

# The United States Approach to Peace building in Afghanistan: Problems and Prospects

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## Abstract:

*The US-led Afghan Peace Process has achieved a partial success. On political front, the US-led international supporters have helped Afghanistan in conducting national elections to transfer power democratically in the last twelve years. However, on economic and social levels, Afghans have lost more than it has gained in more than a decade. The paper is a modest attempt to investigate and analyse if the US approach to peacebuilding in Afghanistan contradicts general objectives of peacebuilding. Few important questions are being raised with regard to the US approach. Does the US faces a dilemma while dealing with the problems in Afghanistan and the larger security concerns in the region? If yes, is it because the premises that led to the invasion in Afghanistan in 2001 contradict the outcomes that the US experiences in these twelve long years in Afghanistan? If no, why did the US take such a long time to sort out Afghan*

*problem? Why it has been trying hard, implicitly, to get Taliban onboard in the Afghan Peace Process? Why peacebuilding has not been successful? The research attempts to answer these questions. It also looks into whether the US really has a “replacement model” in general to implement whenever it needs to intervene in any country as it did in Afghanistan and later in Iraq. If so, what is its replacement model?*

## Keywords:

Peacebuilding; Peace Process; US Approach; Afghanistan; Security; Taliban; Stability; Dilemma; US National Interests; Afghan elections

## Introduction

“A broad understanding of peacebuilding refers to the various efforts in support of political, institutional, and social transformation necessary to bring about lasting peace” (Bertram, 1995). Other

scholars use the term peacebuilding broadly to refer to “peacemaking, peacekeeping, and conflict prevention” (Call & Cook, 2003). The *Alliance for Peacebuilding*, a non-profit Washington based organization promoting peace and development, states that “peacebuilding efforts aim to manage, mitigate, resolve, and transform central aspects of conflict through official diplomacy, civil society peace processes, and informal dialogues, negotiations, and mediations” (Alliance for Peacebuilding, 2014). It also states that peacebuilding focuses on the root causes of violence and works for reconciliation to prevent the return of instability and violence.

Generally, peacebuilding applies predominantly to post-conflict interventions. To some extent, all the political, state-building, reconstruction and developmental work in Afghanistan could be considered as peacebuilding works. Activities that more likely to seek promoting peace have been defined from a theoretical perspective as either political, structural, or social. Political peacebuilding involves high-level political or diplomatic agreements to end a long conflict or to prevent an impending conflict. Structural peacebuilding is concerned with creating structures, institutions, and systems

that support a peace culture, and often involves promotion of equitable and participatory systems of governance. Lastly, social peacebuilding seeks to influence attitudes, behaviours, and values by creating a social infrastructure to promote and sustain peace (Waldman, 2008).

Gross (2013) opines the complexity of the term (peacebuilding) itself as highlighted by Brahmī Report of 2000 and its various activities involving a range of actors. He states that the Brahmī Report defines peacebuilding as “activities undertaken on the far side of conflict to re-assemble the foundations of peace and provide the tools for building on those foundations something that is more than just the absence of war” (Gross, 2013).

The paper refers to peacebuilding as a process to build the war-torn Afghanistan to a state of peace, stability and growth so that it can self-govern and does not retreat to the previous state of conflict. It is a comprehensive process involving negotiations, peace agreements and resultant peace, security, stability and self-governance. Thus it encompasses, security, political and economic dimensions. The US government definition of peacebuilding

seems to conform to this sort of definition. For more clarity, peacebuilding in Afghanistan would mean the efforts to reconstruct Afghanistan since 2001 by the US along with international community so far. This means transformation from a war-torn state to a state of sustainable self-governance in Afghanistan. The paper would use descriptive as well as analytical methods to answer the questions.

### **Afghanistan and Peacebuilding**

Today, Afghanistan signifies a compelling case of a war-torn state attempting to transform into a peaceful democratic state through a top-down process of peacebuilding involving various players—domestic, local, regional and international players in which the US is a leading international player. Peacebuilding in Afghanistan still remains largely in the stage of political peacebuilding as exemplified by the recent change in leadership in Kabul. This is not to deny the various projects and programmes in Afghanistan by the UN and its agencies, private NGOs, efforts by the US and international community in the field of education, infrastructure development, governance, etc. However, the prime responsibility for bringing peace and

prosperity and end violence and poverty lies with Afghanistan and its people.

Having said that, since October 2001, the US has been predominating throughout the course of Afghan peacebuilding. Undoubtedly, much of the stake of peacebuilding in Afghanistan lies with the US as it is responsible for reconstruction of the war-torn Afghanistan after it toppled the Taliban government and made way for elected governments. However, the reluctance showed by the US in seriously pursuing Afghan peacebuilding seems to have apparently come from the realization that the imperatives of a secure and stable Afghanistan is connected with containing or eliminating the various elements of violence such as Taliban, warlordism, insurgency, etc. on one hand and enabling the Afghan government to sustain itself through regular aids, support of democratic processes, training of Afghan security apparatus, capacity building, etc. at a time when US financial resources are shrinking and other geopolitical priorities are to be given primary importance on the other hand.

## **US Role in Afghanistan Peacebuilding: Unravelling the Contradictions**

It is argued that “visions of peace and means of violence went hand in hand since the beginning of international engagement in Afghanistan. The contradictions to simultaneously waging a war in Afghanistan to weed out Taliban which had provided safe havens to Osama Bin Laden led the al-Qaeda network and peacebuilding in Afghanistan were recognised too late” (Suhrke, 2012). Preventing Afghanistan from becoming a safe haven for al-Qaeda was the primary goal for the US to intervene in Afghanistan and peacebuilding was never a top priority for the US (Uesugi, 2009). The Bush administration started its hurried campaign against Iraq in March 2003 even before Afghanistan’s reconstruction began fully (Dobbins, 2008).

The US-led forces were stuck in a complex mosaic of civil strife, poverty, layered insurgency, ethnic cleavages, warrior culture, instability, etc. that have been the characteristics of Afghan society and polity since long. The Americans could not anticipate the cycle of violence and related deprivation of basic human needs and rights that followed after it toppled the then existing Taliban government in Kabul in

2001. President Bush administration was left with two options whether to cut and run or continue engaging in Afghanistan to reconstruct it and enable it to prevent the coming of Taliban or similar extremist forces again in Afghanistan.

Anticipating a worst kind of sporadic violence in Afghanistan in the 2001 itself, the US was left to defend itself and for it the US had to continue its existence in the form of NATO- led ISAF (International Security Assistance Force). The violence continued and Washington’s failure to contain it became more visible.<sup>1</sup> With the change of government in Washington in 2009, the new administration under President Obama asked its staff to review US strategy in Afghanistan. In March 2009, a new and comprehensive strategy was introduced by the administration ‘to defeat al-Qaeda and

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<sup>1</sup>In 2006, insurgent forces and suicide attacks by extremists killed over 4,400 Afghans, including about 1,000 civilians. The fact that the number of the dead has doubled from 2005 indicates that the security situation in Afghanistan has deteriorated rapidly. For example, in 2005 the number of security incidents occurred per day was three on average (the total number of incidents in that year was 1,347), whereas in 2006 that number jumped to ten (the total number of incidents in that year was 3,824). For details see, Centre for Policy and Human Development, *Afghanistan Human Development Report 2007 Bridging Modernity and Tradition: Rule of Law and the Search for Justice*, pp. 85-86. <http://www.cphd.af/nhdr/nhdr07/nhdr07.html>.

combat extremism' in Afghanistan and Pakistan as the US played an important role in the peacebuilding processes (The White House, 2009).

Thus the new strategy envisages two core goals- defeating al-Qaeda and to prevent future safe havens in Afghanistan and Pakistan besides accompanying many other objectives. They are- rooting out of al-Qaeda, reversing the momentum of Taliban and denying it the ability to overthrow Afghan government in Kabul, developing self-reliant Afghan security forces with training given by the US, mobilizing resources for capable, accountable and effective governance that caters the needs of Afghan people, promote international contribution and encourage bigger role of the U.N (Department of Defense, 2010). This regional approach was narrowly restricted to eliminating al-Qaeda and for that it considered Pakistan and Afghanistan as an integrated challenge. Thus, the new strategy under President Obama administration was not different from his predecessors in form but only in contents. That is to say that the difference was only in the tactics it introduced in the discourse of peacebuilding.

The contradictions to simultaneously pursuing the objective of removal of al-Qaeda network and pursuing peacebuilding became more and more visible as insurgency and violence again picked up in 2010 which was coincided with highest casualty deaths for US troops in a decade. This coincided with the coming of President Hamid Karzai's second term in 2009. The 2010 showed the declining confidence in the ability of the then President, Hamid Karzai, to combat corruption; strengthen Afghan security forces and governance institutions. President Karzai presided over both Afghanistan's first National Peace Jirga, aimed at creating a stable future for Afghanistan by calling for reconciliation with insurgents, and the July Kabul Conference, which brought together the Afghan government, the United Nations, and international partners to outline necessary improvements to development and security initiatives (USIP, 2011).

In addition, the US endorsed the seventy-member High Peace Council to oversee the mechanism for bringing in a speedy political solution to the decades of conflicts. Thus, the Afghan Peace and Reconciliation Programme (*Afghan Peace Process*) was launched in 2010 by the then Karzai

government supported by the US. This is a two-tiered initiative with a reintegration and a reconciliation pillar, both of which have been simultaneously implemented. While the reintegration is implemented at sub-national level to reintegrate foot soldiers, the reconciliation pillar is implemented at national and regional levels so as to make way for the Taliban leadership to come to the negotiating table for a long-lasting Afghan peace and stability.

On December 1, 2009, President Barack Obama announced that his administration would increase US troops by 30,000 in addition to already committed in Afghanistan calling its engagement in Afghanistan as a 'vital national interest' (USIP, 2011). However, this was done in anticipation to President Obama's new thinking of formalizing an exit. This intention of the administration began to unfold more clearly after the high-profile execution the then al-Qaeda chief, Osama Bin Laden, on May 1, 2011 from a hide-out few miles away from Pakistan's military academy in Islamabad by an elite team drawn out from US Navy Seals authorized by the US President.

In November 2010, at the *NATO Summit* in Lisbon, Afghan government and NATO allies, including the US agreed to pursue a formal process, called "Transition" in which responsibility for security would be shifted to Afghan government gradually to be completed by the end of 2014 thereby making way steadily for the US forces to change from "combat to support" role. The December 2011 *Bonn Conference* in Germany did not materialize as the international community failed to produce a blueprint for Afghanistan transition to a self-sustaining and secure government and Pakistan, a crucial member, refuses to attend. In May 2012, at the *NATO Chicago Summit*, the Afghan government and NATO added a new step to the formal Transition process, Milestone 2013, which reiterated the previous agreement on Transition in Lisbon with greater force. NATO and ISAF Partner nations also made a political commitment to provide funding for ANSF sustainment after ISAF's mandate ends in 2014 (Dale, 2013).

Sudden announcements on US exit plan after 2014 on December 9, 2011 and June 22, 2011 speech by the President shocked many countries including India. This, at the same time, confirmed the recognition of the

contradictions to simultaneously waging a war to eliminate al-Qaeda and its supporters, the Taliban, and pursuing peacebuilding by the administration. An attempt to dilute the contradiction was made on May 2, 2012 when the two heads of the countries signed the “*Enduring Strategic Partnership Agreement between the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the United States of America*”, a 10-year strategic partnership agreement (SPA) that demonstrates the United States’ enduring commitment to strengthen Afghanistan’s sovereignty, stability, and prosperity and continue cooperation to defeat al-Qaida and its affiliates” (US State Department, 2014).

On the other side, the US, since 2010, has embraced its erstwhile enemy ‘Taliban’ and talks with Taliban reportedly started in early 2011 till Taliban suspended its talk with the US in March, 2012 (AFP, 2013). This was reportedly after disagreement between the two on some ground-level conditions that were put forward from both sides. Washington’s reluctance to fulfill its commitment to release five Taliban prisoners from Guantanamo Bay to be housed in Doha and Taliban’s condition to hold talks only after foreign troops left Afghan soil had been the main factors. The

US-Taliban negotiations even after the Taliban opened a political office in Doha did not materialized. Afghanistan’s minorities and women’s groups fear that the negotiations might produce compromises with the Taliban that erode human rights and ethnic power-sharing (Kaltzman, 2014).

Besides, both Pakistan and Afghanistan had reservations about the US’s unilateral attempts to negotiate with the Taliban. Both felt that they would thereby be bypassed in the endgame (Daily Times, 2014). Western allies of the US have also initiated and served their role in the peace process but no success had come out. The *Paris Peace Talk* (2012) could not end successfully. The *Trilateral Summit* (2013) which involved former President Karzai and former Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari, hosted by British Prime Minister David Cameron in London ended with a highly unrealistic dateline of reaching to a peace deal within six months.

On the part of Afghanistan, former President Karzai, on his visit to Islamabad, had asked for Pakistan’s help in Afghan Peace Process which has been stalled since 2012. This highlighted the importance of Pakistan to Afghanistan in the reconciliation process.

Pakistan Prime Minister, Mr. Nawaz Sharif, had reciprocated positively to extend its help at every opportunity for talks between Afghan High Council and Taliban and reinforce regional efforts to stabilize Afghanistan and emphasized that the peace process had to be 'inclusive, Afghan-owned and Afghan-led' as well (BBC News, 2013). All these happenings has been overseeing by the US as it appears to see Pakistan as a regional neighbour sharing the burden of bringing peace in Afghanistan.

### **US Approach to Peacebuilding in Afghanistan**

The shift in the US approach to engaging in Afghanistan came during the second term of the Bush administration. The shift was the outcome of the realization of the limits of using military muscles in restoring peace and stabilization efforts in the post-conflict environment. The shift from decade-long 'military to civilian' engagement using civilian capabilities with the sole aim of conflict prevention and peacebuilding in pursuit of US interests began to characterise the renewed strategy of a balance of engagement in Afghanistan under President Obama administration. This is done by engaging civilian structure in which greater role is given to the Department of the State and US Agency for International Aid

(USAID). This also highlights an institutional shift by defining clearly institutional role under civilian structure in pursuing US interests in Afghanistan outside the military structure. Under the second administration of President Obama, the administration relies on diplomacy rather than defence with an enduring consensus and commitment towards maintaining and improving on functional civil capacities for peacebuilding (Gross, 2013).

Nevertheless, the US approach to peacebuilding is based on certain basic US long-term interests and values which go beyond the physical boundaries of Afghanistan. Among them some of the main priorities are- countering al-Qaeda and other violent extremists in the region; preventing nuclear proliferation and nuclear confrontation between nuclear-armed states; protection and promotion of human rights and women; and preserving the United States' ability to exercise leadership on the world stage (Dale,2013).This seems to say that the mandate of peacebuilding is allied strongly to the US interests and values in the region.

The very approach mentioned put the US efforts on poor side as questions have been



raised as to whether the interests serve the purpose of peacebuilding in Afghanistan where there are serious issues on threats from insurgency, warlordism, local disputes having the potential to exacerbate into wider conflict, violation of rule of law, widespread corruption, nepotism and governance that can bring a transformative effects to the Afghan people and society. Is the approach to peacebuilding reduced to target-limited nature? Does the US approach restricted to peace and stability in the region without addressing the security concern of the Afghan people? At this point, two very important yet different forms of arguments can be categorized so as to analyze the US approach to peacebuilding in Afghanistan in a holistic way.

### **Defending**

It is stated that Bureau of Conflict and Stability Operations (CSO), previously S/CRS, operating under the US Department of Defense, which aid in coordinating civilian reconstruction tasks and capabilities, “has developed criteria for engagement that include strategic impact and relevance to the national security priorities, but leveraging local ownership and partnerships” (Gross, 2013). This is in congruence with the United States’ National Security Strategy (2010)

which places emphasis on “Whole of Government Approach” that focuses on the integration and alignment of military and civilian institutions (National Security Strategy, 2010). It places emphasis on partnership with civil society and NGOs to report the ground realities.

The US approach to peacebuilding conforms to international efforts in conflict prevention and post-conflict reconstruction. It also furthers the economic development. UNAMA (U.N. Assistance Mission in Afghanistan) under U.N. Security Council is given authority to strengthen cooperation between the US-led ISAF and the Afghan government. The core US mission in Afghanistan is tied to security issues that concern not only the US interests<sup>2</sup> but also the long-term peace and stability in Afghanistan (Kaltzman, 2014). Most of the arguments here in this section are based on the official documents of the US government mainly CRS Reports 2013 and 2014 on Afghanistan.

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<sup>2</sup> In the Joint Press Conference with President Karzai on January 11, 2013 at the White House, President Obama states that, “the reason we went to war in the first place -- is now within reach: ensuring that al Qaeda can never again use Afghanistan to launch attacks against our country”.

Dale (2013) states that the US efforts in Afghanistan includes support for Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF), prosecuting the fight on the ground; counter-insurgency; supporting Afghanistan's political process, including the presidential elections scheduled to be held in April 2014; providing assistance to help Afghans create a sustainable and viable economy to sustain the gains achieved; and facilitating Afghan-led efforts to achieve a high-level political settlement with the Taliban- that the US often termed as "Afghans talking to Afghans".

**Security:** The US on its part as envisaged by the President Obama administration has concluded its commitment to shoulder greater responsibility for security across Afghanistan to ANSF when the US forces engagement change from previously "combat" to a "supportive" role on June 18, 2013. By the end of 2014 full responsibility would be transferred. This is to be reinforced by the US-Afghanistan Strategic Partnership Agreement (2012) which pledges US continued security and economic assistance to Afghanistan until 2024. By the end of 2012, most of the ANSF particularly, the Afghan National Army (ANA), already had war fighting skills and

showed growing confidence along with resilience in counter-insurgency campaigns. There are increasing level of integration between ANA and police in dealing with security issues at local and national level (Dale, 2013). The DOD Report released in November 2013 supports the development.

**Insurgency:** It is a critical factor to measure the campaign progress and the level of achievement in preventing violence, conflicts and restoring peace and stability in Afghanistan. The coalition has reduced the capability of various insurgents to recruit and operate in many areas inside Afghanistan. They have started targeting Afghans in forces and ALP (Afghan Local Police) - the local anti-Taliban movement for thickening the areas where there used to Taliban strongholds (Dale, 2013). The US Commander in Afghanistan, Gen. John Campbell, said in a speech in August 2014 in Kabul that Afghan forces have improved and equipped enough to handle Taliban forces and protect Afghanistan<sup>3</sup>.

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See, "Afghanistan's Way Forward: A Talk With Gen. John Campbell, Decoded", Inskeep, Steve, Nov. 11, 2014, URL: <http://www.npr.org/blogs/parallels/2014/11/11/363093298/top-u-s-general-in-afghanistan-the-afghan-army-can-hold-its-own>.

**Reintegration and Reconciliation:** The US support Afghan efforts to reach a settlement with insurgent leaders. The US-Taliban reportedly started talks in early 2011 till Taliban suspended its talk with the US in March, 2012 reportedly over disagreement on prisoner swaps. The security gains so far through campaign gains would be complemented by broader strategic landscape viz. responsive governance, economics, Pakistan and region and whether and how the war is brought to close (Kaltzman, 2014).

**Responsive governance:** It is required to make ANSF accountable, to provide justice, prevail rule of law, bringing a viable and sustainable economy and to inspire its neighbours to trust. Two fundamental challenges are capacity to make the provinces accountable for the funds from Kabul and corruption. The US encourage that Afghans accept a system that is accountable (Dale, 2013).

**Economics:** The United States has long term commitment in the US. Through the Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework, the US and other partners have committed to provide Afghanistan a sum of \$16 billion in

aid till 2015 and there are mechanisms to support till 2017. In return it is expected to improve its governance mechanism, infrastructure, sustain economic growth, develops capacity-building on its own so as to sustain its economy and provides opportunities for Afghan citizens to participate in the growing economy, etc. (US Department of State, 2014). It is stated that “the US commits to build an economy that can be self-sufficient by 2024 by further developing agriculture, collecting corporate taxes and customs duties, exploiting vast mineral deposits, expanding small industries, and integrating Afghanistan into regional diplomatic and trading and investment structures” (Dale 2013; Kaltzman 2014).

**Pakistan/Regional:** The US wants Pakistan to cooperate against militant groups, such as the Haqqani network, that have a measure of safe haven in Pakistan (Kaltzman, 2014).

Thus the US approach to peacebuilding in Afghanistan based on regional approach by prioritizing its interests in the region is seriously pursued by the incumbent Obama administration. The main argument, mostly from the government official circles, is that US to peacebuilding in Afghanistan is a

combination of military transition, reconciliation and political transition, but not to forget assistance provided for crafting a viable Afghan economy that supports and sustain the gains in the last twelve years or so. The reports do mention the challenges in the post-2014 scenario that are threatening and limitation of the present reconciliation process which is high-level and top-down deal in a short timeline. However, they are overlooked and considered the challenges such as corruption, capacity building and bringing peace, stability, and progress a task responsible for the Afghans themselves.

### **Problems: The Other Side**

Uesugi (2009) states that a fundamental shift from ‘winning mentality to a conciliatory mentality’ which is important for bringing in a qualitative shift in the discourse of peacebuilding in Afghanistan has not yet come on the part of the United States. The US still remains focused firmly on chasing al-Qaeda and insurgency and not on protecting vulnerable Afghan people from lawlessness, criminal conflicts, insecurity and deprivations. Without such a shift there is less scope for a negotiated settlement of conflict which would fundamentally bring political stability in Afghanistan.

Suhrke (2012) argues that “visions of peace and means of violence went hand in hand since the beginning of international engagement in Afghanistan”. The “contradictions to simultaneously waging a war in Afghanistan” to weed out Taliban which had provided safe havens to Osama Bin Laden led the al-Qaeda network and peacebuilding in Afghanistan were recognized too late. Preventing Afghanistan from becoming a safe haven for al-Qaeda was the primary goal for the US to intervene in Afghanistan and peacebuilding was never a top priority for the US (Uesugi, 2009).

Waldman (2008) argues that the existing measures of peacebuilding in Afghanistan are not succeeding. This is not only due to revival of Taliban but the mechanism envisaged by the US-led international community devoid of any strategy to help Afghans deal with disputes in a peaceful and constructive manner. Secondly, the peacebuilding work in Afghanistan has been at political level where there are links to warlordism, corruption, and insurgency, etc. Other initiatives, such as the Action Plan for Peace, Justice and Reconciliation and the Peace Commission lack clarity and are primarily focuses on national level. They partially concern with the people of Afghanistan and the capacity of Afghan

communities, such as community or local tribal elders in rural areas known as jirgas or shuras, to resolve their own disputes and build sustained peace has been largely neglected.

Dale (2013) also states that the current approach to war termination, Doha process, is a high-level, top-down deal between Afghan leadership and the Taliban, against the backdrop of frustrations and infuriation among many Afghans. Third, perceived threats from Taliban is not the only threat which also impact local security, the threats from criminals, international and national security forces are also perceived as posing significant threats. The Report opines for a need to engage in community peacebuilding which is a participatory, bottom-up approach unlike the top-down approach that are employed in the current peacebuilding efforts.

Cordseman (2012) argues that NATO/ISAF and ANSF tactical victories in the campaigns are 'scarcely irrelevant'. The success could be overshadowed by the relative gains by the Taliban and other insurgent networks relative to the Afghan central government. Due to corruption, weakness in ANA (Afghan National Army)

moves by the US for an exit in 2014, etc. the insurgents and Taliban began to re-orient their strategy for larger consolidation. He argues that the present Transition plans seems "vague, largely conceptual, and based more on hope than experienced..." (Cordseman, 2012). It has become a cover for the US exit strategy. The ANA, he argues, is far from ready before 2016 even with increasing outside advisors, funding and partners to assume all the responsibility that is shouldered by the end of 2014 by the US and international partners. The ANP (Afghan National Parliament) is too corrupt and lack elements to provide fair justice and governance to meet transition needs.

**Peacebuilding and Democratization:** The US approach to peacebuilding in Afghanistan seems to have started on the premise that once the Taliban and al-Qaeda are routed out, peace would naturally be accompanied by democracy through elections and a representative government in Kabul. Peacebuilding is never a unilateral process. Rather, it involves the international community to get-together and builds peace in a war-torn nation or region which is to say that peacebuilding is always a multilateral process. "Often peace building goes hand in hand with democratization- the

restructuring of society for opening up political space, including improvements regarding contestation, participation and human rights” (Jarstad&Sisk,2008).

Though these two processes reinforces each other in the sense that a democratized negotiation among conflicting parties would result into an agreement that could lead to a sustainable peace, however, both may not go hand-in-hand as it is supposed to be and create dilemmas in peacebuilding efforts. Thus, before the surge in troop levels, according to Afghanistan’s Interior Ministry estimate (2009), four percent of Afghan territory were controlled by insurgents and thirty percent had their influence or operated by them while the then President Karzai government controlled only thirty percent of Afghanistan’s territory. There were major conflicts and attacks in 2010 that killed maximum US troops in a decade, a year after Karzai was re-elected for his second term. Besides, the 2009 election was marred by violence which suggests many ethnic groups apart of Pashtuns seem to have not accepted the election/ result.

## **Prospects**

The United States has signed the *Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA)*, a crucial

development, with the newly elected President of Afghanistan, Mr. Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai, on September 30, 2014. The motive was to remain engage in Afghanistan for a longer time after the ISAF concludes its mission in Afghanistan after 2014. However, the question remains that would the residual force of around 10,000 by the beginning of 2015 be able to assist, train Afghan forces and equip them to fight against Taliban and other forces. Major international coalition forces have left Afghanistan, the latest being the withdrawal of British troops from the Afghan soil. This is an ambiguous, if not bad, signal for Afghanistan, the US and other regional partners.

***US Assessment of the Post-2014 Security and Stability Outcomes:*** The US’s assessment of the security situation in case if there would not be any foreign troops in Afghanistan suggested that Afghanistan would not be able to sustain itself for long from the onslaught of Taliban, other extremists groups, internal conflicts, warlordism, etc. thus putting Afghan stability in poor light. Even with the Resolute Support Mission (RSM), the long-term stability is debatable. According to Department of Defense (DOD) report in

November 2013, the security and stability situation in Afghanistan is positive. It highlights the ANSF capability to resist insurgents' mobility and their will to spread in many areas. It highlights Taliban's rejection in many areas.

However, the report by National Intelligence Estimate of 2013, projects a less optimistic picture of the security and stability in Afghanistan. The estimate's assessment suggests that despite the RSM, Afghan security is likely to erode significantly by 2017 "as both insurgents and pro-government leaders increase their geographical and political influence" (Londono, 2013). It also portrays pessimistic views about Afghan security capability in terms of deficiencies in air-fighting and emergency medical evacuation. The report also emphasizes the building up of local militias to prevent Taliban gains by various groups in different parts of the country belonging to different ethnicity. This and other similar formation and re-formation moves could spark an intense conflict having ethnic and communal tones that would overturn the political, economic and security gains and lead to an Afghanistan rule by different factions rather than elected leaders as today. Today, Afghan society is

fragmented into various ethnic groups. Taliban still poses threats to civil society, the security establishment and democratic institutions. Afghan economy is way behind self-sustenance status which is the goal. Drug (poppy) trade is still thriving and Afghan government has been unable to prevent diversion of funds for terrorist activities from poppy trade.

Smith (2013) argues that the US is painting an optimistic picture in Afghanistan of level of violence fallen down, ANSF taking the lead to take responsibility of security with confidence, skills and resilience thus paving the way for its exit. This is against the facts put up by the U.N. that reports that civilian casualties rose 16 percent in the first eight months of 2013.

Lockhart (2013) argues that Afghanistan's sustainable security and stability requires beyond security commitments in the form of training, assisting and capacity building among ANSF. Afghanistan has to build its state institutions viable, a self-reliable robust economy that would not require aids and credits from outside, a uniform mechanism for national consensus through a politics of inclusion, and a change in mindset among its regional neighbours to move on beyond the

politics of zero-sum game. Markey (2013) echoes the fear of Pakistan's role in meddling in Afghanistan's affairs including the upcoming election through covert manipulation, assistance, pressure, etc. to support favourable candidates that could of useful help to Pakistan to assert their claims along the Durand line and to prevent Kabul from using as an Indian base on its western front.

One latest important development is that though Afghanistan has managed to achieve full transfer of power from one leader to another through nationalized elections participated by many Afghans defying the Taliban threats, the means with which the decision to end the deadlock with regard to announcing the real winner (President) in the recently held elections could potentially lead to problems in the future (Krishnamurthy, 2014). The voting statistics has been kept secret from public and the fact that the government came out of a negotiation between two rivals of two different political parties does not bode well with the basic concept democracy.

## Conclusion

Afghanistan today is at the cross-road. After twelve years since the Bonn Agreement in 2001, peace and stability is intertwined with

the status of security in Afghanistan. The complexity to address to insecurity among Afghans in the country has not been "analyzed and pursued in the discourse of peacebuilding leaving the families, communities, and tribes- the fundamental units of Afghan society vulnerable and unable to go on better with each other" (Waldman, 2012). More roads, infrastructures, schools, hospitals, transmission lines have been created in the past twelve years. Still, the challenges are there. Things that have gained in those preceding years need to be secured, expanded and multiply. It would need more financial resources, strengthening of institutions and effective security apparatuses to guard them. It would require close cooperation and support from the US.

The US approach to peacebuilding seems to lack the 'conciliatory mentality' that is required to qualitatively change the discourse of peacebuilding. President Obama administration shifted the engagement policy from his predecessor's to a more civilian engagement where there is more civilian-military in the process to peacebuilding to include human security as well. However, the approach of the United States has not yet evolved fundamentally



from the narrower objective of chasing al-Qaeda and other insurgencies and preventing Afghanistan and (Pakistan) from become safe-havens for them. The approach still pays secondary or less emphasis on the matters of building the Afghan society - its educational infrastructure, improving health-care systems, crafting a viable and sustainable policy for a robust Afghan economy that delivers justice and good governance. On politico-social front, the fragmentation of Afghan society is evident. The re-formation of many groups to deter Taliban gains in many regions of Afghanistan under different ethnic umbrella highlights the fear among the Afghans of insecurity and violence after the coalition forces end its mission on the one hand and the declining level of trust that the Afghans bestowed on ANA or Afghan government to ensure Afghanistan remains safe, secure and long-term peace and stability is maintained on the other hand. These challenges still lure the Ashraf Ghani led new government in Kabul. The present government needs to device a substantive yet concrete plan to mitigate this mosaic of challenges and secure what Afghanistan has created so far.

The draw-down and subsequent exit strategy espoused by the administration was an

outcome of the realization of vulnerability of its troops in Afghanistan as violence and 'green on blue' attacks escalates in 2013 and 2012 respectively. Besides, the US has been facing shrinkage of financial resources due to pressures put on its economy following the economic recession and also preoccupation with many other geopolitical priorities in Asia-Pacific. The pulls from these preoccupations necessitated US to plan and exit strategy and, perhaps, save the US from another Vietnam-style failure in Asia. Such understanding dominates the US policy in Afghanistan and shapes its approach to peacebuilding in Afghanistan.

With the US engagement in West Asia (again) to contain the IS (Islamic State) threats, the US has no option to commit itself for a long-term engagement in a region which is no better than Afghanistan. This would divert US energy, resources and, most importantly, its focus. This would cost Afghan peacebuilding process dearly. The US seems to be facing a huge dilemma when two similar challenges are emanated from two different regions at the same time. The end of political dead-lock after the elections in Afghanistan could, perhaps, be an indication of the US's eagerness to settle the Afghan problem and shift its focus on West

Asia. The premise that regime change would bring peace and stability in Afghanistan proved wrong as Afghanistan, despite international effort, remains a liability for the US security interests. The US approach to peacebuilding in Afghanistan is narrow, self-serving, opportunistic and hence flawed on many accounts. It has at the most achieved partial success.

As for the replacement model for such interventions like in Afghanistan, the US simply does not have a clear-cut replacement model. This is because the US approach to interventions in a foreign land seems to harp on short-term military goals without assessing any long-term plans for reconstruction in the post-conflict situation. This has been the cornerstone of US interventions since Vietnam.

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