

The Exclusion of the Taliban from Afghanistan's State-Building and Its Human Security Vulnerabilities

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Abstract

This paper discusses the impact of the Taliban's exclusion from both Bonn Conferences (2001 & 2011) on Afghanistan's state-building process and prolonged humanitarian disaster consequences. It outlines the current challenges facing the democratic institutions of Afghanistan due to the non-recognition and exclusionist policies adopted by the United States and its partner forces. It reviews the background to these challenges focusing on an interpretive framework and ripeness theoretical tool for conflict analysis to examine and analyze the impact of marginalization of Taliban on them. It also focuses on the overall political dynamics of protracted Afghan war. By developing an understanding the dynamics of the issue, it endeavors to find an elucidation for this prolonged exclusion of the Taliban and long lasting human massacres along with its domestic and fast-paced adverse impact on regional and global polity. Lastly, this study endorses the need of negotiation and peace talks among confronting parties in order to offset the ongoing human atrocities in Afghanistan.

Keywords: Afghanistan, Bonn, Conferences, Exclusion, Marginalization, Taliban, United States,

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Introduction

The people of Afghanistan have suffered for last quarter of century due to civil war and external military interventions. The devastation by the conflicts has resulted in the collapse of government including physical, economic, and administrative infrastructure across the country. After the fall of the Taliban in 2001, a conference held in Bonn paved the way for an accord for creation of a post-Taliban administration in Afghanistan. The Bonn Agreement, that followed, aimed, as it stated, to 'end the tragic conflict in Afghanistan and promote national reconciliation, lasting peace, stability and respect for human rights in the country'. Ironically, two major conferences at Bonn (2001 and 2011), along with the other seven international conferences, on Afghanistan could not bring a lasting peace and stability in the country.

Evidently, Afghanistan is still far from reaching the commitments and benchmarks set in Bonn Accord (2001) fifteen years ago. The current development of enduring reconstruction and state-building in Afghanistan has been seriously questioned by academics, policy-makers, and experts on Afghanistan. Therefore, this paper purports to focus, through the lens of an interpretive framework for conflict analysis, on examining and explaining the real perspective and dynamics of the conflict. In addition, the paper under a qualitative research code it draws a leaf from the ripeness theory as a yard stick and cautions that how exclusion of a major stakeholder of the Afghan conflict affect the peace process and state-building in Afghanistan. This paper therefore set out two comprehensive hypotheses that will be tested, hypothesis one; 'the United States and its coalition forces misperceived the imperatives of stability in Afghanistan' and hypothesis two; 'exclusion of the Taliban from the Bonn Conference sowed the first seeds of long lasting insurgency and re-emergence of the Taliban'.

In fact, this paper as an attempt to explore the effects of Taliban's exclusion from the negotiations and peace process and to assess the impact/challenges of their exclusion to the current state-building in Afghanistan. In addition, this paper pays attention to the contexts, characteristics, and complexities of these peace processes and their possible consequences in both scenarios of inclusion and exclusion of the Taliban. Specifically, the purpose of this current study is to address; how does the exclusion of Taliban affect Afghanistan's state-building and human security? In addition, it identifies the opportunities and obstacles (difficulties) generated by Afghanistan's transition for peace, stability and nation building after decades of state failure.

I. Background of The Study

1. History and Demography of Afghanistan at a Glance

Historically, Afghanistan has proven to be the 'graveyard of empires', where many empires flourished and got demolished on its land. Since the earlier times, the country has been under the formidable influence of Persians, Arabs, Turks, and Mongols from time to time. Afghanistan also became a battleground between Britain and Russia in the 19th century. On the land of Afghanistan three Anglo-Afghan wars, in 1839 to 1842, 1878 to 1880, and 1919 did not end conclusively (Runion, 2007). However, this war against Britain was not the last war for the Afghan people, and in early 1980, the

Soviet Union occupied Afghanistan. Later, the Soviet army forced had to leave (or left) Afghanistan on February 15, 1989. Subsequently, the people paid a huge cost to fight against the Soviet, but unfortunately, war never ended until December 2001 (Rashid, 2002).

Being a landlocked country, its total land is 652,230 square kilometer (km). It shares borders with China 76 km, Iran 936 km, Pakistan 2,430 km, Tajikistan 1,206 km, Turkmenistan 744 km, Uzbekistan 137 km. Ethnically, it has a diverse demography and the largest ethnic group in Afghanistan is the Pashtun (including Kuchis), comprising 42% of Afghans from the estimated population 32.5 million. The Tajiks are the second largest ethnic group, at 27% of the population, followed by the Hazaras 9%, Uzbeks 9%, Aimaq 4%, Turkmen 3%, Baluch 2%, and other groups that make up 4% (CIA-The World Factbook, 2016).

2. The Collapse of the Taliban Regime

The Taliban are ethnically Pashtuns and they belong to half the population of Afghanistan. By 1999, they controlled most of Afghanistan, apart from some areas in the north without having any experience to run government institutions. They lost international support as it imposed self-interpreted strict Islamic customs in areas it controlled and employed harsh punishments, including executions, bans on television, Western music, and dancing. It prohibited women from attending school or working outside the home, except in health care, and it publicly executed some women for adultery (Katzman, 2015, p. 5). This policy of violence and their close ties with Al Qaeda, Taliban gained limited acceptance and recognition at the international level (Gilles, 2005). However, the Taliban's hosting of Al Qaeda's leadership gradually became the U.S. overriding agenda item with the Taliban and caused Taliban to step down forcefully by the U.S. after the September 11 terrorist attacks. When the coalition forces over threw the Taliban in December 2001, it continued to fight the international presence and, subsequently, the new regime (Shultz & Dew, 2006).

3. The Post-Taliban Developments

Since the defeat of the Taliban was imminent, a conference was organized in Bonn on 5 December 2001. The UN sponsored Bonn Conference brought together the "winner" of the war to discuss how the new Afghanistan should be governed without the "losers" Taliban. It was the beginning of a long and complex international military engagement in Afghanistan, which has evolved over time. Since then, the Taliban have been fighting with the aim of overthrowing the government and forcing the international presence out of Afghanistan (Sinno, 2008, p. 255).

According to the Figure 1 by (Brown Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs, 2015) around 23,000 civilians have been killed in direct violence by all parties in Afghanistan. Over 68,000 people have died in Afghanistan due to direct war violence, including armed forces on all sides of the conflicts, contractors, civilians, journalists, and humanitarian workers. Whereas, hundreds and thousands of soldiers have been wounded and traumatized seriously. It is likely that many times more than 68,000 people have died indirectly in this war, due to malnutrition, widespread diseases, and environmental degradation. Since 2001, more than 5.7 million former refugees have returned to Afghanistan, but 2.2 million others remained refugees in

2013. In January 2013, the UN estimated that 547,550 were internally displaced persons (IDPs), a 25% increase over the 447,547 IDPs estimated for January 2012 (UNHCR, 2015).

Figure 1: Direct war deaths in Afghanistan October 2001- April 2014

Personnel	Deaths
U.S. Military	2,313
U.S. Contractors	3,248
Allied Military and Police	13,0176
Other Allied Troops	1,114
Civilians	21,000 - 23,000
Opposition Forces	15,000 - 25,000
Journalists and Media Workers	28
Humanitarian/NGO workers	298
TOTAL (rounded to nearest 1,000)	56,000 - 68,000

II. Major Contemporary Challenges

1. Rampant Insecurity

Despite strong presence of the U.S. and other North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) forces for more than a decade and half, Afghanistan remains unstable and insecure, with the government failing to address even basic security issues. The Taliban and its supporters have been attacking time to time, for instance during the 2014 presidential elections, the Taliban conducted a total of 761 attacks during the elections, though only about 174 were effective (McNally & Bucala, 2015). The emergence of new international jihadi groups, such as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), may also be trying to establish themselves in Afghanistan. Since 2015, insecurity has significantly increased throughout the country, civilian deaths have shot up, and the Afghan security forces are taking large and potentially unsustainable casualties (Felbab-Brown, 2015).

Phyllis Bennis argued “the U.S. was not able to impose peace when it had 100,000 troops on the ground at one time in Afghanistan with another 45,000 NATO troops. Now when it has 11,000 troops and about 2,000 international troops, it certainly is not going to be able to militarily impose anything remotely resembling peace (RT-News, 2014). In fact, the U.S. and many NATO members have already pulled out a substantial number of their troops and they have switched their security responsibility in such a critical situation to poorly trained and ill-equipped Afghan forces. Security experts had previously warned that without the U.S. and NATO military presence, current democratic setup would soon collapse.

2. Endemic Corruption

A deep-rooted corruption in the Afghan society is also one of the major challenges for effective state-building in Afghanistan. Corrupt Afghan government institutions have failed to implement important reforms that are needed to promote human and socioeconomic development in the country. Corruption Perception Index for country’s ranking, Afghanistan is 166th out of 168 countries list in 2015 (i.e. third worst in the world). Nixon quotes a former *Wolesi Jirga* member who said that “you hardly find

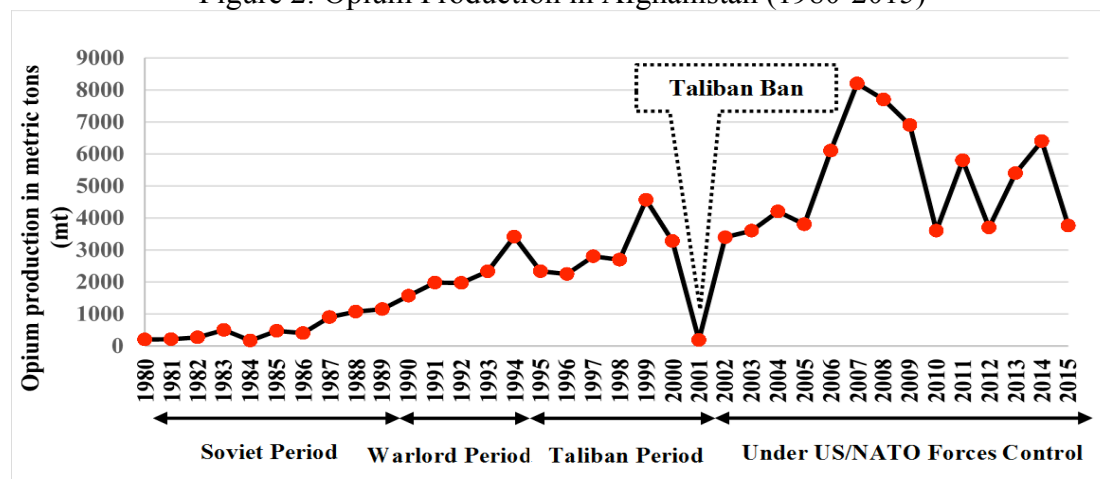
honest compatriots, if a district governor is corrupt, the whole district officials are corrupt. If the minister is corrupt, all the staff will be corrupt (Nixon, 2011).

In reality, public positions and services are seen by many as being for sale; the police, justice system, municipalities, and customs department are widely seen as the most corrupt institutions. Extortion and other crimes by police and drug-related corruption are major issues (The World Bank, 2009). The United Nation Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)'s 2012 report articulates, "half of Afghan citizens paid a bribe while requesting a public service and the total cost of bribes paid to public officials amounted to US\$ 3.9 billion. This corresponds to an increase of 40% in real terms between 2009 and 2012" (UNODC, 2012, pp. 5-6).

3. Illicit Narcotics (Opium Poppy Cultivation)

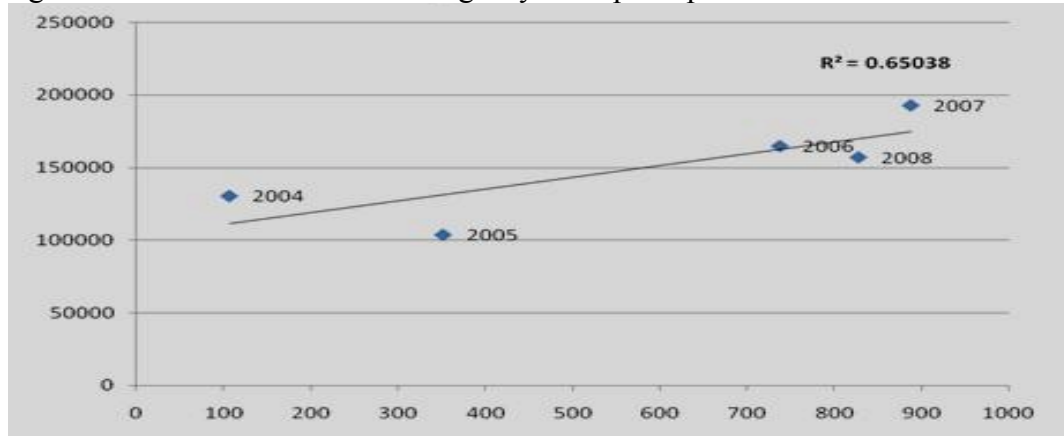
In the dire security situation, the only sector flourishes is the narco-economy. Afghanistan is the world's largest producer of narcotics with the share of 90% of the whole opium production of the world (UNODC, 2009). In 1986, opium production was 875 metric tons (mt), which increased to 3,416mt in 1994 during the warlord period. By the end of 1999, its production increased to 4,500mt when Taliban had occupied 90% of Afghanistan (UNODC, 2009, p. 7). In July 2000, the Taliban leader Mullah Omar declared that poppy cultivation was un-Islamic, resulting in one of the world's most successful counternarcotic campaigns ever in the history. The figure 2 (data calculated from UNODC's opium surveys, 2009 and 2015) gives a stark presentation of the Taliban's stringent measures of ban when the production fell drastically from the previous year 3,278mt, bringing down the total to 185mt.

Figure 2: Opium Production in Afghanistan (1980-2015)



However, under the U.S. and NATO forces control, opium poppy cultivation and production have been drastically increased. Since 2001, the U.S., the United Kingdom (U.K.), and Afghanistan have been struggling to eradicate poppy cultivation with their separately abortive counternarcotic strategies. In fact, Afghan narco-economy being a lucrative source fueling endemic corruption and long lasting insurgency and terrorist networks in the country. The figure 3 authored by (Stancombe, 2009) illustrates the relationship on the aggregate data from entire Afghanistan and the correlation coefficient is 0.65. This suggests a moderately high correlation of insurgents to continue to operate in those areas.

Figure 3: Correlation between insurgency and opium production from 2004 to 2008.



4. Weak Governance

Weak governance, as defined by Rotberg, is the inability of state institutions to deliver proper “political and public goods” to the people. Afghanistan’s weak institutional capacity, ineffective and bad governance with extensive corruption contributes to the political insecurity, lawlessness, insurgency, and so forth (Rotberg, 2007, p. 2). Afghan Ambassador to India Shaida M. Abdali states that “the powerful individuals, mostly outside of the government apparatus, act independently and undermine government power and influence, particularly; insurgents use drug production both to raise funding for war and violent activities and to weaken governance, further delegitimizing the government” (Dehli Policy Group, 2015, pp. 1-10).

Evidently, a vicious cycle by (The World Bank, 2004) presented below in the figure 4 illustrates that weak governance is unable to provide effective security, while poor security creates favorable environment for illicit opium cultivation and narco-trade. Consequently, illicit drug trade financially fuels insurgents, militia, and corrupts officials (IMCO) in Afghan government. As vice versa, IMCO undermines national security and destabilizes Afghan government institutions building.

Figure 4: A vicious cycle of insecurity, corruption, narcotics, and weak governance.



Afghanistan has suffered as a broken, futile, and externally dependent state facing a well-organized insurgency, an uncontrolled and politically pervasive opium trade, and continued penetration by regional criminal networks (Martin, 2011).

III. A Theoretical Prospect for Negotiations with the Taliban

This article challenges some of the underlying assumptions for stability and the notion of political reconstruction that the U.S. and the Afghan government have implemented so far are being largely responsible for the gloomy state of affairs in that country. The paper uses the *ripeness theory* expounded by Zartman (2008), centers on the concept of a 'mutually hurting stalemate' as a yardstick to and cautions that how exclusion of a major stakeholder of the Afghan conflict affect the peace process and state-building in Afghanistan.

The proponents of ripeness notion believe that when warring parties are locked into a conflict that is mutually painful and both believe that they cannot escalate to victory, the prospects for a negotiated outcome improve significantly. To assess whether or not a 'mutually hurting stalemate' exists in Afghanistan it is important to consider the conflict conditions and then the parties' perception of those conditions (Zartman, 1995). In this scenario, the two principal parties to the conflict, the U.S. led coalition and the Taliban are in stalemate. Since 2005, Taliban insurgents have made steady gains; however, they are unlikely to achieve any major strategic gains, such as seizing control of major urban centers. In contrast, international coalition and Afghan forces have not been able to contain the insurgents' territorial expansion.

International military casualties have escalated; so far more than 3,500 NATO troops, including at least 2,381 Americans have been killed; and just in two years there were 711 coalition deaths in 2010, up by 36% on the same period for 2009 (ICCC, 2016). And the war is increasingly costly, it is costing nearly US\$100 billion per year, roughly seven times more than Afghanistan's annual gross national product (GNP) of US\$14 billion (Ayman, 2013). Nasuti argues that 2,000 Taliban are being killed each year and that the Pentagon spends US\$100 billion per year on the war. In other words, US\$50 million is being spent to kill each Taliban soldier. Nonetheless, a rough estimate of the Taliban field strength is 35,000 troops; if that were the case then killing all the Taliban would cost US\$1.7 Trillion (Nasuti, 2015). Both sides could be said to be 'mutually hurting', as the theory requires.

IV. The Taliban's Inclusion-Exclusion Through the Lens of Critical Analysis

The study uses a comprehensive qualitative research methodology of analysis to explain through 'an interpretive framework' as a lens to examine the flawed strategy of exclusion of the Taliban and magnify previously mentioned causes and conditions that led to the Taliban's exclusion and Afghanistan's instability. In addition, in the light of facts and figures and theoretical discussion of the pervious sections the study testes the hypotheses in order to formulate a better understanding of the causes of exclusion of Taliban from the Bonn conferences. Additionally, the article also elaborates the prospects of the inclusion of the Taliban in state-building of Afghanistan and gives a thoughtful analysis of the envisioned consequences.

According to the interpretive framework of five-level model analysis, the U.S. and

NATO forces represent its global level, these actors have direct involvement in the conflict. The second level of the framework magnifies and proves the role of regional actors, in particular Pakistan and China's role that have a vital impact due to their security concerns. Thus, the study has mainly focused on the role of both regional countries rather focusing on other regional actors due to sensitivity and their direct relation to the issue in the subsequent sections. The third level indicates the state's socio-political and economic failure as the previous sections of the study have proved them. Socially, Afghanistan is an extremely fragile society, and ethnically imbalanced one. Economically, weak and it has an illicit narcotics-based economy, deep-seated poverty. Politically, Afghanistan has enormously weak political institutions, partisan government, and high-level corruption. The fourth level has been proving throughout the study that conflicting parties have incompatible goals; therefore, they are in conflict. The final level of the analyses, which is the core of this study that defines non-recognition and exclusionist policies against the Taliban by the U.S. and coalition forces. In addition, this level tests two hypotheses based on previous sections' findings and theoretical discussion.

1. The Impact of the Erroneous Exclusion

Many scholars have heavily criticized the flawed exclusionist strategy and called it historical blunders of the U.S. and coalition forces. In order to find the answer to the core issue, this study tests the first hypothesis through factual and theoretical considerations.

Hypothesis 1: *'The United States and its coalition forces misperceived the imperatives of stability in Afghanistan'.*

Previously discussed theoretical deliberations and extensive facts findings provide an adequate justification to test the first hypothesis that the U.S. and its coalition partners misperceived the unconquerable history and socio-political and ethnic complexities in Afghanistan. Afghanistan being a graveyard of empires has never been conquered even by the most powerful of empires and it is ungovernable by outsiders due to its complex nature of socio-ethnic dynamics.

Many scholars and researchers have criticized the U.S. short-sightedness and short-term faulty initiative to fix the issue. For instance, the U.S. assigned key positions to former warlords regardless of their atrocious and ferocious past. At least four appointed Ministers were militia leaders and in 32 provinces, 22 provincial governors were militia commanders; others were bribed directly in order to ensure short-term stability in their regions (Giustozzi, 2004). Furthermore, the U.S. and its allies' miscalculation undermined seriously the legitimacy and state building in Afghanistan in two ways. First, disenfranchised but still powerful, the Taliban and Hizb-I Islami became spoilers, driven to a lasting insurgency. Thus, the feelings of disenfranchisement arose particularly in the Pashtun South. Second, the co-option of the warlords into the government undermined the legitimacy of the government in the eyes of opposing factions and the wider population" (Fukuyama, 2006). Evidently, the U.S. forceful escalation strategy has proved counterproductive (Ayman, 2013).

In the light of above facts findings, the second hypothesis of this study characterizes the exclusion of Taliban from the Bonn conferences and state-building caused serious

obstacles and had a negative impact on the peace process. The second hypothesis of study is;

Hypothesis 2: *‘Exclusion of the Taliban from the Bonn Conference sowed the first seeds of long lasting insurgency and re-emergence of the Taliban’.*

A great number of conflict resolutions academia and peacebuilding analysts associate exclusion of the Taliban with the current insurgency and insecurity in Afghanistan. According to Afghan officials, the conflict will not be resolved until the Afghan Government along with the U.S. and NATO stop making contact with the Taliban’s leadership (Rubin, 2010). Aimal Faizi, the spokesperson for Karzai, told Reuters, “I can confirm that the Taliban are willing more than ever to join the peace process, but the organizers (U.S.) was uncomfortable with them (Rob, 2014).

Julian Borger also criticized the Americans’ attitude and articulated that the 2001 Bonn agreement is as the root cause of the current Afghanistan conflict (Borger, 2011). The U.S. made a prejudgment about the motives of the opponents-the Taliban and Sunni insurgents; thus, it shut down the possibility of reconciliation in early stages of peacebuilding, and contributed hugely to the insurgencies in the later stages (Higashi, 2015, p. 26). Jonathan Powell a well-known British mediator argues that, the problem for the West is that we left engaging with the Taliban terribly late, in retrospect, it was a mistake to have excluded them from original Bonn talks on the future of country in 2001-2011 (Powell, 2014).

Based on the academic literature and extensive analyses of facts, this study proves both hypotheses positive and suggests that the conflicting parties have possible loses; therefore, the only possible way is to negotiate and find a political solution to the issue. In other words, when a “mutually hurting stalemate” occurs that urge parties to comprehend that they cannot escape from the deadlock by escalating the conflict (Zartman, 1989). Thus, this study further discusses some important developments and indicates significant potential of successful negotiations in the following sections.

2. Ripeness for an Inclusion and Negotiated Political Settlement

The Taliban are vividly part of the Afghan socio-political landscape. Without the Taliban, Afghanistan’s future is uncertain. Indeed, communication is the most important element in settling matters: “without a process of reconciliation, conflicts considered to have been resolved can reappear and jolt the social climate in the national and international arena” (Nets-Zehngut, 2007). In fact, the U.S.-Taliban negotiations formally started in January 2013, in Doha, Qatar, but the Taliban left the negotiating in March, Americans failed to fulfill the conditions for peace negotiations to proceed.

A recent development by the support of Pakistan in July 2015, Afghan government officials and the Taliban leaders met in Murree-Pakistan. Pakistan, being universally recognized as the most crucial external actor has been supporting the Afghan Peace Jirga initiative to bring together influential leaders from both sides and providing a good opportunity to overcome the current stalemate in peace negotiation with the Taliban (Brahimi & Pickering, 2001).

China being a supporter of the peace talk provided an opportunity of meeting between Afghanistan's peace envoy and an unofficial Taliban delegation in the western Chinese city of Urumqi. Since, China has serious concern over Islamic movement and frequent political upheaval in Chinese Muslim populous areas; they believe that anti-China Islamic movement gets physical and financial support from the regional insurgency (Matveeva & Giustozzi, 2008).

Other regional actors (i.e. Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Iran) who are neighbors of Afghanistan have close historical, cultural and traditional links are in general supportive of the political process (Masadykov, Giustozzi, & Page, 2010). Some European countries are keen supporters of reconciliation, as demonstrated by the funding they have given to the Strengthening the Peace Program (PTS) (Semple, 2010). Moreover, an increasing number of the western countries are becoming interested in a political process. The perception is that they are waiting only for a clear statement and policy from the Obama administration in the U.S., and for the U.S. to take the lead (Fields & Ahmed, 2011).

V. Conclusion

Afghanistan has suffered profoundly enough from the clandestine designs of external powers. Certainly, the reality is that the war in Afghanistan is unwinnable. Yet the U.S. still believe that massacre of Taliban fighters' keeps up military pressure that might eventually lead their desired outcome. As vice versa, the Taliban also see military pressure as sound strategy. However, both sides are probably mistaken. The escalated military fight is likely to be as unwinnable as the war. Accordingly, this study has figured out the simplistic notion that a single factor such as non-recognition and exclusion of the Taliban is the primary reason for the current dismal situation of Afghanistan.

The Taliban has a major stake in Afghanistan, it would be extremely unwise to disregard the Taliban and exclude them from the ambit of the Afghanistan. In such a scenario, it is conceivable that the Taliban may not only discard any decision but also significantly intensify their violent activities against Afghan government. While, engaging Pakistan in negotiation process is of paramount importance, given its strategic interests in Afghanistan, it is reckless to omit the Taliban from it. Denial of the fact that Taliban were, they are and will remain not only a potent but dominant force in Afghan politics. Needless to say, that 'No' genuine 'Reconciliation' is possible without real (not engineered/coerced) cooperation and participation of Taliban / Pashtuns (Johnson, 2006).

This paper concludes that peace and stability in Afghanistan can only be achieved through negotiations and political settlement. Many scholars and political analysts consider the inclusion of the Taliban as a viable quick path to a settlement. Let this paper end with a local saying that when there is a stain on clothes, it should be removed by washing rather than cutting the stained area, otherwise there would be a permanent hole on the clothes and this what happened to Afghanistan in the case of Taliban exclusion.

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