TRIANGULAR POLITICS OF RECONCILIATION (US-TALIBAN-AFGHAN GOVERNMENT): MAPPING PEACE-BUILDING MEASURES IN AFGHANISTAN 2001-2019

Muhammad Manzoor Elahi[*]

Muhammad Shakeel[**]

Abstract: Afghanistan, the heart of Asia, has been passing through protracted political instability and societal chaos for almost half a century.The situation became more vulnerable with the launchof US steered Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) against Talibanafter 9/11 who has gradually established a 'state within a state' in Afghanistan. The growing influence of Taliban and day to day insurgent activities are posing grave humanitarian and security challengesand putting the lives of 37 million Afghans at great risk.The research, therefore, within its purview analyzes post-2001 triangular politics of reconciliation in Afghanistan and intends to find out impeding factors for their failure. In the context of Afghanistan, 'reconciliation' is not biangular rather it works in a triangular dimension as itoscillates between the Taliban, Afghan government, and the US. The research analyses only those peace-building measures which have been initiated either by the US, Afghan Government, or the Taliban. The study applies qualitative methodology based upon explorative research design and obtains data through existing literature as well as focus group discussion to seek the answer to research puzzle i.e., howdoes triangular politics of reconciliation work in Afghanistan and whypast reconciliation processes didn't successful, what are thestumbling blocks of peace in Afghanistan?

Keywords: Reconciliation, Taliban, inclusiveness, peace-building, conflict-resolution,

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* Muhammad ManzoorElahi is a Lecturer at Department of Political Science, GC University Lahore, Pakistan (Email: mmelahi@gcu.edu.pk)

** Muhammad Shakeel is an independent researcher (Email: shakeelahmad53@ymail.com)

Introduction

The land of Afghanistan has been witnessing recurrent securityand humanitarian challenges for about half a centuryand any peace-building processfalls prey to domestic political rigiditiesas well asgovernmental malfunctioning.The people of Afghanistan have been yearning for peace since the Soviet invasion in 1979andparticularly situation has become more vulnerable with the launch ofUS steered Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) against the Taliban on the pretext of the global war against terrorism after the incidents of 9/11.The presence of foreign military troops and their direct involvement in micro-administrative affairs of Afghanistan exacerbated the state affairs as warring groups consider their presence illegitimate.Although the US-backed government of Hamid Karzai initiatedthe reconciliation talks with the Taliban[1]but the quest for tranquility, social order, and political stability have constantly been faced failure because reconciliation processes have always been conditioned withthe framework of surrender and amnesty rather on pure intentions for peace-building in Afghanistan.

The process of reconciliation in Afghanistan is not biangular rather it works in a triangular dimension and oscillates between the Taliban, Afghan government, and the US on the basis of following conditionalpolicies:

- Withdrawal of foreign armed forces from Afghanistan within a defined time framework.
- The land of Afghanistan will not be used for any terrorist activity against the USA.
- Demilitarization of conflicting parties and involvement in the negotiation process.
- Adequate representation of Taliban at all administrative levels of the Afghan government.

However, hope for peace once again came to light when President Ashraf Ghani offered a peace deal to Taliban with the aim of true reconciliation. He asserted to recognize them as a political party, exclude their names from the blacklist, invite them to participate in parliamentary

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[1] For instance see, Barnett R. Rubin, *Afghanistan from the Cold War through the War on Terror*, (New York, OUP, 2013). Also see, Thomas Ruttig, "The Battle for Afghanistan: Negotiations with the Taliban: History and Prospects for the Future", *New America*, (2011). The paper is also published as a chapter in: Peter Bergen/Katherine Tiedemann (eds), *Talibanistan: Negotiating the Borders Between Terror. Politics, and Religion*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013)

as well as local elections, whilst Taliban consistently refused to hold talks and conditioned it with withdrawal of all external armed forces from Afghanistan and rigorous amendments in the state constitution. Afghan Taliban rejected peace proposal and said that we will not engage directly with Afghan government officials until we will reach an agreement with the US to completely withdraw their troops from Afghanistan.

Problem Statement/Research Puzzle:

The 'Doha deal' gave an impetus to a critical debate that if reconciliation could be a possible peace-building measure for Afghanistan then why there was a need to apply coercive diplomacy and wage global war on terror against the Taliban who on the contrary have controlled 19 percent of the land of Afghanistan and further vying for 47 percent contested territory.[2] Moreover, despite after 20 years of US steered military concentration in Afghanistan, the Taliban are more powerful than the time of toppling down of their government in 2001 which has raised questions on the US efforts to contain them.

In this context, the research intends to trace the post-2001 triangular efforts for reconciliation in Afghanistan in contrast to the military operation and analyses their efficacy to integrate Taliban and government machinery into a cohesive political system and seek to find out the obstructing reasons in the prevalence of peace in Afghanistan.

Research Methodology

The study revolves around a qualitative research design based upon the exploratory method to investigate triangular politics of reconciliation in post-2001 Afghanistan and to find out the intervening factors in the failure of peace-building measures. The data has been gathered in two parts as per the aforementioned research objectives. For the first part, the existing literature in terms of books, research journals, policy reports along with international dailies as well as news agencies have been discreetly reviewed to analyze the triangular endeavors for reconciliation in Afghanistan and identifies the taxonomy i.e., 'initiator', 'supporter' and

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[2] Taliban are controlling 75 districts in compare to Government Control over 133 districts. Whereas 189 districts are contested areas of influence. 5 Districts of Kunar Province have strict control of Islamic State (IS) forces. See for example, C, Coelho, *Long War Journal*, (May 25, 2020). Also see, Lindsay Maizland and Zachary Laub, "The Taliban in Afghanistan", *Council on Foreign Relations*, (March 11, 2020).

'spoiler' ofthe peace process. The study also chalks out debate on the reconciliation process and presents different models in Afghanistan's perceptive.For the second part, primary data technique of focus group discussion is applied to find out the reasons for the failure of reconciliation process. The mode of discussion was open-ended and revolved around one question i.e., why peace is not prevailing in Afghanistan?The group of four people is selected based upon the purposive snow-ball sampling technique because of their research interest and expertise in the relevant field.The study applies inductive thematic analysis to identifythe intervening variables that are hampering the triangular peace process in Afghanistan.

Conceptualizing 'Reconciliation Process'

This part initiates an academic debate on the discourse of reconciliation and conceptualizes its 'process' by presenting different models. There is consensus among academia on the definition of reconciliation as a concept that it is a process of political bargaining betweenthe conflicting actors to ensure peace and stability in the society and this integrative process engages non-governmental or non-state actors in mainstream politics to promote an inclusive and harmonious political culture butit lacks a standardized framework to make reconciliation process more pragmatic. Reconciliation symbolizes 'peace' but how to achieve it is still debatable.

The discourse of reconciliation coincided with the emergence ofconflict in society. As per 2004 report of the United Nations, "reconciliation is as old as the history of humanity and arises out of an attempt to deal with the legacy of violence and large-scale past abuse"[3]. An empirical research by Caroline and Melise mentions that "90countries have changed regimes in the last half-century. Of these, 46%experienced a successful transition to democracy, 39% failed, and 15%moved gradually to democracy."[4] The successful transition to democracy and political stability is directly proportionate to holistic reconciliation approach and 39 % failure indicates the absence of a peace process. Likewise, Cecelia and Daniel are of the opinion that in recent

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[3]Christopher D. Zambakari, "Conceptualizing Reconciliation in Transitional Processes", *Peace Review: A Journal of Social Justice*, 30 (2018), 373

[4]Caroline Freund and MeliseJaudJaud. "On the Determinants of Democratic Transitions." *Middle East Development Journal*, 5(1), 2013. doi:10.1142/ S1793812013500053

years peace has been restored more through negotiations, dialogues, and table-talks than any militaryoperation.[5]

In contrast, recent studies divulge that the process of state-building based upon the pillars of reconciliation is not much sustainable and effective. The Center for Humanitarian Dialogue reports that 43 percent of dialogue-oriented peace witnessed the resurgence of conflict within the period of five years.[6]. Another study by Anna and Ralph reveals the fragility of peace-dialogues and declares that 69 percent of peace agreements between 1989 to 2000 faced complete failure and consequently gave rise to renewed civil wars.[7]

The question, therefore, arises what steps should be taken to make the reconciliation process more effective.? Reconciliation as a concept indicates 'peace' but how to achieve it is the main concern of peace theorists and policymakers. Against this backdrop, academia is striving to present a holistic and sustainable model of reconciliation for warring societies.

Long and Bereck proposed a three-dimensionalmodel of "reconciliation events". They believe thatthe reconciliation framework is based upon three pillars, i.e., first, meetings of elites of conflicting parties, second, truth-telling stories based upon gestures to attain peace, and third, nationwide coverage with the message of mutuality of interests. This triangular process could lead to the restoration of peace at inter and intra-state levels and could also bea 'proxy' for robust reconciliation. They define reconciliation as"an emotionally driven, problem-solving behavior aimed atrestoring relationships in society".[8]

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[5] Cecilia Albin and Daniel Druckman, "Equality Matters: Negotiating an End to Civil Wars." *Journal of Conflict Resolution, 56(2),* 2012, *155–182.*

[6]"Charting the Roads to Peace: Facts, Figures and Trends in Conflict Resolution". Meditation Data Trend Report. *Geneva Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue.* (2007), cited in, Christopher, *Conceptualizing Reconciliation*, 374

[7] Anna Jarstad and Ralph Sundberg, "Peace by Pact: Data on the Implementation of Peace Agreements." in, O. Ashok Swain, Ramses Amer, and O. Joakim, *Globalization and Challenges to Building Peace*, (London: Anthem, 2007), 73-89.

[8] W. J., Long, & P. Brecke, *War and Reconciliation: Reason and Emotion in Conflict Resolution,* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003), 7-10

Weinstein and Stover link the reconciliation process with the judicial and non-judicial measures of transitional justice[9] and their decisions against the conflicting actors. Their model is based upon empirical research on post-conflict Rwanda and former Yugoslavia and concludes that criminal prosecutions and findings of the truth-commissions may further create fear among conflicting parties and jeopardize the reconciliation process.[10] Later, Meernik also upholds the discourse of transitional justice and finds that judgments and detentions against the war criminal by International Criminal Tribunal for former Yugoslavia (ICTY) increased the momentum of hostility and instigated revenge among their parental bodies.[11]

John Galtung presents a model of Triple-Rs i.e., reconstruction, reconciliation and resolution for peace-building in conflictingsocieties. He defines the reconciliation process as "closure plus healing; closure in the sense of not reopening hostilities, healing in the sense of being rehabilitated"[12]. He is of the opinion that 'closure' can be done through a meaningful negotiation between victims and perpetrators and 'healing' process linked withpolicy of inclusiveness, justice, coexistence, and cooperation.

Another study by Karen Brounéus presents the structured model for reconciliation at the national level and defines it as "a societal process that involves mutual acknowledgment of past suffering and the changing of destructive attitudes and behaviors into constructive relationships

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[9] Transitional justice is a response to systematic or widespread violations of human rights. It seeks recognition for victims and promotion of possibilities for peace, reconciliation and democracy. Transitional justice is not a special form of justice but justice adapted to societies transforming themselves after a period of pervasive human rights abuse. In some cases, these transformations happen suddenly; in others, they may take place over many decades. See for details, "What is Transitional Justice", *International Center for Transitional Justice,*https://www.ictj.org/sites/default/files/ICTJ-Global-Transitional-Justice-2009-English.pdf

[10] E. Stover & H. M. Weinstein, *My Neighbor, My Enemy: Justice and Community in the Aftermath of Mass Atrocity,* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 143-161

[11]Meernik, J. (2005). "Justice and Peace? How the International Criminal Tribunal Affects Societal Peace in Bosnia". *Journal of Peace Research*, 42, 271–289.

[12] Johan Galtung, "After Violence, Reconstruction, Reconciliation, and Resolution: Coping with Visible and Invisible Effects of War and Violence," in, Mohammed Abu-Nimer (ed.), *Reconciliation, Justice, and Coexistence: Theory & Practice*, (Maryland: Lexington Books, 2001), 3-23

toward sustainable peace".[13] His approach entails three levels ofthe reconciliation process for a productive outcome. First, individualresponse and their intentions to take themselves out from past sufferings. Second, societal level, how conflicting parties think of each other. And third, national government's just approach towards perpetrators.

However, Lisa's Comprehensive Peace Process (CPP) Model explains a more robust approach towards peace-building in war-torn societies and particularly explains it with reference to Afghanistan. CPP revolves around "who, what and how"framework for reconciliation and explains*who* should be involved, *what*are the costs of continued-conflict or*what* are the prospects ofnegotiation and,*how* the reconciliation process could be made more integrative and cohesive. At first, the model stipulates that the involvement of a maximum number of voices from multiple sectors of society around the 'negotiation table' could lead to a legitimate and sustainable peace process. Secondly,CPP accentuates that all-comprehensive inputs of stakeholders ranging from civil society, insurgents, and government forces trigger liaison for mutual thinking on the significance of peace in society and to moot on "best alternative to negotiated agreement (BATNA)" to access whether to continue conflict or come across the 'negotiation table'. Thirdly, CPP focuses on a 'multi-layered process' of reconciliation and tries toanswerhowa well-structured and well-coordinated negotiation process could be chalked out for a successful reconciliation.[14]
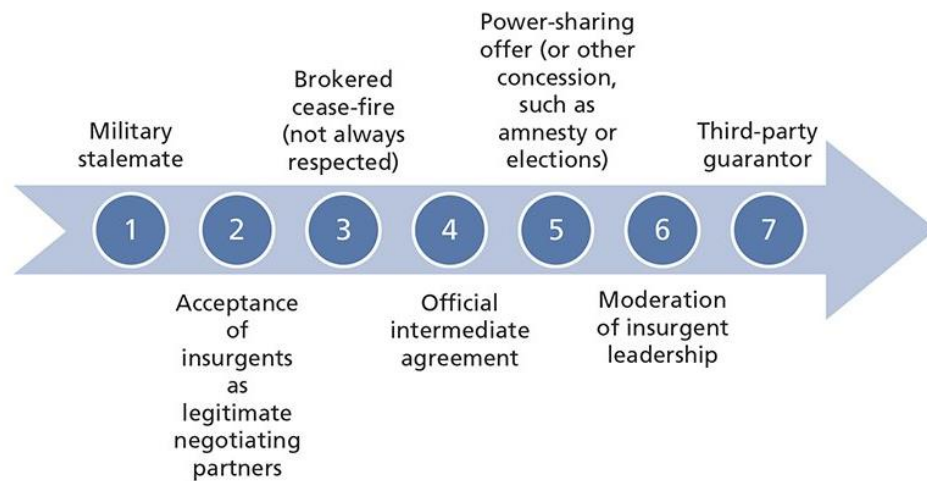
Last but not least, Colin and Christopher propose a supermodel for a sustainable reconciliation process based upon seven inter-dependent stages i.e., "military stalemate, acceptance of insurgents as legitimate negotiating partners, ceasefire, official intermediate agreements, power-sharing offers, moderation of insurgent leadership, and third-party guarantor".[15]

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[13]Karen Brounéus, "Analyzing Reconciliation: A Structured Method for Measuring National Reconciliation Initiatives", *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology*, (2008)14:3, 294 DOI:10.1080/10781910802017354

[14] Lisa Sihirch, *Designing a Comprehensive Peace Process for Afghanistan,* (Washington DC: United States Institute for Peace, 2011), 5-22.

[15] Colin P. Clarke and Christopher Paul, "From Stalemate to Settlement Lessons for Afghanistan from Historical Insurgencies That Have Been Resolved Through Negotiations", *National Defense Research Institute*, (Washington DC, RAND, 2014)

Figure 01: Master Narrative for Reaching Negotiated Settlements

Source: Colin and Christopher, *From Stalemate to Settlement Lessons for Afghanistan from Historical Insurgencies,* (2014).

Discussion and Finding: MappingTriangular Reconciliation in Afghanistan

This part entails an analysis of triangular peace-building measures in Afghanistan since 2001 and chalks out reconciliation efforts in different phases. This part analyses the roles of the US, Taliban, and Afghan government in the triangular reconciliation process as who initiated peace talks, who extended support, and who spoil the negotiation process. These are as follows:
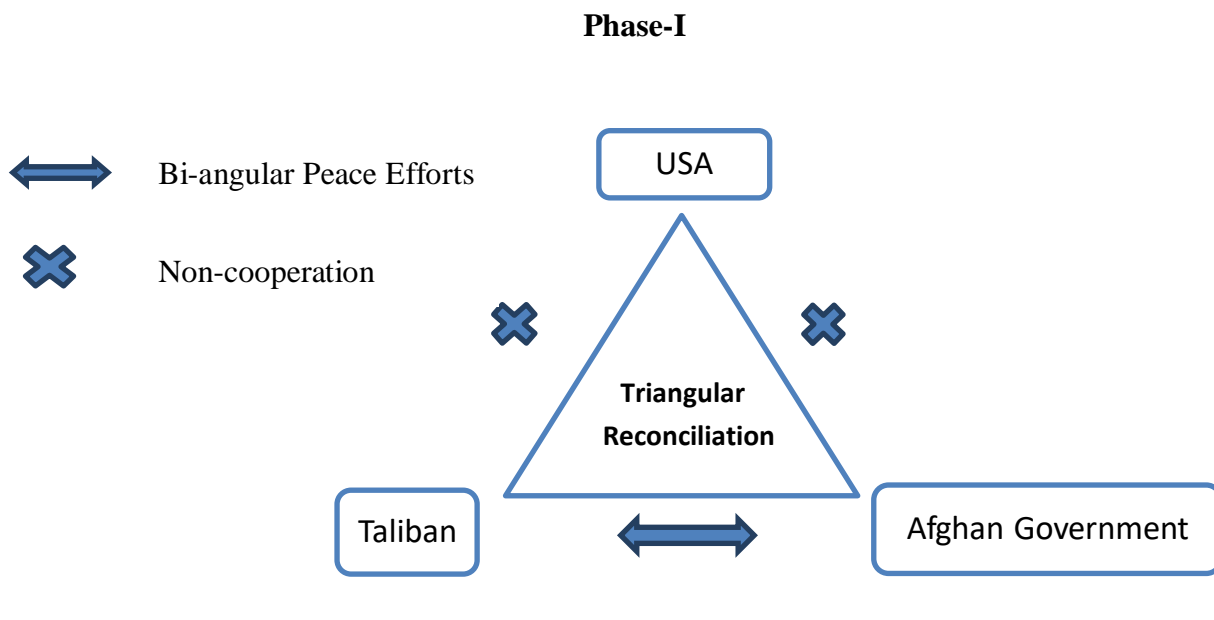
Table 01: Taxonomy of Triangular Reconciliation in Afghanistan 2001-2019

Triangular Reconciliation	Initiator of Reconciliation	Supporter of Reconciliation	Spoiler of Reconciliation
Phase I: Amnesty Scheme	Afghan Government	Taliban	USA
Phase II: High Peace Council	Afghan Government	-----	Taliban + USA
Phase-III: Political Office	Taliban	USA	Afghan Government
Phase-IV: Inclusiveness	Afghan Government	USA	Taliban

- First Phase: Afghan government offered an amnesty scheme to the Taliban but was vehemently criticized by the US.

- Second Phase: Afghan government established the High Peace Council for negotiation with the Taliban. It failed because of the Taliban's reservation and the US troop surge strategy.

- Third Phase: The US extended support toPolitical office of the Taliban for peace talks but was criticized by the Afghan government.

- Fourth Phase: Afghan government with the support of US-initiated policy of inclusiveness for Taliban but Taliban denounce it.

First Phase: Karzai'sInitiation of Peace with Taliban and the US Response

Phase-I

The US hastily installed a new government under the chairman of Hamid Karzai as a result of the international conference on Afghanistan held in Bonn, Germany, to fill the vacuum created by the downfall of the Taliban. An interim government was formed for 6 months to govern Afghanistan until a permanent governing body. He ruled almost for 14 years and endeavored to convince the Taliban to join mainstream politics.

During interim tenure, heoffereda general amnesty to 'regular Taliban'[16] under the surrender agreement. Taliban expressed reservation on Karzai's proposal andconditioned it with the declaration of dissociation of Taliban from Al-Qaeda network as well as terrorism. In that

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[16] Regular Taliban here creates distinction between Afghan Taliban fighters and Al-Qaeda fighters.

case, Mullah Omar, Taliban's leader, promised to cede Kandahar to tribal leaders. He took this decision "…. for the welfare of the people, to avoid casualties and to save the life and dignity of Afghans".[17] The US did not support the amnesty plan of Afghan government and stated that we will bring all the Taliban leaders to justice, otherwise we will not be satisfied. Donald Rumsfeld, the secretary of defense, asserted that "we would prefer to have Omar".[18] The US intentions to uphold the principle of 'New World Order' derailed the first reconciliation effort with the Taliban.

In 2004 Afghanistan drafted the constitution after the consultation of (Loy Jirga). As per the new constitution presidential election was held in Afghanistan in which Hamid Karzai was declared as president. The reconciliation program was also expected to boost Karzai's image among the country's majority Pashtuns, some of whom have accused him of turning his back on his own ethnic group.[19]. In 2005 government achieved limited success in which seven hundred Taliban fighters joined the amnesty program, but it did not reduce violence in Afghanistan. According to Michael Semple,"out of 142 senior Taliban fighters who are on the UN sanctions list, only twelve have been reconciled with Kabul, along with ten other senior members not on the list."[20] It didn't fomentthe reconciliation process asthe major chunk of warring Taliban wereunderground.
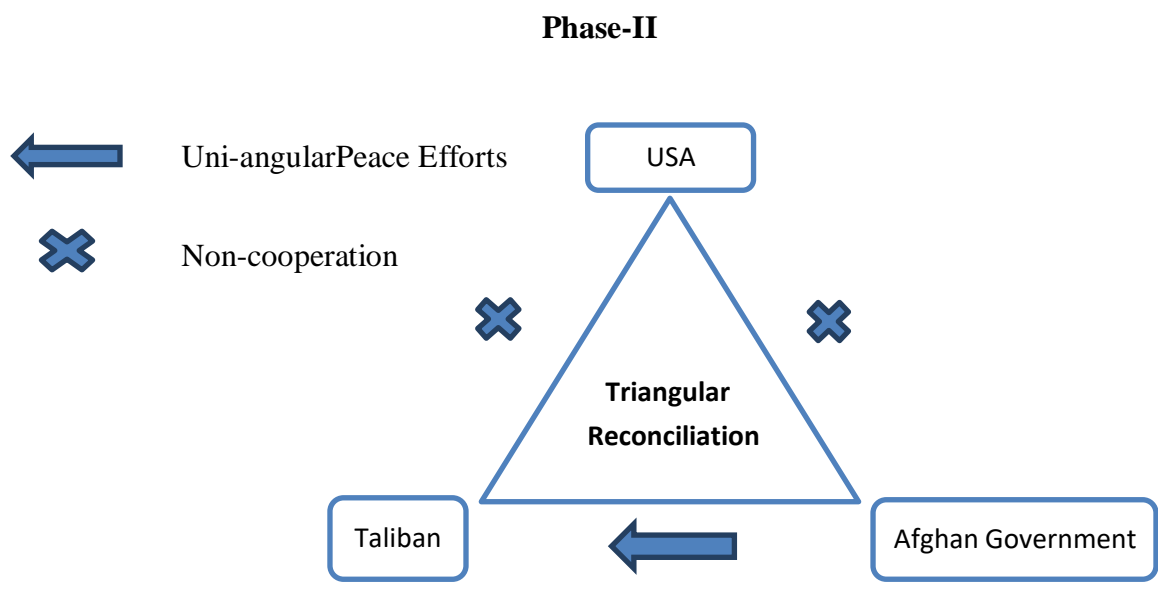
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[17] See for instance, Nicholas Watt, and Julian Borger, "Taliban promise to surrender Kandahar," *The Guardian*, December 7, 2001. Also see, "Kandahar Surrender to begin Friday", *CNN World*, (December 6, 2001).

[18] Michael R. Gordon and NorimitsuOnishi, "Surrender Deal May Hinge on Amnesty for Mullah Omar", *The New York Times,* (December 7, 2001)

[19] Halima Kazim, "Amnesty Offers Taliban Chance to Come Home", *Los Angeles Times*, (June 3, 2005).

[20] Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, "Reintegration of Ex-Combatants: Lessons from the U.S. Experience in Afghanistan," September 2019, https://www.sigar.mil/pdf/lessonslearned/SIGAR-19-58-LL.pdf.

Phase-II: High Peace Council: A Dedicated Body forPeace Process

Phase-II

President Hamid Karzai took another step towards the peace process. He formed a High Peace Council (HPC) in September 2010. It was the official body of the government to negotiate with the Taliban. The HPC under the headship of Burhanuddin Rabbani, the former president of Afghanistan, was destined to offer amnesty and explore different options for a peaceful settlement with the Taliban. President Hamid Karzai candidly stated that "the government will assist the Council whenever necessary but that it would operate independently."[21]

Taliban repeatedly deplored the Karzai's peace offers and argued that "they will not consider talks until all foreign troops have left"and considered HPC as a US-sponsored body.[22]The HPC was failed to achieve its goals as every time it received the same conditional and uncompromising response from the Taliban. There are many reasons for the failure of HPC. Its chairmanship under Tajik origin Burhanuddin Rabbani, Taliban's rival, was one of the corereasons for its failure. In fact, the HPC's efforts were limited to public pledges, lacked a reconciliation strategy and holistic reintegration program.

It is pertinent to mention here that at the time of HPC's offer to the Taliban to lay down their arms and come around the negotiation table for much-awaited peace, the Obama
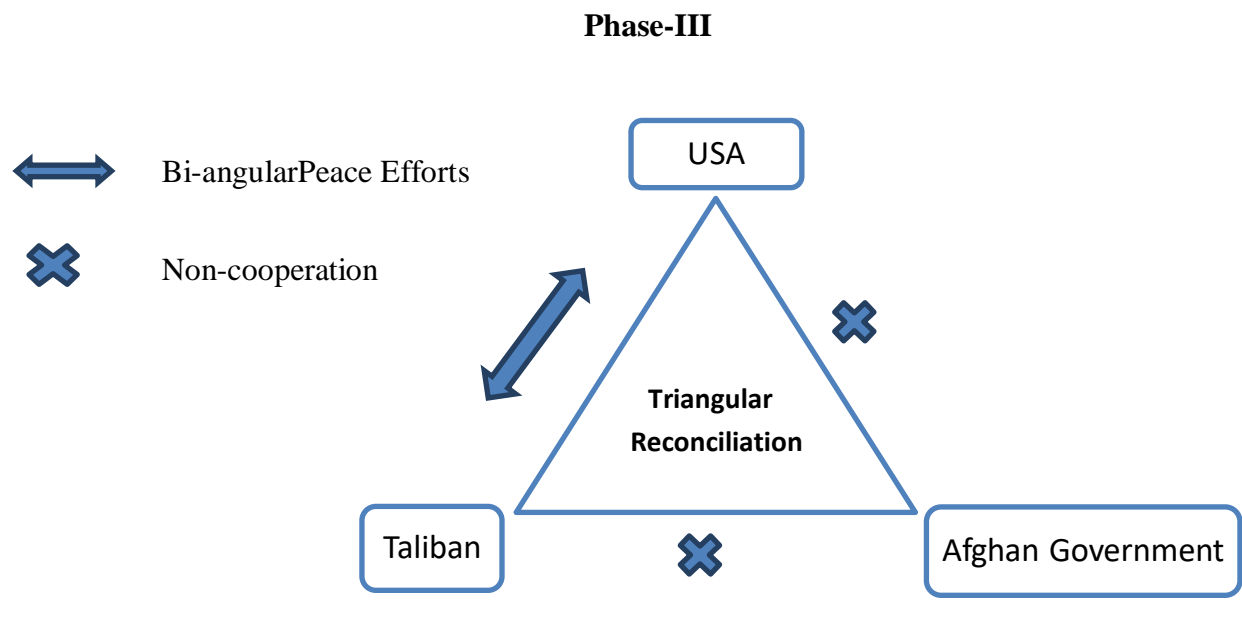
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[21] Thomas Ruttig, "Afghan Reactions to the High Peace Council," *War and Peace*, (October 14, 2010).

[22] Sayed Salahuddin, "Taliban reject Karzai's peace council as failed", *Reuters,* (September 30, 2010).

administration initiated the troop surge strategy which enraged the Taliban. One of the Taliban leaders mentioned that "…. the Pentagon is at present makingpreparation for new military operations in Helmandprovince, southern Afghanistan. Similarly, they putforward conditions, which are tantamount to escalatingthe war rather than ending it".[23]

Later, President Ashraf Ghani dissolved HPC.His spokesman,SediqSediqqifurther mentioned that the power and functioning role of HPChas transferred to the newly formulated'State Ministry of Peace Affairs'.[24]

Phase-III: The US-Taliban Reconciliation Strategy and Karzai's Rant

Phase-III

The third phase of reconciliation in Afghanistan coincided with the change in political elites in the USA when Barak Obama was sworn as president in 2009. He asserted to open up a chapter of negotiation with the moderate elements of Taliban.[25]With the support of the USA dating back to 2011, Sayed Tayeb Agha, head of political wing and also Chief of staff to Mullah Omar during the Taliban regime, highlighted that "the US and the Taliban agreed upon opening

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[23] Anna Larson and Alexander Ramsbotham, "Incremental Peace in Afghanistan", *Accord: An International Review of Peace Initiatives,* (London, Conciliation Resource, 2018), 39.

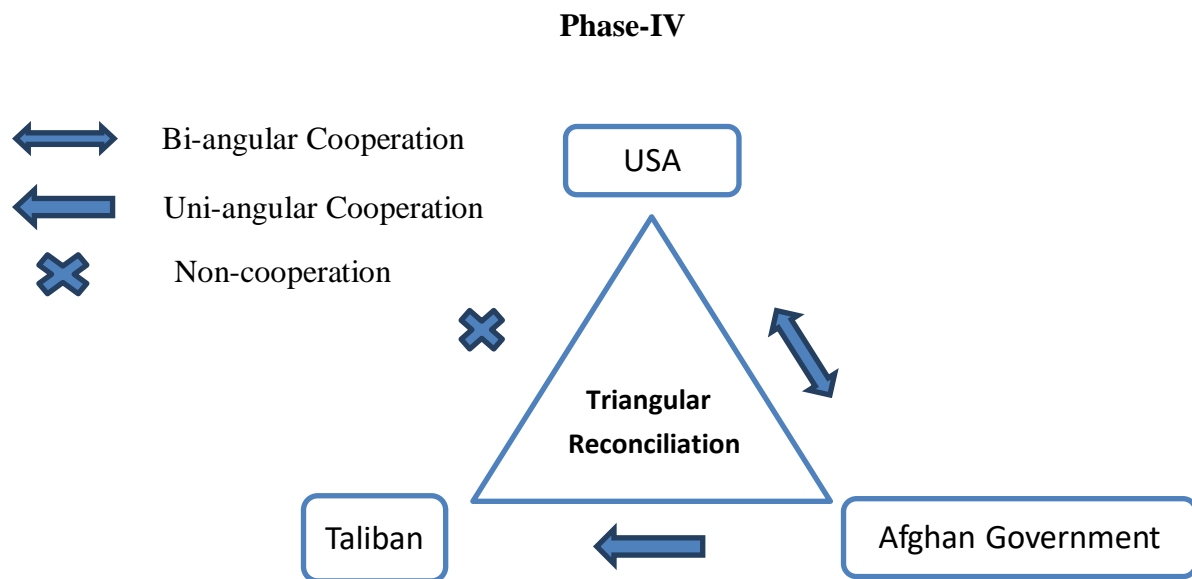[24] "Afghan govt dissolves High Peace Council's secretariat," *Business Standard*, (July 27, 2019).

[25] "Obama Ponders Outreach to Elements of Taliban", *The New York Times*, (March 7, 2009)

the political office of the group and exchange of Taliban detainees in Guantanamo in 2011."[26] The main objective of the political office was to find a permanent place for the Taliban; it will also create an opportunity for both sides to trust each other. Before the opening up of political office, Taliban and the US officials' meetings took place in Germany.

Taliban opened their official political office in Doha in June 2013. It was an open attempt from the US towards peace-building in Afghanistan. The main agenda of the Taliban's political office was peace talks. Hamid Karzai, president of Afghanistan criticized the political office of the Taliban and specified that it will not facilitate the intra-afghan peace process.[27]

Karzai felt that the Taliban used the opportunity to present itself independently and through the political office, they will make diplomatic contacts with other countries. Afghan government immediately canceled peace talks with the Taliban and "also called off negotiations between Kabul and Washington on a bilateral security agreement."[28]

Phase IV: Ashraf Ghani's Offers and Taliban's Rigidity

Phase-IV

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[26]Alissa J. Rubin and Rod Nordland, "U.S. Scrambles to save Taliban Talks after Afghan Backlash," *The New York Times*, June 19, 2013.

[27] "Afghan Taliban open Doha office", *BBC News*, June 20, 2013.

[28] Ali M Latifi, "Taliban's Qatar office stokes Karzai's ire," *Al Jazeera*, (June 2013). Also see, Bruce Riedel, "Why Karzai Suspended Negotiations After Taliban Opened Doha Office," *Brookings*, (June 20, 2013)

The fourth phase of reconciliation starts with the Ghani regime in Kabul. While campaigning for the 2014 presidential elections, Ashraf Ghani placed peace and reconciliation as one of his top priorities.He took oath in 2014 as president and offered an unconditional peace deal to the Taliban. Hisreconciliation policy encompassed recognition of Taliban as a political party, exclude their names from the blacklist, agreed to review the constitution after the Loy Jirga consultation, and withdrawal of foreign troops from Afghanistan. Taliban rejected his peace offers and called him a 'puppet government'.

In an international conference on "Kabul Process", President Ashraf Ghani declared in a joint statement with foreign stakeholders, that Afghan government and the Taliban should begin intra-Afghan dialogues without any conditions, which will be the solid step towards reconciliation in Afghanistan, and also it can end the current miseries of Afghan people. It will be the best way to reach an agreement.[29]Ashraf Ghani's declaration was an important opening to peace talks. He tried to convince the Taliban to join mainstream politics and contest elections. These bounties were offered by the Ghani administration to engage directly in peace talks with the Taliban.

Ashraf Ghani extended serious peace initiatives to ignite the phase of 'inclusiveness' in which every Afghan has an equal right to participate in politics. He even offered Afghan national passports to Taliban for their legitimate mobility across the globe. He showed the gesture of good-faith and candidly stated that his "heart breaks for Taliban". He launched the real process of reconciliation with the Taliban by applying the strategy of ceasefire in order to (re-)build confidence between Afghan government and Taliban. The ceasefire strategy was applied for the first time since Operation Enduring Freedom 2001. He further asserted that "This cease-fire is an opportunity for the Taliban to reflect that their violent campaign is not winning them hearts and minds but further alienating the Afghan people from their cause."[30]The US upheld the stance of Ghani administration. Mike Pompeo, the US Secretary of State,mentioned that "the US stands ready to work with parties to reach a peace agreement and political settlement that brings a

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[29] "Afghan President Ashraf Ghani offers Taliban peace talks and political recognition", *Deutsche Welle (DW)*, February 28, 2018.

[30]MujibMashal, "Afghan Leader Declares Brief, Unilateral Cease-Fire in Taliban Fight," *The New York Times*, (June 7, 2018).

permanent end to this war."[31] He accentuated, "this plan responds to the clear and continued call of the Afghan people for peace."[32]Unlike Afghan government, Taliban announced ceasefire only for three days of Eid celebrations and denounced extending it up to three months. They further made it clear to Ashraf's administration that Taliban will not indulge in a peace dialogue with the US-backed puppet government in Afghanistan and peace cannot be prevailed until foreign troops keep their militant occupation in the region.[33]

Impeding Factors in Triangular Reconciliation

This part uncovers the qualitative attitudinal data based upon focus group discussion and applies an inductive thematic analysis approach to identify the patterns of failure of Afghan triangular reconciliation endeavors in the past. In the case of Afghanistan, reconciliation has its own dynamics and requires local traditional measures. Peace in Afghanistan is strongly conditioned with locals' approach towards peace. The following data reveals that how the Taliban, Afghan national government, and the USbecame stumbling blocks to triangular reconciliation.

Taliban Factor

Taliban are, ethnically,*'pashtoons'*. They historically as well as culturally, are known for valor and heroism. Their warrior traits are considered to be the protective shield to their honor and dignity. The land of Afghanistan, therefore, is unconquerable and known as the 'graveyard of empires'.It remained an epicenter of the nineteenth-century 'Great Game' between Tsarist Russia and Great Britain but both imperial powers could not establish their control over it. USSR invaded the land in 1979 but faced the music in terms of its dismemberment. Alexander the Great once said, "May God keep you away from the venom of the cobra, the teeth of the tiger, and the revenge of the Afghans." [34] The phenomenon of revenge is deep-routed. The tribalism of

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[31] "Afghanistan extends ceasefire with Taliban," *BBC News*, (June 16, 2018).

[32] "Pompeo says 'time for peace' as Afghanistan announces ceasefire with Taliban", *Reuters,* August 19, 2018.

[33]Rupam Jain, SayedHassib, "Afghanistan announces Muslim Eid holiday Ceasefire with Taliban," *Reuters*, (August 19, 2018). Also see, Ahmed Mengli, MushtaqYusufzai and F. Brinley Bruton, "Afghan Taliban's response to cease-fire offer: A mass kidnapping", *NBC News*, (August 20., 2018). "Taliban Reject Afghan Ceasefire Offer", *The Nations* (August 21, 2018)

[34] Ahsan Altaf Abbasi, "The Afghan Imbroglio," *The Nation*, September 25, 2017.

Afghanistan is 'an asset as well as a liability'. An asset in the sense that no one can overpower them and a liability in the sense that they are 'hardliners' and don't show flexibility. They believe in the policy of 'die for honor'.

As the defense of Afghanistan is impregnable likewise prevalence of peace is also an uphill task. Afghanistan has been in a state of protracted conflict for almost half a century and particularly the post-2001 menace of terrorism has completely eroded the political environment which gave more space to insurgents and warring forces. The tribal trait to get 'revenge' is extremely prevalent in Afghanistan that gives momentum to belligerent action.

Table 02: Impeding Factors in Triangular Reconciliation Process

Basic Themes	Organizing Theme		Global Theme
	First Order Themes	SecondOrder Themes	
• *Pashtoons* are warriors and known as 'men of honor'. • They are ready to die for honor. • Tribal culture of an enduring rivalry • The phenomenon of revenge is deep-rooted	Tribalism/ Cultural traits/ Domestic milieu	Taliban Factor	Impeding Factors of Reconciliation in Afghanistan
• Belligerent Attitude • Militant Action • Talks are conditioned with the withdrawal of foreign troops	Austere outlook of Taliban		
• Absence of politically trained strata of Taliban • Non-acquaintance with the political process	Absence of Political Wing of Taliban		
• A direct party to reconciliation rather be an 'arbitrator' • Getting support from international forces and the USA. • Taliban titled it as 'puppet government' • Peace initiatives are not more than rhetoric • Local discourse on peace is missing	Afghan Government	Afghan Factor	
• Taliban claim, they are victims of joint perpetration of foreign troops and Afghan forces. • Afghan government and the US claim that they are victims of the Taliban's hostile activities. • Recalling past-human rights violations	Victim-Perpetrator Syndrome/ Blame Game		
• US interests in Afghanistan • No deal with terrorists • Change in US approach towards Taliban • No serious efforts for reconciliation • Direct talks to Taliban	Vested Interests of US	US Factor	
• Lack of comprehensive and integrative mechanism of reconciliation • No serious efforts by international forces to bring about peace in the region	International support		
• Weak security structure of Afghan National Security Forces • Reservations of people on national security forces • ANSF is not highly trained to deal with insurgent activities	Withdrawal of troops		

Taliban are the 'linchpin of triangular reconciliation process' without whom the process cannot be successful. The faith of reconciliation totally depends upon the response of Taliban. Several times peace talks faced failure due to lack of an integrative political wing of Taliban,unliketheir trained militant wing. The absence of a politically sagacious body is lingering the process of reconciliation. The untrained political body is not capable to draw a charter of peace with the government machinery.

Taliban's austere outlook is also one of the stumbling blocks of reconciliation process. Their belligerent attitude like attacks on governmental offices, US diplomatic enclaves, embassies, kidnapping of international persons and other guerilla activities always fomented the military actions from the US and Afghan national government which in turn further jeopardize the Afghan peace process. In addition, the peace-building process is always linked with some preconditions. Particularly,the Taliban, most of the time, conditioned peace talks with the withdrawal of foreign troops in a definite time period which was not a strategic move for the US and Afghan national government.

Before, Doha round, USA and Taliban directly engaged in peace talks in Qatar in 2018. The aim of these negotiations was the political settlement of Afghanistan conflict on the grounds that the US will withdraw its troops within a period of half-year and Taliban would delink their ties with Al-Qaeda as well as any other terrorist group who threatens the US interest. Both parties brought a draft for final signature after a year of negotiations. But President Trump, suddenly, canceled the peace talks with the Taliban in a response to an attack on Green Village in Kabul in September 2019.

Afghan National Factor

Afghan civil government is the main stakeholder in the triangular process of reconciliation as it is answerable for what is going on in Afghanistan. It is discussed that the national government, which is supposed to play a neutral role, remained a direct party to peace process.Taliban has declared that they are not against the Afghan people rather their wrath is against the two forces. One, the foreign troops, who have invaded Afghanistan on the pretext of terrorism, andsecond the US-backed Afghan government who is not the true representative of its people. The legitimacy crisis, therefore, of Afghan national government is hampering the peace processbecause the Taliban are reluctant to start peace dialogue with 'puppet government'.

It is further discussed that the reconciliation efforts proved futile because of Afghan government's reluctance to initiate a truly inclusive and sustainable reconciliation plan. Post-2001 Afghan government's all-inclusive policy for warring groups was not more than rhetoric and showoff. The initiated reconciliation plans, mostly, were based upon the talks like master-slave relations which, in fact, was not workable in terms of Afghanistan as the Taliban have more territorial control over Afghanistan.This indigenous entity hasa strong militia thatcan only be brought across the table on an equal basis.

The phenomenon of trust-deficit among conflicting parties also hampered the process of reconciliation. This victim-perpetrator syndrome and triangular blame-game of victimization put a negative impact on peace negotiations. All conflicting parties put the blame onto each other to prove that 'we are right and they are wrong'. It is also mentioned that recalling past-human rights violations by the Afghan government, surprisingly, made negotiations more reserved and rigid.It has conversed that in the case of peace in Afghanistan, macro-level reconciliation is not a workable formula as local revolt groups embody their trust in local social structures of conflict-resolution. They prefer to rely on domestic milieus of de-escalation rather than on the official state machinery.Against this backdrop, the emergence of local discourse for peace has been compromised.

The US Factor

The presence of US in Afghanistan is one of the major impeding factors in the prevalence of peace. It is mentioned that the uncertain US policy towardsTaliban put the Afghan peace at risk. For example, a shift in the US approach from 'no talks with terrorists' to 'talks with moderate elements of Taliban' has raised grave concern from the Afghan administration. Particularly, the direct talk policy of the US not only legitimized the Taliban's political outlook but also violated three preconditions[35] set between Afghan government and international forces before initiation of any peace dialogue with the Taliban.

On the other hand, Taliban always conditioned peace-talks with the withdrawal of foreign troops and evacuation of military bases.This phenomenon has raised eyebrows of many of the local and international administrative machinery that Afghan National Security Forces are not

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[35] First, Taliban will cede connections with terrorist group. Second, disarmament and, third, accepting legitimacy of Afghan national government as well as adherence to state constitutional order.

trained enough to deal with the militant wing of Taliban or any other terrorist group and complete withdrawal of US troops could give open space to insurgents. There is much likely possibility of re-establishmentof'Islamic Emirate' of Taliban once again in Afghanistan. The future of Afghanistan is unpredictable after withdrawal of foreign forces as Afghan forces will not be able to carry on fight against Taliban and other terrorist groups without the support of foreign forces.it means that without U.S support Afghan government will not be able to maintain security situation and there will be a breakdown of social order.

It is also discussed that lack of effective international support and frail external security framework is one of the major factors of Afghan destabilization which further provided space to thrive Taliban. The failure to chalk out a clear vision of reconciliation framework' by international forces is another impeding factor of peace-building measures. The reconciliation program mostly made unrealistic demands i.e., complete surrender of Taliban and acceptance of Kabul's all comprehensive inalienable control over Afghan territory. Such measures in the name of reconciliation always offended the mainstream Taliban leadership.

Conclusion

Reconciliation is a peace-building process in post-conflict societies by incorporating conflicting state actors in mainstream politics to establish a stable and integrative state system. It is a painful learning process "through which a society moves from a divided past to shared future".It is difficult in the sense that the existing reconciliation approaches or models are not workable for emerging new trends of conflict and war. Particularly, in traditional societies like Afghanistan,

Peace and Afghanistan are contrary to each other and myriad efforts have been put to bring them closer. The study identifies four different phases of triangular reconciliation and finds multiple patters of peace-interplay between main stakeholders i.e., Taliban, afghan national government and, the US. The research concludes that all four phases of reconciliation faced failure because the interplay for peace-dialogue was either uni-angular or of biangular which, in fact, should be mutually cooperated triangular interplay. All three actors one way or the other played the role of either initiator, supporter, or spoiler of peace-dialogue. The study reveals that three out of four reconciliation measures were initiated by the Afghan national government

whereas the Taliban with the support of US started a peace-dialogue in Doha, Qatar which faced a lot of criticism from Afghan national government.

In addition, the study finds a shift in patterns of US policy towards Taliban. The reconciliation process during the first two phases was spoiled by hardcore policies of the Bush administration but later Obama administration became a supporter of the reconciliation process in Afghanistan and further extended its support to Taliban for political office as well as upheld the Ghani's policy of inclusiveness. The research also concludes that the austere outlook of Taliban spoiled the reconciliation process two times on the pretext that they will not engage in peace talks with 'puppet government' and conditioned negotiations with the extraction of foreign troops.

In short, as per the defined patterns of triangular reconciliation in Afghanistan, the long-awaited peace could only be linked with an effective, all-comprehensive, sustainable, and strategic process based upon the indigenous values and cultural traits of conflict resolution under cooperative interplay between all three main actors i.e., Taliban, Afghan national government and the US.