

## AFGHAN PEACE BUILDING PROCESS: PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

Muhammad Azam\*

### Abstract

*At the beginning of the U.S.-Afghan war in 2001, none of the parties involved was willing to talk to each other. Over time, however, the need for peace negotiations became apparent, and a peace process slowly gained momentum in 2004. Although the Taliban militarily captured Kabul in 2021, one of the outcomes of the peace process was the Doha Peace Agreement signed by the United States and the Afghan Taliban, in which the latter guaranteed that they would not allow Afghan territory to be used against the United States. In addition, the peace process reached several milestones over the years. This article aims to analyze the achievements of the peace process in light of the web approach proposed by Lederach.*

**Keywords:** Peace process, peace negotiations, peacebuilding, the web approach, Afghanistan, achievements of the Afghan peace process, Doha Agreement

### Introduction

Peacemakers seeking peace in Afghanistan began talking about the need for peace negotiations as soon as they realized that a military solution to the Afghan conflict was not a viable approach. As early as 2003, voices from around the world began to be heard stressing the importance of peace talks. The extension of the war by two decades and several desirable outcomes of the peace negotiations confirmed the stance of those who raised these voices. Some of them stepped forward and began to explore ways and means to realize the goal of bringing the warring parties to the negotiating table.

The establishment of initial contacts between the Taliban and the Afghan government and between the Taliban and the U.S.-led coalition was a breakthrough in the evolving peace process. A kind of zone of respect and

---

\* Assistant Professor, Department of Politics and International Relations, Sargodha University, Sargodha, Punjab, Pakistan. Email: muhammad.azam@uos.edu.pk

---

reciprocity was successfully created. Peace talks began in 2004 when the United Kingdom negotiated indirectly with the Taliban in mid-June.<sup>1</sup>

In May 2011, the United States initiated direct but covert peace talks with the Taliban.<sup>2</sup> Two years later, U.S.-Taliban talks entered an overt phase when a Taliban office was established in Doha, Qatar, in June 2013. Covert talks between the Taliban and the Karzai government had begun even earlier. In 2010, Radio Free Europe reported that talks between the two parties had taken place in Kabul. There were also reports of covert talks during the overt phase.

The academic question to be addressed here is whether the Afghan peace process has been a futile exercise or whether it has made a valuable contribution to peacebuilding. The purpose of this paper is to answer this question, i.e., to analyze the achievements of the peace process in light of the web approach outlined by Lederach.<sup>3</sup> To answer this question, the components and processes of the Afghan peace process are identified and related to the corresponding components and processes of Lederach's web of peace to construct the web of peacebuilding in Afghanistan.

The paper is divided into several sections. Following the introduction, an overview of the academic research on the web approach is given. In the same section, a review of the literature evaluating the Afghan peace process is provided. In the third section, the Afghan peace process is discussed and an Afghan peace web is created. The last section concludes the paper.

### **The Web Approach and Literature Review**

The web approach is used in almost all major disciplines in the natural sciences, social sciences, and humanities. A web is defined as a complicated but ordered, linked structure or arrangement. Moreover, it can mean something that is artfully designed or that ensnares or entangles.<sup>4</sup> Terms such as relational web approach, social web approach, and systems web approach are in vogue. However, the semantic web approach has been developed and applied by a relatively large number of scholars. The web approach is more popular in natural sciences, such as environmental sciences, marine sciences, mineralogy, energy sciences, engineering, statistics, computer networks, health sciences, food sciences, metallurgy, artificial intelligence, and multidisciplinary studies. It is also adopted and

---

<sup>1</sup> "UK Holds Talks with Taliban," *Dawn*, (June 14, 2004).

<sup>2</sup> Von Susanne Koelbl and Holger Stark, "Germany Mediates Secret US-Taliban Talks," *Spiegel*, (May 24, 2011).

<sup>3</sup> John Paul Lederach, *The Moral Imagination: The Art and Soul of Building Peace*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

<sup>4</sup> W. Todd Jarvis, *Contesting Hidden Waters: Conflict Resolution for Groundwater and Aquifers*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), 40.

applied in the social sciences in disciplines such as political science (see, for example, Gizzi, 2002; MacIver, 1965; Vavrus et al., 1999), leadership, security, and peace studies, and education (e.g. Bascia et al., 2005; Joshee & Johnson, 2005; Tierney, 1985). Onditi *et al.* (2021), for example, elaborated on a web-like rim in their analysis of security community systems.

The web of peace is frequently mentioned in the peace literature by many authors, including Wood (2016), Blaney (2010), Goode (2018), Cavell (2015), and others. The web approach to peace studies is particularly dominant in certain parts of Africa.<sup>5</sup> Without referring to Lederach (2005) (see section IV), Freire and Lopes (2009) also speak of a web of peace and posit peace promotion, peacemaking, peacekeeping, and peacebuilding as its fundamental components. Their web of peace emphasises a “dynamic and integrated approach” to peace. Wafula (2017) applies the web approach in analyzing the role of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in peacebuilding in Kenya, using a mixed-methods design.

Experts in international relations have also benefited from the Web approach. Phillips *et al.* and Scheff (2006, p. 183), for example, bring the Web approach into play to advance the emotional/relational sources of world conflict. Aside from the institutional framework, ASEAN member states have implemented the spider web approach by creating “a web of overlapping bilateral cooperation” on defence and security issues (Emmers, 2012, p. 11; Ho, 2006). Relatively few scholars have applied the web approach in the neighbouring disciplines of political science and international relations. The adoption and application of the seamless web approach by the social sciences, especially political science, is largely due to Marxist and Western feminist discourse, argues Deutsch (as cited in Elshtain 1995).

The available literature generally highlights the problems and difficulties on the way to achieving peace in Afghanistan. However, what has been achieved has not been adequately understood or analyzed. Many observers view the Afghan peace process as a failure. The second decade since the war began had dawned, and yet hopelessness prevailed, noted Kurt (2013). In 2012, Wormer made similar observations that the High Peace Council had not achieved anything worth mentioning and that the three-stage talks held in the Maldives in 2010 had failed to achieve anything concrete.<sup>6</sup> Basit *et al.* (2018) emphasised that the suspension of the Quadrilateral Coordination Group (QCG) process in 2016 dealt a blow to

---

<sup>5</sup> City College of the City University of New York, *Conditions for the Possibility of Peace in the Horn of Africa*, proceedings, 4th International Conference on the Horn of Africa, May 26–28, 1989 (New York: Center for the Study of the Horn of Africa, 1990).

<sup>6</sup> Nils Wörmer, *Exploratory Talks and Peace Initiatives in Afghanistan: Actors, Demands, Germany's Role as Mediator*, SWP Comments (Berlin: German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP), December 2012), 2, 4.

---

the peace process. The assassination of Akhtar Mansoor, the Taliban's supreme leader, in a drone strike in 2016 led to the termination of the process. Russia's initiation of a parallel peace process was interpreted by some as a "breakdown of regional and international consensus."<sup>7</sup> Although a peace agreement was signed between the United States and the Taliban in Doha in February 2020, Cordesman (2020, p. 7) considered it a "largely failed peace process."

Optimistic analysts included Sheikh and Greenwood, Abbas and Pilster. The Taliban had consistently refused to negotiate, and they had conditioned negotiations on the withdrawal of all foreign troops from Afghanistan. Sheikh and Greenwood (2013, p. 18) viewed the Taliban's willingness to negotiate in 2004 as a positive outcome of the peace process. Similarly, Abbas (2014, p. 228) described Obama's shift from reluctance to willingness to negotiate as a positive development for the peace process. By early 2020, the peace process had made significant progress. Shortly before the signing of the Doha Agreement between the United States and the Taliban, Pilster (2020, p. 121) expressed hope that the peace process was close to a breakthrough.

The peace process received widespread support from all parts of the world—inside and outside Afghanistan. In June 2010, a 1600-delegate peace jirga called on the Afghan government to begin negotiations with the Taliban.<sup>8</sup> In early 2012, Jan Kubis, the special representative of the secretary general of the UN, felt reassured by extensive talks about a possible peace agreement with the Taliban.<sup>9</sup> The release of American soldier Bowe Bergdahl by the Taliban in 2014 as a result of prisoner exchange negotiations proved to be a thriller.<sup>10</sup> The release helped close the trust gap to some degree. Thereafter, the Americans, along with their coalition partners, took a more optimistic approach to the peace process.

The web approach worked in Nicaragua during the war between the East Coast and the Sandinistas. The approach also played an important role in Northern Ireland.<sup>11</sup> Several aspects of the Web approach were knowingly

---

<sup>7</sup> Abdul Basit et al., "South Asia: Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh, India," *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses* 10, no. 1, Annual Threat Assessment (January 2018): 31–52.

<sup>8</sup> Jon Boone, "Afghan Government Must Talk to Insurgents, Says Peace Jirga," *The Guardian*, June 4, 2010, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/jun/04/afghan-peace-jirga-taliban>.

<sup>9</sup> AP, "UN's New Afghan Envoy Heartened by Talk of Peace," *Khaleej Times*, January 25, 2012, <https://www.khaleejtimes.com/world/uns-new-afghan-envoy-heartened-by-talk-of-peace>.

<sup>10</sup> Emma Graham-Harrison, "Release of US Soldier Bowe Bergdahl Revives Hopes for Afghan Peace Process," *The Guardian*, (June 1, 2014), <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jun/01/release-us-soldier-bowe-bergdahl-afghan-peace-process-taliban>.

<sup>11</sup> Lederach, *The Moral Imagination*, 99.

or unknowingly adopted and applied by peacemakers in their efforts to achieve peace in Afghanistan.

### **The Afghan Peace Web**

The peacemaking efforts contributed to (a) the withdrawal of foreign forces, (b) the Taliban's agreement (i) not to use the Afghan territory they controlled against the United States and its allies, and (ii) to holding talks with the regime in Kabul. Reportedly, only one meeting between the Taliban and the Kabul delegations was held in Doha but the negotiations did not make any progress. The Doha agreement provided for the end of the 41-year war in the country. It is the first time since the communist takeover in 1978 that the Afghan country has been under a single authority.

Initially, the United States had rejected calls for peace negotiations, arguing that the Taliban did not deserve a seat at the negotiating table because they harboured and protected al Qaeda extremists. The Taliban had rejected calls for a peace process with the United States, claiming that the Americans were invaders and that invaders could not be negotiated with. Similarly, the Taliban rejected calls for talks with the regime in Kabul, calling it a puppet of the Americans.

Both the Taliban and the United States wanted to win the war militarily. The first and greatest challenge was to convince the United States and the Taliban that it was necessary to talk to each other. In the first phase of the war, the United States was unwilling to draw a line between al Qaeda and the Taliban. One of the first successes of peacemaking efforts was to convince the United States that the Taliban must be viewed and treated as a separate organization that did not share Al Qaeda's global goals. This agreement by the United States paved the way for the next step: U.S. willingness to talk to the Taliban. Slowly but surely, all the major players recognised the need to talk to the Taliban. It was more difficult to convince the Afghan Taliban to talk to the United States than it was to convince the United States to talk to the Taliban.

In elaborating on the web approach, Lederach refers to peacemakers as web makers who construct webs with their strategic and spatial know-how and expertise. The explicit strategic networking aspect of the Web method is the construction of a web of connections and activities that spans the environment.<sup>12</sup> Lederach (2005, 81) convincingly explains that observing and understanding the action plan chosen by the web makers enlightens us in the "art of spatial thinking." The author notes that the expressions and jargon of arachnologists provide a language for creating networks for tactical social change. The peacemakers accomplished several

---

<sup>12</sup> John Paul Lederach, *The Moral Imagination: The Art and Soul of Building Peace*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 81.

---

tasks that can be considered prerequisites for a normal peace process. Against all odds and difficulties, the peacemakers remained persistent and continued to push the adversaries toward peace talks. In the nearly two decades of the peace process (2004–2021), they succeeded in overcoming several obstacles.

The negotiations went through (a) a covert and an overt phase and (b) an indirect and a direct phase, with both phases overlapping. In their efforts to bring peace to Afghanistan, the peacemakers brought spatial thinking into play by including people from the northern Tajik and Uzbek regions and the eastern and southeastern Pashtun regions. Afghan President Hamid Karzai publicly confirmed in April 2007 that talks with the Taliban were underway. It was a success of the peacemakers' creativity that the distinction made between al Qaeda and the Taliban was recognised by the international community. It was thanks to this creativity that the Taliban was persuaded to cut its ties with Al-Qaeda in 2008.

Lederach explains that spiders have tremendous ability and talent to see and understand basic features of their environment, the shape and outlook of a particular place. Spiders must consider how best to cover space and make cross-connections that link different areas into a web. And they must do this repeatedly.<sup>13</sup> Following the spiders' strategies for weaving a web, Lederach also uses the terms vertical capacity, horizontal capacity, and integration to explain the peacemaking process. The vertical capacity of peacemakers is about exploring and focusing on "relational spaces that link people up and down in the society".<sup>14</sup> The term "horizontal capability" refers to racial, ethnic, linguistic, and religious affinities among citizens and populations that bridge identity divides in a given region (79–80). The ability to reshape a society, community, or nation involves discovering "resources based on relationships, its connectors, and social spaces" in a given setting. Where these vertical and horizontal ties converge is called integration.<sup>15</sup> Peacemakers saw and understood the nature of the Afghan environment, its contours, and the possibilities of the Afghan conflict. The peacemakers' vertical capacity created contacts with people who could communicate between the warring parties, i.e., between rulers and ruled and representatives of the upper, middle, and lower classes. They strengthened, deepened and frequented the already existing contacts between the parties. The institutionalization of established contacts was an essential dimension of vertical capacity. Horizontal capacity enabled contacts with representatives of various political parties and groups, including Pashtuns, Tajiks, Uzbeks, Shiites, Sunnis, and others, men and women, old and young. As the peacebuilding process progressed, integration took a more

---

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

refined form in the shape of several formalised frameworks for holding talks, and negotiating teams were formed. Contacts and meetings at several conferences in different parts of the world, between coalition partners and Taliban representatives, and between the Taliban and Afghan government representatives, epitomised the cross-links. Organised cross-links at the international level included the Core Group, the Quadrilateral Coordination Group (QCG), the Quartet, and the Heart of Asia (HoA)-Istanbul Process. These platforms also established cross-links at the international level.

During the above-mentioned contacts, meetings and exchanges, valuable resources were explored and developed, giving great impetus to a major peace process that spanned several continents and involved more than twenty states. Individuals (Afghans and foreigners) and entities (foreign governments and international organizations) with ties to the Taliban, the United States, and the Karzai and Ghani regimes were identified. These individuals and organizations became the connectors.

A spider's web, as Lederach explains, consists of three frames. First, the spider arranges the intertwined threads and builds a bridge across a gap to form a simple star, or frame A. The spider's web is made up of three frames. All the threads connect at "an intersection called the hub." The spider connects the anchor points to create an outer circle as frame B of the web.<sup>16</sup> Next, the spider reinforces the connection between the hub and the outer circle using a series of radii, and in this way, frame B is built. Then concentric circles, called auxiliary spirals, are forged, forming frame C of the web. Local and provincial, provincial and national, and national and international contacts and connections formed three frames of the Afghan peacebuilding network. Relatively unknown individuals and organisations at the local and provincial levels formed frame A. Relatively better-known individuals and organizations at the provincial level and well-known individuals and organizations at the national level formed frame B. Frame C was woven by national and international leaders and organizations. The QCG, the Quartet, and the HoA-Istanbul process each provided anchor points for the outer circle of Frame C (Figure 1).

Female religious leaders participated in peacebuilding alongside men at the local level because they were able to take advantage of the gendered spaces of peacebuilding that were open to them thanks to their understanding of the Quran and hadith. Their religious knowledge also expanded these spaces.<sup>17</sup> At the international level, negotiators and mediators traversed the globe to create a simple star as a third framework for building a peace network. The Core Group provided some of the key

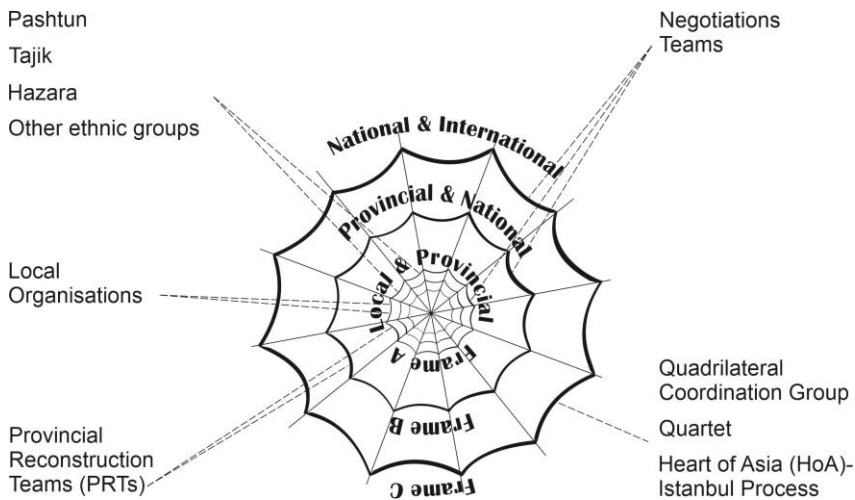
---

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 81–83.

<sup>17</sup> Javier Fabra-Mata and Muzhgan Jalal, "Female Religious Actors as Peace Agents in Afghanistan," *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development* 13(2), (August 2018): 76–90, accessed August 27, 2021, <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1080/15423166.2018.1472031>.

linkages for Framework C. Doha became first a formalised node and later a hub where the government of Qatar established a Taliban office with the approval of the international community. The Doha process culminated in a peace agreement between the United States and the Taliban. In addition, the Doha Process succeeded in convincing the Taliban to begin peace negotiations with the U.S.-backed regime in Kabul.

*Figure 1.*  
**Afghanistan’s Peacebuilding Web**  
 (Linkages and Interactions at Local, Provincial, National, and International Levels)



However, it is only one of the dimensions of the Afghan peace network; the other includes the contacts and connections between actors who provided financial, political, and security support for peacebuilding at all levels—local, provincial, national, and international. Like the first group of warring parties, i.e., the United States and the Taliban, the second group of warring parties, i.e., the Taliban and the Karzai government, were initially unwilling to talk to each other. The former labelled the latter as puppets, and the latter identified the former as murderers and terrorists. The creative skills of the peacemakers overcame this challenge as well. In July 2015, Mullah Omer endorsed talks with the Afghan government,<sup>18</sup> and the first official meeting between the Afghan government and the Taliban took

<sup>18</sup> Baqir Sajjad, “Taliban Chief Mullah Omar Endorses Talks with Afghan Govt,” *Dawn*, (July 16, 2015).



place in July 2015.<sup>19</sup> And direct talks between them began in 2015, preceded by an indirect phase.

The High Peace Council (HPC) formed by Karzai in September 2010, composed of 70 personalities from different ethnic and political groups and parties, its 12-member successor team formed by Ghani in November 2018,<sup>20</sup> and a 14-member team formed by the Taliban for talks with the United States in February 2019<sup>21</sup> became the auxiliary spirals. These teams also provided relational and spatial aspects for the peace web. The roadmap for the peace process through 2015, prepared by the High Peace Council in November 2012, called for direct negotiations with the Taliban in 2013 with the help of Pakistan and other states (page 2), and this goal was achieved.

The aptitude of the spider can be seen in its ability to modify, rearrange, and recreate its web of connections in accordance with the realities that present themselves in a particular place.<sup>22</sup> Lederach, citing Abram, explains that webs must be woven into the present despite the spider's natural programming, patterns, or predispositions (1996). The spider is responsive and creative, not a programmed machine. The ability to identify strategic anchor points that connect disparate but inescapably interconnected components, processes, and physical locations into a functioning social arrangement is the essence of web-making. People who are dissimilar in thought or circumstance must be brought together by peacemakers.<sup>23</sup> In Conniff's words, spiders are "smart flexible," meaning they have the ability to adapt to, respond to, and take advantage of emerging and contextual problems.<sup>24</sup> Peacemakers adapted and reshaped the web of connections by adjusting and realigning the parameters of negotiations, changing negotiation sites, and expanding the circle and scope of conversations by including more actors and stakeholders. Programs, patterns, or attitudes were woven into the present despite the painful past. Thanks to the peacemakers' responsiveness and creativity, Taliban leaders were released from Guantanamo Bay and Pakistani prisons, travel restrictions against them were lifted, and they were allowed to set up an office in Doha and attend meetings and peace conferences in Beijing, Berlin, Dubai, Islamabad, Kyoto, Moscow, Riyadh, Tehran, and other

<sup>19</sup> Kay Johnson and Mehreen Zahra-Malik, "Taliban, Afghan Officials Hold Peace Talks, Agree to Meet Again," *Reuters*, (July 8, 2015), <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-afghanistan-taliban-idUSKCN0PIODX20150708>.

<sup>20</sup> Reuters, "Ghani Forms 12-Member Team to Negotiate with Taliban," *Dawn*, (November 29, 2018).

<sup>21</sup> Javed Hamim Kakar, "Taliban Announce 14-Member Team for next Talks with US," *Pajhwok*, (February 12, 2019), <https://pajhwok.com/2019/02/12/taliban-announce-14-member-team-next-talks-us/>.

<sup>22</sup> Lederach, *The Moral Imagination*, 83.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

<sup>24</sup> Lederach, *The Moral Imagination*, 84.

cities. The peacemakers used an unpredictable environment like spiders to deliberately and creatively weave relational webs across social spheres.

The peacemakers who worked for peace in Afghanistan remained responsive, creative, and smart flexible. There were strategic anchor points that connected diverse but interconnected groups, processes, and geographic locations. People who were not like-minded or similarly situated were connected. Among other things, it was about the expertise of “know-who” and “know-where”.<sup>25</sup> Negotiating teams included individuals and groups who had never before seen each other at the table together. Thus, a strategic structure of connections was established. A vast network was created with numerous connections inside and outside Afghanistan. One of the achievements was the peace agreement signed in September 2016 with former warlord Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, who had fought against the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and NATO.

Contrary to what most observers might believe, Web development is more about creating the platforms for creative responses than developing the actual solution.<sup>26</sup> Although there was no ceasefire during the first 18 years of the war, the first three-day ceasefire occurred in June 2018 (AP, 2018),<sup>27</sup> followed by a series of other ceasefires on Eid occasions, including one on Eid-ul-Adha in August 2020 and another on Eid-ul-Fitr from 13–15 May 2021. The ceasefires proved to be another creative response to peacemaking efforts.

The constitution of peace negotiation teams by Karzai, Ghani, and the Taliban, the hybrid nature of the U.S.-backed Kabul regime, and Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) formed important intersecting links like a spider web. Hybridity as an aspect of the peacebuilding process allowed for the inclusion of unelected but informally revered figures in the Karzai and Ghani regimes. Indeed, this hybrid model of governance had opened the possibility of power-sharing between the Taliban and the U.S.-backed Kabul regime. The PRTs provided important connections and links for the web of peace. The PRTs can be internationalised in the sense that foreign and international institutions and governments consider the model for implementing peacebuilding efforts in other parts of the world.<sup>28</sup>

However, the greatest achievement of the peace process was the agreement signed by the U.S. and the Taliban in Doha on 29 February 2020.

---

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 85.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 85

<sup>27</sup> Hamid Shalizi, “Afghanistan Announces Eid Ceasefire with Taliban until June 20,” *Reuters*, (June 7, 2018), <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-afghanistan-president-ceasefire/afghanistan-announces-ceasefire-with-taliban-until-june-20-iduskcn1j30o2>.

<sup>28</sup> Sebastiaan Rietjens and Myriame Bollen, “Linking Provincial Reconstruction Teams to Security Enhancement in Afghanistan,” *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development* 3, no. 2 (March 2007), 79–83, accessed August 27, 2021, <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1080/15423166.2007.830326856977>.

Under it, the United States agreed to withdraw its forces within 14 months, and the Taliban agreed (a) not to allow Afghan territory under its control to be used by individuals or groups against the United States and its allies, and (b) to begin negotiations with the Afghan government on 10 March 2020, for a permanent and comprehensive cease-fire. The Doha Agreement fueled hopes for a negotiated settlement between the Kabul regime and the Taliban.<sup>29</sup> On 12 September 2020, talks between the Taliban and the Afghan government resumed in Doha<sup>30</sup> to agree on power sharing but did not make any headway. Because Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates had longstanding relationships with the Taliban, the peacemakers (consciously or unconsciously) benefited from the web approach and utilised these relationships.

Despite all the delays, deadlocks, and break-ups, the peace network survived thanks to the persistence of the peacemakers, and the negotiations continued in one form or another. Several times the preconditions and demands were adjusted and readjusted. It was largely thanks to the peacemaking efforts that both the U.S. and the Taliban were satisfied on the occasion of the peace deal. The U.S. was pleased because two of the fundamental goals of the U.S. invasion had been achieved: (a) terror had been driven out of Afghanistan<sup>31</sup> and (b) the Taliban committed in the Doha Agreement that the Afghan countryside would not be used against the U.S. and its allies. The Taliban rejoiced that they had won by defeating NATO. They saw their success in forcing the Americans to sit down with them and reach a peace agreement, and in later driving foreign forces out of the country and subduing all resistance. Many interpret the Doha deal as a face-saving for the United States.

Informal contacts and formal meetings between the Taliban, the Karzai and Ghani regimes, and foreign governments, covert and overt, had raised the possibility of a breakthrough between the Taliban and the elected Kabul regime for so many years. The fact that the Karzai and Ghani regimes, as well as foreign actors, kept the door open to peace talks with the Taliban is evidence that it was understood that the Taliban could not be eliminated. It could be that there was some willingness to accommodate the Taliban within the political framework of the state at the time.

---

<sup>29</sup> Zahra Tawana et al., "Afghan Peace on the Horizon? An Examination of Public Opinion on the Ongoing Peace Talks," *Asian Journal of Peacebuilding* 9, no. 2, (Perspective) (2021): 357, 367.

<sup>30</sup> Baqir Sajjad, "Afghan Peace Talks Begin amid Calls for Ceasefire," *Dawn*, (September 13, 2020).

<sup>31</sup> AFP, "Terror Threat Has Been 'Moved' from Afghanistan: US," *Dawn*, (April 19, 2021).

---

## Conclusion

The Afghan people have experienced one of (if not the) worst tragedies of modern times. War and violence in Afghanistan entered their fifth decade in 2019. The desire of Afghans for peace and stability cannot be overstated as they yearn for peace. However, the challenges faced by peacemakers were countless. It was undoubtedly a difficult task to get the two sides to agree on certain issues. Peacemakers had to convince Afghan and non-Afghan actors that peace and stability would better serve their interests and goals, strategic and otherwise. Both sides—the Taliban and the elected Kabul regime—had to learn to share power and coexist peacefully, but they did not succeed. This was probably the most discouraging aspect of the transformation of this violent conflict, which the peacemakers could not overcome.

However, some important events related to the Afghan peace process indicated a possible optimistic outcome, such as several mutually agreed ceasefires on Eid occasions, a successful agreement with Hikmatyar, and another between the United States and the Taliban. The Taliban showed flexibility by engaging in efforts to bring peace to the country. Their willingness to participate in such efforts had been a source of hope for peacemakers. In some ways, the Taliban benefited the most from the peace process. The start of negotiations and the signing of a peace agreement with the United States meant *de facto* recognition of them. In contrast to the pre-September 11 era, they have been welcomed in the most influential capitals such as Beijing, Moscow, London, Berlin, Geneva, and Tehran, not to mention Riyadh, Dubai, and Islamabad.

The five most important achievements of the Afghan peace process are (a) the warring parties' agreement to peace talks, (b) the Taliban's conviction to sever its ties with Al Qaeda, (c) the Hikmatyar peace agreement, (d) the U.S.-Taliban peace agreement, and (e) the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan. The Doha Peace Agreement can be considered the greatest achievement of the Afghan peace process, paving the way for a logical end to the war between the U.S. and the Taliban. In summary, the Afghan peace process was not an exercise in futility based on Lederach's approach. Over the years, despite temporary setbacks, things have moved in a positive direction and many important milestones have been achieved. Not only the U.S. and the U.S.-backed regimes of Karzai and Ghani but also their democratic opposition, negotiated with the Taliban. The Doha Agreement, signed in February 2020, led to the withdrawal of foreign forces from Afghanistan and ended decades of war. Moreover, the agreement created a kind of clarity about the unlikelihood of such an eventuality that drove the country into this war. It is highly unlikely that al-Qaeda or any other group will be able to use the Afghan country against the West again. Peacemakers can continue to focus on the web approach and overcome the obstacles and difficulties that peace processes face elsewhere.

---

**References**

- Abbas, Hassan. *The Taliban Revival: Violence and Extremism on the Pakistan-Afghanistan Frontier*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2014.
- Abram, David. *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human World*. New York: Vintage, 1997.
- AFP. "Terror Threat Has Been 'Moved' from Afghanistan: US." *Dawn*, April 19, 2021.
- Al-Jazeera. "Afghan Taliban Announces Eid Ceasefire for First Time since 2001," June 9, 2018. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/06/afghan-taliban-announces-eid-ceasefire-time-180609055631419.html>.
- AP. "Taliban Urge Afghans to Boycott Polls." *Dawn*, October 9, 2018.
- . "UN's New Afghan Envoy Heartened by Talk of Peace." *Khaleej Times*, January 25, 2012. <https://www.khaleejtimes.com/world/uns-new-afghan-envoy-heartened-by-talk-of-peace>.
- Bascia, Nina, Alister Cumming, Amanda Datnow, Kenneth Leithwood, and David Livingstone. *International Handbook of Educational Policy*. Vol. 13. Springer, 2005.
- Basit, Abdul, Sara Mahmood, Iftekharul Bashar, and Mohammed Sinan Siyech. "South Asia: Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh, India." *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses* 10, no. 1. Annual Threat Assessment (January 2018): 31–52.
- Blaney, John W. "Lessons from Liberia's Success: Thoughts on Leadership, the Process of Peace, Security, and Justice." *Prism* 1, no. 2 (2010): 101–110.
- Boone, Jon. "Afghan Government Must Talk to Insurgents, Says Peace Jirga." *The Guardian*, June 4, 2010. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/jun/04/afghan-peace-jirga-taliban>.
- Cavell, Megan. "Formulaic Fripuwebban: Reexamining Peace-Weaving in the Light of Old English Poetics." *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 114, no. 3 (2015): 355–372. Accessed August 27, 2021. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5406/jenglgermphil.114.3.0355>.
- Cordesman, Anthony H. *Afghanistan: The Peace Negotiations Have Become an Extension of War by Other Means*. Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, October 28, 2020.
- Elshtain, Jean Bethke. "Exporting Feminism." *Journal of International Affairs* 48, no. 2. Transcending National Boundaries (1995): 541–558.
- Emmers, Ralf. "Security Cooperation in the Asia-Pacific: Evolution of Concepts and Practices." In *Asia-Pacific Security Cooperation: National Interests and Regional Order*, edited by See Seng Tan and Amitav Acharya. New York and London, England: M.E. Sharpe, 2004.
- . "The Five Power Defence Arrangements and Defense Diplomacy in Southeast Asia." *Asian Security* 8, no. 3 (2012): 271–286.

- 
- Fabra-Mata, Javier, and Muzhgan Jalal. "Female Religious Actors as Peace Agents in Afghanistan." *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development* 13, no. 2 (August 2018): 76–90. Accessed August 27, 2021. <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1080/15423166.2018.1472031>.
- Freire, Maria Raquel, and Paula Duarte Lopes. "Rethinking Peace and Violence: New Dimensions and New Strategies." In *Rethinking Peace and Security: New Dimensions, Strategies and Actors*, edited by Paula Duarte Lopes and Stephen Villanueva Ryan, 13–30. Bilbao, Spain: Humanitarian Net, University of Deusto, 2009.
- Gizzi, Michael C. *The Web of Democracy: An Introduction to American Politics*. Wadsworth, 2002.
- Goode, Michael. "The Relevance of Peace in Early American History." In *The Spectre of Peace*, edited by Michael Goode and John Smolenski, 1–29. Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2018. <https://brill.com/view/book/edcoll/9789004371682/BP000001.xml>.
- Graham-Harrison, Emma. "Release of US Soldier Bowe Bergdahl Revives Hopes for Afghan Peace Process." *The Guardian*, June 1, 2014. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jun/01/release-us-soldier-bowe-bergdahl-afghan-peace-process-taliban>.
- Ho, Joshua H. "The Security of Sea Lanes in Southeast Asia." *Asian Survey* 46, no. 4 (2006): 558–574.
- Jarvis, W. Todd. *Contesting Hidden Waters: Conflict Resolution for Groundwater and Aquifers*. London and New York: Routledge, 2014.
- Johnson, Kay, and Mehreen Zahra-Malik. "Taliban, Afghan Officials Hold Peace Talks, Agree to Meet Again." *Reuters*, July 8, 2015. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-afghanistan-taliban-idUSKCN0PI0DX20150708>.
- Joshee, Reva, and Lauri Johnson. *Multicultural Education in the United States and Canada: The Importance of National Policies*. Vol. 10. 1007/1. Springer, 2005.
- Kakar, Javed Hamim. "Taliban Announce 14-Member Team for Next Talks with US." *Pajhwok*, February 12, 2019. <https://pajhwok.com/2019/02/12/taliban-announce-14-member-team-next-talks-us/>.
- Koelbl, Von Susanne, and Holger Stark. "Germany Mediates Secret US-Taliban Talks." *Spiegel*, May 24, 2011.
- Kurt, Andrew. "Working toward Peace and Prosperity in Afghanistan, Review." *Digest of Middle East Studies* 22, no. 1 (2013): 209–213.
- Lederach, John Paul. *The Moral Imagination: The Art and Soul of Building Peace*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.
- MacIver, Robert Morrison. *The Web of Government*. Free Press, 1965.
- Onditi, Francis, Gilad Ben-Nun, Edmond Maloba Were, and Israel Nyaburi Nyadera. *Reimagining Security Communities: Systems Thinking Approach for Africa*. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021.

- 
- Phillips, Bernard, Harold Kincaid, and Thomas J. Scheff, eds. *Toward a Sociological Imagination: Bridging Specialized Fields*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2002.
- Pilster, Ulrich. "Afghanistan: Peace through Power-Sharing?" *The Washington Quarterly* 43, no. 1 (2020): 121–141.
- Reuters. "Ghani Forms 12-Member Team to Negotiate with Taliban." *Dawn*, November 29, 2018.
- Rietjens, Sebastiaan, and Myriame Bollen. "Linking Provincial Reconstruction Teams to Security Enhancement in Afghanistan." *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development* 3, no. 2 (March 2007): 79–83. Accessed August 27, 2021. <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1080/15423166.2007.830326856977>.
- Sajjad, Baqir. "Afghan Peace Talks Begin amid Calls for Ceasefire." *Dawn*, September 13, 2020.
- . "Taliban Chief Mullah Omar Endorses Talks with Afghan Govt." *Dawn*, July 16, 2015.
- Scheff, Thomas J. *Goffman Unbound: A New Paradigm for Social Science*. Routledge, 2006.
- Shalizi, Hamid. "Afghanistan Announces Eid Ceasefire with Taliban until June 20." *Reuters*, June 7, 2018. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-afghanistan-president-ceasefire/afghanistan-announces-ceasefire-with-taliban-until-june-20-iduskcn1j30o2>.
- Sheikh, Mona K., and Maja T. J. Greenwood. "The Reconciliation Process in Review." In *Taliban Talks: Past, Present and Prospects for the US, Afghanistan and Pakistan*, edited by Mona K. Sheikh and Maja T. J. Greenwood. Copenhagen: Danish Institute for International Studies, 2013.
- Tawana, Zahra, Ahmadullah Azadani, Sughra Azizi, Mihr Khoda Mehrzad, Mahdiya Erfani, and Zuhul Ahmadzai. "Afghan Peace on the Horizon? An Examination of Public Opinion on the Ongoing Peace Talks." *Asian Journal of Peacebuilding* 9, no. 2. (Perspective) (2021): 357–382.
- Teachers College, City College of the City University of New York. *Conditions for the Possibility of Peace in the Horn of Africa*. Proceedings, 4th International Conference on the Horn of Africa, May 26–28, 1989. New York: Center for the Study of the Horn of Africa, 1990.
- Tierney, William G. *The Web of Leadership*. Stanford University, 1985.
- Vavrus, Michael, Sherry Walton, Janice Kido, Elizabeth Diffendal, and Pauletta King. "Weaving The Web of Democracy: Confronting Conflicting Expectations for Teachers and Schools." *Journal of Teacher Education* 50, no. 2 (April 1999): 119–30.

- 
- Wafula, Caleb. "The Role of SMEs in Peacebuilding in Kenya." In *Democratizing Public Governance in Developing Nations: With Special Reference to Africa*, edited by Shamsul M. Haque, Anastase Shyaka, and Gedeon M. Mudacumura, 239–255. London and New York: Routledge, 2017.
- Wardak, Ali, and Humayun Hamidzada. "The Search for Legitimate Rule, Justice and a Durable Peace: Hybrid Models of Governance in Afghanistan." *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development* 7, no. 2 (August 2012): 79–88. Accessed August 27, 2021. <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1080/15423166.2012.743823>.
- Wood, Houston. *Invitation to Peace Studies*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2016.
- Wörmer, Nils. *Exploratory Talks and Peace Initiatives in Afghanistan: Actors, Demands, Germany's Role as Mediator*. SWP Comments. Berlin: German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP), December 2012.
- "UK Holds Talks with Taliban." *Dawn*, June 14, 2004.