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ROLE OF PAKISTAN IN THE AFGHAN PEACE PROCESS

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Abstract

Afghanistan is an important state approximately situated in Central Asia. Afghanistan has its borders in the east and south with Pakistan and uses the sea route via Pakistan. Afghanistan has been suffering from war since the 1970s. After the brutalities of the civil war foreign invasion of the Soviet Union in 1979 and America in 2001 made destruction everywhere in Afghanistan and killed thousands of innocent Afghans. Great powers came to Afghanistan to crush the roots of religious extremism, drug trafficking, terrorism and smuggling. Pakistan did not enjoy cordial ties with its western neighbor Afghanistan. Pakistan is the biggest beneficiary if peace prevails in Afghanistan. Pakistan has suffered the most due to the wars and instability in Afghanistan. Pakistan has lost billions of dollars and thousands of people in the war of terror started by America. Pakistan is supporting the peace process in Afghanistan and convincing all stakeholders to sit at the table and try to stabilize the country. The Taliban and America have

signed a peace deal on 29 February 2020, in Doha to end the longest war in the history of America. Pakistan played a positive and constructive role to bring the Taliban to the negotiation table with America. This paper highlights the role played by Pakistan in the Afghan peace process.

Keywords: Pakistan, Taliban, Afghanistan, America, Peace

Introduction

A peaceful Afghanistan is very important to bring stability to the region. Pakistan is the most affected neighbor from the longevity of the Afghan war. War in Afghanistan does not in the favor of the whole region as well as the world powers. Peace in Afghanistan can promote the transit trade through Central Asia. Chinese projects in the region like China Pakistan Economic Corridor and One Belt One Road provide the facility to Beijing, Islamabad, Kabul and Central Asia Republics of transit trade but it will only happen if Afghanistan enjoys peace(Kumar, 2017). Dialogue is the only meaningful solution to end the war in Afghanistan. Pakistan played its vital role to bring the Taliban to the peace table and to sign a peace deal between America and the Taliban on February 29, 2020(Gul, 2020). Pakistan also put stress on the Afghan government and America to keep an eye on spoilers. The world is now acknowledging the positive role played by Pakistan to bring the Taliban to the peace table. It seems the Afghan government is not happy with the role played by Pakistan in the peace process. Afghan government using delaying tactics on various occasions to derail this peace initiative. Spoilers are trying hard to derail this peace initiative and get their interests by using the soil of Afghanistan. Ashraf Ghani and other his close aides are unhappy with this peace agreement, they think the Taliban are in driving seat according to this peace deal(Jamal, 2020). This research paper analyzes the role of Pakistan in the Afghan peace process. This research paper also puts focus on ties between Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Literature Review

Pakistan-Afghanistan Relations Post 2014: Impacts on Pakistan's Security by Ahmed Ali Naqvi. In his publication, the writer puts stress on two major developments in Afghanistan and their impact on Pakistan's security. The author explains that American plans to withdrawal its major portion of its troop will impact the security situation of Pakistan. The writer considers the arrival of Ashraf Ghani into the presidential palace a big development for the relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan. Hamid Karzai often blamed Pakistan to support the militant's activities in Afghanistan. Hamid Karzai also had a soft corner for India and developed his relations with India. The writer considers that both developments will have a great impact on the security situation of Pakistan (Naqvi, 2015).

An Analytical Study of Pakistan's Policy Toward Afghanistan Before the Taliban's Rise by Umbreen Javaid and Qamar Fatima. In this publication, the writers explain the historical relationship between Pakistan and Afghanistan. Pakistan has always tried its best to maintain cordial relations with Afghanistan since 1947. Pakistan's friendly relations with Afghanistan enhance its trade via Afghanistan to Central Asia. Afghanistan always supported separatists' elements in Afghanistan. Afghanistan did not try to solve the issue of the Durand line. The writers put stress on the relations between Kabul and Islamabad before the rise of the Taliban. Afghan governments always tried to disrupt the border areas of Pakistan. Pakistan also changed its policy and tried to establish relations with the Islamists factors in Afghanistan. Pakistan supported the Mujahedeen in the Soviet invasion in Afghanistan with the help of America. The authors define the relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan based on mistrust from both sides (Javaid & Fatima, 2013).

Pakistan's Foreign Policy Towards Afghanistan Since Operation Freedom Sentinel: An Overview by Maliha Zeba. In this publication, the writer expresses the foreign relations of Pakistan towards Afghanistan in detail. The

writer explains the foreign policy of Pakistan towards Afghanistan under the dynamic leadership of the founder of Pakistan People's Party Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. Pakistan jumped into Afghanistan during the Soviet invasion and played its part to defeat the communist regime. The writer explains the side effects of Pakistan's involvement in Afghanistan during the Soviet invasion in detail. Pakistan did not enjoy cordial relations with Afghanistan after the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan. The incident of 9/11 completely changed the world security structure and provided Pakistan a chance to come closer to its western neighbor. Islamabad always took an interest to bring peace to Kabul. The writer explains in detail the relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan and Pakistan's efforts to bring durable peace in Afghanistan (Zeba, 2017).

Descent into Chaos (The World's Most Unstable Region and The Threat for Global Security) by Ahmed Rashid. In this book, the author presents a clear picture of the Central Asian region. Ahmed Rashid presents the internal rifts of Afghan society. The author explains in detail the real powerhouse of Pakistan. The writer discusses the Pakistan army's involvement in Afghanistan and its ties with the Taliban. Pakistan has always enjoyed cordial relations with the Taliban. Most of the Taliban leaders were the students in the madrassas in Pakistan. Ahmed Rashid says in Pakistan the army leads the foreign policy and the civilian government has little influence on foreign relations. Pakistan's foreign policy towards Afghanistan leads by the army. The writer also puts stress on the involvement of neighboring states in Afghanistan (Rashid, 2009).

Afghanistan (Sly Peace in A Failed State) by Musa Khan Jalalzai. In his book, the author talks about the internal rifts of the Taliban groups in Afghanistan. The writer also explains in detail the stakes of external factors in Afghanistan. Neighboring states have their stakes in Afghanistan. Pakistan has close ties with the Taliban and India joins the Northern Alliance. Iran also has close ties with the Hazaras community and also with the leaders of the Northern

Alliance. The writer focuses on the regional and world powers' interest in Afghanistan. In this book, the author says dialogue is the ultimate solution to this long war. Neighboring states want such Afghanistan which suits them (Jalal, 2019).

Research Questions

1. What is the role of Pakistan in the Afghan peace process?
2. Why is Pakistan so keen to see a stable Afghanistan?

Role of Pakistan

Pakistan's role in the ongoing Afghan peace process is very important. Pakistan and Afghanistan are sharing a long border, ethnic ties, and geographical relationship. The most important thing in the history of links between Pakistan's military establishment and the Taliban. These links between Pakistan and the Taliban are making Pakistan a great player in this ongoing peace process. Pakistan's authorities are hoping and trying to bring peace to Afghanistan. Major powers are also considering Pakistan an important player that has the guts to bring the Taliban back on the peace talks table. America and its allies in Afghanistan have given up the hopes of a military solution to Afghanistan. Presently the peace process is the main hope for all the stakeholders in Afghanistan. Pakistan always has been supporting peace initiatives in Afghanistan (Ahmad, Yousaf, & Shah, 2017). Pakistan always stressed direct talks with the Taliban militants. Pakistan demanded on various occasions to provide incentives to the Taliban militants to bring them back to the peace talks table. Pakistan always supported such a realistic, pliable, and attainable road map towards peace in Afghanistan (Dawn News, 2016). The world always said that Pakistan had strong links with Taliban leaders and Islamabad can mold the Taliban leaders towards peace talks. Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) and the religious parties of Pakistan have strong connections with Taliban leaders. Pakistan provided money, weapons, and training to them during the Soviet invasion. Most of the Taliban insurgents belong to the Pashtun majority areas from Pakistan and they have been getting

an education from religious schools in Pakistan. Pakistan supported them to get help for Kashmir and counter to Soviet forces, and to increase its influence in Afghanistan. Pakistan was also supporting the Taliban in Afghanistan to control Indian influence in Afghanistan (Waldman, 2010). Pakistan's military commander General Ashfaq Pervez Kiyani announced openly that Pakistan has such ability to create a suitable environment for Afghan reconciliation. This statement from a military commander shows Pakistan's influential behavior towards the Afghan Taliban (Perlez, 2010). After the military chief civilian government also accepted that the Taliban are under Pakistan's influence. These statements from both military and civilian leadership provided strength to the world's stance over Pakistan's links with the Taliban. It was considered that Pakistan had strong ties with the Taliban while India had close connections with the Northern Alliance (Hameed, 2012). However, there were different views inside the Pakistan Army about ties with the Taliban. Inter-Services Intelligence confirmed that ground-level connections between ISI and Taliban were dislodged after 9/11 (Weitz, 2012). Pakistan's sincere efforts towards peace would lead to permanent peace in Afghanistan. Pakistan has a strong grasp on the Taliban, Haqqani network, and Hizb e Islami. In 2010 High Peace Council was established consisting of 70 members. In January 2011 High Peace Council members visited Islamabad to seek help for Peace Process. Before any concrete step, former President Rabbani was killed in September 2011. Then relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan deteriorated (Vogt & Abbot, 2012). Later in early 2012, Pakistan tried to approach the opposite camp of the Taliban. The civilian government of Pakistan tried to contact former Foreign Minister Abdullah Abdullah who belongs to the Tajik community. Pakistan also tried to find out relations with Uzbek leader Rashid Dostum and Ahmad Zia Masood the younger brother of Ahmed Shah Masood. All those leaders were gathered under the umbrella of the Northern Alliance against the Soviet invasion. These attempts from the Pakistani side put a positive impact on the bitter relations with Afghanistan (Markey, 2013).

In 2013 Afghan President Hamid Karzai admitted the importance of Pakistan in the Afghan Peace Process. President Karzai requested Pakistan to help in arranging peace talks with the Afghan government and Taliban fighters. Hamid Karzai also offered Pakistan to make a joint strategy against extremism in Afghanistan and Pakistan (Dawn, 2013). After President Karzai visited and requested Pakistan to help the Afghan government to bring the Taliban on peace talks. Pakistan released many Taliban prisoners who were under Pakistan's custody. Although America had great concern over this move from Pakistan, America took it as a good gesture towards peace. The Afghan government also thanked Pakistan for this release of senior Taliban leaders (Waraich, 2013).

With the efforts of Pakistan, both the Afghan government officials and Taliban members met in Murree on 7th July 2015. These were the secret talks between both sides The Kabul government and the Taliban. The United States and Chinese officials were also present at that time in Murree. This meeting was considered a ray of hope for a bright future in Afghanistan. Although this meeting divided Taliban groups. Qatar's office of the Taliban was unhappy over this meeting. But Pakistan managed these talks between Kabul and the Taliban and announced that the next round will be held soon (Osman, 2015). Before the second round of talks, it was announced that Mullah Muhammad Omer's leader of the Afghan Taliban had died 2 years ago due to illness. After this news second round of talks postponed. Mullah Akhter Mansour the head of the Taliban announced that the Taliban will fight against foreign invaders and the western-backed puppet government of Afghanistan. After this news Peace Process once again derailed. Taliban groups were also seen scattered and this was considered a real worry for Mullah Akhter Mansour. Pakistan played its vital role to conduct these talks but it was derailed (Notezai, 2015). Pakistan started new efforts for peace through the Quadrilateral Coordination Group to bring the Taliban back on the peace table. But on 21st May 2016, America killed Taliban leader Mullah Akhter Mansour near the Pak-Iran border. America targeted him through a drone strike. It was a

devastating move by the American's. President Barack Obama called it a victory to kill the Taliban Chief. He said Mullah Akhter Mansour was involved to kill American soldiers and thousands of Afghan civilians. President also said that Mullah Akhter Mansour was also a hurdle in the way of peace. Pakistan negated this statement from the American President. Pakistan said that Murree talks were held due to the efforts of Mullah Akhter Mansour. Mullah Akhter Mansour was advocating peace in Afghanistan. But the new Taliban chief Mullah Haibatullah Akhunzada was appointed after the death of Mullah Akhter Mansour was considered a hardliner. Sirajuddin Haqqani and Mullah Yaqoob were his vices. The United States once again disregarded Pakistan's efforts for peace (Ali, 2016).

Pakistan also met with Russian and Chinese officials to find out a way of peace in Afghanistan on 26 December 2016. All countries were agreed to give Taliban sanctions free movements. This step will encourage Taliban leaders to sit back on the talk table. The Afghan government and the Taliban were not present there (Gul, 2016). Pakistan consistently played a significant role in peace in Afghanistan. But American authorities always put pressure on Pakistan to "Do More". President Trump followed his earlier Presidents and slammed on Pakistan. President Trump said that Pakistan has got almost over 30 billion dollars in terms of aid but Pakistan did nothing for America. Trump also blamed Pakistan to support terrorism and provide safe havens to terrorist groups. President Trump also said Pakistan deceived America every time. Pakistan repeatedly played a double game with America (Diaz, 2018). Pakistan responded hard to President Trump's allegations. Prime Minister Abbasi called a meeting of the National Security Committee. Pakistan showed great disappointment with the American President's allegations on Pakistan. Pakistan said we have done our work inside Pakistan. There are no camps of the terrorist group in Pakistan. President Trump has no authentic information about Pakistan's efforts towards peace (Aziz, 2018). It was not the first time that American authorities blamed Pakistan to protect terrorists. President Obama also said that many times to "Do More" to Pakistan. Afghanistan's

government has also complained about America putting pressure on Pakistan to eliminate terrorist organizations working in Pakistan on several occasions. America knew the importance of Pakistan and its links with the Taliban. American vice president in the Obama administration said to Hamid Karzai that Pakistan is important for America 50 times more than Afghanistan (Mazzetti, 2018). In June 2018 America approached Pakistan once again to seek help indirect peace talks with the Taliban. American vice president Mike Pence and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo talked to Pakistani civilian and military leadership to seek help in Afghan Peace Process. Pakistan continually tried to bring peace to Afghanistan. A peaceful Afghanistan is helpful for Pakistan. Pakistan should try its best to bring the Taliban to the peace table it will be helpful for Pakistan to its internal security US officials to Central and South Asia said in a seminar (Gul, 2018). General elections in Pakistan were held on 25 July. Imran Khan took charge as a new Prime Minister of the country. Khan had a strong voice against American drone attacks in Pakistani areas. Mr. Khan always stressed to settle the Afghan war with negotiations. But Trump's announcement to cut off Pakistani military aid was a strong bouncer to Prime Minister Khan. But in 2018 American policy was shifting from reintegration to reconciliation (Schmitt, 2018). Trump administration directed its diplomats to start direct talks with the Taliban in 2018. It was a big change in American policy after 9/11. Earlier America always tried to support the Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process. But the Trump administration changed the strategy towards the Taliban. But this strategy would not work without the full support of Pakistan. The way of peace in Afghanistan comes from Pakistan it was told to President Trump (Mashal & Schmitt, 2018). Pakistan once again supported its stance on Afghanistan. Pakistan's ambassador in America met with the American Secretary of Defense and assured him of his support in peace talks with the Taliban. He said Pakistan constantly tried to bring peace in Afghanistan and Pakistan will continue its support to achieve peace in Afghanistan (Pakistan Today, 2018). President Trump continuously aiming Pakistan's military to supporting

terrorist organizations. In response to his allegations, Prime Minister Khan responded hard, He said America cannot blame Pakistan for its failure in Afghanistan. He said over 10,0000 Nato soldiers over 250,000 Afghan soldiers and spending over 1 trillion dollars America could not win the war in Afghanistan. Pakistan's Military chief also hit hard against allegations, He said Pakistan did a lot to bring peace in Afghanistan. Pakistan has suffered due to the Afghan war more than any country in the region. America should think twice to blame Pakistan (Dawn, 2018).In December 2018 President Trump has changed its policy of allegations. President Trump wrote a letter to Prime Minister Khan seeking help in Afghan Peace Process. The Information Minister of Pakistan confirmed the letter. But the American embassy did not respond to it. After serious allegations against Pakistan, President Trump took it seriously that without Pakistan it is impossible to get withdrawal American forces from Afghanistan (Buckle, 2018).Pakistan responded positively to President Trump's letter seeking help in Afghanistan. Prime Minister Imran Khan directed the Foreign Ministry to respond to President Trump's letter. Prime Minister said Pakistan tried its best to bring peace in Afghanistan (Ahmed, 2018).The world now is acknowledging the efforts made by Pakistan to bring peace to Afghanistan. American Special Representative for Reconciliation Zalmay Khalilzad visited Pakistan many times to meet Pakistani officials to brief them on ongoing peace talks with the Taliban in Doha and seeking Pakistan's help on it. Foreign Minister of Pakistan, Military Chief, and the Prime Minister all assured Zalmay about Pakistan's support for this ongoing peace process. Pakistan supported Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace initiatives earlier and Pakistan will support all steps for promoting peace in Afghanistan in the future (Pakistan Today, 2019). President Trump also claimed that Pakistan is now helping in peace talks due to him. Prime Minister Khan also visited America and assured President Trump that Pakistan has tried to bring peace in Afghanistan. Pakistan had suffered a lot due to the peace situation in Afghanistan. Pakistan has lost billions of dollars and thousands of human beings. Pakistan is the key

beneficiary if peace prevails in Afghanistan. Pakistan supported Afghanistan peace and will do so in the future (Choudhury, 2019). But suddenly in September 2019, President Trump announced peace talks with the Taliban were a dead activity. Taliban wants fight nor peace. Trump said America cannot bear the killing of American soldiers in Afghanistan. Some people who were against to peace deal appreciated Trump's Announcement. While Pakistan wanted peace in Afghanistan, Pakistan was shocked at the sudden cancelation of peace talks. Pakistan was helping America in Afghanistan in these peace talks. All parties Taliban and even America acknowledged on different occasions the role of Pakistan. But Pakistan stressed America to resume peace talks with the Taliban. These peace talks are favorable for America, the Taliban, and Pakistan as well (Jamal, 2019). In December 2019 Taliban and United States resumed talks where they left. Pakistan appreciated this initiative taken by both parties America and the Taliban. Pakistan also reaffirmed its support for the peace initiatives in Afghanistan. Foreign Minister of Pakistan said that Pakistan has believed that President Trump's decision to resume talks with the Taliban will pave the way towards peace in Afghanistan (The New Indian Express, 2019). United States representatives repeated on various occasions the role of Pakistan in the Afghan Peace Process. American diplomats towards South Asia appreciated Pakistan's efforts towards peace in Afghanistan. Ms. Wells thanked Pakistan for its positive role in Afghan Peace. American Special Representative for Reconciliation Zalmay Khalilzad also lauds the role of Pakistan in the Afghanistan Peace Process. Zalmay visited Pakistan in early 2020 and met the top civilian and military leadership of Pakistan. He also said due to the efforts of Pakistan Intra Afghan Talks will take place after the peace agreement between the Taliban and America (Siddiqui, 2020). On 29 February peace deal between the Taliban and America has been signed in Doha. Pakistan's Foreign Minister was also present there. All stakeholders appreciated Pakistan's efforts towards Afghanistan. American Secretary of State appreciated Pakistan's efforts in this peace agreement. Taliban also thanked

Pakistan to facilitate these peace talks. Prime Minister of Pakistan also expressed joy in this peace deal and hope to end this bloody long war. Pakistan also said that all stakeholders should be aware of spoilers. Prime Minister also said my prayers are with Afghan people who suffered a lot due to this long war. Imran Khan also said that I was the only person who always suggested a political solution to Afghanistan (Ameer, 2020).

Pakistan always played a vital role in Afghanistan's peace. Peace in Afghanistan brings comfort to the border provinces of Pakistan. Peace enhances trade with both brotherly countries. Pakistan is also hopeful for the success of Intra Afghan Talks. The people of Afghanistan have suffered a lot due to the long war now peace should give a chance. But due to a neighboring State Pakistan has played a vital role in the peace agreement between the Taliban and America and Pakistan is also ready to play its part in Intra Afghan Talks.

Conclusion

Pakistan is the biggest beneficiary if peace prevails in Afghanistan. Pakistan is playing a constructive role to bring stability to Afghanistan. Pakistan has tried on various times to establish cordial relations with Afghanistan but did not get a positive response from the western neighbor. Pakistan is worried about Indian influence in Afghanistan and has risen its voice against RAW's involvement in Pakistan but the Afghan government is not showing any positive signs. Pakistan also has learned from its past mistakes and trying to engage all segments of Afghan society. Now Pakistan has changed its Afghan policy and inviting other Afghan leaders to belong to different sects and political parties. Pakistan has tried its best to bring the Taliban to the peace table. Islamabad is very keen to play its part in Intra Afghan Talks. America is acknowledging the role of Pakistan in the Afghan peace process. India is playing its role to sabotage the peace agreement between America and the Taliban but failed till now. Pakistan is now fencing its borders with Afghanistan and 80% of its work has been done. It's a positive sign that the

world is now acknowledging Pakistan's efforts to bring durable peace in Afghanistan.

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