accountability, less corruption, and improved service delivery, including security. Resultantly, the institution of the state established as a legitimate authority across the country could be personified with far fewer agents. Instead, people would subscribe to a perception regarding the omnipresence and legitimacy of the state and its responsiveness to act and protect citizens when needed. It is vital for security and justice reforms to be developed with an eye for economic growth and a more pluralistic public space.

Economic Growth: Building Capacity for the Future

A conflict of this complexity and age has understandably many driving factors and root causes, and thus requires for its resolution multifaceted interventions at various levels to disrupt the violent sociopolitical equilibrium and establish a peaceful one. One of the main causes and symptoms of the conflict is economic growth. While lack of economic opportunities drives many to look into violence as an option for subsistence, economic activity and growth is equally curtailed by the proliferation of conflict.¹⁴ This does not stop at rural families sending their children to fight with the Taliban in order to provide for their families. In such an environment, the cost of forming and sustaining

¹³ Tolo News, "Stanikzai Backtracks on 'Dissolving Army' Comments."

¹⁴ Alesina et al., "Political Instability and Economic Growth."

local militias for pure financial profit drops significantly. In urban areas, economically-driven crimes (kidnapping for ransom, theft, burglary, etc.) contribute to insecurity and violence, and thus challenge the legitimate authority of the state as the sole provider of security to the public. In weak economic conditions, the proliferation of an illicit economy where violence is a major component becomes far more likely, with many incentivized to participate.¹⁵ Thus, in instances where a halt in conflict is made possible through political means, work on strengthening a diverse economic base as a conflict prevention measure for the long run must be at the top of postconflict recovery plans.

Providing economic opportunities for those who return from conflict (militia fighters, Taliban members, etc.) will be critical to sustaining peace and preventing them from returning to violence. Reintegration of these fighters back into their communities, where in many cases they would face resentment due to their participation in the conflict, would prove arduous.¹⁶ Decentralized and localized economic planning that would allow them to contribute to the development of their communities is one way to bridge these differences and offer them a path to normal social life.¹⁷ Economic activity enables former fighters to mitigate social stigma and become productive members of the community. On the one hand, this would connect them to the rest of the community and prevent their ostracization. On the other hand, it offers an alternative livelihood, enabling them to provide for their families through nonviolent means and give up on violence as a path to economic survival.¹⁸ In addition to the former fighters and their communities as the main target group, it is important for these initiatives to also consider the communities that have not been hit hard by conflict. If the peace dividends concentrate only in areas damaged by conflict, the areas that have remained relatively peaceful could possibly feel alienated. Thus, a postconflict recovery must not create incentives for other groups to see violence as a shortcut to accessing public resources and economic benefits.¹⁹

The other reason why focusing on economic development as a postconflict recovery measure is absolutely critical is because of its importance in the democratization process. Democratic institutions and processes often owe their strength to the width and breadth of the middle class in those societies.²⁰ And the development of a vibrant and engaged middle class is not possible unless it is achieved through the expansion of a diverse economy. The past two decades' experience offer evidence that the absence of a wide enough and vibrant enough middle class has been critical in the failing process of

¹⁵ Felbab-Brown, "Counterinsurgency, Counternarcotics, and Illicit Economies in Afghanistan."

¹⁶ Dobbins et al., "DDR in Afghanistan."

¹⁷ Dobbins et al.

¹⁸ Dobbins et al.

¹⁹ North et al., *In the Shadow of Violence*.

²⁰ Koo, "Middle Classes, Democratization, and Class Formation."

democratic institution building, and the solidification of liberal values. Parliamentary and provincial council elections have been witnessing candidates buying votes or simply feeding the poor in return for their votes.²¹ Similarly, initiatives to promote women's rights have miserably failed due to a lack of focus on creating opportunities for women's economic activity, something that could give them independence from their families and traditional social structures, a measure that would empower them to defy conservative social practices that curtail their rights and freedoms.²² Thus, postpeace development and postconflict recovery must begin with the expansion of economic opportunities in order to strengthen democratic institutions and promulgate liberal values through the expansion of a vibrant middle class and the empowerment of the vulnerable social groups who have stronger incentives to mobilize against conservative ideologies and regressive social practices.

The lack of economic opportunities has also exacted a heavy toll on the government over the years when it comes to creating employment opportunities. The absence of diversity and productivity have made the economy incapable of hiring job seekers in various professions and sectors.²³ Diversity is particularly important because it is critical for the economy to produce jobs for different types of people and levels of caliber. An economy that would offer opportunities to only a small set of job seekers in particular sectors, or at a particular level of dexterity, cannot serve as a solid base for development. This limited nature of economic enterprises in Afghanistan has turned the public sector into the largest employer. Too many professions, in the absence of a vibrant private sector, have found public employment as the only job market despite the irrelevance of the work to their skillset, or the comparatively lower salary.²⁴ In a highly politicized bureaucracy, this has increased the incentives for mismanagement and corruption as senior bureaucratic managers or political appointees have used government agencies to offer jobs as favors to their political affiliates or personal relatives. The organizational structure of almost all government entities show that none of them are designed to deliver services in an effective and efficient way. With many high caliber people running to the government for jobs, this has further shrunk the private sector and civil society, who could complement the government in a democratic setting. Thus, the provision of economic opportunities in a postpeace setting will ease the burden from the government's shoulders when it comes to job creation, and instead focus on effective and efficient service delivery.

²¹ Ruttig and AAN Team, "Afghanistan Election Conundrum."

²² Nordland, "U.S. Aid Program Vowed to Help 75,000 Afghan Women."

²³ Almukhtar and Nordland, "What Did the U.S. Get for \$2 trillion in Afghanistan?"

²⁴ Almukhtar and Nordland.

A Pluralist Public Space: Mitigating Fragility through Debate

Violence has almost always been the dominant medium of political activity in modern Afghanistan. From the centralization of authority in the hands of Amir Abdur Rahman, to the rise and fall of the communist regime, to the Taliban's capture of state power and then their toppling by the international coalition, successful seizure of state authority has always relied on violence. Only the Musahiban family had managed to keep it under control for a relatively extended period, partially thanks to their wide and brutal campaign to neutralize their rivals early on, and partially due to the gradual pace of their modernization agenda that ensured the sustainability of their grip on power.²⁵ Mohammad Daoud's coup, that toppled the monarch, although bloodless, and his subsequent presidency, sowed the seeds of instability and opened the state's fragility to exploitation.²⁶ The current conflict with the Taliban, thus, is not a novel one that started in 2001, but rather another phase in a continuum that has defined modern Afghan history. Over the years, violence has been established as a credible tool for political activity, one offering shortcuts to capturing political power. Often, those who have seized power violently have monopolized it, as there has been no mechanism to establish legitimacy other than a group's grip on power. By extension, public discourses in these structures have also tried to exclude voices and narratives different from the dominant one.²⁷ The post-2001 political structure also came through violence, a joint campaign of international forces and domestic anti-Taliban political groups.²⁸ The boundaries that were set for the public sphere in post-2001 Afghanistan were heavily influenced by foreign agendas and priorities. The concentration of financial resources for political and civic activism in the hands of Western embassies meant that voices and initiatives that were not congruent to Western priorities had to struggle to get going.²⁹ While the pushback from conservative forces was always there, the public sphere welcomed and empowered only the liberal voices. In this way, the content of the public debate was not reflective of the socioeconomic realities of the society. Despite the burgeoning of media platforms, opening space for political activity, and the expansion of education, the society more or less remained widely conservative. One instance where this clash has been put on display is in the elections. Despite the liberal character of day-to-day public discussions, conservative voices often managed to rally a much larger number of the constituency in elections. That has been the process through which the presidential elections have established conservative leaders as vote winners imperative to any electoral

²⁵ Saikal et al.

²⁶ Saikal et al.

²⁷ Saikal et al.

²⁸ Tomsen, *The Wars of Afghanistan*.

²⁹ Osman, "Bourgeois Jihad."

victory.³⁰ In the parliamentary elections, the highest scorers were always traditional Jihadi leaders such as Mohammad Mohaqeq and Rasul Sayyaf. The only exception in that pool has been the French-educated technocrat, Ramazan Bashardost, mainly because of his overly populist politics. In such an environment, a sense of alienation and disconnect with the debates that took place in the capital, or were driven by the center in the periphery, found sympathy among some pockets of the people.

Years of conflict, the growth of urban population without urbanization (in socioeconomic terms) to offer a social foundation, the indiscriminate flow of information, all have expanded a sense of uprootedness and disorientation among many regarding the content of public discourse. Borhan Osman has explained this well in his recent report, "Bourgeois Jihad: Why Young, Middle-Class Afghans Join the Islamic State" for the Washington-based think tank, the United States Institute of Peace.³¹ The highly centralized political structure and the winner-takes-all nature of electoral arrangements meant that many could not promote their ideas at a smaller scale at the local level, and could not do much to influence the national debate, unless they controlled the top tier of political power. For example, many clerics, despite their disapproval of liberal democracy, human rights, and free media, have supported the government. Politically pro-government, they have continued to preach their conservative ideas. The late conservative preacher Maulavi Ayaz Nyazi was thought of as a moderate only because he was politically against the Taliban and supported the government.³² This is an example of disheartened conservatives maintaining their stance ideologically while supporting a liberal structure to save themselves the trouble. While the exact implications of this on the current conflict has not been investigated more explicitly, it is very likely that it could have incentivized the use of violence as a means to political ends for ultra-conservatives.³³

In order to address the root causes of conflict in the long run, and create an environment that mitigates the eruption of conflict, the public space must expand, both in size as well as in diversity. That is to say that there have to be opportunities for various political groups to contribute to the public discourse across the country with the possibility of influencing politics at subnational levels. Civil politics must grow to a level of such strength and credibility that violence as a means for political activity would not attract any constituency. Allowing subnational planning and legislatures is imperative to opening the space for a broader and smaller range of political groups to engage in political competition. This also minimizes the risks of high-stake clashes at the national level, and instead offers trial platforms at the provincial and local levels.

³⁰ Ruttig and AAN Team.

³¹ Osman, "Bourgeois Jihad."

³² Osman, "The Killing of Farkhunda (2)."

³³ Osman, "The Killing of Farkhunda (2)."

The structure must slice up the pie to much smaller pieces in order to be able to incorporate a wide slew of actors and activists. It is understandable that some of the ultraconservative groups such as the Taliban or Salafi-Jihadist groups would not settle for anything short of a full control over political power without any checks and balances. But the processes and structures should be set in a way that would, on the one hand, offer those groups a credible path to political power through nonviolent means, and, on the other hand, should promote liberal values to credibly counter their threat and narrative. That balance is critical in order to maintain buy-in from all political groups while at the same time ensuring the openness of the public sphere and the liberal character of the debate.

This admittedly is neither simple nor easy. While reforms in the political structure and commitment at the highest level to such an agenda is vital, this is work that inevitably has to take place out of policy planning sessions and government offices.³⁴ A vibrant civil society and liberal educational institutions are at the core of broadening and diversifying the public sphere. High schools, and more importantly universities, are where the capacity for critical thinking and social tolerance must be built.³⁵ Certain departments at Kabul University, the departments of theology and engineering for example, have long been hotbeds of religious extremism. Similarly, Kabul University has produced a wide slew of nonreligious political extremists too, including most of the core leadership of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) that controlled power from 1978 to 1992. The education system must free itself from state control and should innovatively work to challenge students in order to prepare them for a pluralistic society. Academic institutions are also where a culture of tolerance and nonviolence can and should be developed and strengthened. The civil society (in its broad meaning) should further build on the work of academic institutions by actively promoting pluralism in debate and in activism, by effectively bridging differences among different constituencies in the country. The recent episodes of the conflict, among other implications, have created a sociocultural gap between areas that have been deeply in conflict and areas that have remained more or less detached from it. While girls in Bamiyan bike around the city, many in the southern provinces struggle to access basic education. They grow up in two different worlds with strikingly incongruent worldviews.³⁶ That is further exacerbated by social media that create echo chambers where people are exposed only to ideas that fit their own predispositions. It is a space where civil society should work to foster exchange and debate among groups of various political orientations in order to enrich the public discourse.

³⁴ Osman, "The Killing of Farkhunda (2)."

³⁵ Fazli et al., "Understanding and Countering Violent Extremism in Afghanistan."

³⁶ Nordland, "A School with No Heat."

Utilizing Domestic Expertise and Developing Collective Memory

The ambition of this essay is not to offer specific and implementable policy solutions. Nor does it try to present an academic and theoretical account of the issues it raises. The main objective of this work is to identify broad priority areas that could be explored further. While resources would be allocated to recovery and development after a political settlement is reached, they will by no means match the international enthusiasm of the first decade after 2001 that brought hundreds of billions of dollars. One of the key reasons there is a conducive environment for peace right now is that the international players are tired of an open-ended engagement in Afghanistan that has increasingly failed to project signals of progress. Thus, making available resources for postconflict development would probably be lower than the cost of sustaining the war. This is a reason to think critically and ahead of time about priorities: where to invest those limited resources to have the highest return and replicate effects to establish a new nonviolent sociopolitical equilibrium.

It is also very important not to repeat the mistakes of the past two decades. First and foremost, postconflict recovery must be an Afghan-led agenda. With almost all the resources pouring in from outside, donors would all have priorities and preferences about how to achieve them. The World Bank and the US Agency for International Development (USAID) have already developed plans for the postpeace phase. The Afghan Ministry of Finance has worked on concepts and projects with little consultation with other government agencies. That is a model that has been tried, over and again, and has failed. It is absolutely critical to steer all stakeholders, domestic and international, in the same direction in a coordinated manner. This is not to ignore the ineffectiveness and inefficiency of the Afghan government. But in order for the post conflict recovery to succeed, the international community must work with the Afghan government to use the technical capacity and the institutional memory of the past two decades with transparency and accountability. Minimum reliance on international experts, foreign contractors, and models that are developed with little to no consideration of the realities of Afghanistan must be an important characteristic of the work from the onset. Thus, this opportunity must be seized to develop the indigenous capacity for conflict management and a homegrown literature for it that helps incorporate such national experiences into the collective intellectual institutional memory of the society in a systemic way. That is one of the ways to ensure that the collective thinking of the society reflects on the conflict and develops a consciousness that ensures its prevention and mitigation in the future.

This, understandably, is not easy. The inability to make these things happen during the past two decades means it will continue to be a difficult and arduous journey.

To add the Taliban to this calculus only complicates matters even further. The Taliban have made it clear, time and again, that they want an “Islamic System” of governance, a vague term that given Taliban’s ideological proclivities and their past experiences in governance could well be understood as a synonym to their long-sought-after “Islamic Emirate.” In that context, to invest in making the public space more pluralistic than what it is right now would mean to threaten the foundations of the Taliban’s political power and legitimacy.

However, it is critically important for Afghanistan to use this opportunity to lay the foundations of a long-term harmonious and peaceful sociopolitical equilibrium rather than applying a quick fix that would only halt violence temporarily. It would be up to the commitment and political acumen of Afghanistan’s elite to convince the Taliban to at least agree on some of the key principles on the basis of which an inclusive, prosperous, and stable Afghanistan could be built. The Taliban would need to be shown the implications of such an architectural design for their own future, politically as a movement, but more importantly personally for their families and constituencies in terms of access to opportunities for meaningfully participating in the development of their country. It would be incumbent upon the proponents of the republic to lay out these foundations as they principally believe in its values and have operated institutions based on those principles for the past two decades.

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PART THREE

Global and Regional Contexts, Actors, and Factors

Hybrid Insecurity and Actors and Factors in the Conflict in Afghanistan

Dawood Azami

Abstract

Conflictive behavior and collective violence are as complicated and contingent as the human psyche and society. Conflicts generally have different dynamics, a variety of actors, and multiple causes. Scholars have formulated various models and frameworks to understand the characteristics of conflicts and explain their causes and motivations. Empirical and historical evidence show that existing models and frameworks do not fully cover the dynamics of all societies affected by conflicts because they depend on the convergence of a wide range of conditions. In order to reflect the complex nature and underlying dynamics of conflicts, I suggest what I call the “hybrid framework” of conflict, which takes into account a variety of overlapping causes and motivations, as well as the complex web of factors and actors at local, regional, and international levels, the hallmark of most “civil wars” and internal conflicts. As one of the most protracted conflicts in the world, the war in Afghanistan is also the product of a complex web of local motives and interactions as well as regional and international rivalries and interferences. This essay assesses the conflict in Afghanistan in the light of the “hybrid framework” of civil war and argues that, in such a multidimensional conflict, the role of foreign actors, both regional and international, is of paramount significance in both causing and prolonging the conflict. The essay analyzes the role and competing and overlapping interests of dozens of state and non-state actors as well as the significance of natural resources, including narcotics, in the decades-long conflict in Afghanistan. The essay is an analytical, theoretical, and empirical study based on primary and secondary sources as

well as extensive fieldwork and interviews with various stakeholders. It argues that the conflict in Afghanistan is neither just a terrorist/extremist problem, nor an intraethnic confrontation; it is, in reality, the outcome of a combination of various factors inside Afghanistan and beyond, including strategic, social, economic, religious, and historical ones, as well as proxy and vested interests. The essay concludes by offering varying possibilities for the resolution of the conflict in Afghanistan.

Historians and political scientists have described Afghanistan with a variety of epithets, including “a land bridge,” “roof of the world,” “door of India,” “eastern door of the Islamic world,” “a melting pot of civilizations,” “hub of civilizations,” “highway for international commerce,” and “the heart of Asia” (Iqbal 1947, 208; Zorich 2008, 36–37; Szabo and Barfield 1991, 17, 67; Dupree 1973; Hopkirk 1990; Gregorian 1969). Geographically, Afghanistan links three great Asian regions: West, South, and Central Asia. The famous British historian Arnold Toynbee called the country “the roundabout of the ancient world” (Hyman 1992, 3) while Norchi describes it as “a land on everyone’s way to someplace else” and “a pawn in the games of external powers” (2004, 1996).

Due to its important location and geostrategic significance, Afghanistan has frequently been a battlefield of major powers, as well as a variety of smaller invaders, for several millennia. As a result, the country repeatedly paid a very heavy price in both blood and in the destruction of most of its social and physical infrastructure. The breakup of society resulting from a series of foreign invasions and imposed wars also led to internal strife and the active participation of certain local actors in the ensuing conflict.

The recent history of Afghanistan shows that the country has been at the center of various external encounters and regional and international upheavals. In the nineteenth century, Afghanistan became the center of the “Great Game” between the two superpowers of the time, Imperial Britain and Tsarist Russia. During the Cold War in the twentieth century, the country was reduced to being the main battlefield in the proxy war between the US-led, capitalist West, and the communist Soviet Union (USSR). Following the attacks on the US on September 11, 2001, Afghanistan was transformed into the main theater of another international battle: the US-led “War on Terror.”

In modern history, it has been quite unusual for a country to be invaded by multiple superpowers in such a short span of time. Within just twenty-two years, two superpowers, the USSR (1979), and the US (2001), invaded Afghanistan one after the other. In fact,

the US invasion of Afghanistan took place just thirteen years after the defeat of the USSR in Afghanistan, and the withdrawal of the Red Army from the country.

With the toppling of the Taliban regime as a result of the US-led military intervention in late 2001, foreign involvement in Afghanistan increased and the country once again became a zone of competition for dozens of regional and international state and non-state actors where several local, regional, and international conflicts have been fought simultaneously. The presence of Western forces in Afghanistan further complicated the nature of the conflict and gave a number of people a reason to fight against what they saw as a foreign occupation. The US/NATO forces' presence in Afghanistan added to the perpetuity of violence as some regional countries viewed their proximity as a threat to their own security and long-term national interests. Some of these regional state actors used this as an excuse to support those fighting against the Afghan government and its foreign allies.

While briefly discussing the dynamics of conflict in general, this essay assesses the conflict in Afghanistan in light of the "hybrid framework" of conflict, and argues that in such a multidimensional war, the role of foreign actors, both regional and international, is of paramount importance in both causing and prolonging the conflict. The essay is an analytical, theoretical, and empirical study based on primary and secondary sources as well as fieldwork and interviews with various stakeholders carried out mostly in Afghanistan over the past one decade. The essay concludes by offering varying possibilities for the resolution of the conflict in Afghanistan.

Civil War and the "Hybrid Framework"

The conflict in Afghanistan involves a number of factors and issues ranging from ideological, strategic, and proxy factors, to organized crime and the systematic exploitation of natural resources. It also brings together a wide spectrum of state and non-state actors at local, regional, and international levels, whose interests often overlap, thus adding to the complexity and perpetuity of the conflict and making its resolution harder to achieve. There are a number of models and frameworks proposed by different scholars explaining and analyzing the causes, motivations, and prevention of civil wars (Jacoby 2008), including greed theory (Keen 1998; Collier 2007), greed-grievance model (Collier and Hoeffler 2001), relative deprivation and grievance model (Jacoby 2008, 104), "need, creed, and greed" formulation (Zartman 2005), and New Wars theory (Kaldor 2006). However, they have various shortcomings and usually miss one or more important elements of a given conflict. The existing literature and scholarly discourses regarding intra-state conflicts have largely ignored or underestimated the

role of external actors, especially regional state actors, in both initiating and prolonging what are generally termed as “civil wars.” Foreign actors play an important role in these “internal conflicts” in a variety of ways, including interference and intervention, as well as in providing sanctuary and patronage to local actors.

The history of conflicts in many parts of the world shows that certain existing or potential divisions can be exploited by foreign players, especially state actors. The degree and ease of exploitation in a community or country depends on a number of factors, including the level of fragmentation and divisions, the commonality of interests between the two sides, as well as the degree of willingness of different local actors to serve the interests of a foreign backer. It is in this context that narrow, state-centric approaches, and focusing only on the internal dynamics of intra-state conflicts are of limited analytical value.

External states do not only cause or encourage an “internal conflict”; they also play an important role in prolonging and sustaining it. Therefore, while challenging the “closed polity” approach to the study of civil war, Gleditsch argues that it is inappropriate to treat civil war as a fully domestic phenomenon because, in most cases, actors and resources span national boundaries (2007). According to Cunningham, the involvement of external players in a conflict makes them “veto players” and “can prevent the war from ending” by “constraining the ability of the internal combatants to make independent decisions” (Cunningham 2001, 40–41). In such circumstances, the term “civil war” in its traditional sense also becomes misleading because, as King notes, they are never entirely internal in character (King 1997).

The war in Afghanistan, as well as many other intra-state conflicts, can only be understood within a broader global context. As with many so-called “civil wars” in other parts of the world, the causes of the Afghan conflict are not entirely internal. When social cohesion suffers as a result of foreign interference, especially military intervention, local actors usually look for external support and resources, while foreign actors find an opportunity to work with local allies and proxies. This problem is generally bigger in parts of the world where countries do not commit to standard international norms and the principles of good neighborliness.

In addition, colonial legacies and “unnatural borders” and “artificial boundaries,” that separate and divide ethnic groups, tribes, and even extended families, also create an environment for conflict and prepare ground for external actors’ interference. As seen in many parts of Asia and Africa, former colonial powers still have significant political and economic influence and usually play an active role by supporting one or more local actors, thus impacting the internal dynamics of the conflict.

In an increasingly globalizing world, conflicts are becoming more and more complex, involving a variety of actors at various levels, as well as a combination of

different dynamics. Therefore, I suggest what I call the “hybrid framework” of conflict, which takes into account a variety of overlapping causes and motivations, as well as the complex web of factors and actors at local, regional, and international levels. In most cases, the efforts and interests of several actors coincide, which ultimately make them allies and collaborators. In the “hybrid framework,” the overlapping of goals and the hybridity of motivations of different actors is of vital importance because it is this commonality of purpose and interests which makes them allies and/or collaborators.

Afghan Conflict and the Hybridity of Interests

Like in many other parts of the world, the conflict in Afghanistan is also the product of a complex web of local motives and interactions, as well as regional and international rivalries and interferences that set the stage for far-reaching consequences. The Afghan conflict is neither just a terrorist/extremist problem, nor a confrontation between different ethnic groups, nor a struggle for the control of resources. Rather, it is the outcome of various factors inside Afghanistan and beyond. It has a number of internal elements as its motivating factors, such as ideology (nationalistic, anticommunist, anti-Western, antioccupation, Islamist); greed (resources, power); need (poverty, unemployment, famine, drought); and organized crime (drug mafia, human smugglers, antiquities traffickers, corrupt officials, and others). Meanwhile, there are regional and international factors which are, at least partly, responsible for initiating as well as perpetuating the conflict in the country. Thus, the conflict in Afghanistan is a mixture of a number of complex and overlapping causes and motivations involving multiple local and foreign actors competing for influence and promoting their economic, political, ideological, and strategic interests.

With the passage of time, the conflict in Afghanistan became more and more complicated and attracted new actors having a wide variety of interests and priorities. Over the past few decades, Afghanistan gradually became the theater of several regional and international conflicts. Various rivalries are entwined at multiple levels and a number of permutations of power geopolitics are at play at regional and international levels such as India–Pakistan, Afghanistan–Pakistan, Iran–Pakistan, US–Iran, Iran–Saudi, China–India, Russia–US/NATO, China–US, US–Al-Qaeda, Sunni–Shia, and ISIS–Taliban. In addition, the country also became a haven for international militants and a hub for the global drug mafia and other transnational criminal groups and activities.

Although conventional Western public opinion sees the current conflict in Afghanistan as a struggle between the US/NATO and violent extremism, foreign interference and intervention has been a significant part of the war in the country.

As Newberg notes, the regional and international dimensions of the conflict in Afghanistan are of vital importance because “[No] matter how trenchant the local disputes that ignited and nurtured them; none could be sustained without active political and economic involvement from neighboring states, foreign donors, and non-state actors in the region and beyond” (2005, 211).

The list of interlinked issues and stakeholders, as well as the nature of their overlapping interests, is long and complicated. A host of various actors and a variety of factors are contributing to the continuation and prolongation of the conflict in Afghanistan. While some of these actors and factors initiated the decades-long conflict, others are exacerbating and perpetuating it. For example, Pakistan’s alleged support to the Afghan insurgents stems from the desire that it will bring Islamabad more influence in Afghanistan at the expense of its archrival, India. In addition, Pakistan, as well as Russia, Iran, and China, are against the US/NATO’s long-term/permanent military presence in Afghanistan. At the same time, victory in Afghanistan is important for the Taliban as it will mean the end of “foreign occupation” of their country, and the establishment of an Islamic system based on their own interpretation of the religion; the two main goals they have set for themselves. For the Taliban, it is a question of religion (creed), nationalism (identity), power (greed), need, grievances etc. However, it is primarily a geostrategic issue for Pakistan as well as Iran, Russia, and China. Therefore, the interests of these actors overlap here. On the other hand, India supports the anti-Taliban camp in Afghanistan, also to expand its regional influence as part of its competition with Pakistan. The same applies to the interests of other countries who have aligned their goals with the aims and objectives of other actors, mainly local.

The situation in Afghanistan became more complicated as the number of actors directly and/or indirectly associated with the conflict increased. Applying the “hybrid framework” of conflict I have proposed to describe and analyze intra-state wars helps understand and resolve a conflict in a comprehensive manner.

The conflict in Afghanistan has become so complex, and violence so entrenched, that it needs a comprehensive and inclusive resolution mechanism at various levels. The biggest obstacles in the region are the long-standing rivalries and lack of mutual trust among the state actors. Only a sincere multilateral and coordinated approach among regional countries can tackle the threats posed by non-state actors and ensure peace and stability in the region. The past few decades have proved that none of the foreign state actors, including the US, has been able to single-handedly impose its design and preferred “solution” in Afghanistan. But nearly all of them have acquired the capacity to perpetuate violence and create disruptions and hurdles for peace in Afghanistan.

Any major change in the makeup of Afghanistan’s government after the departure of US/NATO forces from the country is likely to set off a renewed bout of competition

between various regional actors, mainly for more influence in the country. Given the history of conflict in Afghanistan, the peace process can be taken in the wrong direction by one or more of the local or foreign actors. Therefore, a multidimensional and multilateral approach, involving key local, regional, and international players, is needed to coordinate efforts for peace, and it is such an approach that will deter and prevent spoilers (Azami 2019a).

Given the complexity of the conflict in Afghanistan, any resolution needs to identify its main actors and factors and understand the hybrid nature of various interests and motivations that sustain it. Any peace effort also needs to incentivize peace and cooperation for all or most actors and develop a package of negative consequences as part of a deterrence mechanism. In my opinion, the conflict in Afghanistan has three major dimensions (international, regional, and local), all of which are linked in more than one way. The motivations of major actors usually overlap, and the interests of many of them are connected. It is precisely this hybridity of motivations and interests and, in some cases, the symbiotic relationship between various actors, which is making the conflict in Afghanistan increasingly challenging and vexing.

International Dynamics of the Afghan Conflict

In Afghanistan, a major problem has been primarily a centuries-old international rivalry which started in the form of the “Great Game,” a power struggle between the British and Russian empires in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Hopkirk 1990; Reshtia 1990). Ever since, the emerging powers have been tussling with each other for influence and control over this resource-rich and strategically important part of the world. This competition for power and influence was evident in the three Anglo-Afghan wars in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (1839–1842, 1878–1880, and 1919), and again after the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the subsequent resistance by the Afghan Mujahideen backed by the US and the rest of the West (Kakar 2015). In fact, the geopolitical struggle for dominance and influence, with Afghanistan as the chosen battleground, never ended; the so-called “Great Game” took new forms with the addition of new actors keen to impose their will and to promote their political, strategic, and economic interests in Afghanistan and the wider region (Azami 2017).

As a result of this superpowers’ rivalry, Afghanistan was dismembered. Consistent foreign interference in Afghanistan and the Anglo-Afghan wars made Afghanistan weaker, both economically and militarily, and the British Empire forced the Afghan King, Amir Abdur Rahman Khan, in 1893 to give up a big chunk of his country’s territory, which was made part of British India. The Durand Line, named after the British

administrator, Sir Mortimer Durand, cuts through the Pashtun people's homeland and ignores tribal, ethnic, or cultural realities (Yousaf and Adkin 2001, 24; Reshtia 1990; Kakar 2011). That historical Afghan territory became part of Pakistan when the British left the Indian subcontinent in 1947.

Therefore, in addition to the "Great Game," colonial legacies in the region created new tensions and hostilities. On the other hand, the Cold War rivalry and geostrategic competition between the US and USSR also contributed to making Afghanistan once again a major theater of a hot war. The 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan brought new and more powerful actors to the country. In order to counter communism and the threat posed by the Soviet Union, the American Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) became close partners as the US launched the biggest covert military aid program to help the anticommunist guerrillas in Afghanistan. Zbigniew Brzezinski, the National Security Advisor in Jimmy Carter's administration, and many other key US officials saw this as a golden opportunity to "make the Russians bleed." In his State of the Union speech on January 21, 1980, the US President, Jimmy Carter, asserted:

The destruction of the independence of Afghanistan government and the occupation by the Soviet Union has altered the strategic situation in that part of the world in a very ominous fashion. It has brought the Soviet Union within striking distance of the Indian Ocean and even the Persian Gulf. It has eliminated a buffer between the Soviet Union and Pakistan, and presented a new threat to Iran. These two countries are now far more vulnerable to Soviet political intimidation. If that intimidation were to prove effective, the Soviet Union might well control an area of vital strategic and economic significance to the survival of Western Europe, the Far East and ultimately the United States. It is clear that the entire subcontinent of Asia and especially Pakistan is threatened (Carter 1981, 165).

The US's Afghan policy became more aggressive with the change of the administration in the White House. In April 1984, President Reagan signed National Security Decision Directive 166, which sought to expel Soviet forces from Afghanistan "by all means available" (Ahmad and Barnett 1988). The Christian West led by the US, along with communist China, Buddhist Japan, Jewish Israel, and Muslim Arabs, Pakistanis, and Iranians, and many others joined hands to fight the USSR in Afghanistan. The anti-Soviet resistance in Afghanistan in the 1980s not only resulted in an unlikely alliance of followers of different religions such as Islam, Christianity, Judaism, and Buddhism, it also resulted in an unusual coalition of political ideologies such as capitalism and

Maoism to fight their mutual enemy, the Soviet Union, albeit in the killing fields of Afghanistan (Coll 2004, 66).

The “Great Game” continued even after the departure of the Red Army from Afghanistan with the addition of new actors and factors. The 2001 US-led invasion of Afghanistan after the 9/11 attacks dramatically changed the strategic landscape of Afghanistan and the surrounding region. What followed was a renewed competition among regional and global powers vying to outdo each other in a new “Great Game” (Azami 2017).

Militancy and the US-led War on Terror

In addition to the dozens of state actors, a number of non-state actors, especially militants, have also been heavily involved in the conflict in Afghanistan. The anti-Soviet war in Afghanistan in the 1980s attracted tens of thousands of fighters from a number of Muslim lands stretching from North Africa to the Middle East and South Asia to East Asia. It is estimated that, in the decade between 1982 and 1992, some 35,000 volunteers from 43 Muslim countries went to Pakistan and Afghanistan to participate in the fight against the Red Army in Afghanistan and the regime it supported in Kabul (Rashid 2010, 130).

The influx of foreign fighters further complicated the conflict in the country and left a long-lasting negative impact on Afghan society. Arab NGOs and state-funded humanitarian organizations introduced and propagated ideologies and creeds such as Wahhabism and Salafism among the predominantly Sunni-Hanafi Afghans. As Milton Bearden, the former CIA station chief in Pakistan, has said, “[The] idea that the Afghans somehow needed fighters from outside their culture was deeply flawed and ignored basic historical and cultural facts” (Marwat and Toru 2005, 139).

Although the Arabs did not play a decisive role in the Afghan resistance, they were more interested in gaining military training and experience. However, their presence was mostly felt in terms of finances, as many of them were wealthy and could financially help local commanders inside Afghanistan as well as Afghan refugees and the Mujahideen leadership based in Pakistan. New terms, such as “Afghan Arabs” and “Arab Afghans” were coined to describe volunteer fighters from the Arab world. The Saudi-born millionaire and founder of the Al-Qaeda network, Osama bin Laden, was one of those Arab fighters who went to Pakistan and Afghanistan in the early 1980s and took part in recruiting and financing foreign fighters. Later on, Islamist activists and fighters (now usually called jihadists by politicians, popular literature, and the media) from China’s Xinjiang, Chechen separatists from Russia, members of the Islamic Movement of

Uzbekistan (IMU), Sunni Muslims from Iran (who felt intimidated in Shia dominated Iran), Pakistani militants, and many others from various parts of the world established safe havens in Afghanistan.

The establishment of the Caliphate by the so-called Islamic State group (ISIS) in 2014 and its rapid expansion to Afghanistan made the situation even more complicated (Azami 2016, 2017). ISIS (also known as ISIL), announced the creation of its Khorasan Province branch (ISKP) in January 2015 and changed the militant landscape in Afghanistan and the wider region (Azami 2016, 2019). Although the emergence of ISIS posed a serious challenge to the supremacy of the Taliban in Afghanistan (Azami 2015b, 2016), it encouraged Iran, China, and Russia, who were fearful of ISIS expansion, to review their policies and open dialogue with the Taliban (Azami 2016, 2017).

The US militarily intervened in Afghanistan in early October 2001, less than a month after the 9/11 attacks on New York and Washington, DC. The US blamed Al-Qaeda for the attacks, whose leadership had been based in the Taliban-controlled areas of Afghanistan. Afghanistan was subsequently turned into the theater of a new and different type of conflict. The war in Afghanistan turned out to be the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO) biggest military mission since its creation in 1949, and eventually became the longest war in the US's history. The number of foreign forces fighting in Afghanistan gradually increased, reaching its peak in 2010 with around one hundred thousand American troops and around fifty thousand soldiers from other members of the US-led military coalition, including the UK, Germany, and France.

China and Its Strategic and Economic Interests

As a security and economic zone important to an increasingly ambitious and assertive China, Afghanistan is of vital strategic interest to Beijing in securing its borders, ensuring access to natural resources, and to counter American and Indian influence in the region. Meanwhile, Pakistan views China as its security patron and a high-value guarantor against its archrival, India. In recent years, one of the primary concerns of Beijing has been the presence of ethnic Uighur Muslim separatists from China's restless western Xinjiang region, which shares a border with Afghanistan and Pakistan. It is also concerned about the spread of Islamist militancy into Xinjiang from Afghanistan and Pakistan (Haider 2005). Uighur militants formed the East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM) in 1989, the same year when the Soviet forces were forced to leave Afghanistan. In 2000, the group's name was changed to the Turkistan Islamic Party (TIP), which aims to counter what it sees as Beijing's repressive policies in their territories.

On the other hand, China maintained good relations with the Afghan Taliban group which emerged in 1994 in Kandahar, in southern Afghanistan. According to the former Taliban ambassador to Islamabad, the Chinese ambassador to Pakistan became the first non-Muslim ambassador from a non-Muslim country to travel to Kandahar to meet the Taliban leader, Mullah Mohammad Omar, who “assured him that Afghanistan never had any interest or wish to interfere in China’s domestic issues” (Zaeef 2010, 135).

Although Beijing declared support for the US-led military intervention in Afghanistan and the US-led war against Al-Qaeda and its affiliates following the 9/11 attacks, the permanent or long-term presence of US/NATO forces in its neighborhood has been a cause for concern for Chinese strategic thinkers and policymakers. China, which shares a short stretch of border with Afghanistan in the country’s mountainous northeastern Wakhan corridor, is suspicious of the long-term strategic goals of the US and its allies. Some members of the Chinese military see “Afghanistan as a central link in a C-shaped land encirclement of China by the US” (Le, Li, and Inkster 2011, 224).

As an important regional player, Beijing has “friendly relations” with the Afghan government. Meanwhile, it has maintained contacts with the Afghan Taliban, who have sent several delegations to China over the past decade. Chinese officials acknowledged their contacts with the Taliban, saying they want to play a supportive role in the Afghan Peace Process (Gandhara, RFE/RL 2015; Deutsche Welle 2015). Resource-hungry China is one of the first countries to have signed economic agreements to invest billions of dollars in Afghanistan’s mineral wealth, including copper and oil.

Russia, from “Great Game” to a New “Cold War” with the West

Russia’s involvement in Afghanistan goes back to the nineteenth century, when it was engaged in “the Great Game” with the British Empire. However, Russia’s current Afghan policy is founded on a more recent episode, that is, the Soviet Union’s invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 and its traumatic experience, commonly called as “the Afghan Syndrome” (Sarin and Dvoretzky 1993). In addition, the Russian officials’ analysis is also partly based on the experience of the USSR and the post-Soviet Russia in its Republics of Chechnya, Dagestan, and Ingushetia where Islamist separatist movements had been active for many years following the fall of USSR.

The Taliban regime was the only government in the world that had officially recognized the government of the Chechen separatists. Several Chechens had sought refuge in Afghanistan during Taliban rule (1996–2001). On the other hand, Russia was a principal supporter of Ahmad Shah Masoud, the key military commander of the anti-Taliban coalition of Afghan factional leaders generally called as the “Northern Alliance”

in the 1990s. Moscow continues to maintain links with leaders of the former “Northern Alliance” and, if needed, could resume arming its Afghan allies to try to shape events in Afghanistan and regain influence, especially in Central Asia, which it considers as its sphere of influence.

Like China, Russia also supported the US-led intervention in Afghanistan in 2001. As Oksana says, “Russia was often interpreted as hoping to see the [NATO] Alliance tied down in Afghanistan for years, and thus unable to intervene in regions of greater importance to Russia” (Antonenko 2011, 206). However, a few years later, tensions between the US/NATO and Russia started having a negative impact on the situation in Afghanistan. In addition to these interests, Moscow aspires to soft dominance in the former Soviet territories in Central Asia, and has been anxious about the expansion of militancy, narcotics, and the long-term presence of US/NATO forces in Afghanistan.

In 2016, Zamir Kabulov, President Putin’s special envoy to Afghanistan, publicly stated that “Russia will never tolerate” the long-term military presence of US and NATO forces in Afghanistan (Anadolu Agency 2016). The other three countries in the region that oppose a permanent/long-term US/NATO military deployment in Afghanistan are Moscow’s regional allies, such as Iran, China, and Pakistan. From 2016 onwards, Russia enhanced its role and influence in Afghanistan, which included the expansion of ties with its former enemy, the Afghan Taliban group. Moscow’s increasingly assertive stance in Afghanistan is largely designed to irritate the US and NATO and is also linked to US–Russian tensions in other parts of the world, especially in Ukraine and Syria (Azami 2018b; Savage, Schmitt, and Schwirtz 2020).

Regional Dynamics of the Afghan Conflict

In addition to these international rivalries, Afghanistan has also been a major theater for a number of regional conflicts and geostrategic and geoeconomic contests. Rather than viewing Afghanistan as a roundabout for regional trade and transnational commerce, as well as a hub of mutual cooperation, several regional countries have exported their own rivalries to the country. Regional rivals chose to fight in Afghanistan for three main reasons—a) to harm each other (inside Afghanistan or by using Afghan territory); b) to increase their own influence in a strategically located country, mostly at the expense of their rivals; and c) to harm Afghanistan itself and keep it weak and fragile in order to achieve their political, economic, and geostrategic objectives. In the next few pages, I outline some of the regional rivalries that have contributed to the perpetuation and prolongation of the conflict in Afghanistan.

Afghanistan-Pakistan Tensions

Afghanistan and Pakistan are connected by various ties, including historical, cultural, linguistic, religious, and economic ones. However, relations between the two neighbors have been tense since the creation of Pakistan in 1947, mainly “over the right of self-determination of the people of Afghan origin in the territories which had been forcibly separated by Britain in the course of the 19th century” (Reshtia 1990, 424; Ghaus 1988). There has not been any formal ratification by Kabul, nor a formal agreement on the so called “Durand Line” between Afghanistan and Pakistan since 1947. The “Durand Line” divides ethnic Pashtuns, who comprise the biggest ethnic group in Afghanistan, and the second biggest in Pakistan. Paradoxically, Afghanistan’s relations have traditionally remained warm with Pakistan’s archrival, India. Thus, the seeds of tension sown more than a century and a quarter ago still haunt the region (Azami 2014).

Pakistan’s support for the guerrilla movement of Afghan Islamists from the 1970s onwards was both “an expression of this long-standing border dispute between Pakistan and Afghanistan” and designed “to harass the Kabul government” (Ahmad and Barnett 1988). Pakistan’s strategy of deploying religion as a foreign policy tool became more aggressive after the Afghan President, Mohammad Daoud Khan (r. 1973–1978), started pursuing a more nationalist and secular approach. Daoud raised the issue of Pashtunistan, an autonomous or semiautonomous entity comprising Pashtun-inhabited areas of Pakistan, and declared support for the rights of the Pashtuns and Baloch ethnic groups in Pakistan (Hussain 2005; Ghaus 1988).

In 1974, Pakistani Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto tasked his close confidante, General Naseerullah Babar, to “organise the nascent Afghan resistance” in order “to convey a message to Sardar Da[o]ud” (Amin 2001). As Weinbaum says, Pakistan welcomed the Afghan Islamists, who wanted to overthrow President Daoud’s regime in Kabul, and gave them protection and military training (Weinbaum 1994, 4–5). Following the communist coup in Afghanistan in 1978, and the Soviet invasion of the country the following year, “these assets proved very valuable” for Pakistan (Abbas 2007). They rose to prominence and became leaders of the Afghan Jihad (resistance) against the communist regime in Kabul and its Soviet ally in the 1980s.

The defeat of the Soviet Union in 1989 and the fall of the regime in Kabul in 1992 brought Pakistan closer to achieving several of its strategic objectives in Afghanistan and the wider region. Shortly before his death in 1988, Pakistani military dictator, General Zia-ul-Haq, stated that his goal had been “to destroy the Communist infrastructure, install a client regime, and bring about a ‘strategic alignment’ in South Asia.” In an interview with the US scholar, Selig Harrison, he had declared that:

We have earned the right to have a friendly regime there [Afghanistan]. We took risks as a frontline state, and we won't permit it to be like it was before, with Indian and Soviet influence there and claim on our territory. It will be a real Islamic state, part of a Pan-Islamic revival that will one day win over the Muslims in the Soviet Union. (Cordovez and Harrison 1995, 92)

Pakistan was a key player in the factional war in Afghanistan in the 1990s and became a major supporter of the Taliban Movement. Pakistan was also the first, and one of only three countries (along with Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates) that officially recognized the Taliban government (1996–2001) (Azami 2013a). Following the fall of the Taliban government, many Taliban leaders migrated to Pakistan and, after a brief lull, reorganized themselves and launched an insurgency in Afghanistan to fight against the new Afghan government and its foreign allies (BBC 2012; Boone 2015; Council on Foreign Relations 2016).

India–Pakistan Rivalry

Since their inception in 1947, India and Pakistan have been engaged in a strategic competition for power and influence in Afghanistan. India, along with the Soviet Union, supported Afghanistan's position on the issue of Pashtunistan. On the other hand, Pakistan was India's archenemy, and was getting closer to the United States, which not only gave it financial support, but was also committed to a military alliance with Islamabad (Newell 1974, 87).

India also supported the Soviet-backed regime in Kabul (1978–1992), partly due to its close relations with the Soviet Union, and partly due to its rivalry with Pakistan. However, Pakistan's support for Afghan Islamists and the Mujahideen groups increased Islamabad's influence in the country, especially after the withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan in 1989, and the fall of the communist regime in Kabul in 1992. From the mid-1990s, while the Taliban had a symbiotic relationship with Pakistan, India, along with Russia and Iran, politically and militarily supported the anti-Taliban "Northern Alliance."

Following the fall of the Taliban regime, most of the "Northern Alliance" leaders took prominent positions in the new government in Kabul, paving the way for increased Indian influence, mostly at the expense of Pakistan. Pakistani officials repeatedly expressed concerns over the increased Indian presence in Afghanistan and accused Delhi of using the Afghan territory to destabilize Pakistan. Islamabad also feared a possible Afghan–Indian alliance which might result in two-front wars on its Eastern and Western borders (Mukhopadhyay 2010; Chaudhuri and Shende 2020).

Traditionally, Pakistan has also linked the issue of Afghanistan with its rivalry with India, and Islamabad's dispute with Delhi over Jammu and Kashmir. General Pervez Musharraf, Pakistan's president and army chief (r. 1999–2008), publicly justified his country's policy of trying to weaken the government of the then Afghan President, Hamid Karzai, as “countering” the increasing Indian influence in Afghanistan. He added that, “Pakistan had its own proxies, India had its proxies” (Boone 2015). Meanwhile, India wants to ensure that a militantly Islamist and Pakistani client regime with a close relationship with the “military-jihadi nexus” in Pakistan does not return to Kabul. The India–Pakistan rivalry, and its proxy fighting, has been a major factor in the ongoing instability in Afghanistan, highlighting an overlapping of the interests and motivations of various actors. Pakistan seemingly supports the Afghan Taliban for a variety of reasons, including: a) countering India's influence in Afghanistan while enhancing its own regional clout; b) keeping the Afghan government under pressure and fragile for strategic reasons; and c) remaining relevant on the global stage and to get concessions from members of the international community, especially the countries involved in Afghanistan. Meanwhile, the Taliban group uses regional support to achieve its goals of expelling foreign forces that support the Afghan government, with the ultimate aim of capturing the state. On the other hand, India supports the Afghan government and other anti-Taliban and anti-Pakistan factions (that are mostly part of the state) because of several converging interests and goals.

Iran's Quest for Regional Dominance

Iran has been another major player in Afghan affairs. It actively supported the anti-Soviet war and provided training and sanctuary to the Afghan Mujahideen in the 1980s. During the factional fighting in Kabul in the 1990s, Iran conducted a bitter proxy war in Afghanistan by supporting the alliance that included its coreligionists, Hazaras, largely against the coalition of Afghan factions, mainly supported by Pakistan and the Saudis. Following the emergence of the Taliban, Iran's involvement in Afghanistan and its competition with Pakistan and Saudi Arabia over influence in Kabul further intensified. While Islamabad and Riyadh supported the Taliban, Tehran, along with Moscow and Delhi, provided money and weapons to the anti-Taliban groups commonly known as the “Northern Alliance.”

After the 9/11 attacks, Iran and its Afghan allies collaborated with the US to overthrow the Taliban regime and “helped” forge a new government in Kabul in late 2001. However, the Bush administration soon rebuffed Iran's overtures by calling it a state sponsor of terrorism and naming it part of the “Axis of Evil” along with North

Korea and Libya. As US–Iran tensions increased, Tehran established links with its former enemy, the Afghan Taliban, to put pressure on the US and NATO in Afghanistan.

Traditionally, Iran's policy toward Afghanistan has been based on its geostrategic interests. It aims to expand its political, economic, and cultural influence, and become a regional hegemon. Forging relations with a variety of players in Afghanistan has been part of Iran's strategy to influence events in Afghanistan and ensure its clout in both peacetime and wartime. Relations with various Afghan factions and individuals are also aimed at countering the influence of its regional rivals, namely Saudi Arabia and Pakistan. In addition, Tehran and Riyadh have also used Afghanistan as part of their competition for leadership of the Islamic world (Azami 2015a).

On the other hand, tensions among various countries in the Gulf, especially the Saudi–Iran rivalry, have also been negatively impacting the situation in Afghanistan. Although Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) supported the Afghan Taliban in the 1990s, they both now back the Afghan government led by Ashraf Ghani. President Ghani has spoken strongly in support of the Saudi-led intervention in Yemen, which was undertaken partly to check Iran's regional ambitions. The two Gulf monarchies also view with alarm the growth in Taliban's ties with their main regional rivals, i.e., Qatar and Iran (Azami 2013b, 2017; Ariana News 2015).

Iran openly opposes the presence of US-led foreign forces in Afghanistan. As international pressure increased on Iran due to its nuclear program, Tehran expanded its ties with Afghan insurgents. Since 2009, US and Afghan officials have repeatedly accused Iran of providing training, and financial and logistical support to the Afghan Taliban (Interviews with Afghan officials in Kabul and Kandahar, Nov. 2013; Tisdall 2010). The emergence of the Islamic State group (ISIS) in Afghanistan prompted Iran to enhance its role in Afghan affairs even further. Having a shared interest in countering ISIS, Iran and the Afghan Taliban expanded their cooperation against their new common enemy, the local branch of ISIS known as the Khorasan Province (ISKP) (Azami 2019b, 2017, 2016).

Iran's links with the Afghan Taliban are tactical, not strategic and ideological. The relationship serves the interests of both actors. The Taliban get support from another regional actor, and an important neighbor of Afghanistan, while Iran gains more influence as well as extra tools and means to prevent the expansion of ISIS and put pressure on both the US/NATO and the Afghan government. On the other hand, the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) organized the Fatemiyoun Brigade, a militia force of the Afghan Shias to fight on the side of the Assad regime in Syria. Composed primarily of the ethnic Hazara community in Iran and Afghanistan, the Fatemiyoun Brigade has been fighting as an Iranian proxy since 2013, and numbers in the tens of thousands (Jamal 2019). Although the Fatemiyoun Brigade has been mainly

focused on the Syrian front, there are concerns that Tehran might use it in some ways in Afghanistan too.

Although Iran, like many other regional state actors, insists that a stable and peaceful Afghanistan is in its interest, several Afghan officials have accused Iran of keeping Afghanistan unstable in order to prevent the latter from completing certain major projects seen contrary to Tehran's interests (Interviews with Afghan officials in Herat and Kabul, April 2017). Such projects are said to have included the planned Turkmenistan–Afghanistan–Pakistan–India (TAPI) gas pipeline that bypasses Iran and undermines the proposed Iran–Pakistan–India (IPI) pipeline. The other major development that concerns Iran is Afghanistan's utilization of its water flowing to Iran. In a major speech in 2017, the Iranian President, Hassan Rouhani, expressed concerns about the construction of dams in Afghanistan, adding that Iran "couldn't remain indifferent" to the construction of such dams in the south and north of Afghanistan (BBC Persian 2017). The continuation of conflict and instability in Afghanistan has been among the main hurdles to realizing such projects.

Afghanistan and Its Central Asian Neighbors

The collapse of the Soviet Union resulted in the emergence of several countries as Afghanistan's Central Asian neighbors. Afghanistan shares its northern border with three such countries: Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan. Afghanistan also shares various ethnic groups with the adjacent countries in Central Asia, such as Tajiks, Uzbeks, and Turkmens. During the internal war between the Taliban and the "Northern Alliance" in the 1990s, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan provided significant support to anti-Taliban factions and hosted some of their leaders and commanders. Those ties are still largely intact and make them influential actors in the affairs of Afghanistan.

Although a number of Central Asian militants aiming to establish an Islamic system in their newly independent countries were already living in Afghanistan, they expanded their activities and sanctuaries during the Taliban rule (1996–2001). After the fall of the Taliban regime, most of the Central Asian militants fled to Pakistan and, after a brief interval, started fighting in Afghanistan against the Afghan government and its international backers (Azami 2010). Thus, both Central Asian governments and militant groups, including the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) and Islamic Jihad Union (IJU), became actors in the Afghan conflict, supporting and allying with local actors and, in the meantime, pursuing their own agendas.

Like Iran, Central Asian states do not have any border dispute with Afghanistan, but the issue of access to water flowing from Afghanistan remains a potential cause of

tension with Central Asian neighbors, as well as with Iran and Pakistan. Their experts and officials have expressed concerns that the future development of irrigation and agriculture in Afghanistan will negatively impact the water-intensive agriculture sectors in these countries, which are already facing water shortage.

Local Dynamics of the Afghan Conflict

There are also a number of local factors that contribute to the continuation of conflict in Afghanistan. Organized crime (including drug cartels, human smugglers, and antiquities traffickers), militant groups, warlords, private militia groups, corrupt government officials, and many other local actors usually benefit, both politically and financially, from the conflict. However, it is mainly the proxy role of local actors, who enjoy patronage from abroad, which has generally paved the ground for foreign interference. This symbiotic relationship between local and foreign actors is one of the biggest hurdles in resolving civil wars.

Although external actors have had a key role in the initiation of the conflict in Afghanistan, the role of local actors has been a determining factor in the perpetuation of the war. The conflict in Afghanistan can be summed up in three phrases; a) interference (by foreign actors); b) accepting interference (by local actors in the shape of support and resources from abroad); and c) seeking interference (by local actors to find foreign patrons and get their support). By pursuing their narrow interests, local actors have usually contributed to both the initiation and the prolongation of the conflict. Thus, while the majority of public has been the victim of the ongoing war, a number of Afghans, both as individuals and groups and factions, have become active actors in running the war machinery. In the next few pages, I discuss the role of local actors, and the importance of local dynamics in the conflict in Afghanistan.

Afghanistan is a multiethnic country with Pashtuns being the largest ethnic group, followed by Tajiks, Hazaras, Uzbeks, and others. It was primarily the leadership of the Pashtun ethnic group that founded the modern state of Afghanistan in the mid-eighteenth century. After being elected as the king in a tribal Jirga in Kandahar in 1747, Ahmad Shah Durrani expanded his writ and brought all of today's Afghanistan and many parts of neighboring countries under his control (Fofalzayi 1980, 36–41; Al-Husaini 2007, 59; and Khaled-Barakzai 2017, 161). The people in what is left of his "Durrani Empire" have been living together for centuries. Therefore, despite tensions and occasional violence, "the Afghans do have a sense of nationhood" and "shared history" (Siddique 2012, 2).

Historically, Pashtuns enjoyed political and military dominance in Afghanistan until the Soviet invasion in 1979. The war broke down the social and economic fabric of society, and resulted in the emergence of new actors. Even the Soviet-backed, ideologically communist Peoples Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA), which took power in a coup in 1978, could not remain immune from social fractures and ethnic tensions (Kakar 2015). The Mujahideen factions fighting the Soviets in the 1980s were mostly ethnically mixed, except the Shia Hazara groups based in Iran which had almost exclusively Hazara members. However, some of the Mujahideen leaders and commanders, as well as officials of the Soviet-backed regime in Kabul, occasionally exploited the ethnic factor mainly as a tool of public mobilization and the expansion of their power base. As Schetter says, ethnicity is not the cause of the conflict, but as a consequence of political and military mobilization (Schetter 2001), ethnic tensions created a sense of alienation in certain communities, making the conflict in Afghanistan more complicated and protracted. The internal war made patron-age politics more common, with foreign backers supporting various militia commanders belonging to different ethnic groups.

In the meantime, other factors such as tribal, regional, and subregional factors were also used for the same purpose. As Afghan society is also divided into tribes, subtribes, clans, and families, loyalties have usually shifted from and among the central government, tribal chiefs, political leaders, clans, families, and groups of shared ethnicity. At times, tribes and subtribes have been at odds with each other, competing for power and prestige. Therefore, in the absence of state control and functioning institutions, people generally sought the help of their immediate family, villagers, and clan or tribe members.

Many Western scholars and politicians have reduced the war in Afghanistan to an ethnic conflict. Some even saw attempts to ensure that a post-Taliban Afghanistan remains as a unified political entity, with a national government, as futile. Commentators like John Griffiths assumed that trying to bring together “such volatile and contentious elements” was doomed to fail, and even suggested that the long-term solution of Afghanistan may be a break up” (Griffiths 2001, 87).

Although ideology, proxy warfare, and greed, as well as a host of other factors were reduced to the communal aspect of factional leaders by a number of foreign scholars and politicians, ethnicity as a military-political peg remained limited in the overall turmoil in Afghanistan. Like almost all the countries in the region, Afghanistan’s population consists of various ethnic groups. However, as opposed to most other countries in the region, Afghanistan never had a separatist or secessionist movement. As Dorronsoro notes, “the employment of the category of ‘ethnic warfare’ to describe the Afghan conflict is far from being neutral, and is in itself an ideological position” (Dorronsoro 2005, 15).

The post-Taliban insurgency in Afghanistan has been driven by a mixture of factors and motivations, including nationalism and ideology. As the Afghans have a long history of resistance against foreign invaders, the Taliban skillfully used this historical legacy and tradition against the US-led invasion and the presence of foreign troops in the country. By calling it an “occupation of the motherland by an alien invader,” the insurgents motivated people to wage armed jihad or holy war to “regain independence” and “save Islam.” As my interviews with several Taliban members and their supporters revealed, a number of fighters believe that, just like their forefathers in the past, it is their nationalistic and Islamic duty too to fight against “the new invader” (Interviews with Taliban members and their supporters in Afghanistan and Qatar, April 2017, June 2013, and February 2020). A 2012 classified NATO report based on the interrogations of thousands of detainees also portrayed the Taliban fighters as being motivated by both nationalism and religion (ISAF 2012).

The Taliban members usually portray themselves as nationalist actors and freedom fighters. They see themselves as the victims of foreign aggression and, therefore, invoke a mixture of nationalist and Islamic ideals. The statements issued by the group generally insist on upholding the right to self-defense and self-determination, and equate their own war with the earlier resistance of the Afghans against the invasions by the Soviet Union and the British Empire (Taliban Statement 2013). They also assert that their war is entirely Afghan-centric and that the group has not been involved in any attacks outside the territory of Afghanistan (Azami 2016, 2017).

On the other hand, grievances and relative deprivation (frustration of economic and/or political needs) have become some of the other factors covered by the garb of nationalistic and Islamic sentiments. Injustice, alienation, discrimination, and violation of culture and traditions have turned many Afghans away from the government in Kabul and its foreign allies. Revenge (*Badal*) for harm caused, and the breach of honor (Nang/Namus) are important pillars of local culture. Therefore, protecting honor, restituting its breach, and avenging injustices (ranging from house searches, insults, and incarcerations, to the killing of civilians in military operations) caused to individuals and local communities are valid enough reasons for a number of people to take up arms.

Crime, Corruption, and Narcotics

There is a lot of criminality around various aspects of the ongoing conflict in Afghanistan. The drug production in Afghanistan links a number of local, regional (including Pakistani, Iranian, Turkish, Gulf, South Asian, Central Asian, and Russian), and other international cartels (such as European drug traffickers, including Italy’s mafia) (BBC

News 2013; Goodhand 2000). Many corrupt government officials in Afghanistan and the neighboring countries also benefit from various criminal activities, including the drug trade, illegal mining and logging, as well as digging for ancient artifacts (Ariana TV 2013). These activities make them partners in crime and provide them financial incentives for the continuation of the conflict.

The looting of antiquities and smuggling of ancient artifacts usually go hand-in-hand with lawlessness and warfare. As Wendle says, “the war has been a boon for both looters and smugglers” and the looting of Afghanistan’s archeological and cultural sites scattered throughout its territory has become one of the most profitable activities for organized crime groups (Wendle 2013). “Blood Antiquities” is a multibillion-dollar trade and involves both local and international criminal groups (Alderman 2012). Tens of thousands of ancient artifacts, worth billions of dollars in the international markets, have been smuggled from Afghanistan during the ongoing conflict to regional markets as well as to Europe, the US, and East Asia.

While a number of Afghans were motivated by greed, many others were driven to conflict and illegal economic activities simply by need and desperation. The decades-long conflict has devastated the Afghan economy, with millions of people losing their livelihoods and living below the poverty line. During the course of my fieldwork, many people told me that they joined various warring factions because that was the only way to guarantee their survival and livelihood. As the state institutions collapsed, many people in various parts of the country associated themselves with different groups and warlords to protect themselves. For a number of people, even staying neutral was not an option as they feared that they will be harmed by local commanders or other predatory actors.

Thus, social mobilization is also driven by the need for material gain and remuneration, and this need is a major factor in the Afghan conflict. Various local actors, including officials in local or central government, find the “spoils” of war and chaos irresistible. These “war profiteers” and “conflict entrepreneurs” exploit local factors to maximize their wealth and power by contributing to lawlessness and exacerbating the disorder.

As Keen notes, war is not simply the breakdown of societies and economies; it is also the emergence of an alternative system of profit, power, and even protection (Keen 2000, 19–42). The reorganization of Afghan society brought about the evolution of a war economy partly based on natural resources available locally. As Kurtz suggests, self-service usually becomes an important part of politics in conflict and postconflict societies, where political agents use skills and power to ensure political survival and social and economic well-being (Kurtz 2001, 10).

When foreign funding decreased and greed increased, financial benefits from natural resources including drugs, timber, minerals, and precious stones (such as rubies,

lapis lazuli, and emerald), became major motivations for violence (Chipaux 1999 ; Rubin 2000; Tolo News 2013). Many factional leaders and local commanders/warlords became notorious manipulators of their political economies, thus enriching and empowering themselves and buying loyalties. Among the conflict resources, opium became the commodity of choice for many local actors, both as individuals and as groups and factions, with some benefitting from it through their direct involvement in the narcotics trade, and others through taxing the cultivation and trafficking of narcotics. The conflict situation also provided multiple opportunities for bureaucratic corruption, which weakened the state institutions even further (Goodhand 2000; Azami 2013, 2018a; Cornell 2006; Felbab-Brown 2009).

The exploitation of natural resources, and the drug economy, generally brought more incentives for the continuation of conflict, resulting in the alignment of interests and the overlapping of motivations of various local actors (including drug traders, corrupt officials, insurgents, warlords, and organized crime) and even created opportunities for cooperation among some of them. As an indication of the factor of greed, a number of local actors who were initially part of the ideological resistance (mainly during the anti-Soviet resistance), transformed into entrepreneurs and became engaged in accumulating wealth by all means possible. Many such local Afghan actors became allies of the US in 2001.

Although greed has been a local factor in the conflict in Afghanistan, the war in the country cannot be explained solely by the “greed theory,” whose proponents argue that such wars are usually caused by economic factors (Collier and Hoeffler 2001). Historical and empirical evidence shows that the conflict in Afghanistan was not initiated as a result of economic incentives. Therefore, the incentives for self-enrichment through exploitation of natural resources were neither the primary nor the sole cause of the Afghan conflict (Ballentine and Nitzschke 2003).

Similarly, it is not the drug production which caused the conflict; on the contrary, it was the conflict that paved the way for drug production. On the other hand, the approach applied by the Afghan government to eliminate the drug industry since the fall of the Taliban has not been effective (Azami 2013c). At the moment, many of the local actors do not have strong enough incentives for tackling the drug economy. Corrupt government officials are not interested in being deprived of the money they receive from poppy farmers as well as drug traders and traffickers. The warlords-cum-politicians and the insurgents will lose an important source of income in the absence of the drug economy. In addition, the drug mafia and organized criminal networks also see their interests served in the continuation of conflict and the weakness of state institutions which, in turn, create a suitable environment for the drug industry to survive and thrive. As the Taliban managed to ban poppy cultivation in 2000, the issue of drugs

(and the exploitation of other natural resources) should be made part of the Afghan peace process and the eventual political settlement with the Taliban. As most of the drug production takes place in areas outside the government's control, the Taliban are in a better position to prevent drug production, processing, and trafficking.

Conclusion

In a globalized world, conflicts are becoming more and more complex, involving a variety of state and non-state actors at local, regional, and international levels, as well as a combination of various overlapping and competing causes and motivations. The existing conflict models do not properly explain "civil wars," including the decades-long conflict in Afghanistan. These models either give too much importance to one factor of internal conflicts (such as greed, ethnicity/identity, and grievance) or fully or partially ignore other dynamics (such as foreign interference and transnational factors as well as certain local interests). On the other hand, the "hybrid framework" of conflict I have proposed takes into account the whole spectrum of factors and the role of all the local, regional, and international actors as well as their motivational overlap and the hybrid nature of interests.

The conflict in Afghanistan provides an excellent case study for the "hybrid framework," which demonstrates the wide range of contradictory and complementary characteristics of the conflict. The 1978 Communist coup and the Soviet invasion the following year made the country a major theater of several wars and rivalries involving dozens of local and foreign actors. The conflict in Afghanistan is neither just a terrorist/extremist problem, nor a confrontation between different ethnic groups, nor a struggle for the control of resources. Rather, it is the outcome of a combination of various factors inside Afghanistan and beyond including strategic, social, economic, religious, historical, proxy, and vested ones. Initially, the conflict in Afghanistan had been a regional and international one. However, it became more complicated over time with the involvement of more and more local, regional, and international actors with overlapping motivations and interests.

In my opinion, the conflict in Afghanistan has three major dimensions (international, regional, and local), all of which are linked in more than one way. The motivations of major actors usually overlap, and the interests of many of them are connected. It is precisely this hybridity of motivations and interests and, in some cases, the symbiotic relationship between various actors which is making the conflict in Afghanistan increasingly challenging and vexed.

The conflict in Afghanistan was created mainly by international factors in the first place. The Afghans fighting against the USSR were generally motivated by nationalistic ideals (of self-determination and independence), and ideology (the protection and preservation of their culture and religion). However, with the passage of time, international factors changed the internal dynamics, and resulted mostly in perpetuating the conflict. Foreign involvement and direct and/or indirect invasions of the country and the destruction it caused created an ideal environment for the drug industry and other criminal activities to thrive.

Unlike what popular perception suggests, drugs did not cause the conflict in Afghanistan; the conflict itself resulted in the collapse of state institutions and paved the way for drug trafficking and production on an industrial scale. At the expense of state weakness and/or absence, a variety of local actors emerged who used drugs and other natural resources to find the much-needed cash to wage their wars and increase their power and prestige. In this case, the interests of the insurgents and the drug traders overlap, because bad governance and weak state institutions serve the goals of both the insurgents and the drug traders, as well as organized crime and corrupt officials. However, illegal economic activities soon became an important factor in sustaining the local warring factions and prolonging the conflict.

In a country where the economic infrastructure was destroyed by perpetual conflict, the struggle for the control of scarce resources at times resulted in intra- and interethnic/tribal tensions. Thus, the conflict also produced “conflict entrepreneurs” and “war profiteers” who used ethnicity, regionalism, and other issues to maintain or enhance power and mobilize people under their leadership. As a result, a wide range of factors including ideological, proxy, nationalistic, criminal, and strategic ones, transformed the Afghan polity and resulted in a complex conflict situation.

Therefore, any resolution needs to identify the main actors and factors of the conflict and understand the hybrid nature of various interests and motivations that sustains it. Any peace effort also needs to incentivize peace and cooperation and develop a package of negative consequences as part of a deterrence mechanism. Although the foreign factor in the war in Afghanistan is of paramount importance, the Afghan sides need to rise to the occasion and act in the greater national interest. Ending the war in Afghanistan is possible, but its resolution requires a sincerely multidimensional and multilateral approach.

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Some New Thoughts on Pakistan's Role in War and Peacemaking in Afghanistan

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Abstract

After its founding in 1947, Pakistan's relations with neighboring Afghanistan have seen four distinct phases. Although relations were tense during the first three decades due to bilateral differences and their affiliation with opposing camps in the Cold War, both broadly respected each other's sovereignty and relations were based on deterrence and were open to achieving lasting stability. Even pressures exerted on each other in the early 1970s were calibrated and aimed at gaining bargaining chips for negotiation. But Islamabad's policy toward Kabul changed radically and acquired a new quality altogether after it became a frontline Western ally in the war against Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in 1980s. Since then the Pakistani military establishment has pushed for establishing hegemony over Afghanistan under the garb of "strategic depth" by supporting armed proxies and subverting peace processes in the country. Pakistan, right from its inception, as a comparatively underdeveloped country had an army that was too big for its resources, but the problem was aggravated after the disintegration of the country in 1971. Following the example of Prussia after the Napoleonic wars, it was also looking for expansion. The concept of "strategic depth," ostensibly coined for militarily countering the big eastern neighbor India, is actually meant to hegemonize a smaller neighbor. Mujahideen created in the 1980s failed to effectively deliver the objectives of this Pakistani policy. It necessitated the creation of Project Taliban. Talibanization is the strategy to deconstruct / weaken Afghan / Pashtun historic national identity. The Taliban is the new instrument for achieving this "strategic depth." This approach has not changed in practice even after paradigm shifts in global and regional politics after the end of the Cold War, notwithstanding the loud denials in mere words.

The internationalization of the politico-military conflict in Afghanistan in 1980s was the climax of the Cold War spurred by great power competition and incessant interference by near and far neighbors. This was in remarkable contrast to Nepal, another country that emerged as a buffer state in South Asia. Beginning in the 1990s, bouts of sociopolitical instability in Nepal were allowed to play out internally taking the country from a conservative monarchy to one ruled by the most radical communist party that eventually turned into a multiparty democracy. Certainly, a different geostrategic location and neighborhood apart from the internal sociohistorical dynamics made all the difference between the two.

By sending the Red Army to Afghanistan in December 1979, the erstwhile Soviet Union overtly and irreversibly escalated the conflict, providing an opportunity to the United States-led Western powers, who had already launched a covert operation to overthrow the leftist regime in Afghanistan, and to “Vietnamize” the conflict there. Bleeding and defeating the Soviet Union was the main objective of the war launched by the Western powers and their allies in Muslim countries such as Pakistan, in the name of jihad. But regional players like Pakistan and Iran had their own “national agendas” within the framework of the grand Western strategy. This is what made the return of peace to Afghanistan so difficult even after the withdrawal of the Soviet forces in February 1989. It was not the only reason, but it was definitely one of the most important reasons which has not been fully recognized and analyzed because the winning side was not ready to take responsibility for the death and destruction created by this strategy.

This essay will make a humble effort to look at the inception and evolution of Pakistan’s Afghan policy, which remains more or less constant despite paradigm shifts in global politics and considerable variations in regional geopolitics during the past four decades. Normalizing instability in Afghanistan has been both the purpose and justification of this policy, ultimately aimed at establishing hegemony over Afghanistan. So, an objective analysis of the policy is very relevant for understanding the factors behind instability and chaos in Afghanistan after the withdrawal of the Red Army in 1989.

Understanding Pakistan’s Afghan Policy

From 1947 to 2020, the Pak–Afghan relationship has passed through four main stages. The first stage, that started in 1947 after the creation of Pakistan, continued till 1971. The relationship between the two countries was complicated by three important factors right after the creation of Pakistan. One, Kabul had strong reservations regarding the Durand Line imposed on Afghanistan in 1893 by the British empire after occupying

parts of eastern and southern Afghanistan by military force. Afghans on both sides of this demarcation continuously resisted this colonial division in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Afghanistan regarded the colonial occupation as illegitimate, and demanded its reversal at the end of colonial rule. The complication was further deepened by the fact that Pashtun nationalists in British India were allied with the All India National Congress, and had their daggers drawn against the Muslim League, the party that founded the new state of Pakistan. Consequently, the Pashtun nationalists, a popular and organized political force at that time, found themselves on the wrong side of the political divide during and after the partition of the Indian subcontinent, and faced severe sociopolitical repression worse than that during the British colonial era. This led to new tensions in relations between the two countries as the Pashtun tribes living across the Durand Line had maintained strong kinship bonds and could not remain indifferent to the events on the other side.

The lack of genuine Afghan expertise among Pakistan's emerging establishment was a second major obstacle. The civil and military bureaucracy inherited by the new country from colonial rule, particularly its Punjabi and Urdu speaking stalwarts, looked down on Afghanistan as a backward small country in the northwest, which could be handled by Pakistan on the basis of pages taken from the playbook of British India. Instead of building on the potential of numerous and strong cultural and historical commonalities between the two countries for creating a strong and sustainable framework of a good, neighborly relationship, the civil and military bureaucracy that controlled the levers of power in the new state loved to use the "Great Game" tactics of the colonial era. These included deliberately weaponizing the neighborhood. For example, Pakistan sent the Pashtun tribesmen living along the Durand Line to take Kashmir in 1948. Thus, the new state pushed them toward militancy instead of providing them with inclusion, and economic and development opportunities. Similarly, the transit trade of landlocked Afghanistan through Pakistan was used to arm twist Kabul rather than to facilitate it according to international law. The centuries-old practice of seasonal immigration by Afghan nomads (predominantly Ghilzai Pashtuns) was turned into a complicated issue.

The snowballing conflict between the two countries quickly pushed them into opposing camps in the Cold War. Pakistan became part of SEATO and CENTO, the Western military pacts for containing Soviet Communism in the early 1950s. Afghanistan, on the other hand, was more cautious and formally stuck to the policy of nonalignment, but had to get closer to the Soviet Union for economic and military assistance after being cold shouldered by Western powers and coming under pressure from Pakistan. During the Cold War, Pakistan, a staunch Western ally, hyphenated Afghanistan with the Soviet Union and India. This also pushed away the Pashtun and Baloch nationalist politicians and their political parties in the new county, and squandered opportunities for establishing stable relations with Islamabad's western neighbor.

In the first quarter century after Pakistan's creation, Afghan King Zahir Shah's cautious approach saved the situation. He did not let the tension between the two countries deepen to unmanageable levels. He defused the situation by visiting Pakistan for exchanging views with Pakistan's military ruler, General Ayub Khan, in the 1960s, which helped in normalizing relations between the two neighbors. Historical experience proved Pakistani fears regarding Afghanistan teaming up with India for encircling Pakistan baseless. Kabul did not side with New Delhi during its two major wars with archrival Islamabad in 1965 and in 1971.

Bhutto's New Pakistan

The second stage of the Pak–Afghan relationship started in 1972 and continued till April 1978. In January 1972, populist political leader Zulfikar Ali Bhutto (whose Pakistan People's Party had gained a majority in the Punjab and Sindh provinces in the 1970 general elections) assumed Pakistan's leadership after the disintegration of the country in December 1971 under the burden of a prolonged military dictatorship. Bhutto promised to build a “new Pakistan.” After the independence of Bangladesh in December 1971, Pakistan lost its geographical connection with South East Asia. It was now a South Asian state bordering West Asia and close to Central Asia. The Bhutto government immediately turned to the Middle East for export of labor and gaining financial support from wealthy Arab countries in funding its competition with a much bigger adversary, India. Bhutto hosted the Summit of Islamic Countries in 1974 to prove that, despite losing half the country, Pakistan was still an important player.

On the internal front Bhutto initially took steps to defuse the political situation. He lifted the ban from the National Awami (People's) Party (NAP), the main political platform of Pashtun and Baloch nationalists (along with other nationalist and progressive elements) in Pakistan. NAP had emerged as the largest parliamentary party in Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan in the 1970 elections, but it was banned by the military dictator General Yahya Khan in 1971 for opposing military action in former East Pakistan, which became Bangladesh after Pakistani forces surrendered to India in December 1971. On Bhutto's invitation, a NAP-led coalition formed provincial governments in Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan in April 1972. But in February 1973, these provincial administrations were suddenly and unconstitutionally dismissed by the federal government after Bhutto's visit to King Reza Shah's Iran. It created unrest and agitation among Pashtun and Baloch populations in Pakistan leading to severe polarization with regional ramifications. In response to brutal repression by the Pakistani state, some Baloch nationalists launched an armed resistance. Political turmoil also deepened in the Pashtun belt of Pakistan where a large number of political activists were arrested and brutally tortured.

The Royal Government of Afghanistan was obviously disturbed by these developments in Pakistan. But sticking to its traditional policy of caution, King Zahir Shah's government refrained from doing anything that could have been construed as interference in the internal affairs of Pakistan. This policy of restraint led to unrest among Afghan nationalists and leftist elements in the Afghan military who regarded the policy to be "too passive" to guard the national interest. It was one of the other many external and internal factors leading to the Sardar Mohammad Daoud Khan-led military coup against King Zahir Shah on July 16, 1973, which brought the monarchy to an end and turned Afghanistan into a republic.

As staunch Afghan nationalists, Daoud Khan and the military officers who had brought him to power did not hide their sympathy and solidarity with Pashtun and Baloch nationalists facing colonial-style repression in Pakistan. As the conflict in the provinces of Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan deepened, elements in the Pashtun and Baloch resistance movements crossed over into Afghanistan for shelter and support. This led to the rekindling of old hostilities between the two neighbors. Although Afghanistan was providing asylum and support to Pashtun and Baloch nationalists to save them from annihilation in the face of Pakistani oppression, Daoud Khan was not planning to disintegrate Pakistan or capture its territory. He understood very well that Afghanistan was not in a position to do so even if it desired such an outcome. He expected that Afghanistan's support would enable Pashtun and Baloch leadership to protect their community's interests and honor in striking a political deal with Pakistan, opening the doors for Afghanistan and Pakistan to forge a good, neighborly relationship.

Pakistan too was not sitting idle. Major General Naseerullah Babar, the then Inspector General Frontier Corps, a border force, was regarded as the Pakistani Army's expert on Pashtun tribal affairs and Afghanistan. Soon after the overthrow of King Zahir Shah, General Babar wrote a paper on the significance and implications of the major political change in Afghanistan. He was of the view that monarchy was the sole legitimate foundation of the Afghan state, and a glue that was holding it together. By decimating it, Daoud Khan had opened the floodgates for instability and anarchy in his country, he concluded. Babar suggested that Pakistan can exploit the situation and build enough pressure on the new government led by Daoud Khan to force it to recognize the Durand Line as the international border between the two countries. The paper was widely appreciated in Pakistan's army and it also impressed Bhutto, who adopted it as the foundation of his new strategy. Thus, as an official strategist, Babar played a pivotal role in shaping the country's Afghan policy. He was appointed governor of Pakhtunkhwa province after his retirement from the army, and he continued to be the focal person for Afghan policy in Bhutto's government.

In Afghanistan, Daoud Khan had come to power with the support of some elements in the leftist People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA). The party was strongly opposed by Afghan Islamists, who were allied with Islamists in Pakistan. Facing bans and restrictions on their political activities, Afghan Islamists gradually resorted to militancy and developed close relations with the Pakistani security state. By providing them active support, Islamabad wanted to achieve two objectives; it wanted to counter the Afghan policy of supporting the Pashtuns and Balochis in Pakistan, and it also wanted to build pressure on the government of Daoud Khan to recognize the Durand Line.

The Afghan Islamists involved in the Pakistan-sponsored destabilizing campaign in Afghanistan against Daoud Khan's government also subsequently played prominent roles in the war fought against the Soviet forces in Afghanistan in the 1980s. But it will be oversimplistic to describe the 1980s war as a mere continuation of the Afghan–Pakistan confrontation in 1970s. Pakistani generals and their apologists generally explain and justify the policy of “strategic depth” as a concept developed by civilians. But prior to April 1978, support to the dissidents across the border from both sides was well calibrated and aimed at achieving well-defined and limited objectives. The later elaborate engagement between the two countries at the highest level to sort out the differences (in 1976) amply proves this fact. Recent research in Pakistan reveals that preventing a possible rapprochement between Pakistan and Afghanistan was one of the major reasons for the military coup against Bhutto.¹ For example, Pakistani army generals were afraid of two things. One, that it would strengthen Bhutto's grip on the country's politics and power. Two, that friendship with Afghanistan may be followed by a reconciliation with India which would decisively bring down the significance of the armed forces in the state system.

Zia and the Anti-Soviet War

But with the Cold War turning hot, governments in both countries were overtaken by internal and external developments and were overthrown in military coups. Bhutto's government was overthrown on July 5, 1977 by a military coup led by General Zia-ul-Haq. In two years, the former prime minister was executed after a sham trial (more below). In less than a year, on April 27, 1978, the Daoud Khan-led setup in Afghanistan was also overthrown by a military coup led by the PDPA. Daoud Khan and his family members were killed by the coup makers.

¹ Former Senior Bureaucrat Khwaja Zaheer Ahmed, a confidant of Bhutto, disclosed this in an interview in the Pakistani media. The issue is outlined in Naya Daur, a news website in Pakistan. *Naya Daur TV*, “5 July 1977, Bhutto Government Removed History | Afghanistan's Role in Zia's Martial Law,” July 4, 2020, Youtube channel, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pTUhiTruIXk>.

Pakistani generals sponsored the campaign of religious parties for "Islamization" to justify their coup. They wanted to roll back the legitimate and consensus constitution adopted by elected representatives in 1973. They wanted to use the religious slogan to camouflage their onslaught on the constitution. Bhutto, despite certain failures during his five-year rule, remained popular, and it was not possible to defeat him in elections. So, using the religious card remained the only option to beat him. But somehow, the said slogan also proved handy to the Western strategy of standing up to fight the "Godless Communist threat" from the northwest, which meant Afghanistan and the Soviet Union at the time.² The anti-Communist role was something normal for the US-trained Pakistan army that had remained a part of SEATO (later Baghdad Pact) and CENTO, the anti-Soviet military pacts of the Cold War. Unlike Bhutto, who was not a Marxist but who employed socialism as a catchy slogan in his populist rhetoric, the generals were more acceptable to the West.

General Zia's martial law regime, which had overthrown an elected government and constitutional system, found a golden opportunity in jumping on the Western bandwagon of fighting the Soviet threat for gaining legitimacy and foreign aid. But Pakistani generals, particularly Zia, Akhtar Abdur-Rahman, the spy chief, and a few others came up with the concept of "strategic depth" for establishing hegemony over Afghanistan. Bhutto did not live to see the formal unfolding of the military's expansionist policy toward Afghanistan as he was executed in April 1979. But he had warned about it in his last book, *If I Am Assassinated*.³

Writing from his death cell in the spring of 1979, Bhutto speculated on how the military will take care of its own large and unaffordable size. The former PM likened the Pakistani Army to the Prussian Army. In the nineteenth century, the latter, after having "expanded beyond the resources of Prussia" for the Napoleonic wars, faced three choices in due time; expanding the territory so that the bigger country could afford a big army; reducing the "longstanding army"; or state collapse under the military's burden. Using this analogy for Pakistan, Bhutto's conclusion was that Pakistan was condemned to have the third option for itself; that the state will be unable to live under the burden of a large army. Had he been alive to witness later developments, he would have been flabbergasted to see that his generals have gone for the first Prussian option adopted by Otto Von Bismarck, which was the expansion of the army state. The term "strategic depth" is an euphemism to camouflage the military's real intentions.⁴

After the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, Pakistan became a frontline state with the full backing of the US and its Western and Muslim allies for launching what came

² The term Godless Communism originated in the United States during the 1950 and early 1960s.

³ Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, *If I Am Assassinated*. New Delhi: Vikas, 1979.

⁴ Otto von Bismarck (1815–1898) was the prime minister of Prussia (1862–73, 1873–90), and later founder and first chancellor (1871–90) of the German Empire.

to be known as the Afghan Jihad. Pashtun areas on the east of the Durand Line were used as a launching pad with dollars pouring in for building physical and intellectual infrastructure for the war fought in the name of jihad.

It became evident pretty soon that for the Pakistan Army, Afghanistan was a mere outpost to manage. As Afghan refugees started entering Pakistan on a large scale, General Zia refused to accede to the 1951 Geneva Convention on Refugees or the 1967 Protocol, which would have tied Islamabad to treating Afghan refugees in line with international norms and standards. His government was also not prepared to frame any legal structure for the citizens of a neighboring country residing temporarily in Pakistan. He demagogically used an analogy from Arab Islamic history by calling Afghans “muhajirs” (refugees) and Pakistanis “ansars” (hosts) in the religious tradition, doing away with the formalities of the state relationship and international legal requirements. It practically did away with whatever remained of the colonial era’s vague Durand Line between the two countries, which divides Pashtun tribes and even families. Ghulam Ishaq Khan, who succeeded Zia as President in 1988, used to call Afghanistan the fifth province of the country.

But the policy of strategic depth was not only implemented by just military means. It also developed an ideological dimension. Zia’s regime, supported by local and Middle Eastern fundamentalists, tampered with Afghan national identity. For about the last one thousand years, the absolute majority of Afghans have been Muslims, and have been known as Afghan Muslims. A systematic effort has been made through Pakistan’s Afghan policy to exaggerate the Muslim part of this identity, not out of love for Islam, but with the specific aim of the weakening of the Afghan part of the identity. Huge factories of brainwashing have been working for decades to inject extremism in the minds of new generations of Afghans. There are around 36,000 religious seminaries (madrassas) in Pakistan, most of them built during and soon after the Afghan Jihad. Hundreds of thousands of Afghans have graduated from these seminaries. Apart from religious seminaries, the curricula used in thousands of schools for educating Afghan refugee children was also full of material meant to brainwash them for transforming a “muhajir” (refugee) Afghan into a “mujahid” (holy warrior). The purpose was, apart from producing fanatical fighters, to deconstruct or weaken the historical Afghan identity, making it vulnerable to Pakistani hegemonism.

Military Control

Pakistan’s Afghan policy is the sole domain of the General Headquarters (GHQ) of the country’s army. Civilian governments are as much in the loop as the army wants them to

be, and they are generally rather limited. Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), as a primary conduit for finances and other foreign assistance to Afghans during the war, has been playing a pivotal role in shaping and executing Pakistan's Afghan policy. Its Afghan Cell initially worked overtly, but after 9/11, has been operating covertly. There is always a lieutenant general-level officer who works as the army's focal person for Afghanistan. Akhtar Abdul Rahman was well-known, followed by Hamid Gul, Asad Durrani, Aziz Khan, and many others. Some of them continue to be active even after retirement from military service. It is during the prolonged Afghan Jihad that Islamic extremism has found ingress into the Pakistani state system. Apart from jihadists, there is another category of "patriotic jihadists" who may not be motivated by religious feelings but regard this activity to be best for "national interest."

For the Pakistani military, the jihadist project offered many dividends. It strengthened its position in the state system by giving it access to large financial resources and foreign and internal policy levers. The capacity to launch clandestine wars of attrition in neighboring countries developed during the Cold War is an expertise that the generals are not prepared to part with. This is a deeply entrenched phenomenon and the main reason for the failure of the Pakistani state to enforce antiterrorism reforms. Even the much-hyped National Action Plan (NAP) of 2014 has become history by now, and the country has failed over the years to meet the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) standards and get out of its black or gray list.

Pakistan's Role in Sabotaging Afghan Peace

Such obsession with micromanaging Afghanistan through subconventional and covert warfare by the Pakistani military sabotaged the prospects of peace in the wake of the withdrawal of Soviet military forces from Afghanistan. It is important to remember that there were three circles of negotiations. The first and most important circle of negotiations was the intra-Afghan dialogue. Such long drawn wars, fought on such a large scale, involving insurgency and deeply dividing the society cannot end without intra-Afghan dialogue leading to reconciliation. The second circle consisted of a regional understanding for bringing the conflict to an end. There were several regional players taking part in the conflict, Pakistan, Iran, Arab Gulf countries, and India are worth mentioning. Pakistan and Iran were not even hiding their role as parties in the conflict. The third circle was international consensus, which was not only important for bringing sustainable peace, but was also significant for starting reconstruction in the war-ravaged country.

Ideally the intra-Afghan dialogue should have been a priority. Beginning in the late 1980s, President Najibullah tried his best to do that. But the internationalized nature of the conflict (that was mainly handled by the spy networks of the concerned countries) and extreme internal political and ideological polarization would not allow that. The Geneva Accords between Pakistan and Afghanistan, signed in April 1988, which committed to noninterference after the end of armed conflict (in which the US and the Soviet Union were supposed to be guarantors) were not meant to be implemented. The Accords were aimed at the Soviet Union's saving face when it came to the withdrawal of its troops. It was also important for Pakistan to publicly declare its allegiance to international law and principles of noninterference, at least nominally, after choreographing for almost a decade one of the biggest guerrilla wars in history in a neighboring country fought by non-state actors from its soil.

But the main hurdle in a peaceful political settlement was the insistence of the international and regional patrons of the Afghan Jihad to overthrow the government of President Najibullah, instead of engaging with it for an agreement toward peaceful transition. They were adamant to do that in order to firmly establish the impression of a convincing victory. The Afghan Mujahideen, as they were known then, had not received recognition as a government-in-exile and did not have any significant role in addressing the international or regional dimensions of the conflict.

As the Soviet intention of withdrawing its troops crystallized, the US accelerated the process of subletting Afghanistan to Pakistan, and the latter was more than happy to embrace the role. Pakistan was confident that a puppet regime that it would install in Kabul would eventually be ready to join a confederation with Islamabad, providing the much-sought-after strategic depth. But the Afghan organizations formed in Pakistan with the help of the ISI were more military machines than political bodies. They were also extremely dependent on the intelligence agencies of Pakistan, the US, Saudi Arabia, and some other countries. This dependence negatively impacted them in developing a political vision or strategy for breaking the political logjam during and after the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan. The Pakistan army was calling the shots in negotiations after the withdrawal of Soviet troops. It was not only ignoring Afghan Mujahideen, but was also not ready to give space to Pakistani civilians in making important decisions about Afghanistan. Even General Zia's handpicked civil government, led by Prime Minister Muhammad Khan Junejo, was sent packing in 1988 when it defied General Zia on signing the Geneva Accords.

Pakistan's Competition and Cooperation with Iran over Afghanistan

For Afghanistan, its other major neighbor is Iran. It has destabilizing ideas of its own. The post-Islamic Revolution Iran was busy in meeting the challenges of consolidating the new system when the conflict erupted in Afghanistan. But even then, it jumped into the fray in the hope of exporting its revolution. During the past four decades, Iran has competed and cooperated with Pakistan in shaping the various phases of war in their neighboring country. For Tehran, Afghan Shias were the obvious choice to become a vehicle for the implementation of its ambitions of exporting its revolution and competing with its Sunni archrival, Saudi Arabia, in preserving what it viewed as its political, cultural, and economic interests. Thus, eight Shia factions emerged in Afghanistan in the 1980s to compete against the seven Sunni parties supported by the West, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia.

But the impractical and myopic nature of this approach got exposed quite soon. In reality, it was very unfair on the part of the Islamic Republic of Iran to pit Afghan Shias against their Sunni compatriots. How can a minority population occupy a country by defeating the majority population? It only created hostility and animosity, poisoning the relationship between the various Afghan groups, which mostly resulted in bloodshed on all sides.⁵ By the time the Soviet army was withdrawing from Afghanistan, the initial Iranian strategy had reached a dead end. Following that, Iran shifted its focus to the cultural front, and started efforts to create a block of "Persian Speaking Countries" by increasing influence in Afghanistan and Tajikistan. This policy prompted Iran to support the Northern Alliance during the civil war in Afghanistan in the 1990s.⁶

Unlike Pakistan's quest for establishing outright hegemony over Afghanistan, the main aims of Iran's Afghan policy are somewhat limited. Tehran wants to keep Afghanistan in the "Iranian sphere of influence," achieving a favorable deal for Iran on the waters of the Helmand River, and using Afghanistan as a corridor to Tajikistan for expanding and consolidating Iranian influence in Central Asia. Iran's approach was more subtle in pursuing these goals. Unlike Pakistan's crude and naked interference, and imposition of a puppet government, Iranian policy was more sophisticated and nuanced. Along with supporting Shia Mujahideen in their fight, Iran maintained its presence in Kabul by having a working relationship with leftist governments there. Iran is quite experienced in maintaining these apparently contradictory alliances in order to widen its influence.

⁵ Author's observations of the developments during the Afghan war in Kabul, Quetta, and Peshawar in the 1980s and early 1990s.

⁶ Known as Northern Alliance in the press and academic literature of the time, leaders of its various components formally called themselves the United Front.

No Winners

Pakistan and Iran both tried their hand at launching military coups against the government of President Najibullah as a shortcut to regime change. With dwindling assistance from the Soviet Union, Pakistan and Iran thought it was possible to mobilize the antiregime elements within the Afghan armed forces. ISI was the first to do it through the links provided by the Hezb-i-Islami of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar in March 1990. The coup was led by the then Defense Minister, Shahnawaz Tanai, a Pashtun military officer with a background in the Khalq faction of the PDPA. The coup failed within a few hours, and its leaders had to flee to Pakistan, leaving no doubt about the choreographers of the plan. The failed coup could not overthrow the government, but it did weaken it, as the subsequent purges in the army and the party created a sense of alienation amongst some elements of the Khalq faction of the ruling party.

The aborted coup also gave ideas to Iran and the Soviets to learn from the mistakes of the leaders of the aborted coup for launching a successful coup. Gorbachev's reforms in his country were based on three major concepts; Perestroika (Reconstruction), Glasnost (Transparency), and *Novi Mysl* (New Thinking). The New Thinking also implied "deideologizing state policies," including foreign policy. President Gorbachev respected President Najibullah as a dynamic leader who had determinedly implemented the policy of National Reconciliation for finding a peaceful political settlement to the armed ideological conflict in Afghanistan. President Najibullah had also introduced sweeping and bold reforms in his party and the government to align it with the patriotic aspirations of the Afghan people. But Gorbachev was losing control over the circles in the ruling establishment who had different ideas. Some experts in the Soviet army and the KGB wanted to establish relations with Mujahideen groups in order to maintain some sort of influence in a future Afghanistan. They thought this objective could not be achieved in the presence of the PDPA, under the new name of Watan (Homeland) Party, and its government.

The Soviet establishment was also worried about President Najibullah's bold gestures of reconciliation toward his country's neighbors, which could drastically change the geostrategic situation in the region. At this stage, the KGB was out to subvert every initiative independently taken by President Najibullah for starting a peace process. For example, in early 1991, through back channel contacts, a secret meeting was held between General Asad Durrani, the then Director General of ISI, and General Ghulam Faruq Yaqubi, the then Chief of KhAD, in Geneva, for holding initial discussions on reconciliation and peace in Afghanistan. It was supposed to be a discreet meeting because Pakistan-based Afghan leaders were not informed about it in advance. But the news about the meeting was not only leaked, it was also reported in Western media. This is how the initiative was aborted before it could take off.

President Najibullah had consistently and clearly pursued the strategy of national reconciliation since the mid-1980s, and by 1991 had institutionalized it at government and state levels, which sounded more convincing to common Afghans, but his government remained under siege because of the hostile attitude of regional and international players. Some of the Pakistan-based Afghan leaders held secret meetings with President Najibullah, and almost all of them were directly or indirectly in touch with him, including the ones known as hardliners, but none of them could become an open partner in a dialogue for peace. As the common cause of fighting against the Soviet troops came to an end, the disunity and infighting among the Mujahideen parties became unmanageable. Even their Pakistani and Arab patrons did not know what to do about it. There was also a competition between Pakistan, supported by the Arabs and the US, and the Soviet–Iranian combine supported by India to install a government of their liking in Kabul to succeed the Watan Party government.

In 1991, the KGB, supported by the Iranian intelligence, started implementing a plan to launch a military coup against the Watan Party government led by President Najibullah. The Soviet and Iranian Consulates in Mazar-e Sharif were the hubs of their activities. Babrak Karmal, the former leader of the PDPA who had lived for many years in Moscow, was sent to Kabul to contact military officers from the former Parcham faction of the PDPA for the planning and execution of the military coup. By the end of 1991, contacts were established among the pro-Karmal Parchamites, the Ahmad Shah Masoud-led Shura-e Nazar, and the militia leader Abdul Rashid Dostum. Political and military tensions fomented in the north of Afghanistan were the destabilizing steps taken as a prelude to the forthcoming coup.

President Najibullah was aware of the coup plans. In the second half of the 1991, he had knowledge of activities by the aforementioned circles which could be regarded as preparation for the coup against him. But he was extremely reluctant to take large scale military action (with whatever military capacity left in his forces, particularly that of the Air Force) in and around Mazar-e Sharif, which could have acquired ethnic dimensions. He would have preferred any option, including a coup by his opponents, over an armed conflict and political polarization with the potential of threatening the national unity of Afghanistan.

President Najibullah also kept talking to potential putschists in the hope that he will ultimately convince them to join the wider negotiation process which he hoped to start with his government's traditional foes. He had heavily relied on the UN for choreographing the reconciliation and peace process. But the international body, heavily dependent on big power manipulations and maneuvers, did not fulfill its promises regarding the implementation of its peace plan with which only one side (the President Najibullah-led government) was complying. So much so that President Najibullah

announced his intention to resign from his office, leaving no excuse for the opposition to oppose the UN plan for a neutral caretaker government.

But the opposition was too divided and too busy with schemes for the grabbing and monopolizing of power in Kabul to work toward a peaceful transition. Pakistan was working on cobbling together a government of the Pakistan-based Afghan leaders (later joined by the Iran-based Afghan Shia leaders) and keeping it united in the hope that this government would fill the vacuum in Kabul. But the military coup in Kabul in April 1992, led by General Nabi Azimi and General Asif Dilawar came as a setback to these efforts. Babrak Karmal and various other PDPA leaders, who had taken part in the coup against President Najibullah, were given safe passage, and the political gains of the coup were reaped mainly by the Shura-e Nazar and its leader, Ahmad Shah Masoud. So, when the made-in-Pakistan Afghan government entered Afghanistan, Kabul was already in the hands of their political rivals supported by the Soviet Union and Iran. It was a fait accompli that they could not do much about. Gulbuddin Hekmatyar and his Hezb-i-Islami made a last desperate effort to take Kabul back from the putschists by military force, which led to fierce fighting between his forces and those of the Ahmad Shah Masoud-led Shura-e Nazar and its allies. This unfortunate development resulted in large scale death and destruction in the capital, Kabul, that had by and large remained out of the prolonged military conflict in the country.

From Geostrategic to Geoeconomic Competition

After the withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan, the US also turned its back on the war-torn country after subletting Afghanistan to Pakistani generals. The proxy wars that followed these developments led to the collapse of the state system. Taliban, the Pakistan-backed extremist group, remained a brutal occupation force without any proper state system. Afghanistan, as predicted by Dr. Najibullah, the former President of the country, became the hub of international terrorism and narcotics production. Then came 9/11, followed by the Bonn process, the induction of US forces, the regrouping of Taliban in Pakistan, and a new cycle of devastating war. Taliban could continue their war against international forces because of their sanctuaries in Pakistan. They could not be decisively defeated in Afghanistan because their leadership and support structures remained intact in Pakistan. Since 2018, the US decided to talk to Taliban to end the long war.

With the start of the intra-Afghan talks in September 2020, Afghanistan is yet again at a crossroads. It is imperative that the country's current leaders and factions, along with international and regional players, learn from their past mistakes and failures and work

toward a compromise that can preserve Afghanistan's sovereignty, national interests, and unity. For durable peace, the international community, and the United States and its Western allies, need to ensure that the current peace process is not sabotaged or hijacked by the hegemonic designs of Pakistan in particular. Iran's support too will be crucial. Both need to give up their support for armed non-state actors in Afghanistan. The existence of militant sanctuaries in neighboring countries has not been properly addressed in the Doha talks, which is a grave omission. One hopes it will be taken care of. The neighborhood needs to switch over to geoeconomic competition, from the geostrategic contests of the Cold War. Sustainable peace will ultimately need Afghanistan to transform into a venue of regional cooperation instead of competition in violence.

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The Najibullah–Kakar Correspondence: Historical Parallels and Divergence

Radha Kumar

Abstract

This article discusses the proposals outlined by the 1990 Najibullah–Kakar correspondence in the context of peace-building lessons to be learned or unlearned thirty years later. It focuses on the challenges for Afghan peacemaking given the geopolitics of South Asia and its impact on domestic politics in Afghanistan, and asks what the prospects are of regional support for an Afghan peace agreement.

No Afghanistan watcher will agree with Marx's often-quoted dictum, that history repeats itself, the first time as tragedy, and subsequently as farce.¹ The unending and endlessly cyclical tragedies that Afghanistan has undergone for the past forty years are evidence enough that here history's repetition is tragedy upon tragedy (so much so that many may long for farce).

In the peace and conflict literature it is generally recognized that the more protracted a conflict is, the more difficult it is to find a lasting solution. Three other criteria can be added to this axiom: the more the conflict becomes an ethnic one, the deeper the divisions grow, exponentially multiplying the difficulty of reconciliation. Connected to this, the more actors there are, the more likely it is that the conflict will be protracted. Equally, the poorer and/or the more patchily developed the country is, the more likely it is that a peace agreement will not hold.

Afghanistan fits all four criteria. From the 1970s on, the country has struggled between competing great and regional powers on the one hand, and competing local and regional factions on the other. Conflict has been fueled by cross-border ethnic diasporas: Uzbeks live on both sides of the Uzbekistan–Afghanistan border, Tajiks on both sides of the Tajikistan–Afghanistan border, and the largest ethnic group, the Pashtuns, live on both sides of the Pakistan–Afghanistan border. Iran's influence is strong across the border in Herat and amongst the Shia Hazaras scattered across west and central Afghanistan. Long a poorly developed country, Afghanistan's decades of conflict have made illicit opium production the chief industry.

Vast global changes—the end of the Cold War, the rise of China and the reconfiguration of Asia, and currently the global coronavirus pandemic, economic recession and the potential retreat of global economies to nationalist or regionalist economies—appear to have left little mark on the Afghan conflict insofar as these structural elements are concerned. Even the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the US and the subsequent war on the Taliban appear to have wrought little change. Eighteen years after the US and NATO undertook their military and stabilization missions in Afghanistan, the country continues to be mired in conflict, casualties, and corruption, the three points that Professor Hassan Kakar emphasized in his letter to President Najibullah in 1990.

The Najibullah–Kakar correspondence seems eerily familiar, touching on issues that are as live in 2020 as they were in 1990. Afghanistan is once again in the throes of a fearful transition from under a great power's umbrella, this time the US and its allies. Once again, the majority of Afghanistan's warring neighbors are in pursuit of power at Afghanistan's expense, with Pakistan reemerging as lead broker for peace negotiations with Afghan armed groups. Once again, the Afghan government controls barely 50

¹ Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, 1985, 5, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/18th-Brumaire.pdf>.

percent of the territory in the country. Once again, the country is deeply polarized ideologically, and once again it is ravaged by innumerable competing factions, each with its own group of fighters.

Once again, too, the Afghan government is on the brink of wide-ranging peace talks with the armed opposition. While in 1990, such talks involved several armed groups, this time the talks are with one very large group, the Taliban. They are taking place, on and off, between the Taliban and Afghan government after a peace agreement was signed between the US and the Taliban, under which the US is committed to withdrawing its troops while the Taliban is committed to snapping support for Al Qaeda or any other armed group that seeks to attack the US or its allies.

* * *

Looking back over the past eighteen years, the postwar peace policy pursued by the US and NATO is similar to that outlined by Najibullah in almost every respect. In his first letter to Kakar, Najibullah proposed “an overall peace conference with the participation of all involved forces” that would “announce a six-month long ceasefire and then create a leadership council.” The council would “create a broad based interim government . . . and assign a commission to draft a new constitution and election laws,” which would be approved by a Loya Jirga (grand assembly) and followed by elections.

An almost identical template was followed after the US-led war against the Taliban in 2001. The US and allies held an international peace conference in which most Afghan stakeholders participated; an interim and then transitional government was appointed; a constitution was drafted; a Loya Jirga ratified it; elections were organized; and a coalition government took power. In other words, Najibullah’s plan was implemented, with one glaring gap: the Taliban were not involved in the peace conference, partly because the war against them had just concluded and the US could not be seen to negotiate with a newly defeated and scattered enemy, and partly because the Taliban were unwilling to participate from a position of such weakness. There was no ceasefire.

Notably, in his reply to Najibullah’s proposal, Kakar suggested two critical preconditions that were absent in both the proposal and its attempted implementation more than a decade later: first, a complete arms embargo on all Afghan warring factions, and second, complete noninterference in Afghan political affairs by great or neighboring powers.

Perhaps neither of Kakar’s conditions would ever have been feasible. An arms embargo was imposed on Afghanistan in 2000 under UN Security Council Resolution 1333, shortly before the 9/11 attacks, but it applied only to those parts of Afghanistan under the control of the Taliban. In January 2002, the embargo was modified by UN

Security Council Resolution 1390 to apply to any sale or supplies to the Taliban or Al Qaeda irrespective of location. In any case, it was loosely observed, when at all. In areas such as Kandahar and Torkham, NATO forces bought off Taliban factions where they could, to achieve uneasy and short-lived truces. Though neighbors such as Pakistan were repeatedly asked to prevent arms and funds supplies to the Taliban, they did not comply. Nor did the Taliban's funders, such as Saudi Arabia, cut off funds completely.

Noninterference was always going to be a nonstarter, for quite different reasons. As customary for NATO, different member-states were assigned different commands. For example, under the allocation of Provincial Reconstruction Teams, British troops were in charge of much of south Afghanistan, US troops of the central and western parts of the country, German troops in northeastern Afghanistan, and so on. Each national unit made its own trade-offs with local warlords,² many of whom were supported by the US and coalition forces as part of the war against the Taliban, and subsequently became power brokers and political contenders. Each also brought its own culture of operations to the area under its command. Further confusion was added when PRT commands rotated from one member-state to another. Inevitably, these shifts made their own contribution to the disintegration of the country into provincial factions. While a uniform and coordinated mission did evolve as the US took an increasing role in training and supporting Afghan security forces, by the time it did, the task of integration was that much more difficult.

Secondly, in 2002 as in 1990, the Afghan government and security forces depended on foreign aid, supplies, and protection, as did local warlords. Inevitably, this brought donor-patrons into the political fray to safeguard their own interests through pressures or bribes, and since these interests were often conflicting, political interference added to the weakness of the government and security forces. Afghan politicians, in their turn, often pitted one ally against another to leverage their positions.

For many Afghans, the 1990s must provide a potentially prophetic mirror to what could happen in the 2020s. Though the Taliban did not exist when the Najibullah–Kakar correspondence took place, they were born out of Kabul's inability to hold its writ, both politically and territorially. Najibullah was unable to unite the factions in his administration, which lasted three years (contrary to realist predictions of a few months); ensuing administrations were even more short-lived. Afghanistan fell apart into warring provinces.

The situation today is comparable. The Ghani–Abdullah coalition of six years ago was achieved after months of hard bargaining and US intervention, and the two leaders were at odds for much of their first term. The next election was even more bitterly

² Sam Zia-Zarifi, "Losing the Peace in Afghanistan," in Human Rights Watch, *World Report 2004* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2004), <https://www.hrw.org/legacy/wr2k4/download/5.pdf>.

contested, and the current coalition was again achieved only with US intervention. Over the past four to five years, in parallel to the NATO drawdown, the coalition has lost control over increasingly large amounts of territory, and Afghan security and police forces have been increasingly attacked.

Yet, as Kakar would warn, a historian must beware the pitfalls of historical repetition. In 1990, the mujahideen were divided into several conflicting armed groups, and when the country descended into civil war, there were a large number of actors with relatively equal forces. In 2020, the Taliban control around a sixth of Afghanistan's territory and contest all of it except a zone around Kabul. While different provinces have powerful regional warlords, few of them can withstand the Taliban without external support.

The Taliban, moreover, might be changing. They have fought the Islamic State of Khorasan jointly with Afghan security forces and have at long last agreed to negotiations with the Afghan government and other Afghan political factions; they say they will support women's education and may accept other civil society gains such as a free media. Whether they will fulfill their promises remains to be seen. There are fissures among local Taliban commanders; indeed, many Taliban converted politically to join first the Karzai, and then the Ghani–Abdullah administrations.

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Externally, too, there are key differences between the situation of Afghanistan in the 1990s and the situation today. Then, the Cold War was ending; now, a new and somewhat amorphous Cold War might be taking shape.

The US and Pakistan are no longer close allies; today, that relationship belongs to China and Pakistan. Russia is not the key player that the Soviet Union was; instead, its complex relationship to China, of both indebtedness to China and concern over maintaining its sphere of influence in Central Asia, impinges on Afghanistan in different ways. With Russia in the Chinese camp, the Iran–Russia–India triad no longer exists. The Central Asian republics are independent countries now, and their conflicts with each other, as well as their difficult relations with Russia, and an increasingly penetrative China, bring their own spillover dynamic to Afghanistan.

Jostling with the US, China has emerged as a key player for Afghanistan, both politically and economically. Politically, with its military-economic ties to Pakistan as well as to Russia and several Central Asian republics, China has the strongest potential influence. Economically, with its large investment in the Belt and Road Initiative, that now spans large parts of central as well as south and east Asia, China again has the strongest influence. Though the Chinese leadership appear content to let Pakistan lead military-political negotiations for peace at present, they may well expect or be expected to step in if or when these negotiations become fruitful.

Militarily, however, the US and allies are still far more important to Afghanistan than China, even at this time of exit. The Afghan security forces have operated with US-NATO support thus far and will continue to look to the US for support. The Taliban say they want their fighters absorbed into the Afghan security forces, but it is difficult to see how. The Afghan army could be reconstructed following an Afghan government–Taliban peace agreement—which is still far away—but a similar effort in Bosnia to absorb local Serbian and Croatian forces into the Bosnian army, under US-NATO supervision, was largely a failure. More likely there will be a provincial distribution of security between government and Taliban forces, leaving the country vulnerable to renewed civil war.

How will the US react then? The US walked away once before, three years after the Geneva Accords of 1988 and following Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, but the extent to which it will walk away in the coming years depends on how events unfold, both within Afghanistan and in the broader region. With growing tensions between the US and China, will the US be sanguine about Afghanistan falling under China's sphere of influence, and would this sphere of influence continue to be limited to economic interests or grow to include military interests as well? Given that South Asia has already seen the way in which China's economic, strategic, and military interests converge, it is difficult to imagine how the three can be kept separate in Afghanistan.

What of my own country, India? Back in the 1990s, when the Geneva Accords fell apart and Afghanistan plunged into civil war, India backed the Northern Alliance militarily. But that was in alliance with Iran and Russia. Russia, as mentioned above, is now closer to China and Pakistan. As Iran may be, given that China, Iran, Pakistan, and Russia have formed a quadrilateral on Afghanistan. Recent clashes between the People's Liberation Army (PLA) and Indian troops at the Line of Actual Control in Ladakh add a further complication for India, as does escalation of ceasefire violations on the borders with Pakistan. Though India has rebuilt ties with the US, whether the India–US rapprochement will stretch to influence US policy on Afghanistan is doubtful.

In 1990, Kakar clearly regarded India's role in Afghanistan as negligent. India's subsequent support for the Northern Alliance was not accompanied by a major diplomatic push in international forums, and India grew even less visible after the Taliban takeover. For two years after the US-led war and instatement of a new Afghan government, India remained marginal. Beginning in 2003, India gradually clawed its way into influence through development aid (close to USD 3 billion) and military training programs. For the Karzai administration, India was also a useful tool to keep Pakistan at bay, sometimes to the further detriment of India–Pakistan relations.

The years 2006–13 were a high point for India–Afghan relations. Despite frequent attacks on Indian embassies and aid workers, mostly by the Haqqani faction backed by Pakistan, development aid and diplomatic and intelligence cooperation continued to

grow. The Modi administration that came to power in 2014 initially curtailed India's gains in Afghanistan, but as US disenchantment with Pakistan grew and Indian analysts clamored for more attention to Afghanistan, they engaged—albeit to a limited extent—with the Ghani administration. That Ghani himself did not regard India as an important actor did not help, either.

Despite these ups and downs, one point has remained constant in Indian policy toward Afghanistan. The Indian government has not engaged with the Taliban. In part, this reluctance springs from experience—the 1999 airplane hijack by Pakistani terrorists was facilitated by the Kandahar Taliban, even though India was quietly trading with Taliban-controlled Kandahar—and in part is born of a belief that support for the elected Afghan government is essential for the country's stabilization. As a result, India remained largely marginal to the Afghan peace process even in the years that it had influence in the country, but was able to work with Afghan security agencies to minimize the risk of anti-India terrorist sanctuaries being reestablished in Afghanistan.

The February 2020 US–Taliban agreement may effectively close the latter option. US envoy Zalmay Khalilzad has visited India periodically, to brief the Modi administration on the peace talks, both prior to the February 2020 US–Taliban peace agreement, and after it. After his May 2020 visit, he remarked that India should talk to the Taliban. The official Indian position remains that the government will support any solution that is Afghan-led and acceptable to the Afghan people, but Indian analysts increasingly echo Khalilzad, recommending that the Modi administration seek to engage with the Taliban. It is difficult to believe that no feelers have been cast—the head of the Taliban's Doha office and signatory to the US–Taliban agreement, Sher Mohammad Stanikzai, was trained at the Indian military academy in Dehradun. His comments that India has always been on the wrong side, however, indicate that even if there were feelers they amounted to little. Of course, the comments may have been an opening salvo.

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Among recent peace agreements that have lasted, one factor stands out. Each settlement, whether of Northern Ireland, Bosnia, or even Sudan, has been embedded in a wider regional framework for peace. In the case of Northern Ireland, it was the European Union (EU); for Bosnia, it was a Balkans economic compact that promised to lead to membership of the EU; and in the case of Sudan, it was the African Union. In each of these cases, the regional organization was involved in peace negotiations, provided security and, for Northern Ireland, a guarantee of economic support.

Afghanistan, however, does not have a similar regional organization to look to. Though many of the South and Central Asian countries are members of the Shanghai

Cooperation Organization (SCO), its mandate is restricted, and the fact that the SCO is dominated by China, with Russia a pale second, makes it suspect. Nor did the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), of which Afghanistan is a member, offer an alternative. Not only has it been held hostage by India–Pakistan rivalries, South Asia is still distant for Afghanistan. Only one member of the grouping, Pakistan, shares a border with Afghanistan, and though another member, India, is an Afghan ally, SAARC as a grouping of relatively poor countries with little security cooperation has little to contribute to Afghanistan.

To plug this gap, the Afghan and Turkish governments launched a new regional initiative in 2011, the Heart of Asia–Istanbul Process. With support from the UN and civil society groups in much of the region, the Heart of Asia initiative worked hard to bring neighboring countries into programs that would make Afghanistan a hub for trade and transit and maintain Afghanistan's neutrality in neighborhood conflicts.

A brave initiative that could have played anchor to an Afghan peace agreement, the Heart of Asia process made some progress toward achieving regional and international consensus on support for an integrated and democratic Afghanistan. Unfortunately, this progress was too slow to influence rapidly changing events. Though regular Heart of Asia meetings continue, both at the ministerial and working group levels, the group now acts more as a support for political and security initiatives taken elsewhere than as an initiator of processes that will engender peace in Afghanistan. India, that was an early and active partner in the process, appears to have downgraded its participation. The December 2019 ministerial meeting, in Istanbul, was attended by the Minister of State for Road Transport rather than the Foreign Minister.

Whether the Heart of Asia process will be able to revitalize itself in the coming five years is a moot point, though regional guarantees of support for peace in Afghanistan are sorely needed.

As Kakar remarked in his long reply to Najibullah: "In the final analysis, the resolution of the Afghan issue is largely beyond the power of the Afghans; it is essentially reliant upon foreign powers." It remains to be seen how these external dynamics play out, and what effect they have on the chances for peace in Afghanistan.

Substantive Peace in Afghanistan: Ending the War; Not Transforming It

Nilofar Sakhi

Abstract

Historically, peacemaking in Afghanistan has been challenging for a number of reasons. Sophisticated internal political maneuvering has led to divides over what issues are considered to be in the country's national interest. Externally, regional and international powers have long had conflicting interests regarding war and peace in Afghanistan. The recent Afghan peace process, beginning in September 2018 is organized around three phases. The first phase of the process started with negotiations between the United States and the Taliban. After more than eighteen months and nine rounds of negotiations between the two parties, the United States (US) and the Taliban signed an agreement on February 29, 2020. According to this agreement, the US committed to withdrawing troops, including US troops, contractors, and coalition forces from Afghanistan within a specific timeframe. The Taliban guaranteed that they would not use Afghan soil to launch attacks against the US and her allies. The Taliban also agreed to join intra-Afghan negotiations to discuss and negotiate a permanent ceasefire and a political road map for the future of Afghanistan. However, the agreement to start intra-Afghan negotiations was conditional on the Afghan government releasing 5,000 Taliban fighters held prisoner, and the Taliban releasing 1,000 prisoners from the Afghan government side. Though the success of the first phase of the peace process lay in creating a framework for the parties in conflict to negotiate within, it took six months to start intra-Afghan negotiations, which marked the second phase of the process on September 12, 2020. The third phase of the peacemaking process is the regional component of the conflict, which has

received little substantive attention so far. This chapter discusses the political peacemaking process in Afghanistan, and how it has been operationalized so far. It outlines the factors that are presenting impediments to the process, with historical reference made to the 1980s peace processes to highlight similarities and address current challenges in order to move forward.

A Brief Overview of Peacemaking in Afghanistan

The primary objective of peacemaking is to end war. It is a process of political and ideological debates in which parties in conflict frame their issues, interests, and continue to bargain over those issues and interests until they achieve the maximum possible gains for their side. Peacemaking is not based on goodwill and altruism. Rather, it is a complex process of calculating benefits and losses with due consideration given to the benefits of peace and the added value of stopping the fighting. It is a process that consists of conflicting parties making choices that best serve their objectives. During this process, political deals are proposed and considered. Conflicting parties will choose not to pursue these deals if they do not perceive any gains. It is typical for the process to fail before the point of face-to-face negotiations due to preconceived notions about unrecognized interests. The success and failure of peacemaking processes is based on internal and external factors that continually influence the parties, resulting in changes in their objectives and interests. Internal factors include regime change, political instability, perceptions about the power and influence of the other side, battlefield strength, and assumptions about losing more than making gains. External factors include the economic and political interests of countries involved in peace and conflict processes in the affected country. Even the goodwill of foreign countries involved in peacemaking has the potential to be perceived as external meddling, which may only serve to further undermine the sovereignty of the affected country.

Taken together, both peace and conflict processes in Afghanistan have been influenced by external factors, with Afghans playing a far less substantive role in waging war or peace. The weak and dependent economy made the leaders of Afghanistan dependent on international and regional power to govern. This international involvement, in turn, has also determined the nature of internal reforms and peace and stability in Afghanistan.

In Afghan peace processes, Afghan leaders have had to make domestic compromises to accommodate international and regional interests in Afghanistan. Therefore, Afghan leaders have not held a strong position in domestic political decision-making processes. Second, the international peace industry, managed by multilateral organizations and

supported by their home governments, has been helpful in delivering services to respond to the basic needs of Afghans. Simultaneously, however, this industry has also challenged the neutrality of the peacemaking process and undermined the sustainability of domestic peace efforts, as countries have sought to stabilize Afghanistan in ways consistent with their own interests.

Looking to the Past

Some Lessons

By examining past Afghan peacemaking processes from the 1980s onwards, this stark reality becomes clearer. There have been a number of major peace processes. Starting in 1988, representatives from the governments of Afghanistan and Pakistan came together to sign the Geneva Accords on April 14, 1988. With the view to ending the war, the Geneva Accords had an additional “Declaration on International Guarantees” signed by the US and the Soviet Union, as state guarantors.¹ In principle, the accords agreed upon by the respective parties provided a road map for peace. Furthermore, Afghan President Mohammad Najibullah (r. 1987–1992), initiated the National Reconciliation Policy (NRP), as the Soviet Union was in the planning phase of withdrawing from Afghanistan. The main objectives of the NPR were to negotiate with Mujahideen; to integrate those willing to join the system; and to develop a comprehensive political settlement plan. It involved both bottom-up and top-down approaches to peacemaking. The constituencies for peace were developed through social and cultural consultation processes, which involved tribal elders and used local methods of consultation such as the Loya Jirga.

In considering how to address the internal and external aspects of peacemaking, President Najibullah and Afghan historian and writer, Hassan Kakar, exchanged a series of letters in the early 1990s. They discussed concerns over a variety of internal factors such as a lack of cohesion among Afghan political and social societies, a lack of clarity about national sovereignty, and a lack of support from political constituencies for a political settlement. They also shared concerns over external factors, including the meddling of neighboring countries in Afghanistan’s political affairs, security, and the flow of weapons from Afghanistan’s neighbors, which serves (and continues to serve) to strengthen opposition to the government and insurgency. In his letters, Hassan Kakar mentioned repeatedly the importance of having a people-centered approach at the heart of peacemaking. Without such an approach, building sustainable peace would remain elusive. He asserted that if the Afghan political system and central administration are

¹ R. Klass, “Afghanistan: The Accords,” *Foreign Affairs* 66, no. 5 (1988): 922–45.

not trusted by the people, they will neither participate in nor legitimize peace initiatives. This was the case with the NRP launched by the government of President Najibullah. In one of his exchanges with Hassan Kakar, President Najibullah asserted that his “goal [was] the permanent cutting off of foreign hands from the internal affairs of Afghanistan and launching positive competition”² to facilitate peace and stability in Afghanistan and also protect her sovereignty.

The following are some of the factors which President Mohammad Najibullah and Hassan Kakar highlight in their letters that remain pertinent to contemporary challenges in current efforts to establish peace and security in Afghanistan.

Dependent Politics

As an economically dependent country, Afghanistan has been reliant on outside subsidies. In return, Afghanistan has had to take into consideration decisions made in the interest of those sponsoring states. No Afghan government has been able to generate enough revenue to either build or sustain the state. Afghan dependency on foreign aid for her survival has been a major problem in every peacemaking process. Reliance on the British Indian empire in the nineteenth century, on the Soviet Union and the US during the second half of the twentieth century, and again on the US and international community for financial aid after 2001 has developed a political culture of dependency: those who pay set the rules. The dependency of Afghanistan on external financial resources, along with her history as a client state of global powers, has developed a discourse of dependency within Afghanistan. Afghans perceive external powerholders to be the ones tasked with resolving conflicts in the country, especially given that the conflicts are initiated externally. To that end, external states (alone) should act to contain, settle, and end wars. Economic and political dependency in Afghanistan has further created an agency of dependency among individuals whereby socio-political chaos is expected to be handled and managed by foreign countries and, particularly, by global powers.

It is difficult to say if there has been any peaceful settlement in Afghanistan without the involvement of external actors. However, the peacemaking processes involving global actors have not ended wars. Rather, their involvement has simply and devastatingly continued, yet transformed existing conflicts. For example, considering the Geneva Accords, the negotiations addressed the timetable for Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan and the timing of ending aid to the Mujahideen. It was expected that its outcome would be the simultaneous Soviet withdrawal, and the ending of aid to the resistance. The actual outcome, however, was quite different. While the Soviets did withdraw, the US and Pakistan continued to aid the resistance. Consequently, the

² Najibullah, Second Letter to Hasan Kakar, 3.

accords marked both the end of one conflict and created the grounds for another. As such, since the 1980s, as President Mohammad Najibullah has highlighted in his letter to Hassan Kakar, the border cities of Afghanistan such as Kandahar, Khost, and Jalalabad encountered severe security threats posed by the Pakistani military and Saudi Arabia's Wahhabi mercenaries.³

Successive Afghan political leaderships have recognized the dependent nature of Afghanistan's political processes. Even so, concrete steps to address the issues of dependency have not been taken seriously, given that leaders have never managed to sustain the state through domestic revenues. A key question then becomes: Does the possibility of having neutral peacemaking in light of such realities really exist in Afghanistan? A year after the withdrawal of Soviet troops from the country, Hassan Kakar spoke of the importance of a neutral peacemaking process where he emphasized the role of outside parties such as the USSR and the US agreeing on a joint position on Afghanistan so that Afghans could have the opportunity to choose a government and political leadership based on the principle of true national sovereignty. The major point highlighted by Hassan Kakar was the nature and intentions of external interventions. In their exchanged letters, both President Mohammad Najibullah and Hassan Kakar underscored the need to address the interests of neighboring and regional countries. President Mohammad Najibullah proposed a regional conference with the participation of Afghanistan, her neighbors, the guarantors of the Geneva Accords, the head of the Non-Aligned Movement, and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (formally the Organization of the Islamic Conference). This regional conference was to have two central items on its agenda. First, an agreement on completely ending the supply of weapons to the warring parties in Afghanistan. Second, recognizing the status of Afghanistan as a permanently nonaligned and disarmed territory guaranteed and protected by the international community. Hassan Kakar opposed the second item, arguing that if it were to happen, Afghanistan would forever be a colony and a protected country.⁴ He went on to suggest it would be suicidal for Afghanistan to be surrounded by more populous and stronger neighbors with modern weaponry.

Regional Instability

Hassan Kakar's continued emphasis on external intervention drew a direct line between (escalating) regional instability and Afghanistan's domestic insecurity. He noted that if the Soviet Union and Pakistan were both hoping that, by increasing differences and divisions among Afghans, they would be able to dominate Afghanistan through

³ Najibullah's Second Letter.

⁴ Hassan Kakar, "Letter to President Najibullah, June 1990" (Kabul: Kakar History Foundation, 2020).

their surrogates, they should note that their special parties would not be trusted by the people, as is the case with the official party of the Kabul regime. An unstable Afghanistan means an unstable region.⁵ Though external players may have divergent interests in peace and conflict processes within Afghanistan domestically, it is clear that a (regional) common interest exists: regional stability. Regional stability and the internal security of Afghanistan are mutually reinforcing and complementary. The current state of instability and insecurity not only threatens Afghanistan's national security, but also the security and stability of the region. The involvement of regional countries in the peacemaking process in Afghanistan could address transnational security threats such as the smuggling and trafficking of weapons and illicit drugs, and cross-border militancy. It is hard to imagine an impartial peacemaking process that does not include discussions of regional stability as a shared common interest.

Lack of Intergovernmental Cooperation

The lack of intergovernmental cooperation nationally and, particularly on policy objectives, divides a government's administrative and technical resources that could otherwise be allocated for the successful implementation of a particular policy to build peace. Afghanistan's continued political divides remain one of the major impediments to a political settlement, power sharing arrangements, and political cooperation among elites, and the appropriate allocation of government resources. There is little doubt that elements of a peace infrastructure have existed in Afghanistan in the form of policies, roadmaps, and national plans for peace, along with the availability of the necessary funds. However, the lack of intergovernmental cooperation for peace in Afghanistan due to differences in political ideology and diverse party politics, issues around power and recognition, and the promotion of self over the national interest, have stifled any nascent peace efforts. This political division and lack of coordination is made worse by Afghanistan's political and economic dependency on external actors and, particularly by a reliance on outside support to foster political settlements. As such, while external conflict mediators and facilitators, along with special envoys, are helpful contributors, their continued involvement has the potential to prevent indigenous peace motivators from emerging, as external actors often transform the issues according to their own interests. This can serve to overshadow or stifle discussions of the main causes of the conflict. Consequently, national and international stakeholders work to address the impact of the conflict rather than its causes, which more often than not are tied to the lack of human security. Failure to address the conflict's main causes results in a population neither contributing nor trusting a peace process, which is meant to serve them and their needs.

⁵ Kakar, "Letter to President Najibullah."

Conversely, “if the relations among diverse parties is to be diffused, involving cooperation along many dimensions, themes and issues, then they have to have different assets and resources, different inputs, otherwise mutual benefits would be limited.”⁶ When many outside parties are involved in brokering peace, they can buy the loyalty of different political actors domestically for the purpose of pursuing their own interests. This can create further divisions within the local political system. That said, most of the political divides in Afghanistan have been created along ethnic and ideological lines as a means to gain more political power. Politicians in Afghanistan maneuver, constantly changing their positions during peace processes. Internal deal making is a common strategy to gain more from the process of negotiating a political settlement. This constant maneuvering to gain more political power has prevented a cohesive and united political entity from emerging that could represent the Afghan government in the process of making peace.

Looking to the Future

Regional Peacemaking

Historically, the wars and protracted conflict plaguing Afghanistan are fueled by regional actors. As previous literature on foreign elements in Afghanistan suggests, these elements are more threatening and dangerous than internal factors. Even if Afghans come to an agreement on a political settlement and road map for peace, domestically, there is little impeding continued external support (financing, weaponry, and so forth) of internal factions. Intra-Afghan negotiations make little sense without first fostering an agreement that discusses the roles regional neighbors and, particularly, Pakistan will play in the peace and stability of Afghanistan. Ignoring regional dynamics will only serve to transform the current war and nature of conflict but not end the conflict.

Current peacemaking efforts have so far only addressed the regional component of the Afghan conflict by holding irregular meetings between government officials and other interested parties. The US Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation (SRAR), Zalmay Khalilzad, had several rounds of meetings during 2019–2020 with regional countries’ government representatives to discuss the Afghan peace process. The meetings were neither organized systematically nor through an organized platform to produce a signed agreement on issues concerning peace and security in the country. For instance, the meetings between Zalmay Khalilzad and the Pakistan government representatives did not produce any substantive written document to guarantee Pakistan’s

⁶ J. Galtung, *Peace by Peaceful Means: Peace and Conflict, Development and Civilization*, vol. 14 (London: Sage, 1996), 63.

commitment to discontinuing financial and military aid to the Taliban. In meetings between leaders from Afghanistan and Pakistan, Pakistan has consistently supported the development of an independent, republican, and democratic political system in Afghanistan. Pakistani authorities have also said that the soil of Pakistan will not be used against Afghanistan.⁷ Moreover, Prime Minister Imran Khan's visit to Afghanistan on November 19, 2020, with a high-ranking delegation, generated a bilateral agreement between the two countries that emphasized a "shared vision" for regional cooperation, peace, and economic development that could lead to stability in both countries. However, the core causes of the conflict, including the flow of weapons from Pakistan, India–Pakistan strategic interests, and the Durand Line and water crisis were not addressed. As such, the implementation of any such agreement would be challenging, particularly as it does not provide a political solution based on the real causes and drivers of the conflict. In addition, without a monitoring system or the necessary conditions to ensure the implementation of a bilateral agreement, official visits can be only be viewed as diplomatic meetings between the two countries which are unlikely to either address underlying conflict issues, nor lead to lasting peace and stability.

Ad hoc meetings and verbal commitments (alone) are insufficient to normalize relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan given Pakistan's history of propping up and actively supporting the Taliban and insurgency. That said, recognizing the role of Afghanistan's regional neighbors is not enough. The peace process must move beyond the current status quo, which comprises a piecemeal approach to the regional component of peacemaking. It must move beyond the current framework of irregular meetings between regional countries' government officials and Zalmay Khalilzad. Rather, a systematic approach to the regional component of Afghan peacemaking is required. This regional dimension must first be addressed and organized around a negotiating table in the presence of China, the US, Russia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and India.

The Focus: Causes, Not Outcomes of War

The focus during these negotiations must first be on the major causes of war and conflict in Afghanistan, rather than the outcomes. By way of example, Pakistan's interest in Afghanistan revolves around minimizing India's political and economic influence regionally, particularly in Afghanistan's domestic affairs, as well as its strategic interest in the Durand Line, the use of the Kabul river basin, and access to the Central Asian market. These issues must be a major part of substantive discussions of regional negotiations with Pakistan. Moreover, Pakistan's support for the Taliban, insurgency, and using the Taliban as their proxy in Afghanistan is based on long-held economic, political, and

⁷ Abubakar Siddique, "Is Pakistan Ready to Crack Down on Afghan Taliban Sanctuaries?" Gandhara, June 2020.

strategic interests. Were regional negotiations to start with discussions of the causes of the conflict, this could help to transform the issues and objectives, which could in turn normalize the relationship and build trust between Pakistan and Afghanistan.

The same must apply for other countries. Therefore, a regional conference for peace should be convened to address the interests of regional players with a deal agreed upon at the end. As proposed in past peacemaking processes, the first objective of this conference “should be an agreement ending the supply of any kind of weapons to the warring parties so that the ceasefire can be enforced and strengthened.”⁸

The Substance

Negotiations must address the “substance” as well as the “procedure of dealing with the substance.”⁹ When parties enter into negotiations, issues such as communication, structure, and the agenda become the most vital components of the process. Negotiations are the central component of any peace process, from setting the agenda and locating a neutral venue to determining what issues are to be addressed by the parties, and exploring options, finding solutions, and securing the necessary support from relevant parties. These are also key for the implementation of a peace deal. The stages of peacemaking should lead the parties to compromise based on cooperation, as modeled through the prisoner dilemma exercise. The scenario of the prisoner dilemma explains well the decision-making process during negotiations between parties in conflict. Players within the game are rational and struggle to maximize their benefits. As the prisoner dilemma highlights, prisoners are left with the choice of either confessing to the police or cooperating with each other. The parties to conflict during a peacemaking process strive to explore and exploit all means to gain more. Therefore, the escalation of violence, boycotting a peace process, and a lack of cooperation and threats are some of the pressure tactics parties can adopt to gain more leverage at the negotiation table. More pressure from the involved parties can be used to draw maximum gains from a negotiation of peace. Cornering these gains can also be made possible by serious losses or an escalation of violence. In line with the rational choice model, parties utilize severe tactics (often violence) to leave each other with no choice but to accept the conditions of the other party and further their goals.

Peacemaking is a protean process, which involves resistance between the parties to compromise on more and not less. Violence is perceived as one of the tactics to gain an upper hand in the bargaining process and win more. It is unlikely that violence will stop prior to and during a negotiation process. In principle, it is beneficial to implement a ceasefire first before embarking on inter-party negotiations. Doing so has the potential

⁸ Najibullah, a Letter.

⁹ R. Fisher, W. L. Ury, and B. Patton, *Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement without Giving In* (New York: Penguin, 2011).

to stop the parties from using conflict to build leverage over each other, implying that they can start a principled negotiation focused on their interests rather than bargaining from positions of power. In reality, however, this has not been the case. Conflict parties strive for more power and other gains from a peace settlement, which has resulted in parties simultaneously engaging in fighting and negotiating until they reach a point where they have explored and exploited all their means and resources.

Procedural Arrangement: Intergovernmental Cooperation

As a first step, the intra-Afghan peacemaking process requires intergovernmental cooperation and comprehensive shuttle diplomacy among political elites, local militias leaders, and the current Afghan government before negotiations with the Taliban even start. It is essential that the Afghan government side of the negotiating table presents itself as united in its message and in its interests, and demonstrate that they are willing to bargain with the Taliban. This unity could prevent the emergence of internal and external peacemaking spoilers. The Taliban have already gained international recognition and significant territorial control within Afghanistan, which could provide them with significant leverage at the negotiation table. Any signs of division within the Afghan government's negotiating camp will not only favor the Taliban, but may also afford them the ability to gain a lot without compromising much. Any one party gaining disproportionately from the peacemaking process and any eventual deal in terms of power and resources will significantly jeopardize the sustainability of a peace deal, increasing the likelihood of it falling apart within twelve months.

Secondly, it is crucial that intra-Afghan negotiations be organized around a substantive and well-grounded agenda. Intra-Afghan peace talks involving the Taliban, representatives from the Afghan government, political parties, and civil society must embark upon serious discussions of the major issues, including ending the insurgency, the political arrangements of states (a political settlement), crafting a political system that ensures strong local governance, limits the resistance of local power holders, sets a framework for reconciliation and the reintegration of Taliban fighters in society, and preserves the institutional gains made over the past several years of transformation. Therefore, it is imperative that a plan to strengthen the Afghan governance system be part of intra-Afghan negotiations. Lastly, as key parties to intra-Afghan negotiations, both the Taliban and the Afghan government must also embark on negotiations with a national economic plan in mind that could alleviate the economic dependency of Afghanistan and reflect on how domestic resources will be used and allocated by any future government in a way that both parties agree on.

Will Substantive Peace Be Achieved?

In this chapter, I have discussed two major elements of concern for the peacemaking process in Afghanistan that incorporates both domestic and regional efforts. Peacemaking in Afghanistan is not possible without taking into serious consideration regional dynamics, including the interests of Pakistan, Iran, Russia, Saudi Arabia, China, and India. As a primary party leading the peacemaking process, the US should assume a neutral third-party role once an intra-Afghan peace deal and a regional peace deal are signed, to monitor the implementation of a signed agreement. Stability in Afghanistan is deeply linked to the stability of the region. Knowing the fragility, and violence-prone nature of Afghanistan, which can easily extend to neighboring countries, Pakistan, China, and Russia would want the United States to remain, but the degree of US involvement must be managed and continually reevaluated. Never-ending US involvement in Afghanistan is and will continue to be viewed as a threat to the interests of Afghanistan's regional neighbors.

No peace deal in Afghanistan will be sustainable if the interests of her regional neighbors, and in particular Pakistan, is not negotiated through a regional peace agreement. Further, peace will not be sustainable if Afghan political leaders do not have a plan for sustaining the state based on domestic revenues to limit international aid. The start of intra-Afghan negotiations suggests the second phase of the peacemaking process in Afghanistan is progressing. However, by not addressing regional challenges, and failing to deal with the interests of Pakistan, Iran, Russia, Saudi Arabia, and India, it is certain that we will simply witness a further and devastating transformation of the conflict accompanied by continued insurgency, with evolutions in the insurgent's identity. Lasting peace will once again remain elusive.

Afghanistan's Quest for Peace: What to Learn from the Past?

Farkhondeh Akbari and Timor Sharan

Abstract

Afghanistan is once again on a quest to achieve sustainable peace. President Najibullah's correspondence with Hassan Kakar thirty years ago is a telling frame through which we can examine the challenges then, and reveal lessons for a peace settlement with the Taliban. By drawing on Najibullah's National Reconciliation Policy and the peace settlement in Cambodia in 1991, we reflect on key lessons from the historical past relevant to Afghanistan today. The three key lessons that emerge are: the importance of consensus among international actors on peace in Afghanistan as to their geopolitical interest; the ripeness of local actors for peace—when stalemate or continuation of the conflict is mutually painful; a strong guarantor to ensure the implementation of the peace agreement and the commitment to peace. The challenges of the past, and the three lessons, provide a comprehensive and detailed way of identifying the important indicators and factors in the current peace process.

A review of the letters exchanged between President Najibullah and Hassan Kakar on peace and reconciliation efforts in Afghanistan provides an interesting historical insight into the complex dynamics and challenges involved in achieving peace in Afghanistan. Thirty years after the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan and Najibullah's "peace plan," known as the National Reconciliation Policy (NRP), Afghanistan is still on a quest to achieve sustainable peace—something proving to be as complicated and challenging as before. The importance of the letters lies in the personal and delicate notes of urgency from the regime to broaden its political bases to strengthen its bargaining position against the mujahideen tanzims in future peace talks, and to ensure its survival once the Soviets left. Internal factional fighting between Khalq (people) and Parcham (banner) had already significantly weakened the party and the regime was fast losing ground to resurgent mujahideen tanzims. The *current* peace efforts must be understood in terms of the continuity of conflict and the failure to reach a sustainable political settlement by addressing the root causes of four decades of war and violence. By drawing on critical historical lessons from Najibullah's National Reconciliation Policy and examples from the successful peace settlement in Cambodia, we reflect on and draw lessons from the historical past for the ongoing "peace process" with the Taliban.

In the first section, we reflect on the Soviets' exit plan, and Najibullah's National Reconciliation Policy and its consequences. The second section highlights three critical lessons from the failure of the Soviet exit and Najibullah's reconciliation policy: first, the importance of geopolitics and an international and regional consensus on peace; second, "ripeness for resolution" and asymmetry of power; and finally, the role of an effective guarantor. Throughout these sections, we reflect on the case of the Cambodian peace settlement in revealing technical insights for Afghanistan. In the concluding section, the paper draws on lessons from Najibullah's NRP, and Cambodia, in order to shed light on the ongoing peace settlement efforts with the Taliban.

Background on NRP: Consequences and Outcomes

Najibullah's national reconciliation policy must be understood in the context of the broader Soviet military exit strategy. By early 1984, four years into one of the bloodiest wars since Vietnam, the Soviet leadership realized that their troops were trapped in a quagmire facing an increasingly stronger insurgency and an unreliable Afghan partner that was consumed with internal party infighting and rivalry.¹ In November 1986, the

¹ On 27 December 1979, using provisions of the Soviet–Afghan Treaty of 1978 as their justification, the Soviet Union began a ten-year military intervention. It staged a coup against Hafizullah Amin and installed Babrak Karmal as the new president. The *Khalq* faction of the PDPA had removed, imprisoned, or eliminated their opponents and had executed thousands of Afghans. According to

Soviet Politburo, under the influence of the new General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Mikhail Gorbachev, finally took the decision to withdraw from Afghanistan. The Soviet exit plan had two important components. At the international level, the Soviets pursued negotiations with the United States and neighboring Pakistan to sign a non-intervention agreement—known as the Geneva Accords. The Accords, technically between Afghanistan and Pakistan, were signed on April 14, 1988, after twelve rounds of talks, facilitated by the United Nations. Both the Soviets and the US agreed on a timeframe for the troop withdrawal, to act as guarantors in the Afghan war, and to facilitate a final settlement among Afghan warring factions. At the Afghan level, the strategy involved bringing a new leader into power who would be more willing to reform the party structure to widen the political base, thereby improving the regime's legitimacy before reaching a political settlement with the mujahideen groups.²

The Geneva Accords quickly disintegrated. The mujahideen tanzims who were excluded from the negotiations refused to accept the outcome because it kept Najibullah in power; Iran called it legally invalid and refused to participate in talks, and members of the PDPA saw the Accords as a betrayal of Soviet commitment.³ Pressured by the Soviets, Najibullah pursued his National Reconciliation Policy. The policy provided for the regime to reach out to different segments of Afghan society, and to the diaspora, including Hassan Kakar, to broaden its base. It brought some noncommunist moderate Afghan groups in exile into the political structure; the most notable change was the appointment, as prime minister, of Mohammad Hassan Sharq, who had been a deputy prime minister during Daoud Khan's presidency. To appeal to noncommunists, Najibullah changed the

Giustozzi (2000, 4), out of the original 18,000 members of the party, and the 28,000 that joined before the end of 1979, half had died or had been purged by the time the Soviet Union invaded. Once the *Parcham* faction had been weakened, internal division emerged within the *Khalq* faction, between Nur Mohammad Taraki (President), and Hafizullah Amin (Prime Minister). After a failed attempt by Taraki to assassinate Amin, the latter staged a coup and killed Taraki and his family. For a detailed account of the 1979 coup, see Arnold (1985) and Kakar (1995).

² President Karmal had resisted including non-PDPA figures and *Khalqis* in his government. He had also wanted the Soviet withdrawal to be tied to direct talks between Islamabad and Kabul—something the Soviet leaders were not interested in pursuing. In a heated exchange between Gorbachev and Karmal in October 1985 in Moscow, Gorbachev decided to send a strong "recommendation" to the Afghan government that "with or without Karmal, we will firmly carry out policies that must lead to withdrawal from Afghanistan in the shortest possible time" (Cordovez 1995, 202). It was announced to the Twenty-Seventh Party Congress on February 27, 1986, that the Soviet Union will exit from Afghanistan through a "phased withdrawal" in accordance with the proposed UN settlement (Cordovez 1995, 202). According to Cordovez, the Soviets went as far as favoring the former king, Zahir Shah, to be the head of any future government. Under pressure, Babrak Karmal reluctantly resigned on May 4, 1986—just hours before the eighth round of the Geneva talks.

³ Mujahideen groups fighting the Soviets were referred to as tanzims because of their political-military organisational structures. By the mid-1980s, seven major Sunni tanzims in Pakistan, and eight Shi'a tanzims in Iran were functional, financed by the US, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and others as part of the international competition of the Cold War.

name of the party from the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan to Hezb-e Watan, and sought to bring noncommunist elites into the cabinet. The regime also held several ethnic Loya Jirgas (the first ethnic Hazara Loya Jirga being organized in 1989) to appeal to different communities to support the regime against the mujahideen. The final part of the policy, once some legitimacy was gained, aimed at seeking a political settlement with the seven mujahideen groups in Pakistan and the eight Shia tanzims in Iran. However, several UN attempts to bring all the Afghan factions to the negotiating table failed. In addition, Pakistan showed no interest in ensuring that a political settlement between Afghans was achieved, because of the general belief that the communist government in Afghanistan would collapse soon anyway. The conflict dynamics were not ripe internally within the party and externally with the jihadi actors to push for a settlement, as discussed in the next section.

The failure of the NRP had several consequences, which eventually contributed to the collapse of the regime. By 1989, when the Soviets withdrew, Najibullah's government had lost significant legitimacy, and his attempt to appeal to noncommunist groups, including members of the intelligentsia such as Hassan Kakar, came too late and lacked credibility. The change of the party name and adoption of a new constitution at the November 1987 Loya Jirga did not bring positive changes. Power remained solidly with the presidency and the party. The NRP not only failed in appealing to a different segment of society; it also produced a large rift within the PDPA, especially in the Parcham faction. Disagreeing with Najibullah's policies, pro-Karmal supporters became busy sabotaging the process.

The most serious consequence of the NPR was the ethnicization of the state. By the time the Soviets withdrew in 1989, distrust between the pro-Najibullah and pro-Karmal factions had an underlying ethnic dimension. Many saw Najibullah's policies to bring change in the organization of the state, the army, and the economy, as an attempt at ethnic realignment.⁴ Najibullah appealed to the Khalqis based on Pashtun solidarity, while balancing their power in the military with non-Pashtun militias outside the regular chain of command.⁵ Some scholars have noted the importance of ideology for PDPA members in shifting toward either Ahmad Shah Masoud or Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, as the former was more moderate than the latter.⁶ However, this does not explain why the Khalqis, as the most ideologically radical group, allied with Hekmatyar, the most radical Muslim leader.⁷ It seems that, as the survival of the regime became questionable, the pro-Karmal network leaned toward Masoud because of ethnic solidarity, and also a belief that Masoud would be more willing to compromise with them in a power-

⁴ Rubin, *Fragmentation of Afghanistan*, 150–153.

⁵ Rubin, *Fragmentation of Afghanistan*, 150.

⁶ Roy, *Afghanistan*.

⁷ Roy, *Afghanistan*.

sharing arrangement.⁸ This was best manifested in the May 1990 *Khalqi* Defense Minister Shahnawaz Tania's attempt coup, in which he made a deal with Hekmatyar to open up the security cordon south of Kabul city for Hezb-e Islami fighters to enter the city. The coup failed spectacularly, and Najibullah ordered the arrest of 127 Khalqi military officers. Twenty-seven of those fled to Pakistan, where they appeared at a press conference with Hekmatyar denouncing the regime.⁹ Hekmatyar appointed Tanai as the commander of his army (*Lashkar-e Isar*; the Army of Sacrifice). By April 1992, with the Soviet Union consigned to history, the collapse of the city of Mazar-e Sharif made Najibullah's position untenable. With his resignation already foreshadowed on March 20, 1992, the pro-Karmal faction staged a "silent coup" against Najibullah on April 15. Unable to leave, Najibullah was forced to seek asylum at the UN compound.¹⁰ A few days later, mujahideen tanzims entered Kabul with Sibghatullah Mojaddedi as the new interim president.

As the above background highlights, the Soviet exit and Najibullah's National Reconciliation Policy failed because of three important factors, explained in detail below. The geopolitics of Afghanistan did change drastically with the Soviet exit and its collapse, which made it difficult for the regime to sustain itself without financial backing. Secondly, the internal power dynamics within the PDPA, and then the Hezb-e Watan and Islamist groups, as well as in the mujahideen factions, were not ripe for negotiation. Neither was the Hezb-e Watan internally ready to accept Najibullah's radical policies, nor were the jihadi actors prepared to make a compromise, feeling that power was within reach with the Soviet Union gone. Their thinking was focused on victory, not compromise. Thirdly, while the Soviet Union had collapsed in 1991, Pakistan continued funding the mujahideen. Hassan Kakar in his letters briefly notes these three key important aspects, which are essential to reaching a peace agreement, especially in his first response to President Najibullah.

⁸ Authors' interviews with several former PDPA members, Kabul, February 2020.

⁹ Giustozzi, *War, Politics and Society in Afghanistan*; Rubin, *Fragmentation of Afghanistan*, 151.

¹⁰ See Fida Yunas, *Afghanistan*, for a detailed account of what happened on the early morning of April 16 when the UN convoy tried to evacuate Dr. Najibullah to the airport, and from there to India. The authors have also obtained a letter by Najibullah in which he alleged that the pro-Karmalis staged the coup to put all the blame on him and exonerate themselves of any wrongdoing in a future Mujahideen government. Najibullah's allies were Yaqubi (WAD), Watanjar (MoD minister), Pakteen (Interior), and Gen. Manokay Mangal. The Military Council was led by Gen. Muhammad Nabi Azimi (commander of Kabul Garrison), Abdul Wakil (foreign minister), Asif Sarwari (the army chief of staff), Farid Mazdak, Mahmud Baryalay (Karmal's brother) and Suleiman Laeq (politburo members).

Lessons Learned from the Past

The first lesson for a peace settlement is how a change in regional and international politics can influence the prospects for peace. Peace settlements are initiated when conflict no longer serves the geopolitical interests of key international actors, although geopolitical shifts at the international level do not always align with the interests of conflicting actors at local levels. The incentive structures of the key regional and international players must change to see sustainable peace.

The collapse of the Soviet Union created a major geopolitical shift—new states emerged, while existing states went through transformations. After the global geopolitical changes, peace agreements were the main form of exit route from the conflict. The UN expanded its political settlement mandate in efforts to intervene in ending intra-state conflicts, and to strengthen fragile and failed states. From 1990 until 2007, around 646 documents labeled as peace agreements were signed—addressing 102 inter-state and intra-state conflicts, of which 91 percent were intra-state in nature. Over 32 percent of peace agreements have collapsed without implementation.¹¹ This indicates that peace agreements emerging as a result of geopolitical shifts do not always lead to peace.

In the Afghan case, geopolitical changes forced the initiation of a political settlement. But geopolitical shifts can require more time to have effects at the local level. Despite the Accords at Geneva in 1988 witnessed by the US and the Soviets, Afghanistan was still overshadowed by the geopolitical Cold War rivalry between the two camps. Both the Soviet Union and the US continued to provide financial and military support to their respective clients. The US and Saudi aid to the mujahideen increased from \$700 million in 1988 to \$715 million in just three months from December 1989 to February 1990.¹² Similarly, regional tensions between Iran, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia were intensifying with the departure of the Soviet troops. For too many of these countries, the collapse of Najibullah's regime seemed imminent, and it just did not make sense for them to reach a settlement with a regime that appeared seriously wounded. With the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the US had no interest in continuing to engage with Afghanistan and to help Afghans reach a political settlement. The US departure created new "complex regional dynamics." As a result, today, the Afghan conflict has become one of the deadliest and most protracted in the world.

Here the comparison with Cambodia is instructive. Unlike Afghanistan, in Cambodia, the change in the geopolitical interests of international actors resulted in the withdrawal of political and resource support for local actors, thus building momentum

¹¹ UN Peacemaker Official Website <https://peacemaker.un.org/document-search?keys>; Walter, *Committing to Peace*, 2002.

¹² Bradsher, *Afghan Communism and Soviet Intervention*, 334.

for meaningful negotiations. In Cambodia, the decline of the Soviet Union from the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, and the major geopolitical shift that this entailed, was a turning point for warring factions to seek an UN-led peace settlement. As a result, two geopolitical factors played a defining role in the breakthrough in the peace talks among the four factions that had ties to international actors with direct influence on their ground policies. First, the Soviet Union was unable to support the Vietnamese-backed government in Phnom Penh anymore, which subsequently forced Vietnam to announce the withdrawal of its forces. Second, China was not facing threats from the Soviet Union anymore; thus, the Chinese were willing to withdraw their support from the Khmer Rouge. Therefore, these geopolitical factors left local and regional actors with little choice other to agree to settle the conflict politically. On October 23, 1991, the Paris Peace Agreements formally ended the Cambodian conflict.

In the aftermath of Cold War geopolitical shifts, a pattern of peace settlement emerged, of which Afghanistan becomes a classic example.¹³ This conveys the significance of external support in the continuation of local conflict. A change in geopolitics is observed in all three scenarios discussed here. The Soviet Union's repositioning led to the 1988 Geneva Accords, and ultimately the withdrawal of support for Najibullah; just as withdrawal of support for the Vietnamese-backed government in Cambodia led to the 1991 Paris Peace Agreements. The US plan for withdrawal from Afghanistan led to the February 29 Agreement "for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan" between the US and the Taliban.¹⁴ Peace settlement policy, it appears, needs to be bound to a powerful state's geopolitical interest to gain the weight required for the enforcing of such a policy. In other words, gaining international consensus on a peace policy is crucial for it to enjoy a strong mandate at the international level, and for it to influence the domestic level.

So far, we noted geopolitical change as a factor that that could impel actors to pursue a peace settlement. However, successful diplomacy relies also on a moment being ripe for local actors. Engaging at the right time is a necessary prerequisite to ensure the effectiveness of negotiations, and to reach a durable peace settlement. Between 1950 and 2004, about 32 percent of peace agreements failed as a result of recurring violence.¹⁵ The large number of settlement failures signals the complexity of peacemaking. William Zartman developed the theory of ripeness in 1989 as a product of sophisticated work on conflict management and negotiation based on his vast knowledge of conflict in the African continent. The theory of ripeness provides guidelines for the right time

¹³ Bell, *Peace Agreements and Human Rights*, 81.

¹⁴ Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan between the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, which is not recognized by the United States and is known as the Taliban, and the United States of America, 2020, retrieved from: <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Agreement-For-Bringing-Peace-to-Afghanistan-02.29.20.pdf>

¹⁵ Human Security Project, *Human Security Report 2012*, 178.

and conditions for negotiation. He argues that conflict management is dependent on skillful observation and the creation of a “ripe moment,” and the assessment of ripeness helps determine the seriousness of a group regarding a political settlement. The concept of the ripe moment is based on conflicting parties’ perceptions of a “mutually hurting stalemate”—associated with a past or impending catastrophe. It arises when actors feel they cannot escalate to victory, that the deadlock is painful, and their assessment is that the pain can rise sharply if nothing is done about it. This can prompt them to seek an alternative policy as a way out. A “ripe moment” is identified regarding the escalation of the crisis and the critical shifts in the intensity of the crisis that mutually hurts conflicting actors.

Najibullah’s National Reconciliation Policy was technically comprehensive; however, it was not ripe in the context and the moment at which it was proposed. It was proposed too late, and did not go far enough in sharing power with noncommunist members. Second, the severe internal division within the party meant that his proposal was seen as flowing from a position of weakness. He simply had no credible political grounds to be considered as a relevant actor in the future of Afghanistan. Also, as noted above, the *Hezb-e Watan* was not internally ready for negotiations. Some of the key politburo and senior party members believed that they could continue fighting, given that the jihadis were internally divided. Interviews with some of the pro-Karmal faction members revealed that they genuinely believed that if they lost Kabul city, they could shift their center of power to the north and continue resisting with the help of General Dostum’s militia forces.¹⁶ The pro-Karmal faction had already shifted most of their military weapons and resources to the north, suggesting a degree of preparation for such an outcome.

The jihadi groups did not fare much better, as they were seriously divided over the distribution of power and the future of the state. As the Soviet exit proceeded, the Peshawar groups began their effort to agree on an interim government that could take over from the communists. On February 10, 1989, a 519 member Shura (council) representing seven jihadi tanzims was convened with the help of the Pakistani and Saudi governments in Rawalpindi. Negotiations with Iran and the Soviets failed to produce a formula for the representation of both the Shia and “good Muslims” from Kabul, as government delegations were called.¹⁷ In the words of one scholar, the process began in “prejudice” and was conducted in “secrecy and corruption,” which produced “bitterness,

¹⁶ Authors’ interview with former PDPA members, Kabul, March 2020.

¹⁷ Author’s interview with two former senior Wahdat and Jamiat officials revealed that the Shia delegation had demanded 120 members (20 percent, proportionate to the size of their population). Mojaddedi was in favor and had worked hard because he wanted to gain the support of the Iran-backed Shia to get elected as president. The main resistance came from Hekmatyar, Khalis, and Sayyaf. Author’s interview, Kabul and New Zealand, February 2020.

and ended in worse than futility by making a peace settlement more difficult.”¹⁸ The Shia, royalists, Durrani Pashtuns, the Kabul regime, representatives of the Commanders’ Council, and others were either excluded or felt excluded.¹⁹ Mojaddedi was awarded the position of the presidency because he was the weakest tanzim leader. Influenced heavily by the Pakistani ISI and the Saudis, the latter’s intelligence agency spent 26 million USD during the Shura.²⁰ To please the Saudis, the position of prime minister was offered to Sayyaf; a plan to make Hekmatyar the defense minister collapsed in the complex deal. Rabbani, the leader of the Jamiat tanzim, received the symbolic position of minister of reconstruction. The key positions of prime minister, defense minister, and foreign affairs were all given to Ghilzai Pashtuns. The Shia groups, as well as the commanders, rejected the outcome immediately.²¹ And in response to this unfair and prejudiced outcome, on June 16, 1990, the eight Shia tanzims came together to establish the Hezb-e Wahdat-Islami (the Islamic Unity Party) of Afghanistan. Feeling excluded, the commanders reinforced their efforts to consolidate their Commanders’ Council, and made some independent decisions away from the ISI’s grip.

In Cambodia, the Khmer Rouge defected from the Agreements in less than two years. The group created a climate of tension by breaking the commands of the Agreement—by breaching the ceasefire, failing to demobilize, and committing violence. As a radical Maoist guerrilla group, the Khmer Rouge had committed genocide during its rule from 1975–1978. The peace agreement provided amnesty for their past crimes and neutralized the content of the Agreement by not mentioning the word “genocide.”²² Scholars such as Ben Kiernan argue that Pol Pot signed the Agreement to buy breathing space for his army to regroup and remobilize.²³ Hence, Pol Pot had no intention to comply with the PPA and desired to be in power again. This clarifies that when an actor does not see a situation as ripe for resolution, it may lack any genuine commitment to peace. When the Khmer Rouge engaged in negotiations and signed the PPA, they had little choice because of the risk of the withdrawal of resources, and of diplomatic recognition. China, as the traditional supporter, had asked Pol Pot to seek power through an election. Commitment to peace has to be meaningful to be effective. Nayan Chanda, a veteran analyst of Khmer Rouge behavior, also suggested that the Khmer Rouge paid lip service to the PPA while buying time, setting up secret bases, and spreading its sphere

¹⁸ Bradsher, *Afghan Communism and Soviet Intervention*, 326.

¹⁹ According to Roy (*Afghanistan*, 80), the Sunni jihadis’ rejection of a 20 percent share for Afghan Shias was not so much based on disagreement on population percentages or on Saudi–Iranian rivalry, but on the strong anti-Shia and Hazara discrimination that existed among other ethnic groups, rooted in Afghanistan’s historical state formation.

²⁰ Rubin, *Fragmentation of Afghanistan*, 250.

²¹ IRNA, from Tehran, March 9, 1989.

²² Peou, *Conflict Neutralization*, 88–89.

²³ Widyono, *Dancing in Shadows*, 82.

of influence.²⁴

Peace settlement initiatives need to consider the readiness of local actors for a positive outcome, which depends upon their assessment of the ripeness of a conflict for settlement. Ripeness can be reached if international stakeholders in the conflict cease support to local factions. Actors may fear a hurting stalemate where continuation of a conflict would be “painful.” Internal factors may also influence ripeness—but it is secondary to the international factors.

Noting how many peace settlements fails and how many withdrawals there are from peace agreements, the role of guarantor becomes crucial in peace settlement studies. When conflicting actors sign an agreement, a third party is commonly selected to act as the “guarantor,” “observer,” or “enforcer.” Monica Duffy Toft argues that, regardless of the nature of the agreement or the way the war has ended, the crucial objective must be a constructive peace.²⁵ The key obstacle to achieving a constructive peace is in the lack of guarantees in the enforcement and implementation of the peace agreement. In other words, mechanisms are required to be in place to punish defectors from the agreement and to ensure that commitment toward the signed agreement and accountability mechanisms is sustained. Defection from the agreement has to be costlier for actors than staying in the agreement.

The guarantor arrangements differ based on the type of agreement and the settlement. There are certain issues to be taken into consideration when the role of the guarantor is identified. Joshua Weiss identified four types of guarantors: (1) the guarantor has an interest and oversees part of the agreement; (2) the guarantor is impartial and oversees part of the agreement; (3) the guarantor has a direct interest and oversees the entire agreement; (4) the guarantor is impartial and oversees the agreement as the whole.²⁶ Based on the character of the conflict and the type of agreement, it is important that the role of the guarantor be codified in the text of the agreement. It is argued that the more power the guarantor is given to enforce the agreement, the more the agreement is legalized.²⁷ Further, clear decision-making authority and the power given to the guarantor can promote compliance. Agreements can range from high-end legalization to low-end legalization.

In Afghanistan, as noted by Hassan Kakar in his first letter, the US and the Soviet Union failed spectacularly in their roles as guarantors of the 1988 Geneva Accords. Most importantly, they failed to stop providing military and financial support to their respective clients, against their explicit agreement when taking on the role of guarantors.

²⁴ See Stephen Heder in his two-part article in *The Phnom Penh Post*, March 24 – April 6, and April 7–20 1995.

²⁵ Toft, *Securing the Peace*.

²⁶ Weiss, “A Tyrian Dilemma.”

²⁷ Weiss, “A Tyrian Dilemma”; Bell, *On the Law of Peace*.

The Soviets continued to supply their clients with aid and weapons, valued by Western sources at 3–4 billion US dollars a year until the end of 1991.²⁸

The Paris Peace Agreement “failed” to be implemented in full because of the lack of commitment from local actors. Problems flowed from the Khmer Rouge’s withdrawal; from noncooperation strategies and escalation of violence on the part of the Cambodian People’s Party; and from failure of international powers to “enforce” the Agreement and fulfill their obligations when local actors failed to comply.²⁹ The United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) was the UN’s most sophisticated peacebuilding mandate. However, it lacked enforcement mechanisms. There was no appetite on the part of international actors to reengage and enforce the PPA spirit.

The empirical examples from the PPA and the NRP, and insights from the theories highlighted here, show how peace settlements emerge from geopolitical shifts and require ripeness and commitment from the guarantor(s) to succeed. Local factions and internal organizational power dynamics need to be ripe for resolution. Both sides of the conflict ought to feel the mutual pain from the hurting stalemate to be forced to cease fighting and engage meaningfully in peace. This is possible when there are guarantees—through guarantor(s)—that returning to fighting is costlier than engaging in peace. Hence, the discussed themes provide a comprehensive picture of challenges faced by peace settlements, and valuable lessons to take into consideration when discussing peace settlement initiatives with the Taliban.

Reflecting on Lessons: Peace Settlement with the Taliban

The US–Taliban Agreement signed on February 29 is the first meaningful result of diplomatic engagement with the Taliban followed by the inauguration of Intra-Afghan Negotiations (IAN) in Doha on September 12, 2020. Unlike previous settlements, this time around there seems to be some level of international consensus around the need for a political settlement of the Afghan conflict. However, there is still serious doubt regarding whether a regional consensus can be achieved. At the opening ceremony of the talks, both Iran and Russia did not participate. India has already expressed serious concern about the process. It is at the geopolitical level that we see an underlying gap in the Afghan peace process. There seems little evidence to say that regional countries’ incentive structures have changed positively to enable a peace settlement in Afghanistan. Issues such as the Pakistan–India rivalry over Kashmir and the region, and Afghanistan’s entanglement in those dynamics; the fear among the Afghans about the post-US

²⁸ Rubin, *Fragmentation of Afghanistan*, 147.

²⁹ Roberts, *Political Transition in Cambodia*, 121.

vacuum and how countries like Russia, Iran, and China might try to fill it as they did in Iraq, Syria, and Libya; and most importantly, how to influence Pakistan to change its incentive structure. Thus far, there is little evidence to show that the US and its allies have found the key to this.³⁰ Although Iran doesn't want control, it is hedging its bets.

The ripeness of the Taliban and the Afghan government, a key element of a successful peace settlement, is clearly lacking. The US has made many concessions in favor of the Taliban, including a timeline for exit which has undermined a key point of leverage of the Afghan government and its international backers. We are yet to see a tangible concession from the Taliban. Zalmay Khalilzad, the US envoy for peace, in a recent interview to CBS admitted that a ceasefire is far away, as he does not think the Taliban will call for a ceasefire until a political agreement has been reached with the Afghan government during the ongoing negotiations.³¹

Despite some expressions of frustration over the past few months by some donor countries, including the European Union, over the lack of the Taliban's commitment to a ceasefire, and in demonstrating evidence of cutting ties with terrorist groups like the Al-Qaeda, it seems unlikely that the EU or any other country would commit militarily post the exit of the US. There is an argument that a military exit should be postponed beyond May 2021 as most of the benchmarks for talks have passed. There is now a consensus that with a few thousand soldiers on the ground, the US and its allies are fast losing their leverage over the Taliban when it comes to forcing them to cut ties with the Al-Qaeda, Tehreek-e-Taliban, and other terrorist organizations operating in Afghanistan. The US military leverage is eroding, and it is eroding fast. All evidence points to the fact that, the February 29 deal is essentially a framework for the withdrawal of US forces to end its "longest war" rather than being a plan for a sustainable peace for Afghanistan. The agreement made several important concessions to the Taliban, such as agreeing to speak in the absence of the Government of Afghanistan, creating obligations for the government (that is, the release of 5,000 Taliban prisoners) and without having a tangible obligation for the Taliban in the agreement which would improve the lives of Afghans. It also endorsed the mindset that the Trump administration is seeking to exit from Afghanistan as an objective for his reelection in November 2020. Furthermore, diplomatic engagement and the agreement gave the Taliban diplomatic recognition as well as international legitimacy that the movement has desperately sought.

Evidence suggests that the Taliban's thinking has passed the hurting stalemate stage. With little international leverage, including an exit timeline in place, the Taliban seems to be thinking about a full military takeover. Recently, as the long-awaited IAN has

³⁰ To read more about the sanctuary provided to the Taliban by Pakistan, and its impact on peace, see Farkhondeh Akbari and Timor Sharan, (2020), "The Key to Peace in Afghanistan?"

³¹ "Ambassador Khalilzad on a 'Hopeful Place' for Afghan Peace," PBS Newshour, 5 October 2020.

begun, a Taliban official was quoted as saying that if talks fall apart, Plan B is “definitely a military takeover.”³² Given the slow pace of talks, one wonders if the Taliban strategy is to wait out the American withdrawal and then take full control. When the Americans had the political and military leverage, they should have included the Afghan government in their talks, secured some sort of a clearly defined and measurable reduction of violence, if not a ceasefire, to force and sustain the hurting stalemate. One could argue that the Taliban’s thinking has shifted past ripeness and maybe they are seeking nothing short of full, outright victory—this is in contrast to the hurting stalemate argument that conflicting parties have to believe that they are not gaining by fighting, or that the continuation of fighting would only hurt more. In the meantime, the Government of Afghanistan is also indicating that in response to the Taliban, fighting will continue. These military signals while the talks have just begun give parties other options as well—even if it is not their first option. Instead, the parties need to feel that negotiation is not only the first option but the *only* option for the resolution of conflict.

The absence of a guarantor in the US–Taliban agreement has been the cause of serious flaws in the pursued peace framework in Afghanistan. The problem that the absence of a guarantor has posed can be observed in the components of the US–Taliban agreement. First, the disagreement over prisoners’ release highlighted the significant need for a guarantor to manage risks and ensure the smooth implementation of a peace agreement.³³ Research indicates that many of the released Taliban prisoners have returned back to the battlefield.³⁴ Apart from verbal consent, there was no meaningful guaranteeing mechanism to ensure the released Taliban prisoners would be held accountable for breaching their obligation to not return to fighting. A monitoring mechanism by a neutral and strong guarantor would have ensured that the released prisoners would not pose a security risk to the people of Afghanistan, and that this would build trust among the people toward the peace process. Secondly, the UN Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Committee reported to the Security Council in June that the

³² Yousafzai and Reals, “What Do the Taliban Want Out of the Long-Awaited ‘Intra-Afghan Talks’?,” CBS News, 15 September 2020.

³³ The major hurdle was over the release of “up to” 5,000 Taliban prisoners and 1,000 Afghan security forces, a commitment made to the Taliban by the US without the consent of the Afghan government. The Afghan Government took a firm position in not releasing 597 controversial prisoners who had been involved in large-scale criminal and terrorist activities. However, the Taliban insisted on 5,000 (not “up to 5,000”) being released, and, furthermore, 5,000 whom they alone would choose. The hurdles with respect to prisoner release in the peace process were first created by the Taliban. One was their seeking of an imposition of an obligation on the Afghan government in the US–Taliban agreement, even though it was not a signatory. A second was the ambiguity in the text on the numbers of prisoners; in the Agreement, “up to 5,000” implies a ceiling, whereas the Taliban chose to treat it as a target. Constructive ambiguity in agreements can be useful to help parties move forward, but where trust between key actors is low, precision is essential to limit the scope for mistakes and misunderstandings.

³⁴ O’Donnell, “Defying Peace Deal, Freed Taliban Return to Battlefield.”

Taliban movement is maintaining ties with Al-Qaeda. The report summarized that “the Taliban regularly consulted with Al-Qaeda during negotiations with the United States and offered guarantees that it would honor their historical ties.”³⁵ A guarantor that both parties agreed to would have had a strong mechanism in place to monitor the Taliban–Al-Qaeda ties and would have held the Taliban responsible.

Conclusion

Procuring a peace settlement is a complicated and challenging process that requires a profoundly comprehensive analysis to find solutions. Peace settlement theories give us a road map of what may be entailed in the process, and empirical evidence paints a detailed picture of the challenges that are likely to emerge. There is no “quick fix” when it comes to war and bloodshed that destroys the deep layers and social fabric of society. Simplistic approaches and solutions further complicate the situation. Furthermore, oversimplifying a peace process dehumanizes the people who have paid the highest price with their sweat and blood. Najibullah’s National Reconciliation Policy and the Cambodian peace settlement offer valuable lessons for Afghanistan’s current quest for peace with the Taliban, highlighting challenges and also providing opportunities to avoid the mistakes made in the former cases. The three key lessons discussed in this paper were the importance of an international geopolitical shift in favor of peace, and reaching consensus; conflicting actors reaching a ripeness for peace by considering a peace settlement as the only option for moving forward; and ensuring that a guarantor mechanism is set up to oversee the implementation phase of the peace agreement. The combination of these three lessons will raise the chance of success and can help the current peace process initiative with the Taliban.

The currently increasing level of violence in Afghanistan does not favor peace. Peace settlement negotiations cannot maintain their credibility when civilians, including children, are murdered for power and diplomatic leverage, and if the Taliban does not even consider discussing the diversity of Afghan interests, history, and achievements. Perpetrators of such acts cannot commit to a durable peace; instead, spurious peace agreements spread the seeds for future conflict. The future of talks and the peace process, as well as the commitment of international partners and allies remains uncertain, and the people of Afghanistan are right to be as concerned today as they have been at any time in the recent and not-so-recent past. This is especially so at a time when the primary objective of talks is driven by the US’s own national security agenda. If talks fail and

³⁵ “UN Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Committee Report 2020,” United Nations Security Council (S/2020/415), May 27, 2020.

the US and its allies withdraw from the country in May 2021, we are likely to see more intensive interference by Afghanistan's neighboring countries, who might see the vacuum as an opportunity to expand their interests. The geopolitical dynamics are likely to shape the future of Afghanistan, as they did following the Soviet exit in 1989.

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What will Peace Look Like in Afghanistan?

Ben Acheson

Abstract

This essay reflects on “what will peace look like in Afghanistan?” To do so, it looks at how various rival parties and other stakeholders in Northern Ireland were able to create a “visioning process” in order to “articulate what a peaceful society will look like, including the steps and goals to achieve it”. How this process was conducted in the Irish context – led by a range of paramilitary parties – is discussed in the essay, with reference to the documents and positions that resulted from the initiative. The argument is that such a process could aid Afghanistan’s quest for peace, given that peace in the Afghan context remains “an abstract, intangible concept” and because contending parties do not yet share a vision of what a situation of peace would look like. The author makes clear that “no solution from Northern Ireland will directly transfer to Afghanistan” but there are still lessons to be learned – the need for visioning is one of them.

“We are all part of the problem but how many are prepared to be part of the settlement? It costs nothing to think about it.”

—Northern Irish Paramilitary Representatives, UPRG, “Common Sense”

Sit back, close your eyes, and imagine a country ravaged by a multidecade war. Every person has been touched by tragedy. They are tired, as are many combatants. Hope has come in the form of opposing combatants meeting each other, after a long period of one side refusing to talk. Multiple ceasefires—often during holiday periods—have been welcomed. But hope is undercut because there is still no end in sight. An unprecedented deal between two belligerent parties has not ended violence. Bickering politicians are as divided as ever. International and regional states talk of peace but still sponsor actors on each side. The killing continues.

This sounds similar to the current Afghan reality. But it is actually a snapshot of Northern Ireland in the late 1980s.

Ten years from then, Northern Ireland transitioned from a sad stalemate to a comprehensive peace deal—the 1998 Good Friday Agreement—which ended thirty years of continuous conflict. The bombs ended and the bullets stopped flying. Northern Ireland embarked on a better path. Belfast, the capital city, was redeveloped from a walled-off and stagnant city into a tourist hotspot. Business bloomed. International sports events like the 2019 Open Championship—golf’s premier world tournament—returned to a country once regarded as one of the world’s most dangerous. Even Hollywood stars arrived to use the stunning natural scenery—the hit series *Game of Thrones* was filmed in areas that were off-limits not many years earlier.

Of course there were challenges. Collapse looked likely at multiple points. Spoilers still exist and neither side trusts the other fully. A political settlement could not eradicate centuries of historical grievances and deep distrust overnight. There is not yet reconciliation in Northern Ireland.

But there is peace.¹

Northern Ireland now knows what peace looks like, although this does not make it a blueprint for Afghanistan. Every conflict and every peace process is unique. This can make parties to conflict resolute in the uniqueness of their situation and reluctant to listen to outsider views. They develop a “deafness.”

But lessons from other peace processes are always relevant, especially as examples of how other people have been in similar stalemates but found a way out. Even if there are no shareable successes, there can be mistakes to avoid. Lesson-sharing can trigger thought and inspire ideas.

¹ Further information is available in various books, including Power, *Building Peace in Northern Ireland*.

Lessons from Letters

Inspiration, ideas, and lessons were clearly what Afghan President Najibullah was hunting for when he exchanged letters with Dr. Hassan Kakar in 1990. Those letters have aged thirty years, but their words have not. Both President Najibullah and Dr. Kakar diagnose problems and provide prescriptions that suit 2021 as much as they do 1990. Their letters are littered with language and concepts still being proposed thirty years later.

A “dignified” peace is what Afghans call for today.² Dr. Kakar’s references to an inclusive process would also fit well in today’s debates. He mentions ceasefires, leadership councils, interim arrangements, elections, international observation, and a Loya Jirga to approve new structures. Troop withdrawal is a central theme too, albeit with reference to Soviet rather than US-led forces. Even “various diseases” are mentioned, as if Dr. Kakar knew what Afghanistan would face in 2021. Of course Pakistan and regional actors are pinpointed as the central problem as well.

This reinforces that many of the tools needed to build an Afghan peace remain the same as thirty years ago. It is a reminder that getting an Afghan peace agreement does not require someone to suddenly have a magical new idea that nobody previously thought of. It is about the right sequence and timing of the well-known tools that will unlock progress.

An equally important recognition that the letters allude to is something often ignored by foreigners: that Afghans are vastly more experienced in peacemaking than any of the rotating international experts foisted upon Afghanistan. In his first letter, President Najibullah writes about the Soviets in a way that could also explain US/NATO behavior after 2001:

lack of trust in the talent and capability of Afghans has created this incorrect idea among some that our victories and achievements are impossible without the assistance and cooperation of Soviet experts.

Look at the Geneva Accords in 1998, or the Peshawar and Islamabad Processes in the early 1990s. Think of the Ashgabat talks in the late 1990s, or the 2001 Bonn Conference. There were multiple talks with Hezb-i Islami after 2001. There was also the 2015 Murree talks and the Quadrilateral Coordination Group in 2016. Multiple track II, or informal engagements, should not be forgotten, nor should Tajik leader Ahmad Shah Masoud’s visits to meet the Taliban in 1994, or his handshake with mujahideen rival Gulbuddin Hekmatyar in May 1995. This is all “practice” in making peace, with many of the key actors remaining the same.

² Ghani, “Speech on Prisoner Release.”

So what is missing? It is still unclear what an Afghan peace would actually look like. Afghanistan needs a vision of peace to aim toward. This is where Northern Ireland can provide inspiration.

Visioning for Peace in Northern Ireland

Any peace process is made of many building blocks. One of the foundational blocks in Northern Ireland was what can be called a “visioning process.” This is a process of internal discussions on peace within various parties, to identify end states that are plausible, probable, and preferred. The aim is to articulate what a peaceful society will look like, including the steps and goals to achieve it.

Such a process sounds so simple that it cannot possibly influence such a strategic outcome as ending a conflict. But visioning provided a way forward in Northern Ireland after a series of peace efforts failed, and when the future looked more uncertain than ever. Peace was a common goal and parties were being pushed to the negotiating table but neither side understood the other’s needs. Even if they sat together, they did not know what to negotiate. Compromise was a dirty word. There was intense pressure to make peace but without any idea of what peace would look like.

The internal discussion—the visioning process—started to change mindsets. It made the key actors think about the situation they were in and why they were in it. It led the parties to ask themselves new questions about old problems, including about the nature and validity of their struggle. They started to imagine the kind of peace they wanted to create, and what the public would accept. It started a process of transformation within their own community long before they engaged “the other.”

By doing this, party leaders could ascertain what issues their own people would accept movement on once negotiations began. This helped the public feel engaged and it reduced feelings of neglect. People felt included. It inoculated against skeptics and spoilers who felt unaware of what compromises would be made once negotiations began. In hindsight, visioning was the early preparation for negotiations, even if those doing it may not have recognized this at the time.

As these conversations evolved and developed, they were written down in what can be called “visionary documents.” Some of these were succinct descriptions of a particular party’s views and needs in peace. Others were comprehensive and included steps for creating peace.³

³ Examples available online include: UPRG, “Common Sense”; Sinn Féin, “A Scenario for Peace”; UVF, “Sharing Responsibility”; and Sinn Féin, “Towards a Lasting Peace in Ireland.”

Some documents were secret, but many were published. This enabled other actors to read them, whether they were state actors, foreign governments, civil society members, or, more importantly—political opponents. Of course no readers stayed silent. They digested rival views with vigor. Some wrote responses, published counterpapers, or held their own debates. That sparked conferences, seminars, and studies on similar topics—whether as an explicit response to various visioning products or as a natural byproduct of a new atmosphere of discussion. Some of the follow-on initiatives were spontaneous, like internal discussions and roundtables. Others were more structured. But all added to the debate.

An example of a structured dialogue that grew out of earlier visioning was the 1992 “Beyond Hate: Living with Our Deepest Differences” conference, where a range of voices debated many of the core issues identified in earlier visioning processes. Messages of support sent from Nelson Mandela and former US President Jimmy Carter elevated its profile and provided international legitimacy. That made all parties and the wider public take note and listen to the conference’s outcomes.

The New Ireland Forum in the mid-1980s is another example of a structured dialogue. It brought together likeminded political parties for consultations on the future. Over twelve months, it held eleven public sessions, twenty-eight private ones, and a range of lesson-learning visits to key conflict sites in Northern Ireland and elsewhere. The Forum had a chair and a secretariat and invited public submissions. 317 people and organizations responded to adverts placed in the media, of which thirty-one were invited to make oral presentations. Submissions came from all sectors of society, including politicians, civil society, business, medicine, the arts, and from among religious figures.

Such was the wealth of proposals received that even before its final report, the forum published three studies on the economic costs of the conflict. It also commissioned papers from experts on core disputed topics, including the nature of the state. The forum’s final report outlined three alternative structures of government for a shared or a “new” Ireland.⁴ With high levels of publicity prior to the report’s release, one of the parties that did not participate in the forum was spurred into publishing its own discussion paper entitled “The Way Forward.”⁵ Even the most senior state officials were forced to consider the debate. British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher chose to comment on the proposals—negatively. In response, her Irish counterpart described the forum’s report as “an agenda, not a blueprint”⁶ that had helped establish a nationalist consensus.

⁴ New Ireland, “New Ireland Forum Report.”

⁵ UUP, “Devolution and the Northern Ireland Assembly.”

⁶ New Ireland, “New Ireland Forum Report.”

The forum was disbanded after publishing its final report. But its influence lived on. Views it had drawn out provided a basis for discussion on all sides and became the default position of many parties for the next fifteen years of the peace process. Today, the forum is seen as a first acknowledgment by Irish political parties that they needed to engage with their opponents directly, rather than ignore them in favor of talking to state sponsors. What was initially dismissed as a one-sided talking shop is now regarded as one of the most important turning points in creating an inclusive peace process.

The lesson is that the forum, and other visioning initiatives, were instrumental tools in:

1. *Sparkling a national conversation.* It advanced a national conversation. It moved discussion from simple claims of “we want peace” to “this is *why* and *how* we want it.” Visioning allowed combatants to engage indirectly when direct contact would have fueled backlash.
2. *Enhancing understanding of “the other.”* Visioning helped (re)humanize opponents whom conflict had dehumanized in the minds of some communities. It also enabled parties to start talking in terms of their opponent’s interests—both important but difficult tasks.
3. *Reducing uncertainty and fear.* Internal dialogue fostered unity in various fractured parties (and the public). People started to understand where their leaders wanted to take them. They knew what the options were. They felt involved. Peace increasingly seemed less of a risk.

Over the next few years, the responses, seminars, conferences, and commentary provided a wealth of views to compare. That coincided with the start of secret and then public negotiations between the main parties. By then the information gleaned via the visioning process enabled identification of common ground—and there is always common ground if one is willing to find it. It also allowed identification of issues that needed to be on the negotiation table and those that could be dealt with in working groups or elsewhere. This made the prospect of negotiations less daunting for all.

By the time the negotiators took their seats, the visioning process had given everyone an idea of what peace would actually look like. All stakeholders could better articulate their views on what a shared future would entail. Politicians, paramilitaries, and the public recognized the benefits of a peace process. They moved beyond a sole focus on the risks and red-lines—both of which are important—but were becoming a tool for spoilers and an excuse for nonnegotiation. Mindsets shifted from thinking of peace in terms of *loss* to what they could *gain* from a peace process. As a result, belief grew that peace was possible.

What Does a Visionary Document Look Like?

Visionary documents came in different forms. “Common Sense—An Agreed Process”⁷ was not the first, but it is among the most comprehensive, clear, and concise. It was written in 1987 by the political wing of the Ulster Defence Association (UDA), one of the largest paramilitary groups during the conflict. It charted the UDA’s preferred path out of the conflict and possessed a level of detail rarely articulated by politicians, let alone paramilitaries. Its honest appraisal of the situation and admittance of some fault won the authors plaudits, especially as it was written during the most violent years of the conflict when combatants were normally stubborn in their defense of all their actions—and their atrocities. The authors framed their ideas with the following sections:

How Long Can This Go On?

The authors accepted that, after decades of violence, they had “nothing to show for it all but the prospect of looking forward to an ever polarising society brutalised by violence, ravaged by fear and demoralised by economic depression.”⁸ They recognized that the determination of “not to be beaten” led to endless fighting, and that “each community tends to form its impression of the other from the rhetoric and posturing of the most zealous and vocal sections of that group.”

What Impression Does Each Community Have of the Other?

This section identified that irrational fear of opposing communities stopped peaceful engagement. The authors acknowledged that they were part of the majority population but acted politically as if they were a “threatened minority” with “the politics of the besieged.” They admitted that this prevented power sharing because their constituency feared that their opponents would be a “Trojan horse” if let into government. They feared losing their perceived advantage.

Catch 22

The authors dug into the defensive mindsets that stymied talks. They identified that the nature of the state was the heart of the problem, but it was a starting point for dialogue: “[a Northern Irish state] may not be the whole-hearted wish of everyone in the province but must be recognised to be the wish of most. Surely then this is the logical place to make a beginning.” Importantly, they were not belligerent about it. They admitted that no party was “totally innocent or indeed totally guilty, totally right or totally wrong” and while the responsibility for violence was shared, so was “responsibility

⁷ UPRG, “Common Sense.”

⁸ UPRG. Subsequent quotations from the same source.

for finding a settlement and then the responsibility of maintaining good government.”

Far from being seen as a sign of weakness or fatigue by their enemies, the honest self-reflection was praised. A ruthless paramilitary group—whom many deemed as terrorists—had demonstrated a capacity for understanding and compromise not associated with such groups. This psychological self-assessment helped open the door to a new way of thinking about peace across the country. Some even saw it as a signal that previously unimaginable partnerships may be possible.

The self-assessment was only a starter. The authors also articulated the mechanisms and structures of governance they wanted in a situation of peace. They laid this out in detail, proposing serious solutions rather than repeating empty slogans or red lines. Learning lessons from elsewhere, they stated that settlements almost always “took the form of a contract between the various parties (a written constitution).” Such a contract would be “a set of rules which form the basic blueprint for society and which can be referred to for guidance when a dispute arises.”

The detail contained in the “Common Sense” document is important. Until then, most discussions on peace involved platitudes and statements. But these proposals went deep. They talked of a power-sharing structure that all parties, including their sworn enemies, could be part of. They outlined how many seats each party would get based on proportional representation. They sketched a breakdown of ministerial positions and how elections would work, amongst other things. They also reaffirmed their commitment to equal citizenship, that is, a willingness to change the inequality that drove the conflict. The authors reaffirmed that they did not want to deny any section of its community their aspirations.

The proposals in “Common Sense” were signals to the other side that even hardened terrorists and mortal enemies could potentially be talked to. The conciliatory tone was also a signal to opponents that the UDA were genuinely contemplating peace. After a warning that the only alternative to a pragmatic approach is “to fight a bloody civil war and let the victor dictate the rules by which we will live,” the document ended with a call to action: “The most dangerous thing to do, and unfortunately the most politically popular, would be to do NOTHING.”

No solution from Northern Ireland will directly transfer to Afghanistan. That is not the point. The lesson is that by doing the visioning work, those who eventually negotiated a peace deal and those who had to support it (i.e., the public) came to understand their options and were socialized into seeing peace as an opportunity rather than a threat. Hindsight shows that this was the much-needed covert preparation for negotiations at a time when overt preparation would have been misconstrued as a pathway to surrender and loss. Visioning in Northern Ireland enabled preparation without trepidation. Can it do the same in Afghanistan?

Would a Visioning Process Help Afghanistan?

Elements of visioning have occurred in Afghanistan. The Najibullah–Kakar letters were early stages of visioning in 1990. Various track II initiatives in the intervening years could also be classed as visioning. Multiple peace “plans” released by various political parties in 2020 are as close as anything to visioning, and President Ashraf Ghani called for a national conversation on peace in 2017,⁹ and many times since. On the same day this essay was sent for publishing, Ghani gave a talk to the United States Institute of Peace entitled “Afghanistan’s Vision for Peace,” where he presented five very broad objectives for Afghan prosperity and its foreign relations.¹⁰

Such efforts should be continued, energized and formalized into a process—a joined-up or structured dialogue. Various plans, events, and initiatives should be linked together and built upon one another. This is how to move discussion from surface-level declarations into detail. Too many recent articulations have been one-off. The recent peace plans published by political parties in early 2020 are an example. Many included valid ideas but faded into irrelevance after a limited burst of media coverage. What would help is if an opposing party or political rival could respond to a proposed plan and argue why it would not work, or what tweaks would be needed to gain their acceptance. A back-and-forth would prove beneficial.

Also of value would be a visioning process that has the negotiating table as a means to an end rather than the end itself. The sole focus of recent Afghan efforts has been getting to the table as quickly as possible. Whether it is US impatience or simply the Afghan way, the unstated assumption is that if the parties can just be herded to the table, then they’ll thrash out a deal and everything will be ok. This risks failure. Success should be seen as more than getting intra-Afghan negotiations underway. The public must not be misled into thinking that a peace process consists of a few intensive meetings leading to a well-publicized and symbolic signing ceremony. Coming out of a long war requires a long peace. Remember that peace is a process, not an event.

Going Forward

Even with intra-Afghan negotiations started in September 2020, a visioning process is needed. It can run concurrent to negotiations and feed into them as they progress. It can act as scaffolding for negotiations or as a forum where difficult discussions can continue away from the main table. Visioning infrastructure—formal or informal—can

⁹ ARG, “Press Release on the Kabul Process Conference.”

¹⁰ USIP, “A Conversation with H.E. President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani.”

be used to maintain contact between parties even if formal negotiations stall or pause. The visioning process may also offset the problems seen in September 2019 when a US–Taliban deal looked imminent, but there was huge public backlash due to uncertainty over its unknown content. A visioning process can increase public engagement and provide inputs for negotiations, thereby offsetting any feelings of neglect.

Afghanistan has seen extreme effort expended on creating peace architecture and its negotiating team. This is worthwhile and understandable. But just as important as *who* is going to face down the Taliban is *what* is going to be discussed and what will be created once each side leaves the table. Think of it like this: how can Afghanistan’s negotiators enter negotiations (and expect success) if they do not know what they are negotiating for?

Just a few years ago, the idea of peace in Afghanistan was balked at. Anyone who said they were working on peace was ridiculed. Today, there is belief (albeit fragile) that peace is possible. The term “peace” is on the tip of every tongue. It is in the public bloodstream. It is now ingrained as the eventual—and only—way forward. Whether by a warlord or a women’s activist, political calculations are being made with peace in mind. This is a remarkable shift and an enabler of a peace process.

Yet while there is more alignment than ever toward a political settlement, there is still no clear or shared vision of what a preferred peace will look like. Peace remains an abstract, intangible concept. This creates uncertainty and stokes tension between competing actors. It will be an impediment to negotiations. The actors who will be instrumental in its creation do not—or cannot—articulate what they are trying to create. “Creation” is a key word because peace means transformation. It is a process of change that creates something new. It is *not* a return to life as it was before war. It has to be a process of enhancement for both sides—otherwise it will not hold.

Now is the time to begin—or advance—the “high-caliber discussion” that President Najibullah talked of in his letters to Dr. Kakar. Other peace processes, like in Northern Ireland, demonstrate that discussion on what peace would look like is a foundational step. President Najibullah and Dr. Kakar understood this. Their letters show it. President Najibullah recognized that peace “is possible only through conciliation and understanding of the thoughts and views of all Afghans.” He called for “a series of contacts and exchange of ideas and understandings among Afghans.” Dr. Kakar knew of the need to “be psychologically prepared to accept negotiations.”

They started a visioning process, but historical events dictated that it was discontinued. Thirty years later, there is merit in picking up where they left off. Dr. Kakar quoted the famed Afghan poet Khushal Khan Khattak when saying: “if fate has pushed you into the mouth of a lion, don’t lose your courage.” A visioning process is what will give Afghanistan the courage to enter the lion’s mouth.

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The Mindset of Peace Negotiations in Afghanistan

Aref Dostyar

Abstract

This essay discusses the impact of the lenses which the sides of the conflict in Afghanistan use to view the peace process on the conduct and outcome of the ongoing peace negotiations. The essay contends that these lenses, which the author refers to as mindsets, impact the courses of actions of the actors (such as negotiators, decision makers, and decision influencers) of the process, which in turn shape the outcome of these negotiations. The author holds that two mindsets have been applied before—namely the compromise and defensive mindsets—and they have not achieved the desired outcome: peace. The essay introduces a transformative mindset as a more effective mindset in the context of the Afghanistan Peace Negotiations.

The question of how Afghans can initiate and effectively complete the Afghanistan Peace Negotiations and end the internecine war in Afghanistan continues to dominate the minds of people in the country and abroad. Variations of this question can be grouped into three categories: questions regarding the content of negotiations, which includes the agenda and substance of the talks; the process of conducting the negotiations, which includes timelines, venues, inclusivity mechanisms, decision-making processes, principles of negotiations, and other strategic details; and mechanisms and guarantees for implementation of a potential peace agreement. While the Afghan government and analysts are strategizing and implementing these ideas, I wish to draw attention to the mindset we use to work through these questions. Mindset refers to how we view the peace process to ensure what we do is effective. The mindset question guides the manner in which we approach the content and process of negotiations, as well as the implementation of a potential peace agreement. Our mindset toward peace talks has a direct impact on the substance, process, and outcomes of the negotiations.

Drawing upon the reflections of participants at the 2019 Afghan peace dialogue in Doha, and lessons learned from failed peace processes in the 1990s, I will examine factors that shape our approaches in peace negotiations. I will specifically discuss two types of mindsets that can be observed throughout the history of the Afghan quest for peace, which I describe as the “defensive” and “compromise” mindsets. I will build upon these mindsets and introduce a transformative type of mindset as a broader and more effective mindset for the Afghanistan Peace Negotiations.

Compromise Mindset Versus Defensive Mindset

President Najibullah is known for his efforts toward peacemaking, even though he failed to bring about peace. A study of Dr. Najibullah’s approaches to peace in the early 1990s might offer historical context to inform Afghan stances toward negotiations today. His proposal for reconciliation and building an internal coalition included a series of actions, that included transfer of power to a “leadership council” composed of members from all factions that would pave the way for an interim government in return for cessation of violence (Ahmadzai 1990, 2). He was prepared to make such a major concession to demonstrate his desire to achieve peace. He believed that by giving all forces—including the government—a share of power in Kabul, the armed opposition would be incentivized to end the war. In response to Dr. Najibullah’s continued calls for peace, the armed opposition increased their military operations. They believed a military victory was imminent. In a series of letters exchanged between Dr. Najibullah and the renowned Afghan historian Dr. Hassan Kakar in 1990, Kakar said that the

armed opposition equated the idea of a political solution to collusion with communism (Kakar 1990, 3). Thus, they continued to reject making peace with the government.

Dr. Najibullah's government used a compromise mindset to approach peace negotiations. Peace efforts failed to avert the government's collapse and the public execution of Dr. Najibullah. Memories of this event remain in the minds of many Afghans and often play a role in the current peace process. While there is consensus that a political settlement is the best way to end the armed conflict, Afghans have not agreed as yet on what it will cost. A majority on the Islamic Republic side, particularly the new generation of Afghan leaders, are not willing to rely on a compromise mindset to pursue peace negotiations. In fact, the 2019 Afghan peace dialogue that brought together 40 participants from the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan with a group of Taliban leaders demonstrated that the sides encountered each other with a defensive mindset. Most of the public discourse around negotiations continues to be about defending principles such as human rights, or existing structures such as the Republic. While I believe these ideals must be preserved during the Afghanistan Peace Negotiations to make peace last, it is not my intention to argue for or against either of the aforementioned mindsets in this essay, because both are undergirded by certain assumptions that are worth attending to. It is my purpose to build upon these mindsets and examine our approaches to negotiations in order to assume a mindset that is holistic, strategic, and capable of responding to the demands of Afghans in a way that can lead to the end of war and the beginning of peace.

A defensive mindset toward the Taliban in negotiations stems primarily from two sources: horrific historical events that unfolded in the 1990s, and current behaviors of the Taliban. Shaharзад Akbar, one of the 2019 Doha peace dialogue participants, has reflected on concerns about the Taliban's "unclear narrative" regarding the future political system of Afghanistan. She wrote that the Taliban still had the return of the Emirate in mind (Akbar 2019). Similarly, Timor Sharan, another participant, noted that the Taliban used victory language in their encounter with the government-led delegation (Sharan 2019). Taliban refer to the agreement "to bring peace to Afghanistan" signed in February 2020 between the United States government and the Taliban as the "termination of occupation agreement" and describe their side as "victorious" (Qazi 2020). It is true that the Taliban have at times used softer language about negotiations, human rights, and peace (Amiri 2020). They have essentially agreed to conduct peace negotiations with the Afghan government. However, the contrast between some of the Taliban's softer statements from their political office in Doha and actions on the ground in Afghanistan demonstrated through violence on a mass scale is too wide. Such a contrast has raised questions among Afghans about the Taliban's real motives, a point Sharan emphasizes, and which he has discussed in his contribution to this volume as well.

Considering the above, it must come as no surprise that the Afghan people and government seem hesitant regarding the ideas of compromise or the costs of peace. While certain compromises are inevitable, and can be constructive in any given effort toward a settlement, a compromise-focused approach to negotiations has several attributes that make it unattractive in Afghanistan. It aims to treat the symptoms of the conflict rather than to address its root causes. A compromise mindset seeks easy fixes such as distribution of power in government, instead of systematic political inclusion of all people, beyond assigning positions to certain individuals. Madhav Joshi, a specialist in comparative peace process studies, observes that concessions over seats in government do not end the violence, let alone in the establishment of peace (Joshi and Darby 2013). Examples of this type of compromise include the Angolan agreement in 1994, which collapsed, and the Sierra Leone deal in 1996, which failed to produce peace. More importantly, a compromise-focused approach toward peace in Afghanistan has failed to bring about stability before.

A compromise mindset focuses on immediate problems with short-term responses. It gives the appearance of peace but not the substance of it because this type of mindset does not tackle injustices of the past, nor create a sustainable system of governance for the future. In this approach, progress is measured by ceremonial events, while poverty, insecurity, and injustice may continue to intensify. A compromise approach to negotiations focuses on finalizing and signing a document that, if implemented fully, might at best end that which is not desired: violence. However, it fails to move beyond that event to create a possibility that is desired: peace. The main question a compromise mindset asks is “what/how much are we willing to give up?” It is not clear if compromise is required in terms of values and ideals, which lies somewhere in the spectrum of difficult to impossible for most Afghans, or systems and methods of governance, which is more pragmatic and, although a superficial approach, maybe considered as constructive.

The defensive mindset, which emerged in reaction to the failure of a compromise mindset, seeks to protect the gains of the past. It appears to address the past injustices by including victims of war in the negotiations process; however, it does not provide an answer as to how the society can move beyond the past toward a peaceful future. A defense-focused approach to peace negotiations has the capacity to rally people around an agenda because it posits that the society’s ideals and values are under attack. However, defense by definition does not intend to gain more; it only protects what already exists. This type of approach creates confrontation, whereas the purpose of negotiations, as stated by Colombian peace negotiator Serio Jaramillo, is to create a space of cooperation “which enables change in the mix of interests” (Jaramillo 2018). In the end, it turns out too costly in terms of human blood, financial costs, and cultural destruction, because the war continues.

The Transformative Mindset

Peacebuilding practitioner and scholar John Paul Lederach illustrates people's tendencies in viewing conflicts through a topographical conflict map (Lederach 2014, 2003). He says that conflict is often a mountain with peaks and valleys. Mountain climbers normally focus on the present challenges without looking at the whole mountain. The two mindsets we discussed so far at best respond to the peaks (challenges), and deals with the valleys (failures), which are smaller parts and surfaces of the whole mountain (conflict). Lederach introduces a lens that calls for seeing "the immediate situation," "beyond the presenting problems," and a "framework that holds these perspectives together" (Lederach 2003, 14). That is the lens of conflict transformation. This mindset takes into consideration the past, the present, and the future. It deals with surface issues, such as power sharing among certain groups, as well as the deeper sources of the conflict, such as systemic political exclusion and injustice, to create change that lasts.

Surface issues need to be addressed. These challenges form the substance or content of the negotiating positions in the Afghanistan peace process. The content might include a legal package to remove international sanctions and release prisoners; a security package to address existing violence and possession of illegal arms; an economic package to reintegrate ex-combatants into the society and facilitate the repatriation of refugees; and a political package to include the Taliban in decision-making processes. The compromise and defensive approaches stop at this agenda. These are necessary topics, but peace negotiations ought to be viewed as an opportunity to include and move discussions beyond content to the context, that is, to address the conditions which have led to war in the first place. To approach peace in its context is to address injustices of the past and build an agreement between ideologically opposing groups to coexist without overt and violent hostilities regardless of circumstances. Furthermore, context entails addressing regional and global aspects of the Afghan war. If context is not addressed, peace will not be sustainable.

Lederach's theory has insight to offer into the Afghan peace process. Grounded in this theory, I propose that we use a transformative mindset to approach the Afghanistan Peace Negotiations. This mindset, which takes the defensive mindset a step further, seeks to stop the bloodletting and end the military quagmire first by negotiating the four packages identified above, and additional potential proposals by the opponents, and secondly by addressing contextual and structural challenges to sow the seeds of development in the peace process in a wider sense. This mindset takes both a short-term and a long-term view, and focuses on structural change rather than mere achievements of certain milestones. The focus of a transformative mindset is building inclusive institutions, rather than sharing power through the division of government posts. It

is process-oriented as opposed to event-centric. This mindset is informed by history, but not captive to it. We should acknowledge and address the challenges without being overwhelmed by them. This approach is focused not only on ending the violence now, but also on creating a peaceful future together. The main question a transformative mindset asks is, “What can we build together?”

The Afghan government’s Seven-Point Peace Plan released in October 2019 took a transformative approach. It not only addressed the process of negotiations with the Taliban, but also contextual needs such as reforming national institutions, attending to rural-level grievances, resolving tensions with Pakistan, coming to terms with other regional countries, reviewing Afghanistan’s commitments with the US and NATO member states, and building a vibrant economy in partnership with international organizations. However, this plan was not welcomed by several factions, including the Taliban, perhaps because it presented a broader view of the conflict in Afghanistan and deflected the focus from just one group.

Advocating a transformative mindset does not suggest unnecessarily prolonging the ongoing peace negotiations. Rather, the suggestion here is that during these negotiations the sides should agree on a platform, or develop mechanisms, to continue negotiations even after reaching and signing an agreement which will have limited items. The fact of the matter is that the conflict between the parties will not be eliminated once a document is signed. The violent expressions of the conflict will probably stop, but underlying factors and ideological differences will persist, and can serve as conditions for the reemergence of violence in the future. Therefore, it is important to create a platform through which the two sides can continue to address their differences in the future. Ultimately, negotiations should be viewed as a long-term process rather than a limited series of events.

Conclusion

This essay has argued that our mindset—the lenses we use to approach peace—will guide the content and process of negotiations and determine their outcomes. Historically, Afghanistan’s pursuit of peace has experienced two types of mindsets. A compromise mindset, that emphasizes the role of concessions in return for cessation of violence, was used in the early 1990s. It not only failed; it also led to a devastating civil war and a series of destabilizing events including the public execution of Dr. Najibullah. As a result of the 1990s predicament, many Afghans—consciously or subconsciously—advocate for a more defensive mindset toward negotiations in the current peace process to guard what we have achieved during the past twenty years, such as the Islamic Republic system, and

prevent loss in areas such as human rights and civil freedoms. I have outlined features and implications of each of these mindsets and introduced a transformative mindset as a more holistic and strategic approach to negotiations that not only protects the gains of the recent past and our historical ideals, but also builds upon them to create a more lasting peace in Afghanistan.

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APPENDIX A

Najibullah-Kakar Original Letters in Dari

۱۲ اپریل ۱۹۹۰

جناب محترم برادر هموطن عزیز !

معذرت نمایندگی دائمی جمهوری افغانستان در موسسه ملل متحد را بنابر
تأخیر در ارسال نامه محترم نجیب الله رئیس جمهور افغانستان به اد رس شما
بپذیرید . تأخیر در ارسال نامه عدم موجودیت اد رس شما نزد ما بوده است .
امیدواریم با دریافت شماره تلفون شما با شما تماس حاصل نمائیم
و در مورد حوادث و واقعات کشور محبوب و مشترک ما افغانستان
اطلاعات بیشتری را تقدیم کنیم .

متوقعست که شماره تلفون شما را به اد رس تلفونی این نمایندگی
و یا از طریق پست برایا معرفی نموده منت گذارند .

اد رس نمایندگی دائمی جمهوری افغانستان در ملل متحد قرار ذیل است :

Permanent Mission of the Republic of Afghanistan
to the United Nations
866 United Nations Plaza, Suite 520
New York, NY 10017
(212) 7541191/92



بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

شاغلی محترم محمد حسن کاکړ !

ازمدتیمت که د رانديشه، مکاتبه و طرح برخی مسایل وطن مشترک ما یا شما بوده ام. خوشحالم که اکنون فرصت آن میسر میگردد تا شما بی از اندیشه هایم را با شما در میان گذاشته و از شما بحدیث یک افغان متشخص و وطن دوست و طلب مشورت بنایم.

پیش از یک دهه است که افغانها در آتش جنگ و وحشی و ویرانگر میسوزند. هر خانواده اقلا یک جگر گوشه خود را از دست داده و خدمات اقتصادی بزرگی را متحمل شده است. در طول این سالها پیش از یک مایون هموطن ما به شهادت رسیده و یا معلول شده اند و پیش از پنج ملیون هموطن دیگر مجبور به ترک خانه و کاشانه خود گردیده و در سرزمین های بیگانه سرگردان و مهاجرانند. ولی با وصف آن و هنوز هم سلسله جنگ و ویرانی خاتمه نیافته است.

برای این همه بدبختی های افغانستان و هر کس طبل جداگانه ای را میسوزاند تصور نمیکم اکنون موقع آن باشد که روی سبوریتهای این یا آن طرف حرف بزنیم. زیرا از این امر جز تشدید تضاد ها و ادامه خونریزی چیز دیگری متصور نیست. در عوض باید همه بکوشیم تا راه بیرون رفت از بحران خویش موجود را جستجو کنیم. مردم افغانستان نمیخواهند بیسوفی از این قیامی انتقامجویی های دیگران شوند. آنها اواخر از همه به صلح نیاز دارند تا بتوانند در پناه آن گذشته تلخ را فراموش کرده و متوجه ساختن یک آینده از پیمای، مصون و مرفه برای خود و نسلهای آینده کشور شوند.

بدیهیست که عوامل خارجی بیشتر از عوامل داخلی در تشدید بحران نقش داشته اند. از یکطرف مداخلات مسلحانه خارجی و از جانب دیگر موجودیت قوای اتحاد شوروی نقش و تاثير اقدامات صلح طلبانه داخلی را خیلی محدود میساخته. اگر این دو عامل وجود نداشت، یقیناً مصیبت ها و آلام مردم افغانستان به این پیمانها عمیق نمیشد و افغانها میتوانستند برای اختلافات خود یک راه حل افغانی و اسلامی را جستجو نمایند.

با درک همین واقعیت ها بود که سیاست مصالحه ملی سه سال قبل از طرف ما اعلام گردید و سعی صادقانه بعمل آمد تا خواستها و منافع مشروع نیروهای سیاسی افغانی برای رسیدن به یک صلح عادلانه و دایمی در نظر گرفته شود. برای تحقق این ارمان بزرگ و اوتسر از همه لازم بود تا عوامل خارجی از صحنه کناره زده شوند. به همین علت دولت جمهوری افغانستان با نشان دادن نموش ها و گذشته های اصولی در چوکات مذاکرات ژنیو و زمینه

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عقد موافقتنامه های چهارگانه را فراهم ساخت که براساس آن باثبات تمام اشکال و انواع مداخله خارجی در امور افغانستان متوقف میشد و تضامین بین المللی برای جلوگیری از ادامه ویا اغماز مجدد مداخلات نافذ میگردد و زمینه مساعد برای عودت مصوون و ابروندانه مهاجرین افغان به کشورشان فراهم میشد و قوای اتحاد شوروی خاک افغانستان را ترك میگفت.

چنانکه اطلاع دارید آخرین سرباز شوروی حدود یکسال قبل به کشور خود عودت کرد و ولی سایر بخشهای موافقتنامه ها مخصوص سند مربوط به عدم مداخله و عدم دخالت و نه تنها علی نگردیدند بلکه برخی شهرهای سرحدی کشور ما مانند کندهار و خوست و جلال اباد در معرض تجاوز وسیع و مستقیم نیروهای مشترك مخالفین و قوای مسلح پاکستان و اجیران و هاپسی سعودی قرار گرفت.

افراطیون مخالف و محافظ خارجی که از آنها حمایت مینمایند و توقع داشتند که دولت جمهوری افغانستان طی چند روز و حداکثر چند هفته پس از عودت قوای اتحاد شوروی به زانو در خواهد آمد و انکشافات یکسال اخیر بطور قانع کننده پی به اثبات رسانید که همه ایمن تصورات دراز واقعیت بوده و تحمیل یک راه حل نظامی بر افغانستان بیشتر از هر وقت دیگر ناممکن به نظر میرسد اما بد بخانه هنوز هم سیاست قبلی بنی برتر شدید فشار نظامی و تعزیرات اقتصادی طبع افغانستان ادامه دارد و که در نتیجه آن مصائب مردم افغانستان افزایش مییابد و این وضع ناگوار علی الرغم تغییرات مهم و اساسی در سیستم مناسبات بین المللی که به ایجاد فضای مثبت و امیدوار کننده برای یک آینده مصوون و مرفه بسود همه بشریت منتج شده است و تغییر محسوس نکرد است.

دولت جمهوری افغانستان نمیتواند که به امید تغییر نهضت ها و پالیسی های جانب متقابل در انتظار نشسته و ابتکارات صلح خویش را به آینده موکول کند و باد رك این حقیقت که تا مین صلح و دموکراسی نمیتواند بدون تعدد احزاب و جلوگیری سیاسی بمیان آید ما مصالحه و اعتدالات همه نیروهای افغانی را مطرح نموده ایم.

ماینهاد کرده ایم که مذاکرات وسیع میان دولت جمهوری افغانستان و تمام نیروهای سیاسی جامعه مادر داخل و خارج کشور که خواستار تائید صلح و قطع جنگ هستند و آغاز شود مقصود از این مذاکرات فراهم ساختن زمینه تدوین یک کنفرانس سراسری صلح به اشتراك همه نیرو های نیکوخل میباشد و این کنفرانس روی ایجاد یک شورای رهبری کشور که از عقاید و نظریات همه نیرو ها نمایندگی کند و موافقت بعمل خواهد آمد و کنفرانس سراسری صلح همچنان یک اثتش ششماه را اعلام مینماید که در خلال همین مدت حکومت موقت انقلابی دارای پایه های وسیع اجتماعی توسط شورای رهبری و تحت اداره آن تشکیل خواهد شد و شورای رهبری همچنان کمیسیون تسوید قانون اساسی جدید و قانون جدید انتخابات را ایجاد میکند.

شورای رهبری پس از تأیید مسوده های قوانین مذکور و لویه جرگه عنعنوی مردم افغانستان را دعوت مینماید تا بر مسوده های متذکره غور نموده و آنرا به تصویب برساند.

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سپس انتخابات آزاد ، سری ، مستقیم ، مساوی و همگانی پارلمانی براساس قانون جدید دایر گردیده و حکومت جدید بر اساس نتایج انتخابات بوسیله حزب ویا ائتلافی احزاب دارای اکثریت کرسی ها در پارلمان تشکیل خواهد شد و اداره امور کشور را براساس قانون اساسی جدید بر عهده خواهد گرفت . ما حاضر هستیم تا برای جلوگیری از سوء اعتقاد و بخاطر تضمین قانونیت در جریان انتخابات ، نظارت و کنترل یک کمیسیون بین المللی را بپذیریم .

بنظر اول حل ابعاد خارجی قضیه ، جمهوری افغانستان پیشنهاد کرده است تا یک کنفرانس بین المللی به اشتراك افغانستان و همسایگانیش ، کشورهای تضمین کننده موافقتنامه های ژنیو ، رو ، سای چنینی عدم انسلاک و سازمان کنفرانس اسلامی سایر کشورهای ذی علاقه دایر گردند . این کنفرانس در مرحله نخست بخاطر تقویت آتش بس در افغانستان روی قطع ارسال همه انواع سلاح بطرفین متخاصم به موافقه خواهد رسید و در قدم بعدی ، کنفرانس مذکور موافقت حقوقی جدید افغانستان را بحدیث یک کشور بیطرف دایمی و غیر نظامی که در قانون اساسی جدید نیز تسجیل میگردد ، برسمیت شناخته و انرا مورد حمایت و تضمین بین المللی قرار خواهد داد . ما صمیمانه عقیده داریم که طرحهای صلح و میکانیزم تطبیق علی ان میتواند باید چاگزین طرحهای ناکام و غیر واقع بینانه ، حل نظامی گردد . قوای مسلح ما از هر زمان د یگرنهیر و منند تریبونه و قابلیت رزمی خویشرا علی یکسال دفاع مستقلانه در برابر تهاجمات بزرگ روسیه قوای مشترک افراطیون ، قطعات اردوی پاکستان و اجیران وهابی سعودی به اثبات رسانیده است .

باوصف ادامه جنگ و تجاوزات مسلحانه ، سیاست مصالحه ، ملی توانسته است قلب و اندیشه ملیونها افغان را تسخیر کند و در صفوف نیروهای افراطی جنگ طلب و آشتی ناپذیر رخنه و شکاف بزرگ بوجود آورد . خوشبختانه اکنون وضع نظامی و امنیتی در تمام نقاط کشور به استثنای دو - سه ولایت سرحدی با پاکستان ، روبه آرامش گراییده است .

ما به یاری خداوند متعال و به اتکای خرد و عمل سالم تمام افغانهای وطن دوست به مساعی صادقانه ، خود بخاطر تاءمین صلح در زمین با ادامه خواهیم داد و به پیروزی این ارمان افغانی ، انسانی و اسلامی ، ایمان داریم . من یقین دارم که تمیر و قلب شما بحیث یکی از شخصیت های وطن دوست و خادم افغانها همواره بخاطر جنگ وید بختی هائیکه طی چند سال اخیر کشور را در خود فرو برده است ، رنج میبرد . همچنان اطمینان دارم که همیشه در اندیشه یافتن یک راه حل انسانی و عادلانه برای مشکلات کشورتان بوده و برای خیر و فلاح افغانها به دربار عز و جل دعا کرده اید .

من و سایر هموطنان از شما صمیمانه دعوت میکنیم تا جهت تبادل نظر و مذاکره به کابل مسافرت کنید . میتوانید از تاحیه مسوئیت سیاسی و فز یکی تان و همچنان عودت مجدد تان به کشور محل اقامت فعلی اطمینان کامل داشته باشید . ما این وعده صادقانه خویشرا در مورد تمام شخصیت هائیکه برای مقابله بکابل آمده و دوباره برگشته اند ، ایفاء کرده ایم .

با انهم در صورتیکه شرایط بشما اجازه مسافرت به افغانستان را درین فرصت نمیدهد

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من از شما تقاضا میکنم تا به این نامه هرچه اولتر پاسخ داده و راهی و نظارتیک تسانرا
 درین فرصتیکه همه افغانها چه در داخل و چه در خارج کشور در جستجوی یک راه کوتاه بسوی
 صلح هستند از مان ریغ نکنید. البته محتویات نامه شما نزد ما محفوظ خواهد بود. من
 کاملاً مطمئن هستم که با استفاده از عناصر مشترک در مشوره های شما و سایر افغانهای وطن
 دوست میتوان چنان راه حلی را مطرح نمود که از موافقت و حمایت قاطبه مردم افغانستان
 برخوردار باشد.

عسر غلیه اندیشه ها از طریق سرکوب سائراندیشه ها سپری شده است. اکنون
 دیگر باید در رسالت زیست با همی داشت و این امر فقط از طریق اشتی و تفاهم افکار و نظریات
 افغانها امکانپذیر است. در چنین راه حلی همه افغانها ذینفع بوده و هیچکس شکست نخواهد
 خورد. بلکه همه افغانها پیروز خواهند شد.

برای شما و خانواده نجیب تان از خداوند بزرگ صحت و سعادت آرزو میکنم

نجیب الله
 رئیس جمهور افغانستان



کابل - افغانستان

Feb 1990

/ دلو / ۱۳۶۸

پوهاند درکتر محمد حسن کاکړ
۱۲ جون ۱۹۹۰

نامه جوړیږي

ښاغلی محترم نجیب الله :

نامه چار هغه یې تاریخي ماه دلو ۱۳۶۸ تمه که توکړه نامه
مورخ ۱۲ - بربر ۱۹۹۰ هیئت نمایندگی دریمی جمهوری افغانستان
در ملل متحد یا درس تحقیق من در مرکز حقوق دغوب پوهنتون
هوړی فرستنه شده بود یا لخواه پت ریح ۲ ماه می در کمان دیگو
بمن رسید. تشکر.

نامه تمه از شه بخش عمده مقدمه، تجویزی برای حل قضیه
افغان، و دعوت از من برای زنتن بکابل عرض یادله نظر
در باره موضوع افغانستان نیکین خدایک.

زنتن من بکابل خبرا عودت میون ها زنتن مهاجران پرود
که از روی دلائل معلوم موثق ترک وطن کرده اند، و یا بخواهی
منطقه شهادت شرایط زندگی عادی دمعون در افغانستان
اند، تا بچون موقوف خود برگردند، و در اعیان کشور دیران
شده بهم یارند. بنا بر آن اکنون قرار خواهنش تمه از زنتی

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نظر خود را با ارتباط به تجویز شما به ترتیب ذیل تقدیم می‌کنیم.

در مقدمه نامه که اولین ترین موضوع رز موضوعات است گمانه را تشکیل میدهد. بر وقایع دردناک وطن ارز دیدگاه خاص نظر اندازی شده است. لازم بخدا انتم در باره آن در اینجا بحث کنیم. ضمناً آن در اینجا موقتاً یا شما هنوز می‌گفتیم که می‌گویند: «از تقویری هستیم اکنون موقع آن باشد که روی مشکلات های این یا انطباق حرف بزنیم.» ولی بنحوی هم حرف می‌تواند یا در موضوعات که گنجینه یکدیگر تجارب نشان دارد، گویای در حل موضوعات از بی تا اثرات فرارزون دارد و این تا اثرات دینی زیاد و شدید میباشد که بعد از موضوع مورد نظر زیاد تر، پیچیده تر و دردناک تر شده باشد.

تکفانه قفسه افشان امروز چین حالت تراجمی را دارد، یکدیگر ظاهر شکل لدنی می بخود گرفته است. موضوع نجاری لدنی می نماید که قدرت های خارجی، بویژه اتمی و هسته در موضوعات درونی افشان؛ مدافع محوره، و هنوز هم می‌تایند و در اثر این مدافع و تعاضد برحق افشان ها که حق طبیعی شان است خود دکن شان در معرض خطر آن کسی درآید شده اند، چنانچه تاکنون، طوری که شما می‌دان مختصراً اشاره کردیم، بیشتر از پنج میلیون شان در وطن های دیگران، و در حدود دو میلیون شان در داخل خاک خود می‌جوشیده اند. بین ۱۲ الی ۱۵ الی ۲۰ میلیون در جهات جنگ گشته شده اند؛ شاید در حدود یک میلیارد

بندي و ممکن در حدود پنجاه هزار بندي اعدام نمند.
 (از جمله اعدام نمندگان و هاجرين، افغان ها يک اعدام
 و قدرت خدمت رکنی و رهبری در شت با در نظر داشت جدی
 کسی بکمی موجود بود خاص قایل یادداشت است؛ ممکن در حدود
 یک تن افغان میوب نمند یا نمند. مرید بر آن از کودتای
 شور تا گیل ششم تجاوز نمودی بر افغانان بصورت لایق
 و از آن پس یکه یکه افغان ها از رکنی ترین حقوق
 زندگی خود محروم گردیده بودند، بحدیکه در دوره اول نه از آزادی
 بیان و نه از آزادی اجتماع در شت، دهن خود دهن مایملک افغان
 حتی در درون فزایل خود معون بودند؛ و فزایل شان بکرات
 از ظرف قوه های انیتهی دارد و تلذشی میشد. این حال با عده
 تخریبی سبب بقیه وطن معورمان در مجموع به بی اعتمادی تام بکرات
 کایل تمام نمند، و حکومت از ملت بکلی تخریب گردید.

در بین حال در جهت ابوزین هم در دوره مقاومت
 تعداد بیشتر ظرف های تنظیم برای ترنگون کردن حکومت و گردنبار
 بکرمک ها، مجموع کرمک های رکنی بر قدرت های خارجی
 تنگی نمند و قدرت های خارجی یا استفاده از این حال گرفته اند
 با در نظر داشت ضایع ملی خود از آزادی محل تنظیم ها را تمهید نمایند.
 در بصورت معورمان خارجی در هر دو جهت در فقیه افغان
 بهتر شد، طوری که تا هم یا آن را کرده گویند که «معورمان
 خارجی بهتر از معورمان داخلی در تشدید بحر آن نفس داشته اند».

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در نهایت موضوع من فقیه افغان عمدتاً از قدرت افغان خارج
شده است. اگر قدرت های خارجی بسته گردید. با کزبهم طوریکه نتوان
گویند؛

که غر لوم دی به مگر بی لدرشته،
نیاید مایوس دخی دگرزند و باید بیوخته بی طوق من کران بود
و بخت خورشید خاک؛

که قسمت دی دزیری به خورگی درگیری
دزیری به خورگی ممبر بزرده صت.

از بنیاد که متعین می باشد برای جتوی یک راه حل
(قطع جنگ و تشکیل یک حکومت قیام لیرای کافه هویتان)
که در انظار سال ۱۹۸۷ نام «نشی ملی» اعلام نمود و رسیده مردم
های ادلی در راه راکت بخت ببرد. ولی از آنجا که هنوز مردم
قبول تمام طرف های زیرض افغان و ترغیر لغو نمود است یا صلحت
راک نمی قدرت داد. چنانچه تمام مردم خشی این حقیقت را قبول
کرده بیوخته نقاط اهدی دیگری بان میفرایند که این شکل
اطری آن در این دعوت نامه شکل دیس لراست شد است؛

« دولت جمهوری افغانستان نمیتواند که باید تغییر
رضیت ها و پالیسی های جانب تعین در انتظار نشسته و انتظار
صلح خوش را به آینده موکول کند. با درک این حقیقت که تا این
صلح در موکول نمیتواند بدین قدر اغراب و پیور ازیم بکنی
میان آید ما که در اهداف و نیردهای افغانی، العوام

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مخوده ایم.

« ما پشېوا دکر ده رئیس که مذاکرات دکیچ بیان دولت جمهوری
 افغان نشن و دهم نبردهای بیکی جامه ما در دراض دف رج کتور که
 خواستار تامین صلح و قطع جنگ استند، اغاز خود - بمقتور از این
 مذاکرات فراموش حق زینته تدویر یک کفواش سرکاری صلح
 با نتراک همه نبردهای دین فعلی باشد - در این کفواش اوی
 ای دیک خورای رهبری کتور که از عقاید و خطایات همه نبردها
 نمائنده گی کند بمورنقت بعض خورده اید - کفواش سرکاری صلح
 همچنان یک ایش پس شتما همه را اعلام می نماید که در ضمن این
 مدت حکومت وقت استند فی دررای پایه های وسیع اجتماعی توسط
 خورای رهبری دامت در دره آن تکلیف خورده اند بخورای رهبری
 همچنان کمیسیون تشوید قانون رکنی جدید و قانون جدید
 را ریزی می کند. »

« خورای رهبری پس از تا یک سوده های قوانین مذکور
 لویه جرگه مشغولی مردم افغان نشن را دامت بنمایند تا بسوده های
 تذکره مخور مخوده دآنها به تقوی برسانند - سپس اتمایات ازاد
 رسی، شتفیم است دی و دهانی ببارگانی بر رکنش قانون جدید
 در ایر گردیده و حکومت جدید بر رکنش نتایج اتمایات پوشیده
 ضرب و دیا استلاف افراب دارای اکثریت کرسی ها در پارلمان
 تکلیف خورده اند در دره امور کتور را بر رکنش قانون کتوری
 جدید بر مبنای خورده رفت - ما هر هشتیم تا برای جویگری از کتور »

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اعتماد دینی و تقنین قانونیت در جریان انتخابات نظارت و کنترل
یک کمیسیون بین المللی را بپذیریم ۱۲۰
لا محذور حل این دغدغه جمهوری افتات آن پیش
کرده است تا یک کنفرانس بین المللی یا شورای افتات آن دهک شش
کشورهای تقنین کنند موافقت نهادهای ژنیو روی جنبش مردم کوچک
و زنان کنفرانس بلندی در کشورهای دمسدقه در بزرگواران کنفرانس
در مرحله نخست نمی توانست اثنی عشر در افتات آن روی قطع اربابان
صه انواع ملاح بلو فین تمام بموافقه خواهد رسید و در قدم بعدی
کنفرانس مذکور موافق حقوقی جدید افتات آن را بحث یک کنفرانس
دریسی و غیر نظامی که در قانون ملی جدید نیز تمهیل میگردد برکت
نست خسته و آن را مورد حمایت و تقنین بین المللی قرار خواهد داد ۱۲۱

هر افتات که مقرر حل بحران از طریق مذاکره و دیپلماتی
باشد این جنبه را تا دیده گشته نمیتواند در بین حل تقنین است
تمام یا بی فکر خواهد بود که بخوبی شما اینچنین است برای تمام
جوانب زیر فعل تا بل قبول یوده نمیتواند.

بشما و بدستیاران می باید مورد توجه قرار گیرد یکی اینکه
پیشنهادهای مذکور را از طریق مذاکره بین « نیروهای زیر فعل »
از طریق نظامی ترجیح میدهند و دیگر اینکه این جنبه و تطوای تمام پیشنه
ها یک تاکنون از طرف شما پیش نگذاشته نشده است و تعدادی از
زبانی از موضوعات را که محل گنگه ارتباط دارد در بر دارد

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و در نهایت بر اثبات مکتبگری امری، و تحقیم انوار است. و
بدینصورت یک شرط برای پیگیری بنی برار دارد. می را بهر می کند
اما طریقه ای را که برای تحقق اراده می بخورن عوده است. این
عامل را بر اراده می قسه نمیتواند. در این نقیصه را می آن نمرد
می شود، که برودی بر آن بحث می شود.

اکنون حل بحران از طریق مذاکره نمی طری مرجع شد است. که
طرف های دیگر در قیسه طی ۱۶ ماه که از خروج قوای شوروی
از افغانستان میگذرد، در حال بن بست است. راکت های هم بر درم
کابل هم بر مردم اطراف چون عسکری کور حواله می شوند و تعداد
زیادی از عوف ن زنده و متحقق زندگی پارتیک های اجنبی از طرف
خود افغان ها کشته می شوند. در بین حال اوضاع گونه گون قیسی
می تغییر و در بعضی حصص کندر قحطی زندگی افغان ها را تهدید می کند.
نس جوان از سارت و طی تحصیل ابتدا ری محرم شد است. و بیغته
رنجیر محمد الحق « ملی در حال استحضار است. »
مردن

دوام این تراجیدی می باید برای هیچ افغان بخوش
انها بیک خدمت به عوف ن را شمار می در کندی خود میدانند. بیشتر
از این قابل قبول نباشد.

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البته راجع به این، یا در آن کم قیمت بوده است. بنا بر دلایلی، هنوز هم
 به مذاکره با حکومت کابل حاضر نیست و پیشنهادت را که تا از تاریخ
 اعلام یکایت بام «اثنی می» تقدیم عود می کند. در اعلامیه های
 خود رد کرده و حتی عده ای حریفی بجل نظامی تقیه اقرار دارند.
 محمد ظاهر شاه به نیت بق که قرار سرگردی در جبهه مرسوم پوهانند
 سید بهادرالدین مجروح یگان شخصی است که از حاکمان افغان
 ها بر خور در می آید. میگوید: «تجیمی کمونستی نظام لاهم کامل
 کی باقی دی.» بن علی صفت لاهم بددی، رئیس حکومت نوت
 یا الفاظ هیچ بدام با رزده نظامی اقرار دارند و میگویند: «
 ما برتر با دگرده کمونست خلق دپرجم نمت هیچگونه شرایی
 استند مخور هم کرد، بلکه یا عمل نشاد تشدید با رزده نظام
 کمونستی را دکتور خوشترنگون عود همی نحت، «در حالیکه
 استادیر خان الدین ربانی امکان صلحی کی فقیه افغان
 را «است نش با کمونتر» میخواند.

پس طوری که دیده می شود، از هدف بن موفق ها نیاید
 است، داین یکی از مباحثی ترین شکل درگاه در راه صلح موقوف
 رز طینی سیاسی بشا می رود. دشمن درم مدافعه قدرت های دفاعی

9

در امور داخلی افغانستان ملت، که بر دوی بران بحث میگرد.

درینجا باید چه کرد؟ موقف شما در حق ملت که میگویند: «دوست
جمهوری افغانستان نمیتواند یاسید تغییر در صفت و پالیسیهای جانب
مقابل در انتظار نشسته، انتظار صحت خویش را یا آینده مگویند.»
برائستی هم یا در نظر داشت در ام بحران و عورتب خلونانگ آن اکنون
بیشتر از عودت دیگر جتجوی راه حل از راه عداوت و سیاست
لذمی شد نیست. بن بست دولدار، راکت آبی کور، بی اتفاقیهای
انتخابی بین کسوت پوزیشن، تراجمیدیهای دلخراش تو دلم
فرخار دانش زیادگان فیصله قفیه را از همه جنگ میزند از
دور قوماندرن عری بر کرسی سیاسی انتقال داده است. پانزری بر
فضیه حرف از راه افغان کنی و بر لود کنی احمیت و انبذاب خود را
از دست داده است. امام خمینی ایران علی الرغم موقف سخت خود در
برابر عریقی یا لود بند اگر حضرت به پیغمبر اسلام صفت محمد (ص)
این روش را با پیمان حدیبیه بیشتر دنیمن قرآن پیش از امروز
برای مسلمانان تشریف گذارسته است.

اما ممکن نیست «انتظار صحت» شما و یا انتظار صحت
شما به از صراط دیگر یک پیش خود، بدون همکاری تمام جوانب
ذخیر حل دموکراسی امکان عملی پیدا کند، هر یک که جنگ
قطع گردد، و حکومتی بر بنیاد قاعده و شیخ میمان آید.

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در قسمت زمینه سازی علی همتی است که قدرت های خارجی
 اصل حاکمیت ملی افغان را که در گفتارهای خود بیان تحریر
 دارند، در عمل بپذیرند. قدرت های ذیدخل در قفسه افغان
 به دیپلوکورد و دیرینه ^{تجارتی} دن سرمنشی ملل متحد، چنین انقادی
 توانقات ژرینو در ابریل ۱۹۶۸ چنین دعه هم دارد بودند،
 طوریکه کورد دیر در یکی از فعالیت خود در دولت ^{شکست} بکرت
 (۱۲- ابریل ۱۹۹۰) بتوسط او در ژرینو تمام این چک در اکران
 اثرات کرد بودند بکرت بمن گفتند که بعد از خروج قوای شوروی
 افغان به مجال آن را هوزند درخت که از حق کلف دیر بشن
 خود از لودنه استفا ده کند.

نیاید نقش اتمی دشواری در بخورد، بشتر از هر کشور دیگر
 باشد. اتمی دشواری باید بر طبق قوانین بین المللی مخصوص
 توانقات ژرینو که خود یکی از نفین کدگان دوهانه آن
 است. در قسمت زمینه سازی با قدرات شخص ذیل بهر دزد:
 سرحد ^{شکست} خود با افغان ^{شکست} با بحث سرحد بین المللی در
 نفت و شد افراد و انتقال اموال و غیره محکم احترام نماید؛
 تعداد دیپلمات های خود را در کابل که به تخمین مارک فری مین
 نمایند. لیس انجمن تا بکرت در کابل (۵ جون ۱۹۹۰) در حد در

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500 نفیبند اگر یا برکنش انسانی در کشور بر نمی‌آورد
 دست کم متعادل می‌آورد؛ تعداد تبعه خود را که بنام «شاد دین»
 در دستجات ملکی و نظامی در کابل و دیگر شهرها و بعضی دولتات
 دیگر بین سه هزار و چهار هزار تخمین شده، تعیین دهد
 و تعداد اصل یا قیامده را یا خود یا حکومت کابل اعلام نماید
 تعیین آنها به معنی مدرسی نیست، و خیاره و رد کرده بتواند که
 خدمت آنها هم بخاطر محدود بودن بر دژهای زنگنه
 و هم به سبب مخالف بودن انان؛ یا آنها قدرت رئیس نمی
 شود. لکن «وجود آنها یا انقدر تعداد زیاد کنیم در برابر
 موجود حور انان را یا این فکری نماید که آنها قتل گداز مطبعتی
 یعنی ^{مطلب} صحت مصالح ملی انان را تعقیب می‌تایند و در حد دکت
 که دنی بر رسته تشکیل حکومت انان می‌باید، تبعه حکومت کابل
 و نژادی را محال نفوز کند.

انحاز این اقدامات از طرف شوروی بدو تنگ
 تاثیرات فراوان در قسمت زمینه‌های ملی و نفعیه از راه
 مذاکرات خواهر درخت. از جمله در درک به دین تاثیرات
 رکت خوری و نهایت رنگی خواهر بود.

الف - جمهوری پاکتن یا اتحاد اقدامات مشابه
 تشویق و آماده خواهر شد. بدون تنگ اتحاد اندک مشابه

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از طرف پاکستان برایت می‌شدت زمینه حل‌تفیه از راه انداز
 و دیپلماتیک با آن اندرزد، هم هست، که از طرف اتی دینوری
 هم پیشه. در صورتیکه خوردی یا اقدامات فوق‌الذکر بپردازد،
 پاکستان هم با همان غایب یا آن خواهد برداشت. اگر چنین نکرد،
 غایباً یافت ریکه از طرف افغان‌ها دکتورهای دین‌محل مخصوص
 اریکا و دکتورهای کسودی بر آن وارد خواهد آمد، تن خواهد داد.
 اگر این هم موثر واقع نشود، در صورت خوردی بتواند آن‌ها
 اقدامات خود را در زمینه یا حتی از اقدامات قبیه از طرف پاکستان
 شروع نماید. اما زنگ فانتیسمی که آخرت آن به حد که اقدامات
 سیر کند، در واقع ممکن است عملی در برابر با بعضی‌های خوردی
 در افغان‌ها پیشه. بنابراین استنتاج شد، بتواند که اگر خوردی
 با اقدامات فوق‌الذکر بپردازد، پاکستان به پیروی از آن
 یا اقدامات قبیه خواهد برداشت. اگر این چنین می‌شود، خوب با تف
 تفیه حل‌تفیه خواهد بود در این بهیسی که نقش این دکتور در حل
 تفیه مخصوص هم پیشه، چنانچه اگر در دین‌محل یا دین‌محل
 گوید: «(حل‌تفیه افغان‌ها) صورت می‌گرفته، پسبیکه فانتیسم
 فرینو نه تنها خروج قوای خوردی، بلکه فاعله‌ترین کامل
 بنی‌العملی را در نظر داشت، تا افغان‌ها را قوی‌تر کند که

که اخلاقیات ذلت الهی خود را رنج کند، شکیه این کار
را در گذشته چندین مرتبه اجرا نموده اند. اگر این چنین
می شود دلیلی وجود ندارد که شکایت از طریق مردم
ممکن نه شود. ۱۰

ب - برخی از اقدامات مشخص از طرف شوروی که در
بالند کار یافت، حکومت نظامی اعتبار خواهد داد. حکومت
نظامی تاکنون از اعتبار و شریعت برخوردار نبوده
است. آن هم در وضعی است که باید از تاج و توردی بر
رهنشنان حکومت کابین برود و قوه نظامی آن بجا نماند.
رهنشنان؟ هو در کار را مشافی حقوق آن نمی داند. حکومت
می خود داشته می آن را می بیند. حقد که قوای نظامی شوروی
در جنگ یا رهنشنانها دیگر شده. همان اندازه حکومت کابین بی اعتبار
در مردم تجربه کنند. مسکو یا بیرون شدن قوای نظامی از
این طبیعت در حاشا کاشته شد. یکدیگر باید از آن مجموع در این
دست ها. جهات جنگ دیگر با اندازه بخت ها نیست و در بینانم
جنگ در بوزن کافش محکومی رو نمانده است. در این میان
اقدامات که در کابین جها بنام « نشی ملی » یا می شود تا
در مردم و ملی بر رفع بحران طور بی کسی کو می نکرد، و گمان کنیم

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نخبرود. علت آن هم گنجینه حکومت و هم این است که ای دشمنی
 افغانان را عذر هم گماند ترک نکرده. ای دشمنی علی الرغم
 بردن کشیدن قوای نظامی خود از راهش درین دغارت
 نهایت بزرگ و اعطای انواع رنجهای بیشتر تر به گمان
 بیشتر از آن بنی عذر هم بر حکومت کابل مسلط است. موثرترین
 کاریکه ای دشمنی برای دفع تشویش برحق افغانان ها
 وزیریه حد قفیه افغانان را از طریق یک کمیته
 میتواند، همانا اتخاذ اقدامات است، که در حقوق دگر گردید
 افغانان ها در اظهار این تشویش حق بجانب اند. شوری
 که یک ابر قدرت است بغیر اینکه سر قدرت جوی آن نالغون
 بود بر افغانان تا تحت. افغانان ها اکنون با این تجربه
 تیغ و بر خوردهای خونینی که با توای شوری عذر اند
 در حالیکه شوری عذر هم، به ترتیبی که گفته شد، بالدی داریم
 تسلط است. چطور از آینده، اشتغال کثور، و حکایت عذر مطبوع
 میشوند؟ اکنون که علیریم فیصله در حال ظهور است، و در نتیجه
 صلح برخی از آن را اثبات میدهد، ای ز اندامات یا شده
 عذری شده به عذر حکومت نمی شود، زیرا که عذر

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اما بپشتدادت حوچه وارز پر جانب یا خند از اینجا که بکرات
 رخن بر یک طون برتری های زیاد و تشدید بی اتفاقی ها و
 نفادها و همچنان بر یک ذیر خل شدن قدرت های خارجی
 دارای ابر و متعدد خند صل آن در درمده از هم تمایز
 که در پیشه دشما هم آمده است. مصحت حوزد بود. مرصه موتی
 (مجبوری یا زنتالی) در مرصه دریمی.

در مرصه موتی یکا ترم و طر عمل ضعیف و در بر حال ملوک
 طرف ها طوری باشد که رهت رهت نفای اتمام و حکماری
 رایجی ن کرد. تا در نتیجه آن طرف ها روحا بقیوی مذاکره با همی
 وضع یا رقیب ها در بوزرشن ارا ده شوند. نفای نو طو شن پی
 که در سطح جهانی پذیرد ار شده بفتنه که بر موضوع افشای تاثیر
 مسامدی دارد و حوزد آورد. موفقیت مرصه موتی موفقیت مرصه
 روی را در بعضی حوز دارد.

پشتدادت نما بطوانی ب. طوری که بیشتر نذا کار بافت خوب
 منجم بوده. غامری را در بر دارد که باید در صل مرفوع و تخریب
 ارا در اصل بر یکسانی استوار است که از روی چار دلیل دین
 بحث است. مذاکره قبول شده نخواهد توانست.
 ۱- پشتدادت موفق حکومت شما را بر موفق بپوزرشن اعتبار

- ۲- جنبه د در یک نقطه بر اصل حاکمیت ملی استوار نیست.
- ۳- چون در پیتها د حکومت موقتی در مرحله مبعوری باید
 رز « نیردهای » می نف تشکیل شده باشد ، این حال قضای کشی را
 محض رنگه برای رسیدن به بقعه نهایی حکومت مدتی نزد محصل داد
 خواهد رفت .
- ۴- مزید بر آن چنان یک نوع بطرف بین اصلی در آن پیش نمی
 نشد بهت ، که از شروع پرده بر آن موثر اظهارت کند .
- ۱- جنبه د بهیسی موقت حکومت شما را بر دیگران ممتاز می کند
 حکومت شما تا بین آمدن حکومت موقت در کابل یا بر جواهر آباد
 دنیوری چند بیدی نظامی (لرود ، میلتی ، خاد) خواهند دی و
 جوار چانی و همچنین می گم در دترس کن خواهد بود . این حال کم
 دیش بعد از تا یکس حکومت موقت هم بهین ترتیب خواهد بود ، در هر
 محکم و قوه های چند بیدی نظامی مبعوص فا دایا دلد که در دایم
 پایه دمحور اصلی حکومت کابل باشد ، اعداد در یک از غی و دهور و فرخان
 سر فرمان حکومت باشد ، و هیچ نفور نمی شود که خاد یا س بقه افغان کشی
 د شوروی پرستی که در رد ، در کون هم گی . جی . بی بر آن مستوی
 باشد ، بطرف مانده بتواند اثر شما در حق معمم یا شیدا فقیه افغان
 از طریق سیاسی حل شود ، و پیتها شما از طرف رپوزیشن بحث است

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غدار که بخون خود باید دشتگاه خاد از بین رود - خادک ها
 نشاید بکشد دل کشته که دجور یک دشتگاه بختباری انجمنه دایر
 کندهی منطقه جزو حکومت شد در افتادن هم دجور این چنین
 دشتگاه براس حفظ انبث کنور حذر شد بکشت قشانه ابن لطف
 شون درک معلوم بخوردی اکنون همی نمیدانم که عرض خاد چنان
 دشتگاهی بخورنقه طوفی زید خصل دیا از نظر حکومت وقت بمان
 آید که شکل از کدرای بر فشن بخورن باشد؛ بودم آن
 سین و حرف از خود افتادن باشد؛ امور آن طور نظم از
 طرف مایم مدلی یا نوه مقننه انشی می وارگی شود؛ و در بر حال و طبع
 درک حفظ معنیت ملی در برابر طوالت خاد می نماید اینک بکشت
 دیده افتاق و ترور ملی در درک حکومت قرار گرفته باشد و در داد و
 هر نوع احصاء تازه بشمول تعدد بودن افراد میانی؛ بدین نام
 ضرب رسمی و اماره تمام ملکیت های قبلی که قرارش بدین شکل
 افوی «عاشقی ملی» باشد بدین الفا می خاد مفهوم داشته
 نمیتواند، زیرا حرف نظر از سابقه غرق بین عنوآن قرار گرفته
 است و سمندر غوریانی «... در گره افراد کابینه یا لغرض از
 عنایه بپوز بگون درک خود، نقطه یا یک اثرات «داد»
 در یک چشتگاه و با شبا نگاه گریه نیست می خود ۱۴ دی

هم به نیکی که «مخلوده برتر یک نامور از انوارش مل در کسوت»
 آن زمان می دیگری طی بردنتر از حکومت به وجود آمده که
 قدرت حکومت در فاعلیه یا توامندی زن است تا جایی که...»
 ۲- تم در پنجا د گفته اند که کنوانشن بین المللی «موقف حقوقی
 جدید اختلافات را محقق یک کشور بطرف دریمی و غیر نظامی که در
 قانون است جدید تسخیر میگرد، برکتی است فته و کن را مورد
 حمایت و نفی بین المللی قرار خواهد داد.» چون همیشه شهود
 که شما پیش از این پیش فعه کرده اند که اختلافات نباید «محیت
 یک کشور بطرف دریمی و غیر نظامی» در آید کنوانشن بین المللی این
 حالت را «مواضعیت و نفی» قرار دهد. اگر این فین می شود
 «اختلافات غیر مسلح» مورد حمایت «کشور» منجمله کشور می می قرار
 میگیرد اختلافات برای اید یک مستقره و کشور دیگر تبدیل خواهد شد.
 این نظر بنا بر آن مانی طرح میگفت می اختلافات منجمله ویران
 را با غیر مسلح شدن اختلافات، در هر یک منجمله با کشور می برابر بر نفی
 تردقی تر می طرقت، در این کشور می مجا در با انواع پسر فته ترین
 اسلحه ها مجزئ بشد، انتی امی نخواهد بود؟ مثلاً در صورتیکه اختلافات
 غیر مسلح گردد، مورد حمایت «دیگران» واقع شود اسلحه ها و کت
 می طرف بنام موجود خواهد بود. شوا در ناز می هم در پنجا در

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ده نقره بی خود که بتا رنج ۱۵ فروری دکن پېش کړه پېست،
 شل شپږ نظامي ساقین افغانان را تجويز غوښته پېست اېته هدف
 شوروی دربار په افغانان درېج پېست بشوروی توارکت باقوه
 نظامي افغانان؟ را خلع کولې ساقسته زیرتا پړک خود ترره دغه
 اکون نیام نفین پېش اعلیٰ پخوانی پېش پان هدف را اړاوه
 دره لیکه بر نفین پېش اعلیٰ هیچ اعتبار نه پخوانه ایا شوروی
 اوسان تمام به فیصله های جمع عمومی صل متحد پېش پراپیکه قوی خود را
 از افغانان خارج نازد، گوش دارد؟ ایا افغانان هاتجی و شوروی
 را با پیکه و غم اضمین خود از وطن طرد کړخت؟ پېش دره لیکه پخوان
 مسیح باشند افغانان های خود هم قوی تر، مسلح تر، دهم پېست تر پخوان
 ضامن پېستور، حاکمیت ملی و زندگی بر اتمی راند، دېک در پېش
 عرفیات دخی زبوتف بېلوفی، غیر نظامي شدن، یا نظامي شدن و خپل
 رکن از وحدت قانوني و حقوقی خود مردم افغانان پېست، که
 در صورت لزوم دزېمه نمایندگان با وحدت داتمیابی خود آن را
 مورد کت و نظر قرار خواهد داد، نه اینکه کنوانسیون اعلیٰ دیا
 کدوم هیئت دیگر خارجی حق وحدت بخت دفعه بران را دارد.
 ۳ - در صورتیکه ترره پېش پخوانی حکومت موافق از طرف شوروی

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رهبری « مرکب از » تمام نیروهای سیاسی « فاعل عیان کرد، این
 حکومت نه اینکه در مورد رئیس آریند. ملی بیطرف نخواهد ماند، بلکه
 از همه کس عدل حق نفای کرد و در ارم برای رسیدن به فاعل نهایی
 برآمده خواهد توانست. تشنجیات و کشمکش های جدید و شدید در دیگر
 آن خواهد شد. در بعورت افعال بر در واقع ناگوار که اکنون
 بیش بینی شده، نتواند، برود که ممکن تمام بر در فاعل نهایی را
 عمیقاً ترس خسته و شایدهم از بین برد. برای اینکه از این
 افعال جلوگیری شده باشد، بهتر خواهد بود حکومت محبوری در مرصه
 صحرای انتقابی قرار تجویز کرد و دیز، یا کورم تجویز شد به دیگر
 عیان کرد، که امکان اصطکاک در آن بعد افعالی باشد. کور و در
 در تابستان ۱۹۱۸ برای رئیس یک حکومت ملی بینی بر پایه های
 وسیع بنهاد کرده بود که در دوره انتقالی حکومتی مرکب از عیان
 غیر مستعد را دارد در کشور داری عیان اید. معنی این تجویز
 این بود که حکومت مایل های خود را با این حکومت دانند و افود
 مثل طرف های دیگر در انتما بات بهم نگردد. چنان فهمیده می شود
 که بنده دشمن را بدل نگار او اس خفته شده باشد. بدون شک
 بطور الزام سیاسی و مذهب پارامانی آن قبل تا میاید و برای

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افغانستان هم معلومت د ضروري شده بخت. دلی از آری که بهین
 تویق تانند بخت د حزب خلق کابل نفادت؟ فرادون بخت. د از ای که
 نفود. بخت هم به تجربه شد. دلی اعتبار د نفوذ در بد یو د نفوذ هم
 بر حکومت کابل منگولی باشد. مادل نگار گوتا تا چایکه به حزب رومی
 در رژیم کابل تعلقی بید. در افغانستان علی د قیل قبول نخواهد بود.
 در حال حکومت موقتی بر طبق پنهان د کور دوز موقوف خواهد
 بود نقدات تشکیل حکومت ملی را تا حدی زد. ^{پنج} بخت اغفای صیحت
 رژیم حکومت موقتی قرار تجویز در حکومت آئینده ملی تان نخواهند بود.
 د این حکومت بخت عامل د کیت بنایران صافاته حوزه کوشید با
 حفظ بسطی د با همکاری د موزقمه کران طرفی د بدخل با
 استفاده از کالوشن؟ ای تند اول از قبل جوگه، گیتون ها،
 د قانون لک می جدید بالدفه حکومتی را بستی بر اشیای پات تر با کران
 سزی، د سفیم بجان آورد، د لید از آن خود حرمانه ^{کاید} اوداع
 البته حکومت موقتی موقوف د مکلف خواهد بود که برای ای بخت حق
 زمینه تان دی فعالیت برای تمام طرف های د بدخل بکوشد. د در
 نه ها د طرف چنان شرایط را بستی کرد که در آن برای تمام
 طرف ها بموجب تعورات د نظارت موزمل متحد ذمت فعالیت کی دی
 میسر باشد.

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۴- در پنهان دشت چنان قوه بین امدنی پیش پنهانی نشسته است، تا
 تشکیل حکومت ملی برسد که فیصله ی کمی نظارت کند در حالیکه بدون
 وجود این چنین قوه مرجحاً قوه ملی متحد شاید فیصله ی کمی ممکن نبود.
 نمی گفتارنش بین امدنی مرکب از کشورای ذیدخل و معدومند پنهان و
 کرده اند ولی این چنین گفتارنش نمیتواند یک میل حاد و ضمای از نفس
 انشائی، قطع نمیکند بکوارنس تقابل و غیره را در دوره انتقالی طور
 موثر نظارت و حل کند. در شرایط موجود تنها قوه ملی متحد میتواند
 از عهده این چنین امور برآید. ملی متحد در این نوع موضوعات
 تجربه و سبقت دارد. مورد احترام و اعتبار ملی است، و بصورت خالص
 موضوع انقضا نیست از جمله اجندا و مسئولیت آن است بمعنا بدین
 توانفات ژنیو، دیپلو کور و دوز را ماموریت ختم بود برای
 تشکیل حکومت داراری پایه های دیکس و عدت. بخرج دهد از
 همکاری و محاسبه خود یاد و عده دلاد بود. کور و دوز بر طبق
 این عده ها با ظرف های ذیدخل در فقیه مذاکره نمود و بالقره
 پیشاد جاسمی پیش نمود که اگر عیناً مورد قبول واقع نمیشد، کم از کم
 آن کمی برای مذاکره شده میتوانست. اما این چنین نشد، بی طریقه
 سران بعضی منظم ها اصیت آن را درک نکردند و ای دشواری
 و پاکتین بر حدت توانفات ژنیو، و هم بر حدت تعهدات خود

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که بگوردد و دیز دارد بدو ده در موضوع افتاتان پیش تر از پیش
 دخیل خنده را با پنهان و خور هم بر جای خود در ادای اعتیادت
 تاکنون هونوع پنهان دیکه در زمینه پیش شده است باندازه
 پنهان دگوردد و دیز در تعبیه شده بطورانی و موزونی به شرایط
 افتاتان در صلات موجود بنورده است

در افرا کلام را موشک لطایف انجای در فیه افتاتان
 هلد صه میگرد

۱- قدرت های زید فضل خارجی مجموعی آن دشواری در ایستاد
 حالیکه در بسیاری از موضوعات بزرگتر جانی با هم فصول لغام و
 سورقم نزدیک شده اند در فیه افتاتان هم چنان راه شری ختیار
 کند که افتان ها در نتیجه آن بحال آن را پیدا کنند که بر طبق
 اصل حاکمیتی بی به نیکل حکومت و رعایت شریک سیاسی تا یکنند
 انجی دشواری و پیچیدگی در نیور و فتن ریا دتری بازی میگردند
 این بنفع آنها هم خواهد بود که در افتاتان ارام یک حکومت مستقل
 می حاکم باشد افتاتان تارام، یا افتاتان تکی بر یکی
 آن ها و یا حاکمیت انارشی دریمی در آن بدون شک ظواهر
 را یا آنها هم تنوع خواهد داشت افتاتان مجموعی بی نظیری
 دگورددی یا این در همچنان با ایران بقدری مرتبط است

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که بحین در آن در درون سرحدت آن بقید شده بمنوانه چنانکه
 بر آن موجود هم آن ها را تحت آن ترساقه است اما اگر باشد
 یا پائنتن و یا هود با در نظر داشت بی انتقامی افغان ها می‌دارد
 بطی تکتی از راه طرف های خاص خود باشند لازم این
 را در نظر دارند که طرف های خاص آن ها از رعنا و ملی
 بهره مند نخواهد شد، شبیه کوب ریکی در ژیم کابل نشد.
 استقلال ملی چنان تمایل قوی بیکه و عسکری افغان ها را
 تشکیل میدهد که اکنون آن را دشواری می‌دارد از تجربه عقاید نهان تحت
 بارها یا آن عزت دارد، دگر بیکه تمایز یا لایق آن گرفتار
 گفت خوردن هوگن یا ردید یا فتنان خود نظامی خواهد
 فرستاد.

۲- چون کردن طرف های متعدد افغان در مورد تشکیل حکومت
 موافقه نکردند، و در پیورد حتی علیم افغان در استقلال و دورانی
 آن هم دیده نمی‌شود، و از این که افغان ها بحث یک ملت تشکیل ندهند
 صفت حیات از ناحیه جنگ گرتن شده اند، و از این که اصل
 دارد حاکمیت ملی و استقلال افغان تن تمیید و ملی گلب گردد،
 باید اینها یا سرشنی ملل متحد همکاری کنند تا حکومتی نظارت

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ملل متحد با رعایت کامل اصل هاکیت ملی و بدون تأثیرات خارجی در فضای آزاد دموکراسی عیان گردید. در عین حال از زبانی که حکومت کابل نسبتاً با قوه نظامی شوروی برپا شده، حرف بر شهرها و اطراف مجاور آن آیدیم به اتفاق و قوه خاد هاکیت نمی نماییم. و در نتیجه مدت هفتاد که از گشت رسته جمعی و انفرادی و احتشاق تخت و از مدتی از سیاستی بنام «اشتی ملی» کار گرفته مشر و عیت و قانونیت کتب نگارده باید مانند ابوزین عرق عیان آمدن یک حکومت قانونی ملی با سرمنشی ممل متحد همکاری کرده قبول کند که پیش از اعانز در دره انتظامی جای خود را بیکومت موفقی داند گذارد. تنها با مصلحت ممل متحد خواهد بود که خود مردم افغانستان از راه انتخابات سرتاسری فقیه را انتخاب کنند. در غیر آن ممکن نداشت رهان مخالفت و دشمنی های طوین را شدید تر و حل فقیه را هنوز هم شکل نریم. چنان مردم می شود که این راه، و یا کدام راه نباشد دیگر، باید فرد راه حل فقیه افغان باشد. اما پیش از آنکه وطن دیران هنوز هم دیران تر، و همچون مصیبت نده هنوز هم مصیبت نده تر شوند، دنیا بر آن فقیه پیچیده هنوز هم پیچیده تر گردد. بآن اقدام نمود. نقش کلیم چنین را انتظامی کرد.

دخین شافین بیشتر ممل متحد در پیر رسته عیان آوردن حکومت بیسی بهم تر شد. است که ممل متحد نباید ماهیت خود عرق فقیه در باره افغانستان ندارد و با آن کشور عی عمدتاً محفوظ گزهای حق به در دیوار لغم شده، بتوانند که هیچ یک طرف افغان بهیم

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هیچ یکی آن تحریک دیارستان نخواهد شد. این حال آنست
 بنی اعلیٰ مکتوب حق است گذرهای می‌دور راتا درم افوی
 ممکن گم محوز امکان استقرار حکومت را پیش تر خواهد بخش.
 مملکت بر آن محمل متد مفتح خواهد داد که در موقوف بهم مملدی
 یعنی در باره اعمار مجدداً افشانتان در این شده است پس
 بگرد ویرانی عورت پیش تر از پنج میلیون بهر باجیب
 کونکهای یولی دخی از سایر کشورها دین و مکتب لدانی
 فراهم نماید. هو قدر که سوخته مملکت در سنجور در خنتری
 شود بهمان انداز و حاکمیت کشورهای دین و مکتب لکتر شده بخرد
 صلح افشانتان تمام خواهد شد.

۳- طرز اصل و دلق میان آوردن حکومت ملی در
 صورتیکه طرفی ذی حق خارجی و در ضعی برای آن معذانه

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یا خند هیچ شکل نخواهد بود اما در صورتیکه طرف های زیرین
 افغانی برای میان آوردن حکومت بین خود موافقه و امانت
 نشان دهند و در بموجب مصالح عدلی مملکتی دلی را حقوق
 مدد خطات خاص گردد و شخصی خود قرارند هند، ممکن نیست بکران
 موجود رنج خود. هیئت های رئیس طرف های زیرین و در واقع
 حو افغان انفرادی حسب نظر و احتیاج در بخورد بدر احوال
 مسکوت دارند. این سادگی خواهد بود که فکر شود دیگران نشانی
 عرض رنج بکلیان مایه سرفرازی و تقدیم خواهد نمود. اینهمه
 بیجا خواهد بود که از کوه مک لدرانی دیگران در این حال هیئت ملی
 و انسانی خود را بی نیاز دانست. تاکنون نشانه های متعددی
 از هر طرف دلی از امانت بخور و تقدیم شده دلی هیچ یکی آن
 هم به یک ناقص بودن، دهم به یک بی نفوذ طرف های تعادل بود
 قبول عموم واقع نشده. نه دیر و نه کوتاه ها در ثبات یک طرفه ناقص
 که تاکنون از هر طرف برپا شده مشروطیت را بر تیر کردند بمان
 آن نقیب نشوده، و این بد در آیند هم نقیب نشاید، مگر آنکه
 رهائی، و بدون مدد و نفوذ خارجی در واقعیت امر
 محتمل اراده محکوم باشد. و ما عینا ای البدخ.

با احترام

محمد اکبر



شاغلی محترم پوهاند اکر محمد حسن کاکړ،
 نامه، موخ ۱۲ جون شمارا که بجواب مراسله، ما د لور ۱۳۶۸ من نگاشتم
 بودید، دریافت و با توجه و علاقمندی مطالعه کردم.

د لایل ترک وطن نزد من روشن بود، و با هم امکانات می‌کوشیم زمینه عودت
 آبرومندان، مصوون و دایمی همه، هموطنان را به ما وای شان فراهم سازیم. اما
 درین مرحله، دعوت من از شما و سایر چهره‌های سرشناس افغان جهت مسافرت
 به کابل بیشتر معطوف به راه اندازی سلسله تماس‌ها، تبادل نظر و تفاهات
 میان افغانها بود، است که یقیناً شما نیز ضرورت آنرا در چنین احوال حساس کاملاً
 درک می‌کنید.

در مورد آنچه که بحیث پس منظر اوضاع کنونی و عواقب تاریک آن نگاشته‌اید
 تشابه نظر کافی میان ما وجود دارد. درین رابطه و سایر موضوعات توجه عمیق شما را
 به گزارش اینجانب به دهمین کانگرس حزب ما جلب می‌کند. چنانکه خود نیز متذکر شد،
 اید، ما هرگز ادعا نکردیم که طرح‌ها و سیاست‌های مایگانه وسیله دستیابی به
 صلح و آشتی خواهد بود. ولی آنچه را پیشنهاد کردیم، صمیمانه معتقدیم که
 اساس خوب و استواری برای تفاهد شد، می‌تواند.

شما مواضع آشتی ناپذیر برخی چهره‌های اپوزسیون را بر شمرده‌اید که بر
 انهدام دولت جمهوری افغانستان از طریق اعمال فشار نظامی تأکید می‌ورزند.
 گمان می‌کنم از زمان خروج قوای اتحاد شوروی تا کنون راه حل نظامی بارها و به اشکال
 مختلف مورد آزمایش قرار گرفته و بی‌هودگی پافشاری بر آن نزد همه افراد واقع‌بین
 روشن شده است. بدین ترتیب، آنچه در قدم اول به آن نیاز داریم تعدیل است
 بیشتر در طرح‌های صلح ما نیست، بلکه تعدیل اساسی در موضع‌گیری جنگ -
 طلبانه، برخی از حلقه‌های اپوزسیون بسود یک راه حل مسالمت‌آمیز است. برای من

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نهایت د لگرم کنند، است که شما وعدۀ زیادی از شخصیت های برازندۀ افغان د اروپا و امریکا قاطعانه ازیک حل عادلانه سیاسي و صلح آمیز جانبداری میکنید. اصولی را که شما برای تحقق امر صلح برشمرده اید، بادیدگاه ماد رزمینه تضاد و یا تباین ماهوی ندارد و روی وسایل و شیوه ها نیز همواره میتوان به موافقه رسید. ایمن که قدرت های بزرگ میتوانند در چگونگی انکشاف پروسه صلح نقش و تأثیر داشته باشند، امریست مسلم. ولی این نقش بهیچوجه نباید حاکمیت ملی ما را متاثر سازد و در نهایت باید خود افغانها سر نوشت د لخواه خود را رقم بزنند.

د رمورد رعایت کامل رژیم حقوق بین المللی نه تنها د سرحدات مشترک افغان- شوروی، بلکه د سرحدات افغانستان با سایر کشورهای همسایه نیز کاملاً موافقت داریم. ولی باید به اطمینان اظهار داشت که تخمین آقای مارك فریمن - خبرنگار لاس انجلس تا یز د رمورد تعداد کارکنان سفارت اتحاد شوروی و سایر اتباع شوروی د ر افغانستان کاملاً اغراق آمیز بود و از واقعیت خیلی بد و راست. بی باوری به استعداد و توانایی افغانها، این اندیشه نادرست را نزد برخی ها بوجود آورد، که گویا پیروزیها و دستاوردهای مبدون مساعدت و همکاری کارشناسان شوروی محال بود، است. حال آنکه مجموع سیستم مشاوریت از دولت افغانستان بهر چید، شد و خارجیان آگه تر از مارك فریمن به این امر اذعان دارند.

د رمورد این امر که پاکستان اخلاقاً مجبور خواهد شد سیاست های خود را تعدیل کند، میخوایم شریک امیدواری شما باشیم. ولی تجربه ایام بعد از عودت قوای اتحاد شوروی درین زمینه ناراحت کنند، است. چنانکه میدانید پاکستان از مسالمة افغانستان بحیث وسیله بی جهت عطف توجه از بحرانهای داخلی آن کشور استفاده کرد، است.

باشما کاملاً موافقت داریم که موجودیت قوای اتحاد شوروی د ر افغانستان تا تأثیرات ناگوار را بر اعتبار و محبوبیت دولت بجای گذاشت که با عودت آن اکنسوز

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این تاثيرات بسرعت زایل میگردد. آنچه که تا حال درچوکات سیاست مصالحه ملی بدست آمده است، مطمئناً درشرایط موجودیت قوای شوروی امکانپذیر نبود. بشما اطمینان میدهم که درحال حاضر اتحاد شوروی اصول وقواعد شناخته شده بین المللی را درروابط خود بادولت افغانستان رعایت نمود و دولت افغانستان نیز بر ضرورت این امر همواره تأکید میکند. بهر صورت، هرگونه راه حلی باید متضمن حاکمیت ملی و تبارز مستقل و آزادانه اراده مردم افغانستان باشد.

شما هنگام تبصره برپیشنهادات ما میگوئید که این پیشنهادات حکومت مارا بر موقف اپوزسیون امتیاز میدهد و علاوه کرده اید که چون براساس پیشنهاد حکومت موقت بایستی از نیروهای مخالف تشکیل گردد، این حال فضای سیاسی را محتملاً حاد خواهد ساخت.

نخست باید توضیح کنم که بمجرد حصول توافق درکنفرانس سراسری صلح روی مسایل اساسی منجمد روی تشکیل وترکیب شورای رهبری، دیگر نمیتوان از موقف امتیازی این یا آن طرف صحبت کرد. زیرا شورای رهبری درواقع اداره امورحکومت را بصورت کل بدست خواهد داشت. ازجانب دیگر ما حاضریم روی تشکیل حکومت موقت به ترکیب ائتلاف همه نیروهای نیدخلویا به هرترکیب و تشکیل دیگری که بگفته شما "نتیجه" مقالوه طرف های نیدخل دینامیک" باشد، بهمن اکره بنشینیم. بنابراین سرازآغاز مرحله انتقالی الی تدویرانتخابات عمومی و تشکیل حکومت تجدید، تمام نیروهای نیدخل درموقف تسامد و رقابت مساوی وعادلانه قرارخواهند داشت. ولی دوام حکومت ما الی تشکیل حکومت موقت ضرورتی است که عواقب خطرناک بوجود آمدن یک خلای سیاسی ونظامی برآن صحنه میگذارد.

اظهارمیدارید که پیشنهاد دریک نقطه بر اصل حاکمیت ملی استوار نیست. من معتقدم که روح اساسی طرح مارا تحکیم و تقویت هرچه بیشتر

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حاکمیت ملی و وحدت ملی تشکیل میدهد. همه اصول متذکره در طرح معطوف به تحقق همین اهداف عمد، است که بخودی خود متضمن صلح و آرامش سراسری میباشد.

تاجائیکه مساله به موقف حقوقی بیطرفی دایمی افغانستان و غیر نظامی ساختن آن ارتباط میگیرد، باید توضیح گردد که این دو موضوع لزوماً از هم دیگر مجزا بود و تاکنون فقط حیثیت یک طرح را دارند. آنچنانکه شما نیز بد رستی متذکر شده اید، فقط و فقط نمایندگان منتخب مردم افغانستان حق دارند، طرحهای مذکور را در روشنی منافع و مصالح علیای حال و آینده مردم و کشور مورد بررسی قرار داد و در مورد تصمیم اتخاذ نمایند. بهمین علت در پیشنهاد ما گفته شد که این موقف در قانون اساسی جدید تسجیل خواهد شد که این کار صرف بوسیله نمایندگان منتخب مردم امکان پذیر است.

در مورد اینکه چرا چنین طرحی بعیان کشید و شد، است، شما بحیث یک مؤرخ و رزید، دلائل آنرا در راستای تاریخ کشور بوضاحت مشاهده خواهید کرد. افغانستان به برکت موقعیت نهایت حساس و پیرارزش شتراتی که خود، همواره در معرض دسایس، توطئه ها و تجاوزات بیگانگان قرار داشته است. هرکدام از قدرتهای بزرگ منطقوی و جهانی کوشید، اند به نحوی از انحاء نفوذ و سلطه خویش را بر کشور ما پهن نمود و از آن بخاطر منافع سیاسی، نظامی و استراتژیکی خود استفاده نمایند. بامن هم عقید، خواهید بود که وضع موجود کشور را نیز نمیتوان جدا ازین امر مورد مطالعه قرار داد. اگر احساس قوی و وطن دوستی و روحیه آزادی دوستی و سلحشوری افغانها نمی بود، شاید افغانستان قرنهای قبل بحیث یک هویت و شخصیت مستقل حقوق بین الملل از نقشه سیاسی جهان محو میگردد. استقلال افغانستان به بهای خون تعداد بیشمار از فرزندان صدیق این وطن حفظ گردید و این میراث بزرگ عالیتیرین نقطه عطف وحدت ملی بود و باقی خواهد ماند.

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توصیه میکنم طرحها را در روشنی نمونه های تاریخی سوئیس، فنلاند و اطریش مطالعه نماید. هدف ما کوتاه ساختن ابدی دست بیگانگان از مسایل داخلی افغانستان و برای انداختن يك رقابت سالم میان قدرتهای خارجی بخاطر - انکشاف اقتصادی - اجتماعی کشور ما میباشد. چنانکه اطلاع دارید موقف حقوقی بیطرفی دایمی صرف زمانی مدار اعتبار بود، میتواند که مورد شناخت کشورها و دید خل قرار گیرد و این امر صراحتاً به معنی احترام و امداد روخته ناپذیر حاکمیت ملی، تمامیت ارضی و استقلال کشور ما از طرف تمام امضا کنندگان سند نهایی کنفرانس بین المللی، بشمول قدرتهای بزرگ و همسایگان افغانستان میباشد. اصل احترام و تضمین موقف حقوقی بیطرفی دایمی افغانستان بخود و خود هرگونه مداخله و تجاوز علیه کشور ما را منتفی میسازد.

از طرف دیگر، طرح غیر نظامی ساختن افغانستان به مفهوم خلع سلاح کامل کشور نیست. هدف اینست تا بخاطر تأمین، رشد و استحکام دموکراسی در کشور تمام وسایل و امکانات غصب قدرت از طریق نظامی از میان برداشته شود. در عین حال سیستم اداره تأمین امنیت و قانونیت و یک نیروی دفاعی معقول جهت تحفظ سرحدات برای آیند، کشور پیشبینی شده میتواند.

در پایان این بحث بخاطر معلومات شما علاوه میکنم که طرح های بیطرفی دایمی افغانستان و غیر نظامی شدن آن در یک تعداد بیانییه های رسمی اینجانب در سال ۱۳۶۷ ارایه شده و پیشنهادات ه فقره بی دولت ج. اکم طور صریح بیطرفی دایمی و غیر نظامی شدن کشور را در بر دارد، در ختم دومین اجلاس شورای ملی ج ۱۰ در قوس سال ۱۳۶۷ ارایه گردیده و متعاقباً در پیشنهادات و طرحهای بعدی پیرامون حل و فصل سیاسی قضایای افغانستان بالا و آن - تا کید بعمل آمده است.

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بهر صورت اینها مسایلی اند که صرف نمایندگان منتخب مردم در مورد -
آن فیصله بعمل خواهند آورد .

در رابطه به يك "قوه" به طرف بين المللی "ما عدا" خواسته ایم در
مورد چگونگی نقش، ترکیب و وظایف کمیسیون بین المللی نظارت و سازمان ملل متحد
بطور مشخص صحبت کنیم. زیرا این امر نیز بایست در چوکات مذاکرات افغانها
 مطرح و مورد توافق قرار گیرد. بدیهیست کشورهایی که در ترکیب کمیسیون شامل
میگردند، نیز نظراتی در زمینه خواهند داشت. در مجموع بانظر شمار مورد
سهم فعال و مؤثر سازمان ملل متحد و جامعه بین المللی از گذشته تا هم
کامل داشته ایم.

هموطنان محترم،

نامه شما گویای احساس عمیق مسوولیت و اعتناء نسبت به کشور و مردم تان
است. از لای نظریات شما صداقت و صمیمیت نیت و اراده شما آشکار بود و
به یقین بخش پراهمیتی از تبادل نظرمیان افغانها را تشکیل میدهد. آرزو مند
سلسله مکاتبات، بخاطر آیندۀ وطن عزیز و مردم رنجیده آن ادامه یابد.

شکی ندارم که در آتیۀ نه چندان دور بوسایل معقول و واقع بینانه يك
حل عادلانه سیاسی دست خواهیم یافت.

برای شما، خانواده محترم و دوستان افغان تان صحت و خوشوقتی را
از بارگاه خداوند لا یزال تمنای میکنم.

نجیب الله

رئیس جمهور افغانستان



کابل - ۳۰ سرطان ۱۳۶۹

APPENDIX B

Najibullah-Kakar Letters in English Translation

NAJIBULLAH'S FIRST LETTER TO KAKAR

(Logo of the Republic of Afghanistan)
In the Name of Allah

Esteemed Mohammad Hassan Kakar,

For some time, I have been thinking of writing to you to discuss some issues concerning our homeland. I am happy that I now have the opportunity to share my concerns with you and to ask you as a distinguished and patriotic Afghan to comment.

It has been more than a decade that Afghans have been burning in the fire of a barbaric and destructive war. Every family has lost at least one dear and suffered great financial losses. During these years more than a million of our countrymen have been martyred or maimed and more than five million others, forced to leave their homes and towns, are now wandering in foreign lands as refugees. Nevertheless, war and destruction have not yet ended.

Everyone gives different reasons for the misery of Afghanistan. I don't think now is the time to talk about the faults and responsibilities of this or that side because nothing will come out of it except an increase of differences and a continuation of the bloodshed. Instead, we should all try to find a way out of the current bloody crisis. People of Afghanistan no longer want to be sacrificed because of the vengeance of others. Foremost they need peace so that they can forget the bitter past and turn their attention toward building a fair, safe and sound future for themselves and for future Afghan generations.

There is no doubt that foreign elements have had a larger role in increasing the crisis than internal elements. On the one hand, armed foreign intervention, and on the other, presence of Soviet forces, limited the effectiveness of internal measures for peace. If these two elements did not exist, there is no doubt that the Afghan people's misery and pain would not have been so deep and they would have been able to find an Afghan and Islamic solution to their differences.

It was this understanding that led us to announce a national reconciliation policy three years ago and start honest efforts to consider the rightful wishes and interests of the Afghan political forces for a just and lasting national peace. To accomplish this great wish, it was necessary, more than anything else, to remove foreign elements from the scene. It was for this reason that the Republic of Afghanistan, through flexibility and major concessions in the Geneva talks, paved the way for signing the four agreements under

which all foreign intervention in the affairs of Afghanistan would stop; international guarantees would be provided so that intervention would not be continued or resumed; conditions would be created so that Afghan refugees would return with honor and safety to their homeland; and Soviet forces would leave Afghanistan.

As you know, the last Soviet soldier returned to his country about a year ago. But the other agreements, especially those related to non-interference and non-intervention, are not only not implemented but parts of border cities of our country like Kandahar, Khost and Jalalabad came under a direct and severe offensive mounted by combined forces of the opposition, the Pakistani military and Saudi Wahabi mercenaries.

The extremist opposition forces and the foreign circles who support them expected that the Republic of Afghanistan would collapse in a few days or, at a maximum, in a few weeks after the withdrawal of soviet forces. Developments in the past year have proved convincingly that all this speculation was far from reality and that the imposition of a military solution on Afghanistan looks more impossible now than it ever did. Unfortunately, the policy of increasing military pressure and imposing economic sanctions against Afghanistan continue with the result that the suffering of the Afghan people has increased. Although, there have been major and significant changes in the structure of international relations resulting in the creation of a positive and hopeful atmosphere for a secure and sound future for all human beings, the situation in Afghanistan has not changed.

The republic of Afghanistan cannot just sit and hope that the other side might change its views and policies. It cannot postpone its peace initiatives. Knowing that peace and democracy cannot occur without an increase in political pluralism, we have proposed conciliation among and a coalition of all Afghan factions.

We proposed that broad negotiations be started between the Republic of Afghanistan and all political forces inside and outside our country who want peace and an end to war. The purpose of these negotiation is to prepare for a comprehensive peace conference with the participation of all related forces. In this conference, the creation of a leadership council would be agreed upon which will represent the views and beliefs of all forces. This broad peace conference will also announce a six-month ceasefire. During this time, a broad based interim coalition government would be created by and work under the administration of the leadership council. The leadership council will also assign a commission for the task of drafting a new constitution and a new law for elections.

The leadership council will approve the draft constitution and election laws. It will then invite a traditional Loya Jirgah (Grand Assembly) of Afghanistan to study the drafts and approve them. Then according to the new law, free and direct elections will be held in which balloting will be secret and everyone will participate equitably. Then in accord with the results of the election, a new government will be formed by a party

or coalition of parties who have the majority in the parliament. That government will then rule the country according to the new constitution. We are ready to accept an international commission who will observe the elections so that fraud can be prevented and fairness and legality assured.

To solve foreign aspects of the Afghanistan issue, the republic of Afghanistan has proposed that an international conference be held with the participation of Afghanistan, its neighbors, the guarantors of the Geneva agreement, heads of the non-aligned movement and the Islamic conference organization, and other interested countries. This conference will first come to an agreement for ending the supply of any kind of weapons to the warring parties so that the ceasefire can be enforced and strengthened. In the next step, the conference will recognize the new legal status of Afghanistan as a permanent non-aligned and non-military country (Which could also be documented in the constitution) and support this status by providing international guarantees. We honestly believe these peace proposals and the mechanism for their implementation can and should replace the failed and unrealistic proposals of a military solution. Our armed forces are stronger than at any other time and they have proved in the past year that they have the capacity to independently defend against huge offensives by the joint forces of the extremists, Pakistani military units, and the Saudi's Wahhabi mercenaries.

Although the war and armed aggression continue, the national reconciliation policy has captured the hearts and thoughts of millions of Afghans. It has brought about a major weakening in the militant and non-conciliatory forces of the extremists. Luckily now, with the exception of two or three provinces which border on Pakistan, the military and security situation in the country is calm.

With the help of almighty God and depending on logic and proper action by all patriotic Afghans, we will continue our honest effort to bring peace to our land. We have faith that this Afghan, humane, and Islamic wish will come true. I am sure that as a patriot and as a servant of Afghanistan, your conscience and your heart continually suffer because of the war and misery that have encompassed our country in the past few years. I am also sure that you continually think about finding a human and just solution for the problems of your country and have prayed for the welfare and safety of its people.

I along with other of our countrymen cordially invite you to come to Kabul for an exchange of views. You should be completely assured that you will be protected politically and physically and that you can return to the country that you currently reside in. We have carried out this honest promise with all those Afghans who have come to Kabul for talks. They have all returned to the places they came from.

If circumstances do not allow you to come to Afghanistan now, I request that you respond to this letter as soon as you can. Don't hold back on your views. All Afghans both inside and outside the country, are now in search of a speedy road to peace.

I am sure that there will be common elements in your advice and that of other patriotic Afghans from which we can find a solution acceptable to and supported by all Afghans.

The era of gaining victory for one line of thought through the suppression of other opinions is gone. Now we shall live together in peace. This is possible only through conciliation and understanding of the thoughts and views of all Afghans. In such a solution all Afghans will benefit, no one will be defeated. All Afghans will be victorious.

I wish you and your family health and happiness.

Najibullah

President of Afghanistan

(Signature)

Kabul, Afghanistan- February 1990

KAKAR'S REPLY LETTER TO NAJIBULLAH

4161 E. Alifan Place
San Diego, California 92111
619-571-6911
June 12, 1990

Esteemed Mr. Najibullah:

Your four-page letter of February 1990, which had initially been sent on April 12, 1990, by Afghanistan's Permanent Mission to the United Nations to my previous address at Hawaii University's East-West Center, was finally delivered to me in San Diego on May 2. Thank you.

Your letter consists of three major parts of an introduction, a prescription for solving the Afghan issue, and an invitation of me to visit Kabul for exchange of views on the issue of Afghanistan.

My going to Kabul could only be as a part of return by millions of Afghan refugees who have temporarily departed their homeland for obvious reasons. All of us are impatiently waiting for normal and safe conditions in our dear but devastated homeland so we can return and participate in its reconstruction. I will therefore turn to sharing my views on your prescription.

In the introductory part of your letter, which is the longest of the three parts, painful events in our homeland's recent past have been commented upon from a particular vantage point. I don't think it is necessary to comment on that part here. I will, therefore, agree for the time being with you when you say "I don't think now is the time to talk about the faults and responsibilities of this or that side". But I do want to point out that, as experience has shown, past events have major implications for the resolution of human problems and that these implications are more serious when the concerned issues have assumed more complex and more painful dimensions.

Unfortunately, the Afghan issue has become now a tragedy. So much so that it appears irresolvable, especially since foreign powers, notably the Soviet Union, have intervened in the internal affairs of Afghanistan and continue to do so. Because of this intervention and the resistance of Afghans, which is their natural right, they and their country have suffered a major disaster. As you mentioned briefly, over five million Afghans have become refugees in other countries and about two million have become refugees in their

own land. Between 1.2 and 1.5 million people have been killed on the battlefield. About 150 thousand individuals have been imprisoned, with 50 thousand prisoners probably executed.)It is worth special mention that among the dead and those who fled there were Afghans with great potential for leadership and authority in the country.(Around one hundred thousand Afghans may have been maimed.

Moreover, ever since from the Sawr coup [April 1978] until the sixth year of the Soviet invasion, Afghans were deprived of the most basic rights unreservedly , thereafter with some reservation. To the extent, that during the first period [until the sixth year after the Soviet invasion], they had neither freedom of speech nor freedom of assembly; neither their persons nor their property were protected; they were not safe in their own homes which were searched over and over by security forces. This, plus the unprecedented destruction of the country, brought about a total lack of [public] trust in Kabul government and the government moved away completely from the people.

At the same time, on the opposition side, during the resistance period, most parties, in order to overthrow the government and repel the [Soviet] invasion, became dependent on foreign aid, especially arms and financial aid supplied by foreign powers. And these powers used this situation, with a view to their own national interests, that question the parties' freedom of actions. Thus, external factors assumed further importance on both sides of the Afghan issue as you have pointed out in your letter: "External factors have played a greater role in intensifying the crisis than the internal ones."

In the final analysis, the resolution of the Afghan issue is largely beyond the power of the Afghans; it is essentially reliant upon foreign powers. But still as Pashtuns say, "if the mountain is high, there is still a way over it." We should not be disappointed or frustrated and should continually search for ways to solve the crisis. As Khushal Khan Khattak says, "if fate has pushed you into the mouth of a lion, don't lose your courage."

In this spirit, your efforts to find a solution (cessation of hostilities and the formation of a government acceptable to all our fellow countrymen), which you began under the National Reconciliation Plan at the beginning of 1987, constitute the first steps in the right direction. But because it is still not acceptable to all the relevant Afghan parties, it obviously needs major changes. You too, have implicitly accepted this fact by constantly making revisions in your plan, the latest version of which reads as follows in your letter:

"The Republic of Afghanistan cannot postpone its peace initiatives in hopes of a change in views and policies of the other side. Realizing the fact that peace and democracy cannot come without the multiplicity of political parties and political pluralism, we call for reconciliation and coalition between all Afghan forces."

“We propose that broad negotiations be started between the Republic of Afghanistan and all political forces of our society, both inside and outside the country, who want peace an end to the war. The purpose of these negotiations is to prepare for an overall peace conference with the participation of all involved forces. The conference will announce a six-month long ceasefire and then create a leadership council which will represent the views and beliefs of all forces. During the period of the ceasefire, the leadership council will create a broad based interim government to work under its direction and assign a commission to draft a new constitution and election laws.”

“When these documents are ready and have been approved by the council, the council will invite a Loya Jirgah (Grand Assembly) of Afghanistan to study the drafts and give its approval. Elections will follow in which balloting will be secret and everyone will participate equally. In accordance with the results of the election, a new government will be formed by a party or coalition of parties which secures the majority in the parliament. That government will rule the country according to the new constitution. We are ready to accept an international commission to observe the election so that fraud can be prevented and electoral fairness and legality assured.”

“For the solutions of foreign aspects of the Afghan issue, the Republic of Afghanistan has proposed that an international conference with the participation of Afghanistan, its neighbors, the guarantors of the Geneva Agreements, the head of the Non-Aligned Movement, the Organization of Islamic Conference, and other interested countries will be held. The conference will first come to an agreement on completely ending the supply of weapons to the warring parties so that the ceasefire can be enforced and strengthened. Next, the conference will recognize and provide an international guarantee and protection for the new legal statues of Afghanistan as a permanently neutral and demilitarized country. The new status will also be underlined in the new constitution.”

No Afghan who favors a negotiated and diplomatic solution of the issue can ignore this proposal. At the same time, you know that your proposal, as it is, cannot be acceptable to all involved parties. Nonetheless, for several major reasons, the proposal should be considered. First, because the proposal prefers a negotiated solution between “involved forces” to a military solution. Second, because this proposal is more coordinated than others you have offered so far. Finally, because this solution is based on general, secret and direct elections and thus meets the condition that the issue should be solved through

the national will of the Afghan people. However, the procedure you have outlined for the achievement of the national will cannot bring about this end. I will discuss this major flaw soon.

A negotiated settlement is preferred now because in the 16 months since the Soviet forces have left Afghanistan the involved parties have reached a stalemate. Rockets are fired on Kabul as well as on the rural populations. These forces are like a blind man who, when he gets mad, hits out with his cane without knowing who or what he will hit. Thus, many Afghans who have survived the war and deserve to live are killed by foreign weapons. Meanwhile, various diseases, an unprecedented rise in prices, and even the possibility of famine in some areas, threaten the lives of Afghans. The younger generation is deprived of education, even elementary learning, and as Engineer Mohammad Eshaq has said, "a nation is dying." The continuation of this tragedy should no longer be acceptable to any Afghan, especially those who consider service to their countrymen as their national and Islamic duty.

The opposition, of course, at least the major part of it, for certain reasons, is not yet ready for negotiations with the Kabul government. It has rejected the proposals you have offered since the announcement of the "National Reconciliation" policy. They are clearly insistent on a military solution to the issue. The former king, Mohammad Zahir Shah, who according to opinion polls conducted by the late professor Bahauddin Majrooh is the only person supported by all Afghans, says "the imposed communist regime is still in power in Kabul." Mr. Sibghatullah Mojaddedi, President of the Afghan interim government, insists in clear words on the continuation of the military struggles: "We will never, under no conditions, come into coalition with the Khalq and Parcham. Through pressure and an intensification of the struggles, we will overthrow the communist regime in our country." Professor Burhanuddin Rabbani even considers the possibility of a political solution of the Afghan problem as "collusion with communism."

So as we can see, the differences in positions are fundamental. This is one of the two main problems that stands in the way of a political solution. The other is the intervention of foreign powers in the internal affairs of Afghanistan. I will discuss this issue soon.

So what should we do now? Your position is clear. You say, "the Republic of Afghanistan cannot just sit and postpone its peace initiatives in the hope that the other side will change its views and policies". This is true. Considering the dangerous consequences of continuing the crisis, it is now, more than ever necessary to seek a just political solution. The continued stalemate, blind rockets, obvious differences between leaders of the opposition, the tragedies of Torkham, Farkhar and many others like it have indeed transferred issues from the battlefield to the negotiation table; from the hands of military commanders to the political center. Insistence on solving the issue through killing Afghans and brothers has lost its significance and attraction. Iran's Imam

Khomeini, with his tough position regarding Iraq, finally came to negotiations. Islam's prophet Mohammad, with the treaty of Hudaibia thirteen and a half centuries ago, has left a model of negotiation for Muslims.

But it is not possible that your "peace initiatives" or any other for ending the war (creating a broad-based government and reconstructing the devastated country), can be implemented without the cooperation of all influential, involved, national groups and parties. If such a will and readiness for cooperation does not exist soon, the former king, in my view rightly sees danger ahead: "Developments created by regional and international aspects of our country's issue are indicative that if Afghans themselves do not take the initiative, not only their national interests but even the existence of Afghanistan will come under the influence of International and regional interests.

For your "peace initiative" to become the basis for negotiations, it should be made comprehensive enough to reflect the real will of at least a majority of Afghans. I think people expect the end of war and the creation of an Islamic country which should not be under the influence of any foreign power, meaning that it should be created freely, preferably under the supervision of the U.N or some other international delegation acceptable to all involved parties. For the achievement of this goal, it is necessary that foreign powers reduce their influence in the Afghan issue and thereby create an opportunity for you to amend your "initiative" so that the UN can supervise the establishment of a government.

In this process, it is vital that foreign powers actually and practically accept the principle of Afghan national sovereignty which they continually speak about. The involved powers all made this promise to Diego Cordovez, the former special envoy of the UN secretary General, at the time the Geneva Accords were signed in April 1988. As Cordovez said in one of his articles in the Washington Post (April 12, 1990), "in Geneva, those who participated in the negotiations repeatedly told me that after the withdrawal of Soviet forces, Afghans would be allowed the right of self-determination."

The Soviet Union might have a bigger role in this regard than any other nation. The Soviet Union, according to international laws, especially the Geneva Accords for which she is a co-guarantor, should begin to carry out the following specific measures: respect the Afghan – Soviet border as an international border in matters of travel and the transport of goods; reduce the number of its diplomats in Kabul, which according to the correspondent of the Los Angeles Times, Mark Fineman (June 5, 1990), number about 500, to the level of Afghan representation in Moscow, or at least close to that; reduce the number of Soviets, estimated at three to four thousand, who are working as so called "advisors" in civilian and military agencies in Kabul and other cities of the country.

When this is accomplished, the Soviets or the Afghan government should announce how many Soviets remain in the country. This reduction is necessary and should not

lead to harm since there are very few development projects in the country. Moreover, their presence makes Afghans believe that the Soviets have some foreign goal, are working for goals that are against the national interest of Afghanistan, are trying to establish a government which will benefit the Kabul regime and the Soviet Union. There is no doubt such measures by the Soviet Union will have a great impact on creating the proper opportunity for a negotiated settlement of the Afghan issue. Especially in the two following areas, the influence of such measures could be very significant and major:

- A. The Republic of Pakistan would be encouraged to do the same. There is no doubt that similar measures by Pakistan are as important as those of the Soviet Union for a negotiated political settlement. If the Soviet Union comes up with the measures outlined above, Pakistan would probably do the same. If not, the pressure that Afghans and other involved countries, such as the U.S and Saudi Arabia, bring on Pakistan will force it to do so. If this isn't effective either, the Soviet Union can put a condition saying it will only reduce its influence if Pakistan does the same. But the latest political developments show that the actions of other countries are a reaction to the Soviet policies in Afghanistan. Therefore, we can say if the Soviets reduce their influence, Pakistan will do the same. If this happens, half of the issue is solved because the role of these countries in the solution of the Afghan issue is especially important. As Cordovez says in his article, the solution of the Afghan crisis "hasn't come about. The Geneva Accords not only envisaged the Soviet withdrawal but also international disengagement so that the Afghans would be able to solve their differences themselves as they have so many times in the past. If this happens, there is no reason why the Afghan issue wouldn't be settled through negotiations".
- B. If the Soviet Union does take the above mentioned measures, this will bring credit on your government, too. It's certain that your government so far has not been regarded as valid or legitimate. The reason is obvious. It was set up after the Soviet invasion by force and military might. Afghans considered this against their basic rights as well as the right of national sovereignty. They fought against it. The more Soviet military forces got involved in the war, the more the Kabul regime was rejected by and became isolated from the people. On the other hand, when the Soviet withdrew, it became clear that the distance became smaller, at least to the extent that now the fighting is not nearly as intense as it was in the past. "National Reconciliation" measures, as you call them, have had some influence but have not helped much in the solution of the crisis, nor is it likely they will help much in the future. The reason for this is the past history of the government and the fact that the Soviet Union is not totally out of Afghanistan. Although Soviet forces are out of the country, it is still dominant in the Kabul government through its advisors, the very

large embassy staff, and transfer of large amounts of very advanced weapons. The most effective action the Soviets could take to reduce the concerns of Afghans and prepare for a political settlement of the issue would be to take the above mentioned measures.

Afghans have a right to be concerned. The Soviet Union, a superpower that worried that its southern borders might be in danger, invaded Afghanistan. Now that Afghans have had this bitter experience in bloody battles with the Soviet forces and while the Soviets, as we said, have a great influence over the Kabul regime, how can Afghans be assured of the future independence and sovereignty of their country? Now that indications of a solution are coming into view, with your own peace proposals amongst them, taking the above mentioned measures are necessary. They wouldn't harm your government either. You say yourself, "our armed forces are stronger than at any other time and have shown their fighting ability in the past year through and independently handled defense against the large offensive forces of the extremists, Pakistani army units, and the Saudi's Wahabi mercenaries, all combined." Creation of an opportunity for a political solution, as I mentioned earlier, would mean that all forces of the internally involved parties, who have an influence in national politics, will accept negotiations as a principle.

Perhaps some sides might not accept this principle, but if through your proposal or any other offered for this purpose, the national will of the Afghan people could be obtained and national sovereignty achieved, most probably all Afghans as well as America and the Soviet Union would support it. In such a case, a solution based on some proposal or other would not be difficult because Afghans, as a dynamic people with their own mores, traditions, and a very rich culture, are good at politics and show great skill in the solution of internal issues, a skill they could use to create a new government. After all, the state (or government) is essentially the result of a covenant of the involved dynamic parties.

But whatever the proposal and from whomsoever it comes, because the Afghan crisis has caused much bloodshed and intensified differences and also because foreign powers have become involved, its solution in two different stages, temporary and permanent, as mentioned in your proposal, would be proper. In the temporary period an atmosphere of trust and cooperation should be established so that the various factions would be psychologically prepared to accept negotiations among themselves leading to a solution in which rival factions would participate. The new optimistic atmosphere in the world will hopefully give a positive influence to this process. And success in confidence building in the temporary period should bring success in the second stage.

As I said earlier, your proposal looks comprehensive to me. It contains elements that should be effective in the solution of the issue. But it is based on the assumptions that cannot be accepted as a basis for negotiation for the following four reasons.

1. The proposal privileges the position of your government over that of the opposition.
2. The proposal, in one point, is not based on the principle of self-determination.
3. Because the proposal indicates an interim government must be created of opposing forces in the transitional period, the political atmosphere for the final stage will become more tense.
4. Additionally, the proposal does not consider an international neutral force to observe effectively the process from the very beginning.

As for the first point, this proposal privileges your government position over the opposition, in power in Kabul until the creation of an interim government. The military forces (Army, militia, Khad, police, and Jowzjani) as well as the courts would be under your control. These forces would be in place even after the creation of the interim government. Courts and the multi-pronged military forces, especial Khad, which are made up of your loyal supporters are now the strongest pillars of the Kabul government. Would anyone believe that a Khad which is still dominated by the KGB, with its past history of killing Afghans and favoring Soviets, would remain neutral? If you are really determined to solve the Afghan issue through political means and if you want the opposition to accept your proposal as the basis for negotiations, Khad must go. Maybe those in Khad will say the existence of such an intelligence structure is needed for the security of the country, as it is in other countries. Unfortunately, this is probably right but instead of Khad another structure, consisting of nonpartisan professionals, should be created with the agreement of the involved parties or by the interim government. Its budget should be paid by Afghans and its affairs regularly checked by courts of justice or the government's legislative body. It should not be used by the government as a means of suppression and national terror.

Bringing any kind of new reforms, including a multi-party system, a change in the name of the official party, and a return of all confiscated property, as are rumored to be part of "National Reconciliation", does not mean anything as long as Khad remains. We cannot forget the unforgivable past of Khad. As professor Samander Ghoriani, says, "even if the cabinet includes members from the opposition, they can be terminated in a twinkling of Khad's eye overnight." Ghoriani also says, "compared to the power of the very strong organizations which have come into existence such as Khad, the power of government is nothing even if its membership is overbalanced in favor of opposition representatives."

2. You have said in your proposal that an international conference would recognize the status of Afghanistan as a permanent neutral and demilitarized country. This status would be outlined in the constitution and guaranteed and protected by the

international community. It looks like you have already decided that Afghanistan should be permanently neutral and unarmed and that an international conference should guarantee and protect this status. If a future unarmed Afghanistan is “protected” by countries including its present neighbors, it will forever be a colony and protected country. This view, therefore, is clearly not in line with Afghan national sovereignty. Besides, isn’t disarming Afghanistan, while it’s surrounded by more populous and stronger countries with modern weapons, suicidal? It’s certain, if Afghanistan is unarmed and “protected” by others, that independence and national sovereignty will be in name only. Shevardnadze, in his ten-point plan of February 15, 1990, like you, proposed that Afghanistan become an unarmed country. The Soviet purpose in this connection is, of course, obvious. They were not able to demilitarize Afghanistan by their military might and were not able to bring it under their domination. Now they want to achieve the same goal through international guarantees, even though such agreements cannot be entirely trusted. Did the Soviet Union listen to the eight annual resolutions of the General Assembly of the United Nations calling for the withdrawal of their forces from Afghanistan? Didn’t the Afghans break the Soviet hold over their country with the use of weapons along with their strong determination? So, when others are armed, the still stronger, more armed, and more united Afghans are the only guarantee for independence, national sovereignty, and a dignified life. In any event, the subjects of neutrality and armament, and so on, are legal matters that should be decided by the people of Afghanistan. If it becomes necessary, the authoritative elected representatives of the Afghans will discuss these matters, not some international conference or other foreign delegation which does not have the right and authority to talk about and decide such matters.

3. According to your proposal, “the leadership council made up of all political forces” shall create an interim government. Such a government would not be neutral concerning the formation of a future national structure and would not be able to bring about a government that is needed for the final solution of the crisis. There would be severe new tensions and new struggles. It’s likely that very unhappy and unpredictable events would occur and effect the entire political process of decision making—possibly even destroying it. In order to prevent this outcome, it would be better that an interim government be created in the transitional period to reduce tension and confusion in accord with the Cordovez proposal.

In the Summer of 1988, Cordovez proposed that, in the transitional period, before a broad-based government is created, an interim government be established which would be made up of neutral professional people. That proposal meant that the Kabul

regime should submit its power to that government and participate like other parties in elections. As we can see, your proposal is based on the model of Nicaragua. There is no doubt that political pluralism and a parliamentary system are needed for Afghanistan. There are great differences, however, between the Sandanistas and Kabul's Khalq Party. Moreover, the Soviet Union has proved to be an unreliable neighbor with ill intention, still dominant over the Kabul government. For these reasons, the Nicaragua model is not practical or acceptable while the Kabul government and the official party there remain in power. In any event, it will be the duty of the interim government to prepare the conditions for the creation of national government. According to this proposal, members of the interim government could not be included in a future national government. For this reason, the interim government would, as a transitional body, honestly try to maintain its neutrality. With the cooperation of leaders of the involved parties meeting in traditional conventions like Jirgahs or in commissions, or in other ways permitted by the new constitution, the interim body would finally bring about a government through general, secret and direct elections. It would then step aside. The interim government, of course should try to create an equal opportunity for all involved parties to campaign in the cities and rural areas according to stated regulations and under the effective supervision of the U.N.

5. In your proposal, it is not stated that an international force would supervise the political process for the creation of a national government. Without such a force, preferably operated by the U.N, a political solution is not possible. You have proposed an international conference with the participation of involved and interested countries, but such a conference cannot solve the controversial issue of a ceasefire, cutting off arms and so forth. It cannot effectively solve and supervise such matters in the transitional period. Under the current circumstances, only U.N forces can do this. The U.N has experience in such matters. Nations respect the U.N and consider it trustworthy. Afghanistan particularly, is on the U.N agenda and remains a U.N responsibility. The guarantors of the Geneva agreements asked Cordovez to attempt to create a broad-based government. They promised him that they would cooperate and help in this endeavor. Based on these promises, Cordovez talked to the involved parties and came up with a comprehensive proposal. If that proposal was not as it was acceptable, it could at least have been the basis for negotiations. But that did not happen because the leaders of some parties did not get the significance of the proposal, because the Soviet Union and Pakistan, in contradiction of the Geneva Accords and their promises to Cordovez, became more and more involved in the Afghan issue. But that proposal is still available and valid. So far, no other proposal as realistic and impartial as that of Cordovez, which is suitable for Afghan condition, has come about.

In conclusion, I want to summarize my views regarding Afghanistan.

1. The major foreign powers involved in Afghanistan, particularly the USSR and the US, who are close to reaching an understanding on many bigger world issues, should also agree on a joint position on Afghanistan so that Afghans can have the opportunity to choose a government and political leadership based on the principle of national sovereignty. The Soviet Union and Pakistan can play a greater role than others in helping to bring this about. It would be to their benefit if a stable national government is in power in Afghanistan. An unstable Afghanistan or an Afghanistan dependent on one of them, or the prevalence of anarchy in Afghanistan will without doubt be dangerous to them. From a cultural and human standpoint, Afghanistan is tied to them as well as Iran and the crisis cannot be contained within the borders of Afghanistan. As we can see, the current crisis has also affected them greatly. But if the Soviet Union and Pakistan are both hoping that because of differences and divisions among Afghans they will be able to dominate Afghanistan through their surrogates, they should note that their special parties will not be trusted by the people just as the official party of the Kabul regime is not trusted. Independence is such a strong characteristic and tradition of Afghans that now even the Soviet Union, after a very costly struggle, admits to it. As Soviet spokesman Gerasimov said, the Soviet Union will never again send its military forces to Afghanistan.
2. Because the leaders of the various Afghan parties have not come to an agreement on the creation of government, because we cannot see indication of an agreement or the hope of coalition in the near future, because the whole Afghan nation is suffering because of the war. Because it is possible that national sovereignty and the independence of Afghanistan will be limited or trampled, all Afghanistan's leaders must cooperate with the U.N so that under its supervision a government can be established with full respect to the principle of national sovereignty, under no foreign influence, and operating in a free and democratic environment. Because the Kabul government was created through Soviet force and rules only in cities by depending on Khad, it could not gain legitimacy in all this time, no matter how many people it massacred and how much pressure it placed on the people. Since it was unable to get what it wanted through its "National Reconciliation" policy, it should, like the opposition parties, cooperate with the U.N General Secretary for the creation of a legal national government in Afghanistan and should agree to submit to an interim power before the beginning of the transitional period. Only through the mediation of the U.N. will the Afghan people be able to solve the issue through general elections. Otherwise, the passing of time might intensify differences and rivalries and make the situation even more complicated. It looks as if this proposal or another one like

it will finally solve the Afghan issue. Before a devastated Afghanistan becomes more devastated and before the already complicated issue becomes more complicated. Common sense says we should go with this proposal.

Involving the U.N. more and more in the process of creating a government is significant because the U.N, through its very nature, has no special intention for Afghanistan. Interested countries, especially Afghanistan's neighbors, can be assured that no Afghan faction will be used against them. This will decrease international sensitivity and that of the neighboring countries as much as possible and create conditions for stability for the government. In addition, the U.N. will get an opportunity to take a major part in the next important Afghan issue which is the reconstruction of the country, an effort that will require money to be raised from other countries for the return of more than 5 million Afghan refugees to their homeland. The more the U.N gets involved, the more the sensitivity of involved countries will be reduced. This will be to the good of Afghanistan.

3. If the involved parties, foreign and internal, are ready and determined, the procedures for creating a national government will not be a problem. If the internal sides give priority to the interest of the country and its people or that of their own, then it is possible that the current crisis can be solved. The leaders of the involved parties and in fact every prominent Afghan has a great responsibility in this regard. It would be naive to think that others will prescribe a disinterested solution for us. It would also be a case of improper pride to say that we don't need anyone's help in this national disaster.

So far, many prescriptions have come from different groups and individuals but none of the them have been accepted by all because of flaws and the opposition of the various sides. One-sided Jirgahs and elections that have been held so far by both sides have not given legitimacy to either and won't do so in the future either. Unless such Jirgahs and elections are held nationally and without interference and domination by foreigners, they will not represent the general will of the people.

Respectfully

Signature

Mohammad Hassan Kakar

NAJIBULLAH'S SECOND LETTER TO KAKAR

(Logo of the Republic of Afghanistan)

Esteemed Professor Dr. Mohammad Hassan Kakar,

I received and read with care and interest your letter dated June 12 which you had written in response to my correspondence of the month of February 1990.

The reasons for people leaving the country were clear to me, and we are trying through all means to provide for the dignified, safe and permanent return of our compatriots to their homeland. However, at this juncture, my invitation to you and other prominent Afghan figures to travel to Kabul is more focused on starting a series of contacts and exchange of ideas and understandings among Afghans the needs of which during these sensitive times you certainly understand, too.

There is ample similarity of views between us in terms of what you have written by way of the background of the current conditions and their dark consequences. In this connection and with regards to other issues, I draw your earnest attention to my report to the second congress of our party. As you have noted yourself, we have never claimed that our plans and policies are the only way of reaching peace and reconciliation. However, we sincerely believe that what we have proposed can be a good and solid basis for understanding.

You have pointed out the irreconcilable positions of some opposition figures who insist on the collapse of the Republic of Afghanistan through the use of military pressure. I guess since the departure of Soviet forces until now, military solution has been tried many times and in different forms, and the futility of insisting on it has become clear before all realistic individuals. Therefore, what we need in the first step is not more amendments in our peace plans, but a fundamental amendment in the war-mongering position of some opposition circles in the interest of a peaceful solution. It is immensely encouraging for me that you and a large number of prominent Afghan personalities in Europe and America are siding with a just political and peaceful solution. The principles that you have outlined for the realization of peace do not contradict the substance of our view, and one can always reach agreement on the tools and approaches, too. That great powers can have a role and impact in how the peace process develops is a given. However, this role must in no way undermine our national sovereignty and ultimately Afghans themselves should decide their own preferred destiny.

We are also in full agreement with regards to observing the international legal regime not only at the common Afghan-Soviet borders but also at the borders of Afghanistan with other neighboring countries. However, it has to be said with confidence that the estimate of Mr. Mark Freeman, the Los Angeles Times reporter, about the number of employees at the embassy of the Soviet Union and other Soviet citizens in Afghanistan is totally exaggerated and is very far from the truth. Lack of trust in the talent and capability of Afghans has created this incorrect idea among some that our victories and achievements are impossible without assistance and cooperation of Soviet experts. This is at a time when the entire advisory system has been removed from the Afghan government and foreigners more aware than Mark Freeman admit this fact.

Regarding the point that Pakistan will be morally compelled to amend its policies, I would like to share in your hope. However, the experience of the days following the return of Soviet Union forces is worrying in this respect. As you know, Pakistan has used the Afghan issue as a tool to divert attention from its internal crises.

I am in full agreement with you that the presence of Soviet Union forces in Afghanistan left unfavorable effects on the credibility and popularity of the government, effects that are now disappearing quickly with their return. What has so far been achieved in the framework of the policy of national reconciliation would have surely been impossible during the presence of Soviet Union forces. I assure you that in the present time, the Soviet Union observes recognized international rules in its relations with the government of Afghanistan and the government of Afghanistan too consistently insists on this point. Regardless, any solution must guarantee national sovereignty and be the independent and free manifestation of the will of the people of Afghanistan.

While commenting on our proposals, you say that these proposals favor the government over the opposition's position, and given the fact that the proposal calls for the interim government to be formed from among opposition forces, you have added that "this situation will likely aggravate the political atmosphere."

First, I have to explain that as soon as agreement is reached at the national peace conference, including on the formation and composition of the leadership council, then one cannot speak about this side's or that side's advantage, for the leadership council will in fact have complete control of the government's affairs. On the other hand, we are prepared to negotiate on the formation of the interim government as composed of a coalition of all relevant forces or with any other composition or structure that, as you say, "is the result of talks between the relevant dynamic sides." Therefore, beginning with the start of the transitional phase until the holding of general elections and the formation of a new government, all relevant forces will be in a position of equal and just cooperation and competition. However, the continuation of our government until the formation of the interim government is a necessity that is affirmed by the dangerous consequences of the emergence of a political and military vacuum.

You express that the proposal “in one instance is not based on the principle of national sovereignty.” I believe that the further bolstering and strengthening of national sovereignty and national unity form the fundamental spirit of our plan. All the principles mentioned in the plan are focused on the realization of these major goals which themselves guarantee countrywide peace and calm.

As far as the question concerns the legal position of permanent neutrality for Afghanistan and its demilitarization, it has to be explained that these two issues are essentially separate and so far only have the status of a plan. As you have also correctly noted, only and only the elected representatives of Afghanistan have the right to assess these plans in light of the people’s and country’s present and future key interests and make decisions about them. For this reason, our proposal states that the point will be codified in the new constitution that decision about this matter is only possible through the elected representatives of the people.

Regarding the question why such a plan has been put forward, as an accomplished historian you will observe with clarity its reasons through the course of the country’s history. Afghanistan, thanks to its utmost sensitive and valuable strategic location, has always faced the plots, conspiracies and invasions of foreigners. Every one of the major regional and global powers have in one way or another tried to extend their influence and control over our country and use that for their own political, military and strategic interests. You will agree with me that we cannot study the current situation in the country in isolation from this matter. If it were not for the strong sense of patriotism and spirit of freedom loving and chivalry of Afghans, Afghanistan as an independent identity and legal entity in international law may have been erased from the political map of the world centuries ago. Afghanistan’s independence has been preserved at the cost of the blood of countless true sons of this land and this great heritage has been and shall remain the highest mark of national unity.

I advise that you read the plans in the light of historic examples from Switzerland, Finland and Austria. Our goal is the permanent cutting off of foreign hands from the internal affairs of Afghanistan and launching a positive competition among foreign powers for the socio- economic development of our country. Permanent neutrality can be credible only when it is recognized by all relevant countries which explicitly means continuous and unblemished respect for the national sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence of our country by all signatories to the final document of the international conference, including great powers and Afghanistan’s neighbors. The principle of respect and guarantee for Afghanistan’s position of permanent neutrality in itself negates all types of interference and aggression against our country.

On the other hand, the plan for the demilitarization of Afghanistan does not mean the total disarmament of the country. The goal is to remove all tools and possibilities

for usurping power through military means for the purpose of securing, growing and strengthening democracy in the country. At the same time, a system for the administration of security and rule of law and a reasonable defense force for the protection of the country's borders can be contemplated for the future of the country.

At the end of this discussion, for the sake of your information, I add that plans for the permanent neutrality of Afghanistan and the country's demilitarization have been put forward in a number of my official speeches in the year 1367, and the 5-point proposals of the Republic of Afghanistan which explicitly contain the permanent neutrality and demilitarization of the country were offered at the conclusion of the second session of the National Assembly of the Republic of Afghanistan in Qaws 1367 which have subsequently been reiterated in the proposals and plans regarding the political resolution of Afghanistan's issues. At any point, these are matters that only the elected representatives of the people will decide upon.

Regarding a "neutral international force," we have deliberately not wanted to talk specifically about the nature of the role, composition and duties of the international monitoring commission and the United Nations because this matter also must be discussed and agreed in the framework of Afghans negotiations. There is no doubt that countries that will be included in the composition of the commission will also have views about the matter. In sum, we have had full understanding about your view from the past regarding the active and effective role of the United Nations and the international community.

Respected compatriot,

Your letter speaks to your deep sense of responsibility and attention about your country and people. Your honesty and sincerity of intention and will are evident from the midst of your views and will surely form an important part of the exchange of views among Afghans. I wish the series of correspondence for the sake of our beloved country's future and its suffering people will continue.

I have no doubt that in the not too distant future we will get our hands on sensible and realistic tools for a just political solution.

I wish you, your esteemed family and Afghan friends health and prosperity from the court of the immortal Allah.

Najibullah
President of Afghanistan
(Signature)
Kabul – 21 July 1990