

Pakistan's Mediating Role in Intra-Afghan Talks

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Abstract: This paper investigates Pakistan's role as a mediator in intra-Afghan peace negotiations aimed at ending Afghanistan's protracted civil war. It examines the motivations, obstacles, and future prospects of Pakistan's participation in the peace process, as well as its implications for regional and international security. The paper contends that Pakistan has a vital interest in facilitating a political settlement that can guarantee stability, security, and cooperation in Afghanistan and the surrounding region. Nevertheless, Pakistan confronts a number of obstacles and dangers, including the mistrust of the Afghan government, the influence of other regional actors, the pressure of the international community, and the possibility of violence from militant groups. The paper concludes that Pakistan's role as a mediator is essential but insufficient to achieve an enduring peace in Afghanistan and that a comprehensive and inclusive approach addressing the fundamental causes and grievances of the conflict is necessary.

Keywords: Pakistan, Afghanistan, Taliban Stance, Doha Peace Talks, Future Prosperity, Way Forward

Research Question

What significant role did Pakistan, a US frontline and non-NATO ally, play in promoting the intra-Afghan peace discussion after the evacuation of the foreign troops?

Research Methodology

It will be a qualitative kind of study. Secondary data is being utilized in this context. Secondary data will be gathered from various research publications, including books, periodicals, newspapers, academic journals, and website-hosted materials.

Introduction

Despite 19 years of American-led conflict in Afghanistan, there has been insufficient impetus to initiate a sincere peace process and restore normalcy. The objectives of the Afghan peace talks have had a considerable impact on the future structure of security, both at the local and global levels. As a moderator and facilitator, Pakistan has a distinct chance to demonstrate its responsibility and unwavering dedication to fostering peace in Afghanistan and along its borders. The United States and China are present in these peace negotiations in an observer capacity. History, geography, and cultural legacy are all similar to both Pakistan and Afghanistan. Pakistan's actions made it feasible for the Taliban and Afghan government to negotiate. The Taliban and Washington have had several unofficial discussions. The summit that attracted the greatest interest was held in Doha, Abu Dhabi. Representatives from the US, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates also participated, besides the top leadership of the Taliban. In order to safeguard its northern and western borders, Pakistan is striving to rebuild its economic, political, and social relations with Afghanistan on the other side of the mirror by earning that country's confidence. The star alignment for upcoming conversations seemed to be increasing as a result of Hina Rabbani's trips and the indigenous people's position.

The peace talks would directly touch Pakistan, which is a good enough reason to conduct a full probe into this lengthy war. It is a chronic problem with a variety of potential outcomes that might benefit or harm Pakistan. The article makes a significant effort to understand these possibilities, and by carefully examining all of the episode's elements, it will tremendously assist Pakistani and Afghan policymakers. According to the

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US Secretary of State, the US will grant Afghanistan membership in the UN if these discussions are successful in the future.

The MX.3 discussions, referred to as the peace process, commenced on July 7, 2015, following a prolonged civil war between the Taliban and the Afghan government. The peace discussions meeting was attended by Hekmat Khalil Karzai, the deputy foreign minister of the Afghan government, and Mullah Abbas, the leader of the Afghan political shura, along with Qatar's official representatives and Aizaz, the foreign secretary of Pakistan. Pakistan has the belief that a tranquil Afghanistan is probable to result in a tranquil Pakistan and, ultimately, a tranquil regional and global scenario. The Pakistani foreign office is fully dedicated to ensuring that the peace process negotiations are solely led and owned by Afghanistan, without any disagreements among stakeholders, external policy engagement, interference, or undue influence.

The significant month of Ramadan, known for its blessings, coincided with the peace negotiations held at Murree, a mountainous region of Pakistan (Jalal, [2021](#)). Based on the reports, the progress is in line with the established plan, and both sides are eager to engage in discussions and collaborate towards achieving their objectives. The Taliban expresses apprehension regarding the specific schedule for the complete withdrawal of foreign military forces, the liberation of their imprisoned Taliban comrades, the revised Afghan constitution, the elimination of Taliban designations from the US sanctions roster, and a captivating proposal to establish a temporary governing body until a new democratically elected government is established. The Afghan government has approved the Taliban's proposals, save for one concern: the interim administration (Yusufzai, [2019](#)). In order to promote regional peace and stability, the United States and China also participate as observers (Riedel, [2016](#)).

The conversations were deteriorating due to rumours of obstruction within Afghanistan. The escalation of tensions as a result of cross-border terrorist activity and the public disclosure of Mullah Omar's death (Collett, [1996](#)). Nevertheless, Pakistan was endeavouring to reestablish authority and convene the parties for negotiations. The primary impediment arose from the demise of Mullah Akhtar Mansoor during the peace negotiations, thus altering the relationship between Pakistan and Afghanistan. This targeted event in Baluchistan, Pakistan was executed on May 21, 2016, using a drone attack. He expressed divergent opinions regarding the future trajectory of the peace process. According to reports from the International NEWS and BBC, this had a beneficial effect on future peace negotiations as Mansoor actively opposed them and did not want the aforementioned agreement to proceed.

Early Periods of the Peace Process

Upon assessing the Afghan Protected Conflict, we discovered that Pakistan's goals of establishing peace and stability in South Asia coincide with those of the global community (Collett, [1996](#)). Prior attempts to alleviate tension, resolve the Afghan civil war, and establish peace in the region were unsuccessful. Pakistan adopted a firm stance to apply pressure on the Taliban to engage in the peace process and achieved a favourable position in terms of regional stability, necessitating a strong diplomatic endeavour. Pakistan appears to have abandoned its biased approach to the peace deal and has assumed a sincere role as a participant, potentially facilitating the advancement of Afghanistan and its neighbouring countries' individual national interests. Pakistan prioritises dialogue and consensus above the internal conflicts within Afghanistan and their own military operations. Furthermore, we observed that Pakistan transitioned from a short-term strategy to a long-term strategy. Pakistan's involvement in the Afghan Peace Process as a mediator greatly benefits the country. Pakistan aims to enhance diplomatic ties with other nations by recommencing conversations with the prominent regional powers. Pakistan's principal foreign policy objective towards Afghanistan is to establish a network of regional friends. This opportunity provides a means to accomplish that objective. Considering Pakistan's status as an Islamic Republic, it is expected that they will provide assistance to their fellow Muslim brethren in Afghanistan, who have endured a prolonged military intervention led by the United States for the past 15 years or more. If Pakistan had supported Afghanistan when the USA unjustly invaded and attacked the country, the USA would have faced bankruptcy and been rendered neutral. Pakistan would have experienced substantial adversity, however this would have been more desirable for its sustained existence and progress.

Yes, of course! Pakistan really wants peace in Afghanistan; we must resume our original course. Peace belongs to the Afghan people. Pakistanis no longer want their neighbors to despise them furthermore (Saad, Anjum, Babar & Khattak, 2022). We shall strive for and fight for a stable Afghanistan. One side of the coin represents Pakistan's active participation in the Quadrilateral Cooperation and Coordination (QCCM) peace negotiations, while the other side represents its analysis of the QCG, which demonstrates Pakistan's position and the implications of the deal for the South Asian region (Jalal, [2021](#)). Pakistan encouraged the two sides to continue talking in December 2019 and to take part in the Moscow and Bhurban discussions. It demonstrates that Pakistan is instrumental in aiding the Afghan negotiations.

Pakistan Needs to Improve its Ties with Its Stakeholders

Pakistan should create a courteous administration in Kabul that is disengaged from its own political and economic turbulence at home in order to enhance relations with the parties concerned. Due to the fact that different participants in the negotiations had close ties to Afghan territory and pursued their own national interests, Pakistan took a variety of positions regarding the peace process. This ultimately weakened Pakistan's position and stoked wider tensions, negatively affecting Pakistan's political and economic participation in the peace process (Siddique, [2011](#)). To ameliorate the situation, Pakistan must keep out of the Doha discussions and the internal issues between the Taliban and the Afghan government. Pakistan should declare its intention to continue collaborating closely with the Afghan economic, political, and cultural administration and recognize the Taliban Administration as the nation's new administration. In light of Pakistan's dedication to ensuring a good outcome from the intra-Afghan talks has improved its standing with the international community.

However, the peace process has created a false feeling of security in the region. The time after the successful completion of the peace process and the ensuing US pullout from Afghanistan is problematic for Pakistan's national security (Threlkeld & Easterly, [2021](#)).

Pakistan's Prospects: According to different reports and analyses Pakistan would benefit from a number of significant opportunities. Positive progress in the negotiations between Afghanistan and the Taliban may have significant advantages for Pakistan. The chance to strengthen its influence in regional politics is obviously presented by the ideological and cultural similarities with Afghanistan and the fact that it is now acting as a mediator in diplomatic relations (Hamid, 2017). Among the advantages that may be attained are the eradication of terrorism, tranquil neighbors, improvement of Pakistan's reputation, restoration of bilateral trust, reduction of Indian influence, and bolstering of national defence and security (Afzal, [2020](#)).

Participants in the Peace Negotiations

Given its close geographical proximity and strong social connections with the Afghan brotherhood, Pakistan has become an indispensable state that cannot be disregarded, whether in the current Afghan Peace Process or the previous War on Terror. After over two decades of prolonged conflict and damages amounting to approximately \$1 trillion USD, the United States abruptly concurred with Pakistan's perspective, which had been consistently reaffirmed throughout. According to Aljazeera's report in [2021](#), it is stated that war is not an effective means to attain peace in Afghanistan. The US war inadvertently bolstered the Taliban within the state. Furthermore, it forced the US administration to shift its goals from eradicating the Taliban to facilitating their participation in peace negotiations.

The recognition of Pakistan's participation in the area was crucial for the feasibility of the peace process. Pakistan has been disproportionately affected by the significant influx of refugees and infiltration of terrorists from Afghanistan due to its lengthy and permeable Western border (Kayani, [2011](#)). Washington asserts that Pakistan played a pivotal role in facilitating the American deal with the Taliban in February 2020 and the subsequent intra-Afghan peace negotiations. Nevertheless, these conversations ceased when President Joe Biden assumed office in January 2021. The absence of a well-defined strategy following the withdrawal of the US troops, along with the alliance of these extremist organisations, poses a grave threat to Pakistan's national security. Pakistan may be compelled to engage in a military confrontation due to its

support for numerous parties from neighbouring countries such as India and Russia, as a result of a fully-fledged civil war erupting in Afghanistan.

Strengthening the Afghan Peace Process

If the Afghan peace effort were to stagnate or fail completely, the relations between Islamabad and Kabul, as well as Washington, would deteriorate. The potential escalation of instability or Taliban achievements in Afghanistan is likely to bolster Pakistani militants who have affiliations with their Afghan counterparts. This could exacerbate Pakistan's vulnerability, especially in its tribal regions adjacent to the Afghan border. Upon the withdrawal of foreign soldiers, it is likely that the Western tolerance towards the nation's perpetual strife and its bickering factions would diminish. If Pakistan aims to ensure domestic security and facilitate a political solution that grants its Taliban supporters a pathway to legitimate power sharing, it must prioritise the element of time in order to avoid the Afghan crisis from posing a threat.

Get Rid of Terrorism: When there was a threat of assaults in Afghanistan in the late 1970s, terrorism was entrenched in Pakistan. As a frontline ally of the United States, Pakistan has actively participated in the fight against terrorism since that tragic occurrence ((Jalal et al., [2021](#)). The brutalism strategy could give Pakistan a bad reputation abroad, but Pakistan would work to exterminate terrorists, normalize the situation, and play a constructive part in the Afghan peace negotiations. According to BBC News, terrorist activity inside Afghanistan poses a severe danger to Pakistan. The Taliban war in the late 1970s, religious extremism, the growth of Madrasah culture, the zeal for unnatural jihad, Indian spies, Kalashnikovs, the influx of Afghan refugees, and drug and smuggler activities are just a few of the significant obstacles that Pakistan has faced as it has become mired in a web of security-related social, political, and economic problems. Pakistan is still working to reduce tension and bring the Afghan and Taliban to the negotiating table despite the difficulties mentioned above.

Peaceful Neighbor: It is common knowledge that a peaceful Afghanistan always favours a peaceful Pakistan (Khan, 2021). Although Pakistan's eastern neighbor India is hostile, both nations spend most of their budgets on defence. Due to this disadvantage, Pakistan cannot afford to separate from another neighbor on its western border. Along with these peace negotiations, the connection between India and Afghanistan would be fatal for the security and stability of Pakistan as well as the whole region (Zafar et al., [2020](#)). If there are any weaknesses or cracks in ties with or policy orientation toward its neighbors, Afghanistan and India, or if there are any concerns about internal or external stability, Pakistan has to solidify its policy in this regard. In the future, if these peace negotiations are successful, terrorism won't have an impact on Pakistan or other areas.

In order to project a favorable image to the world after terrorist attacks and the lack of stability in Afghanistan, Pakistan must participate fully in the peace negotiations in Afghanistan. To achieve this goal, Pakistan has committed all of its resources to reduce tension, adopting a strong stand in favor of peace development across the whole region and bolstering the economy in order to enhance its favorable image there. Pakistan has already received high praise for its proactive efforts in acting as a mediator in these negotiations in the global arena. It is a known truth that Pakistan must take part in any Afghan peace negotiations. Therefore, Pakistan emerged as a peace broker due to these peace discussions.

Rebuild Mutual Trust: Pakistan's genuine aspirations to contribute to stability in Afghanistan are clearly pointed out in the peace process meetings (Abu Dhabi, MUREE, and Qatar). Simply The objective of each group must be reviewed, and confidence must be established amongst them. Pakistan can guarantee that Afghanistan has unrestricted access to collaboration, trust-building, and weighing national interests. This would be advantageous for the two nations as well as the whole area. This might be achieved by taking additional actions to boost one's confidence and ensuring that these steps are followed.

Reduce India's Influence: It's critical to combat and neutralize Indian influence in Afghanistan. According to CNN, the direct threat to Pakistan's security was the driving force behind India's influence in Afghanistan. As a result, India has given Afghanistan economic and development aid to leverage its military influence and

establish a much stronger political presence in Afghanistan (Baloch & Niazi, [2007](#)). Pakistan supports and promotes peace negotiations in order to lessen Indian influence, which is blatantly hostile to Pakistani territory.

Disablements

There are certain obstacles to the Afghan peace process, notwithstanding the abovementioned advantages. It led to an insurgency inside the nation and placed strain not only on the Afghan and Taliban but also on the region. The peace negotiations have been delayed a few times as a result of various obstacles. The following challenges have made stakeholder positions weaker and hampered the peace process:

Internal Issues: The primary impediment to the peace negotiations is Afghanistan's domestic issue. These barriers include corruption, issues with a unifying administration, security issues, and a weak/fragile economy (Ng, [2022](#)). At the regional level, the stakeholders are interacting with the Taliban and the Afghan government, and their internal disputes and pointless challenges have weakened the political system that is supposed to be a bastion of democracy. The two political entities of Ashraf and Mohammad Abdullah formed a peace accord to end any potential conflict between them in order to lessen this danger. Secretary John Kerry of the United States assisted in this effort. Both sides came to an agreement on a constitutional change to address such issues.

Indian Influence: It is true that India is attempting to harm Pakistan's reputation at any cost (Verma, [2016](#)). The key motivation for remaining in Afghanistan and fending Pakistan's interests is improving ties with that country. India's main goal is to attempt to diplomatically and politically distance Pakistan from Afghanistan.

Pakistan and Afghanistan's mutual mistrust: Various non-state actors are now able to move freely and openly to and from both sides due to mistrust between the two parties and border tension between Pakistan and Afghanistan (Khan, [2017](#)). There is animosity between the Afghan government and its people because they think Pakistan trained the insurgents Taliban and interfered in Afghan domestic issues. Due to Pakistan's participation in the Taliban negotiations and the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, there is no room for foreign occupation. Questions regarding Pakistan's objectives have been raised as a result of sanctions, mistreatment, and suicide attacks both inside and beyond the area.

Taliban commanders being killed: The main impediment to the advancement of the peace negotiations in Afghanistan is the ongoing counter-action against Taliban commanders. The killing of Mullah Mansoor broke the peace process, which sent an ominous air across Afghanistan (Aljazeera, [2016](#)). However, once Mullah Mansoor was killed and Haibatullah's leader took over, negotiations started up once again. We are aware that the former leader's policies were hostile to negotiations. Furthermore, the peace effort is hampered by Mullah Omar's passing.

Pakistan's Participation in the Peace Negotiations: As a neighbouring country, Pakistan has an extensive record of meddling in Afghan affairs. Pakistan has made a significant contribution to the Afghan peace efforts. Since the collapse of the Taliban rule in 2001, Pakistan has played a crucial role in the peace discussions between the Afghan government and the Taliban. Additionally, it has facilitated dialogues between the Taliban and the United States. The nation has conducted numerous rounds of negotiations between the two parties. Pakistan's involvement in the peace negotiations for Afghanistan can be attributed to multiple factors. Pakistan and Afghanistan have a lengthy and permeable border, and the instability in Afghanistan directly affects Pakistan's security position (Rasul, [2021](#)). Furthermore, Pakistan has established connections with the Taliban and manipulated them as a puppet to acquire influence in Afghanistan. Furthermore, Pakistan seeks to counterbalance India's burgeoning influence in Afghanistan, perceiving it as a threat to its own security (Pips, [2022](#)). Pakistan has played a significant role in facilitating the inclusion of the Taliban in the negotiation process. Pakistan's mediation facilitated the inaugural round of peace discussions between the Taliban and the Afghan government at Murree in 2015. Subsequently, upon the revelation of Taliban

leader Mullah Omar's demise, the negotiations were terminated. Nevertheless, Pakistan continued to advocate for peace talks and facilitated direct negotiations between the Taliban and the US in Doha, Qatar, in 2018.

Indicators of Convergence: The absence of a comprehensive policy, the presence of Afghan's militants and tribal groups, the conflict between Sunni and Shia Muslims, the Taliban and the Afghan armed forces, suicide bombings, political instability, and the withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan without a timetable or proper management are all impeding the Doha peace process. India's financing of terrorism to undermine Pakistani security, the International Economic Body's economic freeze, and Afghanistan's poor education system all harm the Peace Talks. These causes harm the area, not just one nation.

Context Analysis

Pakistan's peace negotiations participation has been criticized. India claims Pakistan supports the Taliban and uses them to influence Afghanistan. The Afghan government has also accused Pakistan of harboring the Taliban. The claim has strained Pakistan's ties with Afghanistan and peace process commitment. Despite all the criticism Pakistan supports the Afghan peace process. The nation has facilitated Taliban-Afghan government negotiations and promoted peace. Pakistan has also urged for an inclusive administration in Afghanistan that respects Afghan aspirations. Pakistan is crucial to Afghan peace discussions and strives to interact with Afghan and neighboring nations. Pakistan's peace initiatives are unmissable. Pakistan's struggle against terrorism and for international peace bodes well for Afghan peace negotiations. The world community applauds Pakistan's peace talks participation. Pakistan's assistance for the peace process and facilitation of discussions have been praised by the US. The Afghan government has also appreciated Pakistan's peace negotiations involvement.

Conclusion

Pakistan has been a key player in the Afghan conflict for decades, supporting different factions and pursuing its own interests. Pakistan's role has been controversial and often criticized by other countries and the Afghan government. Despite this, Pakistan continues to bring all the stakeholders of the Afghan conflict to table talks and make a peaceful outcome. In this regard, Pakistan played a vital mediating role and participated in many negotiations, which the international community praised besides India. Pakistan should focus on minimising the Indian influence in Afghanistan and make its western border a strategic depth for its national interest. Pakistan's role in the future stability of Afghanistan remains uncertain and depends on its relations with the Taliban, the regional powers and the international community.

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