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COMPLEXITIES OF THE PEACEBUILDING PROCESS IN AFGHANISTAN

The long-lasting conflict in Afghanistan leads to an aggravation of the socio-economic crisis in the country. This is a serious obstacle to the stable development of Afghan society and a challenge to regional security. The peace talks in Qatar in September 2020 between the Government of the IRA and the Taliban movement could contribute to ending the conflict and implementing measures for the peaceful construction and development of the country. However, the events following the announcement of the withdrawal of international forces from Afghanistan and the coming to power of the Taliban government have once again put on the agenda the issue of finding ways to resolve the conflict as soon as possible by peaceful means.

The article analyzes the fundamental principles of establishing the peace process in Afghanistan. Exploring the interaction of all parties involved in the peace process, the authors pose research questions: "What are the main difficulties in establishing a peace process in Afghanistan?" and "is there a prospect of achieving peace and stability in modern Afghanistan?"

The role of national, regional and international actors in establishing peace in Afghanistan is considered based on the content-analysis and review of the opinion of the expert community (using the Delphi method), as well as their own observations (the included observation method) of one of the authors of the article, who was a direct participant in the Doha negotiation process.

Key words: Peacebuilding, nation building, stability, US withdrawal, Afghanistan.

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Ауғанстанда бейбітшілік орнату процесінің күрделілігі

Ауғанстандағы көпжылдық қақтығыс елдегі әлеуметтік-экономикалық дағдарыстың шиеленісуіне әкеледі. Бұл тұрақты дамуға елеулі кедергі болып табылады, сондай-ақ өңірлік қауіпсіздікке қатер төндіреді. Катардағы 2020 жылдың қыркүйегінде АИР Үкіметі мен «Талибан» қозғалысы арасындағы бейбіт келіссөздер қақтығысты тоқтатуға және елдің бейбіт құрылысы мен дамуы жөніндегі шараларды жүзеге асыруға ықпал етуі мүмкін. Бірақ Ауғанстаннан халықаралық күштердің шығарылуы және «Талибан» Үкіметінің билікке келуі туралы хабарланғаннан кейінгі оқиғалар қақтығысты бейбіт жолмен тез арада шешу жолдарын іздеу мәселесін тағы да күн тәртібіне қойды.

Мақалада Ауғанстандағы бейбітшілік үдерісін құрудың негізгі принциптері талданған. Бейбіт құрылыс процесіне қатысушы барлық тараптардың өзара әрекеттесуін зерттей отырып, авторлар келесі зерттеу сұрақтарын қояды: «Ауғанстанда бейбітшілік процесін орнатудағы негізгі қиындықтар қандай?» және «қазіргі Ауғанстанда бейбітшілік пен тұрақтылыққа қол жеткізу перспективасы бар ма?».

Дохадағы келіссөздер процесінің тікелей қатысушысы болған мақала авторларының бірінің сараптамалық қоғамдастықтың пікірін (Дельфи әдісі арқылы), сондай-ақ өз бақылауларын (енгізілген байқау әдісі) талдау негізінде, контент-анализ және эксперттік әдіс арқылы Ауғанстанда бейбітшілік орнатудағы ұлттық, аймақтық және халықаралық субъектілердің рөлі қарастырылды.

Түйін сөздер: Бейбітшілік орнату, мемлекеттік құрылыс, тұрақтылық, АҚШ әскерлерін шығару, Ауғанстан.

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Сложности процесса установления мира в Афганистане

Многолетний конфликт в Афганистане ведет к усугублению социально-экономического кризиса в стране. Это является серьезным препятствием для стабильного развития афганского общества и вызовом региональной безопасности. Мирные переговоры в Катаре в сентябре 2020 года между правительством ИРА и движением «Талибан» могли бы способствовать прекращению конфликта и реализации мер по мирному строительству и развитию страны. Но события вслед за объявлением о выводе международных сил из Афганистана и приходом к власти правительства «Талибан» поставили вновь на повестку дня вопрос поиска путей скорейшего разрешения конфликта мирными средствами.

В статье проанализированы основополагающие принципы налаживания мирного процесса в Афганистане. Исследуя взаимодействие всех сторон-участниц процесса мирного устройства, авторы ставят перед собой исследовательские вопросы: “каковы основные сложности в установлении мирного процесса в Афганистане?” и “есть ли в современном Афганистане перспектива достижения мира и стабильности?”

На основе контент-анализа и экспертного метода (посредством метода Дельфи), а также собственных наблюдений (метод включенного наблюдения) одного из авторов статьи, являвшегося непосредственным участником переговорного процесса в Дохе, рассмотрены роль национальных, региональных и международных субъектов в установлении мира в Афганистане.

Ключевые слова: Миростроительство, государственное строительство, стабильность, вывод войск США, Афганистан

Introduction

During past few months, numerous qualitative changes have taken place in the political and Peace building process of Afghanistan due to on-going high level of violence, lack of political consensus in Kabul, trust deficit in all sides, US hasty troops withdrawal till sept 2021, conquering strategy of Taliban and due to some national, regional spoilers playing a more proactive role in destabilizing the current momentum of the peace process. The Peacebuilding complexities have proven been much right as with the fall of Kabul on 15th August, still there is not peace in Afghanistan. ISIS is attacking Taliban across the country, in addition, there are target killing of Shia minority by the same group. US/EU and NATO have not decided yet to recognize Taliban's government in Kabul, in addition, regional powers are pushing Taliban for a more inclusive government, women rights, human basic rights are at the stake where Western powers are seeking Taliban to respect such universal rights to be engaged in regional and international political, economic matters.

Therefore, in this research paper we will comprehensively analyze the complexities of the formal peace process in Afghanistan. in fact, these

complexities affected the general optimism for the Afghan peace process, so far. To respond to this question, the paper will initially provide a theoretical foundation describing peacebuilding efforts, the main actors of the peace process in Afghanistan. Next, the paper provides an account of the historical events, regional, and international efforts for the peace building support in Afghanistan, that brought about the Doha Peace Process and are trying to open a new venue for Afghan peace talks in Istanbul, Turkey.

With these immense accounts and international efforts in place, the paper will then examine the role of national, regional and international actors in bringing peace to Afghanistan; specifically, the US and Taliban peace agreement in 29th Feb 2020 in Doha, Qatar which paved way to an intra Afghan dialogue in Doha which still faces stalemate to make any significant decision in making a ceasefire viable and pave way to a peace agreement between all fighting sides in Afghanistan.

The paper will then seek to answer the question, in modern day Afghanistan “Do we have hope for Afghan peace?” And will support the main argument of the paper; that while the role of the historical perspective of peace has changed over the last two decades.

Research methods

This paper will account for the types of sources that are used in collecting the data and the research methods that have been applied in analyzing the collected data. The choice of sources and methods are mainly guided by the research questions and the aim of the study. The research is based on variety of sources of data: A – internet websites- journal reports, recent analysis regarding Complexities of Peacebuilding Processes across the world. C – reading literature regarding peacebuilding process in Afghanistan. We have supplemented the sources by reflecting with personal observation of working in the peace process, attending many conferences and meeting many of the elites combining own experience of eight years with international aid agencies which supported peace and nation building development.

Rationale for choosing a topic. Goals and objectives

Document/Content analysis

Secondary source of data collection, in the form of research documents and other written material, were also applied to form part of the analysis. The secondary data came from a variety of documented sources;

- NGOs research documents like USIP, UN or World Bank research papers.

- Recently written reports on the development of state and tribe communication in the region

- Reading local newspapers- News stories

- A vast list of books, journal reports and recent research papers on the topic which are listed in the bibliography of the paper.

Content Analysis Table:

No	Terms with the definition and analysis	Code/word used	Sources, authors, main ideas	Content details
1	-A process to end war in Afghanistan. -Letting Taliban to be back to share power with all other Afghan political parties, political influential and ethnic groups. -redefining the power share, and inclusivity.	Peacebuilding	1.To reach a peace deal, Taliban say Afghan president must go By Katty Gannon 2.Minatti, W. (2020, 9 28). The Challenges of The Afghan Peace Talks. 3.Peace, Reconciliation and Tolerance in the Middle East 4-Afghan Government Could Collapse Six Months After U.S. Withdrawal, New Intelligence Assessment Says <i>Taliban advances prompt agencies to revise outlook for how long Kabul can hold out</i>	To check the link: 1. https://apnews.com/article/middle-east-only-on-ap-taliban-fb-bce635cf19ce4874700fd2d81a0f39 2.Retrieved 2 2021, From Euiideas: https://Euiideas.Eui.Eu/2020/09/28/The-Challenges-Of-The-Afghan-Peace-Talks/ The book is outlined by Natalie Weder , Rebeca Garcia-Nieto & Daphna Canneti-Nisim <i>A detailed situation analysis and its future impact on the peace process</i> By Gordon Lubold and Yaroslav Trofimov on June 23, 2021
2	After war situation where reconciliation amongst all Afghan parties is pertained	Stability	1 Minatti, W. (2020, 9 28). The Challenges of The Afghan Peace Talks. 2- Peace, Reconciliation and Tolerance in the Middle East 3- Afghan Government Could Collapse Six Months After U.S. Withdrawal, New Intelligence Assessment Says <i>Taliban advances prompt agencies to revise outlook for how long Kabul can hold out</i>	1.Retrieved 2 2021, From Euiideas: https://Euiideas.Eui.Eu/2020/09/28/The-Challenges-Of-The-Afghan-Peace-Talks/ 2.The book is outlined by Natalie Weder, Rebeca García-Nieto & Daphna Canneti-Nisim 3.A detailed situation analysis and its future impact on the peace process By Gordon Lubold and Yaroslav Trofimov on June 23, 2021
3	US/NATO troops withdrawal	Withdrawal	1.Afghan Government Could Collapse Six Months After U.S. Withdrawal, New Intelligence Assessment Says <i>Taliban advances prompt agencies to revise outlook for how long Kabul can hold out</i> 2. Joe Biden announced the full withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan in a news briefing.	1. A detailed situation analysis and its future impact on the peace process By Gordon Lubold and Yaroslav Trofimov on June 23, 2021 2- https://www.france24.com/en/france-24-1 . (2021, 04 14). france24.com. Retrieved from France 24: https://www.france24.com/en/asia-pacific/20210414-live-biden-announces-afghan-withdrawal-says-time-to-end-america-s-longest-war

Table continuation

No	Terms with the definition and analysis	Code/word used	Sources, authors, main ideas	Content details
4	Afghan war which is militarized by three factors: domestic confrontation over power, ethnicity and political differences and regional interference, a proxy war and international invasion under the flag of war on world terror.	Conflict	Afghan Government Could Collapse Six Months After U.S. Withdrawal, New Intelligence Assessment Says <i>Taliban advances prompt agencies to revise outlook for how long Kabul can hold out</i>	1. Retrieved 2 2021, From Euiideas: https://Euiideas.Eui.Eu/2020/09/28/The-Challenges-Of-The-Afghan-Peace-Talks/
5	A way out of the Afghan Conflict: Doha Agreement	US- Taliban negotiation -Intra Afghan Negotiation -A process to end war in Afghanistan.	1.To reach a peace deal, Taliban say Afghan president must go	1. Retrieved 2 2021, From Euiideas: https://Euiideas.Eui.Eu/2020/09/28/The-Challenges-Of-The-Afghan-Peace-Talks/

The findings of content analysis are correlate with expert's opinions due to the peacebuilding matters.

Expert assessment

Many experts were forecasting that a civil war may happen with the withdrawal of US and Its allies forces from Afghanistan in the near future, others were believing that Kabul Government would not be able to stand against Taliban's spring offensive not more than six months but few were predicting that Kabul may fall into the hands of Taliban easily as the rest of the country. In fact, Vinay Kaura was believing that Afghan conflict is so virulent that any peace plan gets trapped in domestic contradictions, regional rivalries and geopolitical ambitions of the region. (Kaura, 2018).

In addition, Anthony H. Cordesman writes that Peace in Afghanistan is highly uncertain option; because the administration in Kabul doesn't have any official description of the terms for the peace to be prevailed (Cordesman, 2019)

For instance, the fear that the state might be on a path to collapse is higher than ever before. As Jeff Seldin believes that despite a series of cautiously optimistic assessments by high-ranking U.S. military officials and Afghan leaders, a new report from the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) portrays the situation as "bleak" and echoes concern that Afghan security forces are not ready to mount any meaningful resistance which proved correct by the mid of August 2021 when Kabul collapsed easily into the hands of Taliban.

The latest intelligence assessment, as reported by Gordon Lubold and Yaroslav Trofimov in June 2021, stated that the Afghan government, led by President Ashraf Ghani, could collapse between six to twelve months after complete withdrawal of American forces which proved to be too early of after the consecutive collapse of district which lead to the fall of provincial centers and then Kabul all in 15 days, beginning with the first of August and completed by 15th of August when the previous president Ashraf Ghani left escaped from Kabul to UAE. Other officials were even more pessimistic. They believed that the Afghan government could potentially fall within three months by Mychael Schnell.

The problems of peaceful settlement of the internal political situation in Afghanistan are in the focus of experts from Central Asian countries. So, for example, within the framework of the scientific forums "Kabul Process", "Moscow Format", the forum "Heart of Asia – Istanbul Process", the International Contact Group on Afghanistan, the SCO–Afghanistan Contact Group, the Conference of Regional Economic Cooperation on Afghanistan (RECCA), opinions were expressed on the need for an early start of direct negotiations between the Government of Afghanistan and the Taliban Movement without preconditions, as well as the basic principles of a political settlement – there is no alternative and inclusiveness of the peace process, readiness for mutual compromises, respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Afghanistan.

Russian researchers note that "the peace process faces a number of serious obstacles, both internal and external to it, both substantive and procedural. Among the most serious problems is the already

mentioned dynamic combination of negotiations with ongoing violence on the part of all parties to the conflict, and the absence (as of December 2019) of direct official negotiations between the main Afghan parties – the central government and the Taliban. Of the other difficulties, two should be particularly noted – one external to Afghanistan, and the other internal. Zigzags of the US administration policy became as a serious external test for negotiations.” (Stepanova E.A.,2019).

Results and Discussion

Peacebuilding Process in Afghanistan

Afghanistan is once again at a crossroad between potential political stability or a worsening crisis. Previously, planned Intra-Afghan Peace Talks, following the US-Taliban agreement of February 2020, which were supposed to pave the way for a possible political settlement among Afghans. However, the negotiations were hampered from the start. The trust and confidence of Afghans in the previous government and its leadership was at an all-time low which prevailed to its collapsed-on 15th of August 2021. The broader political leadership of the country is now in disarray.

In fact, Peacebuilding is the most recent term associated with the peace process. Peacebuilding is the strategy which most directly tries to reverse the destructive process that accompany violence. (Ryan, 1995)

After President Joe Biden’s announcement of unconditional withdrawal of American troops, the complexities of the Afghan Peace Process have become glaringly vivid. The hope that the international community, under the leadership of the United States, would push for a political settlement between the warring sides is fading away. The morale of the Afghan security forces was drastically low. Those on the frontline increasingly wonder what it is they fight for. Are they fighting for the survival of the Afghan state, as they were told? Or are they fighting for the political preservation of the unpopular leaders of Kabul? These concerns amongst the rank and file are believed to have contributed to the fall of Kabul into the hands of Taliban in the mid of August, 2021.

There is a prevailing public perception that the Afghan ‘Republic’ has been systematically reduced to a mere ‘oligarchic enterprise’. This has led to growing distrust between various political leaders, the civil service and the general public. However, the most pressing issue for Afghans was no longer

peace, but the survival of the Afghan state. The latest intelligence assessment, reported by The Wall Street Journal in June 2021, stated that the Afghan government, led by President Ashraf Ghani, could collapse between six to twelve months after complete withdrawal of American forces which proved to be too early of after the consecutive collapse of district which lead to the fall of provincial centers and then Kabul all in 15 days, beginning with the first of August and completed by 15th of August when the previous president Ashraf Ghani left escaped from Kabul to UAE. Other officials were even more pessimistic. They believed that the Afghan government could potentially fall within three months.

The Intra-Afghan peace negotiations that started on Sep 12, 2020, were stalled from the very beginning. As rightly noted by Wolfgang Minatti, that the vision of the two opposing sides for the future of Afghanistan are fundamentally at odds with one another.

The negotiating team representing Kabul, was prudently cherry-picked by President Ghani and his inner circle to ensure that its fully subservient to the President. The negotiators didn’t have any authority and they receive instructions in every step. Any of their potential decisions have to first be approved by the president’s office, which also meticulously dictates all their public and private communication. It was said that Ashraf Ghani’s five-year presidential term, as a result of his controversial victory in 2019’s Presidential Election, was a redline for the negotiating team. Similarly, delaying tactics were applied to stall serious talks until after the US Presidential Elections of 2020. The strategy was to stall progress until the new president is inaugurated in Washington and the new administration’s policy for Afghanistan is outlined. This strategy was predicated on the assumption or hope that the new administration could change the terms of US-Taliban agreement, strengthening the position of President Ghani. Much to Ashraf Ghani’s chagrin, his hopes never materialized. Furthermore, the High Council for National Reconciliation, headed by Abdullah, was comprised of many Afghans political leaders as an authoritative body to pursue a political agreement backed by the international community. The newly found institution never materialized into anything of substance. Internal divisions and opposing visions among leaders in Kabul remain high, leaving them unable to form a unified front against the Taliban during the peace negotiations.

The Taliban negotiating team, on the other hand, didn’t seem to be in any hurry either. This was per-

haps because they believe that time is on their side, and any delay in talks only strengthens their position in the battlefield and around the negotiating table. They seemed particularly to welcome delays from the government side, for which they couldn't be blamed and could also point fingers at the government for. In addition, the Taliban have made it clear that peace would not be possible with President Ghani. For this purpose, the Taliban have indicated on occasions that a peace settlement with the current Government negotiating team may not be feasible. For the insurgents, engagement in talks might have only been for the fulfilment of a condition of US-Taliban agreement or partial achievements such as the release of the remaining of their prisoners. This could be the main reason for the shifting of Taliban's efforts to the battlefield even more.

The peace talks currently were where both sides (The Afghan political parties, influential figures & Taliban) perhaps want them to be under the circumstances: deadlocked. The rhetoric and actions both out of Kabul and also from the Taliban in power now speak of war, not peace. The current Government, led by Taliban, however, is on the losing end both on the international community's trust and also in public perceptions. The fear that the state might be on a path to collapse is higher than ever before. As previously reported by Jeff Seldin that despite a series of cautiously optimistic assessments by high-ranking U.S. military officials and Afghan leaders, a new report from the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) portrays the situation as "bleak" and echoes concern that Afghan security forces are not ready to mount any meaningful resistance. He adds that "The overall trend is clearly unfavorable to the Afghan government, which could face an existential crisis if it isn't addressed and reversed," Special Inspector General John Sopko wrote in the report, released Wednesday 29th July 2021.

Recently, some regional countries also, based on that doomed expectation of Afghanistan might be descending into civil war, renewed preparations for prolonged proxy rivalries on Afghan soil. Each is prepared to have its own interests on the ground protected by assets, which would necessitate the re-arming of former armed groups and militias some of whom were active participants in past wars and destruction.

The public optimism about peace has waned significantly both because of the surge in violence and lack of meaningful progress (or expected progress) in peace talks. There has also been the loss of trust and confidence in the leadership of Afghan political parties, civil society leadership and other influential sides. It could be concluded with some confidence that peace talks as they have been so far have a remote possibility of success.

On the other hand, the broader political leadership of the country has also been paralyzed by either excessive risk aversion, or disunity or the pursuance of pity personal objectives or all. Thus, the broader political leadership as well as the parliament in a such a state of inaction cannot serve as saviors on their own.

To conclude, the result of the prevalent status quo points to one direction: continued killings and destruction for Afghans, a massive brain drains, forced migration and a rapid melting down of the state – the consequences of which for regional, neighboring countries `the rest of the world would also be monumental. If Afghanistan goes down, this time the outflow of refugees to regional and neighboring countries and way beyond will be massive. Afghanistan is already one of the largest producers of narcotics and this problem could further multiply; the country could become a safe haven for terrorists and criminal networks with connections and access to the rest of the world.

Conclusion

In short, there are still concerns that Afghanistan will become an international catastrophe of an epic scale. Nevertheless, the intra-Afghan peace talks was a historic opportunity for Afghanistan to find a durable peace agreement to end almost half a century of war which has devastated the country and cost millions innocent lives. The negotiation process and political events after the Taliban came to power mean the entry of the conflict into a new stage, which requires rethinking both by the Afghan society and the world community as a whole. But, above all, the Afghans themselves must take primary responsibility for their own future. Yet finding a compromise between all Afghan sides will prove a difficult task for all parties involved, and even then, its successful implementation is far from guaranteed.

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