

Indo-Pacific Focus

Nian Peng
Khalid Rahman *Editors*


The Uncertain Future of Afghanistan

Terrorism, Reconstruction,
and Great-Power Rivalry

 Springer

Indo-Pacific Focus

Series Editors

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Chapter 1

Introduction



Nian Peng  and Khalid Rahman

Abstract This edited book aims to analyze the domestic politics and foreign relations of the country after the Taliban regained power in August 2021. It touched upon the key issues affecting the Taliban regime, such as peace talks, terrorism threats, BRI cooperation, and the policies of the great powers and neighboring countries toward the new regime in Afghanistan. It makes a significant contribution by incorporating various viewpoints from government officials, university scholars, and think tank experts from China, Japan, and South Asian states.

Keywords Afghanistan · Taliban · Terrorism · China · US

As a significant junction between South Asia and Central Asia, Afghanistan has suffered far more severely—from external invasion to civil war—than any other country in recent decades. Even now, when the powerful Taliban have returned to power in Afghanistan by overthrowing the US-backed ‘democratic’ government in September 2021, these symptoms are unlikely to disappear. Instead, foreign intervention, if not foreign occupation, the revival of terrorism, and the factions within the Taliban have raised serious concerns over the uncertain future of Afghanistan.

Externally, a new round of power rivalry between China, the United States (US), and India in strategically important Afghanistan intensified in the days after the US exited the country. On the one hand, the US has imposed economic sanctions and diplomatic isolation on the Taliban regime in Kabul; on the other hand, it has engaged with the Afghan Taliban to avoid pushing the latter to swing to China. India has also tried to revive its relations with the Taliban regime to avoid encirclement by the China-Pakistan alliance via Afghanistan, although it lost much of its influence in

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Afghanistan after the US-backed government collapsed. China has not only initiated official contacts with the Taliban regime¹ but also agreed to extend the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) to Afghanistan to promote Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) cooperation among the three countries. In September 2023, China became the first country to formally name a new ambassador to Afghanistan after the Taliban takeover, which was perceived as a clear sign that China had virtually recognized and legitimized the new Taliban leadership in Afghanistan. It is unclear whether other great powers and neighboring countries will follow China's approach or not, and how the US and India will compete with China in Afghanistan in the future.

Internally, a revival of radical terrorism and civil protests during the initial days of the Taliban's second tenure challenged the new regime in Kabul. Even though the Afghan Taliban has fought against terrorists such as the Islamic State of Khorasan (ISIS-K), the number of terrorist groups appears to have increased since the Afghan Taliban seized power in Afghanistan. Not only the US but also neighboring countries have pressured Taliban forces to eliminate terrorists. Meanwhile, the Taliban's efforts to attract foreign investment have also been undermined by the endless terrorism phenomenon in Afghanistan. Hence, revived terrorism is one of the main threats to the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. In addition, the reconstruction process has stagnated due to the persistent economic downturn in Afghanistan. To date, the Taliban government has not made a national plan for economic development, which has prevented the weak economy from reviving. Given the ongoing internal and external challenges, it is uncertain whether the Taliban regime can consolidate its power and stabilize the country in the near future.

Given the high uncertainty of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, this book, while discussing the overall context, aims to analyze the domestic politics and perspectives on the foreign relations of the country after the Taliban regained power in August 2021. It touches upon the key issues affecting the Taliban regime, such as peace talks, terrorism threats, BRI cooperation, and the policies of the great powers and neighboring countries toward Afghanistan. Although it is an early observation of the current regime in Afghanistan, it would be helpful for readers to deepen their understanding of the Taliban and Afghanistan. This study also makes a significant contribution by incorporating various viewpoints of scholars from different backgrounds, including government officials, university scholars, and think tank experts from China, Japan, and South Asian states. The broad approach and extensive coverage of all relevant countries make this book a valuable resource for more than just a specific academic community. It appeals to a diverse readership, including academics, policymakers, journalists, and general readers.

The main content of the book is divided into ten chapters. In this chapter, the 'Introduction,' *Nian Peng* and *Khalid Rahman* briefly introduce the aims and contents of the book, highlighting the background of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan in August 2021 and posing several key questions that have affected and will continue to

¹ For instance, Chinese foreign minister Wang Yi met with the Taliban representatives in Beijing in late July 2021.

affect the Afghan Taliban. They have tried to analyze these issues by incorporating insightful views from scholars and experts in China, Japan, and South Asian nations.

In Chap. 2, 'Afghan Peace Negotiations: Over the years,' *M Azam* identifies the factors hindering the peace process. These mainly include an unbridgeable ideological divide, the presence of foreign forces, the absence of trust, and the complexity arising from many actors and spoilers.

According to *Azam*, the Taliban's 'Islamic beliefs' and their views about Western democracy were fundamentally at odds, making it impossible to reconcile differences. The lack of trust among key national and international stakeholders exacerbated the challenges faced by peace negotiators. The situation grew even more intricate because of the involvement of numerous local and international actors. Spoilers who remained active participants throughout the conflict dashed any remaining hope for peace. The Taliban anticipated a military victory against the Kabul government after the withdrawal of foreign military forces. Peace negotiators confronted a formidable task, as Americans were reluctant to completely withdraw their forces from Afghanistan, posing a challenge to the Taliban and other anti-regime forces.

In Chap. 3, the 'Taliban Retaking of Afghanistan: The Challenges Ahead,' *Mansoor Ahmad Khan and Muhammad Tahir Khan*, articulate the key challenges faced by the Taliban regime in the war-torn country. The writers review the serious threats associated with the presence of a vast network of global and regional terrorist groups in Afghanistan for regional peace and security and the concerns of neighboring countries about the Afghan Interim Government's cooperation in eliminating these groups, Afghanistan's relations with major powers and neighboring countries, the nonrecognition of the Afghan regime, and the capacity constraints on Afghan state institutions. The authors posit that the Taliban regime has focused on creating conducive conditions for economic growth, trade, transit, and infrastructure to promote regional economic integration and connectivity, which can help Afghanistan achieve lasting stability.

China has attempted to keep politico-security issues separate from the economic cooperation agenda to create a conducive environment for addressing these challenges. However, the international community's concerns about political inclusivity and women/girls' rights issues will not disappear simply because of the Taliban's intransigence. A comprehensive approach is needed to address these complex challenges effectively. The starting point for a region-based solution should be through the forums of neighboring countries, which should focus on promoting economic cooperation and regional connectivity. China can act as a catalyst to operationalize these neighboring/regional economic interaction frameworks, stimulate bilateral interactions, and prepare the groundwork for mega-investments in connectivity projects under the BRI, such as the CPEC and other global and regional initiatives.

The global effort to bring an end to the US-Afghan War was enormous, involving all major powers, neighboring Afghan states, and combat and noncombat actors. Despite extensive efforts by both Afghans and the international community, peace negotiations proved unsuccessful, leading to the war's prolongation until the US withdrawal and the Afghan Taliban's overthrow of the Kabul regime in August 2021.

In Chap. 4, 'Afghanistan under the Taliban Rule: Security Threats and Regional Response,' *Yu Hong Fu* takes over from where *Azam* left off. She discusses the concerns of the international community regarding the spillover effects of nontraditional security threats and complex regional geopolitics in Central and South Asia. In her view, Afghanistan's strategic location and protracted conflicts have led to linkage effects in surrounding areas. The implications of the Afghan Taliban's return to power in 2021 extend beyond regional boundaries, drawing attention to terrorism and geopolitics at both the regional and international levels. The implications of their return on transnational terrorism, the reactions of foreign countries, and the international community's policies are of particular interest. The menace of terrorism in Afghanistan and its ramifications for the surrounding region are of great concern to regional nations and the international community at large. While there are concerns about extremist militants from South Asia traveling to Afghanistan, there have been limited reports of such movements outside Pakistan. The return of the Afghan Taliban has had a limited impact on other areas and is mainly confined to online extremist narratives. However, the security situation in Pakistan has become more complex, with domestic terrorist attacks on the rise since the Afghan Taliban took over. The impact of their return on extremist armed activities in South Asia may be gradual, indirect, and long-term, with regional counterterrorism capabilities, policies, and external environmental changes playing a significant role.

According to *Fu*, Afghanistan's neighboring countries generally have a positive outlook on the new Afghan Taliban regime and aim to establish good relations and increase their influence in the country. However, these countries need to learn from past experiences. In the past two decades of war, some regional countries have not adequately addressed the negative impacts of their lack of sincere cooperation and action on Afghanistan's stability. While some countries supported construction and capacity building in Afghanistan, their agendas focused primarily on their own interests rather than Afghanistan's needs, and their actions were often not well coordinated, contributing to internal divisions within the country. Some rivals have also used proxy strategies to weaken each other and create favorable geopolitical environments for them, which not only exacerbates instability in Afghanistan but also puts these countries in internal and external difficulties.

Fu stresses understanding the characteristics and evolutionary logic of the Taliban. After their regime was overthrown by the US in 2001, the Taliban leaders analyzed the reasons for their collapse, the impact of their relationship with Al-Qaida, and the direction of future armed struggles. They recognized the importance of public support and international recognition and adopted more flexible social and foreign policies. The revised code of conduct in 2009 and 2010 revealed compromises with respect to local tribal culture and international norms. Although some analysts view these changes as tactical, the Afghan Taliban have demonstrated the ability to become more pragmatic and moderate in their rhetoric and policies. However, limitations remain, particularly concerning women's rights, political freedom, and political participation, due to their conservative religious nature. External policies, such as isolation and sanctions, may also contribute to the rigidity of the Taliban. Constructive, respectful engagement can help guide the Taliban to address international concerns,

soften its stance, and adopt more flexible policies. To ensure long-term stability in Afghanistan, key foreign countries need to cooperate with each other to guide the Afghan Taliban toward a more moderate, inclusive, and open direction while also supporting Afghanistan's independent development.

Mairaj ul Hamid Nasri's Chap. 5, titled 'US Post 9/11 Objectives and Policy in Afghanistan: A Tale of Persistent Failures,' goes deep into the US's unsuccessful efforts in Afghanistan. According to estimates, the U.S. spent more than a trillion dollars and lost more than 2,400 soldiers fighting its longest war. The conflict has resulted in hundreds of thousands of deaths, injuries, and displacements among American soldiers, Afghans, and Pakistani citizens. Additionally, the war has caused economic losses of billions of dollars, with Pakistan suffering the most, with more than 83,000 lives and US\$126 billion in economic losses. The author elaborates on the overt and covert objectives of the US. The US propagated the idea that its objective was to build an Afghan nation with functioning national institutions and to facilitate democratic processes. However, the covert objectives of the US in Afghanistan were to expand its influence in the South Asian region, control strategic resources, monitor Russia, Iran, and Pakistan, and encircle China. Despite significant financial investments and the loss of innocent lives, the US has not achieved any of its overt or covert goals in Afghanistan, as evidenced by historical records and media reports.

Nasri argued that the ongoing unrest in Afghanistan had had significant consequences for the global community and neighboring countries. Despite UN recommendations for a political settlement, the US chose to continue fighting. Former Afghanistan President Ashraf Ghani questioned the US's commitment to peace. The US's defeat in Afghanistan was worse than that in Vietnam, and the importance of local and regional entities was overlooked. Despite Afghanistan's historical legacy, no empire could ever conquer the country, and its geographic position should have been considered during the formation and implementation of policies. Additionally, the cultural facets of Afghan society were disregarded, leading to raids and operations that violated cultural norms and values, ultimately resulting in the Afghan people turning to the Taliban. Consequently, the Taliban restructured, revived, and expanded the security system established by NATO and American forces across Afghanistan. Key issues to address include gaining a deeper understanding of Afghanistan's recent internal workings, the objectives and responsibilities of various regional and international actors, and the functions and responsibilities of international organizations, such as the UN. In summary, there is a need for profound contemplation of the unrest in Afghanistan, encompassing its underlying factors, the current state of affairs, potential future developments, and repercussions on a national, regional, and global scale.

In Chap. 6, 'China Afghanistan Relations and the BRI: Progress, Challenges and Prospects', *Xin Yi Qu* and *Nian Peng* delved into the consequences of expanding the BRI into Afghanistan. This chapter focuses on the triangular cooperation between China, Pakistan, and Afghanistan and how the Taliban regime viewed China as an important partner after regaining power in Afghanistan. This chapter evaluates the BRI's recent developments in five key areas: policy coordination, unhampered trade,

physical connectivity, financial support, and people-to-people exchanges. Additionally, it examines the internal and external obstacles faced by BRI projects in Afghanistan and predicts the future trajectory of the initiative under Taliban rule. Ultimately, both China and Afghanistan could benefit from the BRI, especially by extending the CPEC to Afghanistan.

According to the authors, the Afghan Taliban viewed the BRI as a means of supporting the country's socioeconomic development. In 2017, Afghanistan, China, and Pakistan discussed the possibility of extending the CPEC to Afghanistan and aligning it with the China-Central Asia-West Asia Economic Corridor. Chinese officials contend that the CPEC had a positive impact on Pakistan's economic development and that the expansion of the project to Afghanistan through policy coordination, scholarships, educational exchange programs, capacity building, and professional training, as well as physical connectivity, financial assistance, and people-to-people exchanges, would also have a positive impact on the war-torn country. Beijing aims to invest in Afghanistan's future, bringing much-needed economic assistance, technology, and expertise into the country. In return, China could gain access to regional countries and Afghanistan's untapped mineral wealth, potentially bringing Afghanistan into regional economic connectivity by providing economic opportunities to address the country's protracted conflicts. Nonetheless, China's ambitions in Afghanistan have been challenged by security threats from various terrorist groups based in Afghanistan, competition from other great powers such as the US and India, economic challenges, infrastructure gaps, chronic political instability, and social and environmental issues. The authors argue that China has fully realized the high risks of implementing BRI projects in Afghanistan and has taken action to mitigate these risks. In the future, China will cautiously push forward the BRI in Afghanistan, and extending the CPEC to Afghanistan will be a top priority for China.

In Chap. 7, titled 'Russia's Engagement in Afghanistan Pre and Post 201 and Future,' *Najimdeen Bakare* evaluates Russian policy in Afghanistan in the post-9/11 period. This chapter examines Russia's official foreign policy documents and highlights why Afghanistan holds significant importance for Russia's economic and geostrategic position in the region. The author posits that the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan in 1989 and its subsequent collapse in 1991 did not entirely diminish Russia's (formerly the Soviet Union) influence in the region. Russia maintained its presence and engaged with successive Afghan governments primarily through sustained Indo-Russia relations. The US invasion of Afghanistan renewed Russia's strategic interests in the region. *Najimdeen* addresses key questions such as the primary considerations of Russia's Afghan policy, the evolution of this policy since 2001, how Russia plans to engage with the new Taliban regime in Afghanistan, and whether neighboring countries such as Pakistan should be cautious about Russia's resurging interest in Afghanistan. From a theoretical perspective, the chapter underscores how the US succumbed to a "hegemonic overstretch," leading to its inability to prepare and establish competitive players in Afghanistan vis-à-vis the Taliban. As a result, Russia is compelled to engage with the Taliban as a major player in the Afghan landscape.

This chapter addresses the key questions of how Russia should address the new political reality in Afghanistan, the strategic considerations of Russia's Afghan policy, the trajectory of Russia's Afghan policy since 2001, and, more importantly, the nature and scope of dealing between the new Taliban government and Moscow. This chapter establishes the securitized language and lens through which Russia has looked at Afghanistan since the post-Soviet era and how 9/11 realigned US-Russia interests vis-à-vis Afghanistan and the Taliban. The Greek philosopher, Heraclitus of Ephesus, said, "the only constant in life is change." Like life, international relations are also characterized by change. Russia-Taliban relations were once characterized by animosity, but the formidability of the Taliban caused a shift in attitude and policy. For its own security and geopolitical reassertion, Russia is smoothing its relations with Kabul. The Afghan government under Taliban rule, has significant potential to provide benefits to Russia, while simultaneously reaping substantial rewards if their growing relationship with Moscow is strengthened. The chapter concludes that Russia does not pose any form of immediate or direct threat to the security of the region; instead, the regional players stand to gain from cooperating with Moscow.

In Chap. 8, 'India-Afghanistan Relations and The Return of the Taliban,' *Muneeb Yousuf* and *Nazir Ahmad Mir* investigated India's policies and choices in Afghanistan, considering the history of New Delhi's relationship with Kabul during the postpartition period. They analyzed this relationship within the context of traditional India-Pakistan rivalry. The chapter's main focus is on the US-led War on Terror, which resulted in the Taliban's removal from power. *Yousuf* and *Mir* asserted that the Taliban's emergence in Afghanistan in the 1990s posed significant security threats and geopolitical challenges for India, especially in the Kashmir region. The US's removal of the Taliban created an opportunity for India to reengage in Afghanistan and participate in state-building efforts. Over time, India has employed a soft power approach and initiated various development projects in the war-torn country. However, the return of the Taliban in 2021, aided by Pakistan, has presented a challenge to India's regional interests. This chapter assesses whether Taliban policies have changed. India is particularly concerned about Afghanistan not becoming a haven for local and foreign terrorist groups. Although India cannot allow Pakistan free rein, the potential implications of the Taliban's policies cannot be ignored. Moreover, China's growing presence in seeking resources and influence in Afghanistan poses a challenge to India's interests not only in the country but also beyond it.

The authors argue that it would be too early to predict what would unfold in Afghanistan in the coming years. The Taliban may have been able to create a semblance of political stability. Nevertheless, they have not been recognized even by a single country thus far because of their harsh and exclusionary policies. Moreover, they have not been able to kick start the country's economy because of international sanctions and the absence of foreign investors. The terrorist threats using Afghan territory remain large. These factors create opportunities and challenges for New Delhi. The authors suggest that a strategic approach is essential for India to better navigate the current situation in Afghanistan. India's current policy of limiting its involvement in humanitarian efforts and development projects appears to be a wise move that keeps its options open for the future. As Afghanistan's domestic politics

evolve and unfold over the next few years, India must adapt its policies accordingly to respond to these changes.

In Chap. 9, titled 'Pakistan's Policy in Afghanistan in Post 9/11-Treading A Tightrope,' *Khalid Rahman* analyzes Pakistan's Afghan policy in the post-9/11 period. He evaluates the six phases of Pakistan-US cooperation, the sudden exit of US forces and the Taliban's takeover, the challenges of the current Taliban government, and the policy course for Pakistan. According to the author, Pakistan faced hard policy choices in the post-9/11 period. Cooperation with the US in its retaliatory war in Afghanistan—a neighbor with which Pakistan shared historical, religious, cultural, and ethnic ties—appeared full of risk in view of the global setting and political and economic constraints that the country was facing. All-out opposition to the US or remaining neutral was also not considered prudent for the same reasons. Islamabad chose to ally with the US, but the nature, scope of cooperation, and emphasis continued to shift between the various options because of the push and pull factors arising during the war. However, the alliance had pitfalls and never proved to be smooth sailing. This chapter analyzes the foreign policy challenges Islamabad faced in the post-9/11 scenario, given the ambiguous agenda of the war. This chapter evaluates the protracted US war, categorizes cooperation between the U.S. and Pakistan into different phases, looks at the chaotic endgame in Afghanistan, the challenges faced by the Taliban government, and policy options for Pakistan in the rapidly changing scenario. The chapter stresses that a country's foreign policy aims to protect its strategic interests, which include political, economic, ideological, geographical, and historical factors. It is also emphasized that ongoing evaluation is needed due to the impact of other countries' actions in the region and globally. It also suggests that a good foreign policy is characterized by well-thought-out, consistent, and timely initiatives that garner national consensus and align with people's aspirations.

The relationship between Pakistan and Afghanistan has been shaped by proximity, leading to significant developments in the post-9/11 period. Pakistan has faced criticism from the U.S. for its involvement in the Afghan conflict, yet Islamabad's approach has been constantly balanced. The US withdrawal from Afghanistan caused a surge in terrorist attacks in Pakistan, and the regrouping of organizations such as Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and Daesh with US weapons are among the major challenges Pakistan faces. Pakistan has also faced challenges in managing the large number of Afghan refugees, which has led to cross-border movement and tensions. Maintaining a balance between the security of the country and goodwill toward refugees is a test for Pakistan. Pakistan and Afghanistan are facing various challenges. One of these challenges is drug trafficking and cross-border terrorism. These illegal activities benefit from an unstable environment. Ongoing clashes, terrorist attacks, and the repatriation of illegal refugees are creating mistrust between the two countries. Therefore, it is crucial to have a well-developed border management policy that targets criminals while allowing the lawful movement of citizens. Additionally, Pakistan needs to continuously engage with Kabul to devise a joint strategy to combat militancy and improve its external relations diplomatically. Along with other

friendly countries, Islamabad should also proactively address the larger question of better global governance.

In Chap. 10, 'Japan's Policy toward Afghanistan since 2001,' *Hideaki Shinoda* argues that Japan's involvement in Afghanistan in the post-9/11 period was an extraordinary yet bitter experience. The fall of Kabul in 2021 was a serious blow to Japan, but few people knew how to accept reality. The post-WWII policy of Japan was to avoid military engagement in a foreign country. After 2001, Japan was encouraged to become one of the top financial donors for Afghanistan. Japan has intensively engaged in the "reconstruction" of Afghanistan through "DDR," "Ogata Initiatives," and "Ring Roads," among others, especially in the initial phase of "reconstruction." Thus, the sentiment toward Afghanistan after 2021 will continue to have a negative impact on Japan's overall commitment to international peace-building efforts in the contemporary world. The sense that Japan may not have clear policy guidelines for successful peace-building activities will continue to create anxieties among those who are engaged with conflict-prone countries. This would accelerate the inward-looking mindset of Japanese policy-makers as well as the general public. Perhaps Afghanistan is of grave importance to Japan. A serious question after the fall of Kabul in 2021 was whether Japan could afford to resume its readiness to contribute to international peace-building efforts in the near future.

Despite the initial enthusiasm about assistance in Afghanistan in approximately 2002, Japan downgraded its interest and actual involvement in the country, especially after the completion of the Bonn Agreement process in 2005. This does not mean that Japan has lost its interest in or completely detached itself from Afghanistan. However, Japan could not better rebuild the way it was engaged with such a highly volatile country.

First, Japan initially aimed to harmonize with the US to achieve international peace and security, but anxiety and frustration decreased with international recognition of its role in Afghanistan. After Obama's presidency and the DPJ administration's takeover, both countries viewed Afghanistan as a serious problem and wanted to withdraw, leading to Japan's return to a traditional low-profile attitude on international security issues.

Second, Japanese policymakers initially believed that their traditional development aid experiences would apply to Afghanistan, but the volatile security situation soon proved otherwise. Despite initial tasks during the Bonn Peace Agreement process, Japanese stakeholders resigned, believing that improved security would have improved their performance. The desire for normalcy did not materialize until August 2021, and Japan's assistance remained half-hearted throughout its engagement in Afghanistan.

Third, Japan's lack of political will and human resources hindered its ability to develop peace-building policies in volatile countries such as Afghanistan. Consolidating political will and retaining experienced experts from international organizations, NGOs, and private sector organizations were challenging. Maintaining long-term commitments to volatile areas requires retaining experts in the government system, which may affect personnel systems and customs. If Japan had not engaged in Afghanistan 20 years ago, it may not have pursued a stronger attitude in the future.

According to *Hideaki*, these points do not necessarily lead to the conclusion that Japan will never engage in international peace-building efforts in the future. Rather, Japan would dare to do so, for instance, if an opportunity arises in a country such as Ukraine, where its major ally and friendly nations are making the best possible efforts. However, Japan would never commit itself to gigantic projects as if it could cultivate a new path or take a lead role in international efforts. Japan would have to find its role in a very modest manner after the harsh lesson in Afghanistan. Japan may still look half-minded. However, ambitious goals have already been lost, and ambitious approaches are needed.

While readers may encounter some repetition across chapters, this is mainly because contributors come from different countries, reflecting the multifaceted nature of the topic and diverse perspectives. Each chapter delves into the subject from the unique perspective of a scholar from a specific country, offering valuable insights and interpretations. This approach ultimately enriches the overall understanding by showcasing the multifaceted nature of the issue and nuanced perspectives within the scholarly community. Finally, it should be highlighted that this book is a joint work of scholars from China, Japan, and South Asian countries, anonymous reviewers, and editors at Springer Nature. It cannot be completed without their kind cooperation and assistance. The views expressed in this book are entirely those of the contributors and do not reflect the editors' affiliations. Each contributor is responsible for the accuracy and validity of their statements, and any inaccuracies or deficiencies are their own responsibility.

Chapter 2

Afghan Peace Negotiations: Over the Years



M. Azam

Abstract Peace endeavors to bring the US-Afghan War to an end were made in different parts of the world at an enormous level, involving all major powers, Afghan neighbors and states engaged in combat and noncombat operations in Afghanistan. Despite these efforts by the Afghans themselves and by the international community, the peace negotiations did not yield the desired outcome, and the war came to an end only after the US withdrawal and overthrow of the Kabul regime by the Afghan Taliban. Why did the peace negotiations not remain fruitful, and why did the war linger on for two decades until the pull-out? This chapter is an attempt to ascertain and elaborate on major factors that played a part in the failure of large-scale peace efforts. Several factors responsible for the failure of peace negotiations are identifiable, such as ideological divides, the presence of foreign forces, the absence of trust, and the multiplicity of actors and spoilers.

Keywords Afghanistan · Taliban · US · Peace · Terrorism

2.1 Introduction

Despite efforts spread over more than a decade for peace in Afghanistan, the war was prolonged until the Taliban's military victory. Efforts for peace and reconciliation started at least as early as 2005 when the German intelligence service and the British established contacts with the Afghan Taliban.¹ The peace negotiations, however, were marred by many downtimes and setbacks, including (a) when Karzai abandoned talks after Rabbani's assassination in September 2011, (b) when news of the death of Mullah Omer was leaked to the media at a critical time in July 2015, and (c) at the occasion of the assassination of Taliban chief Mullah Mansour when the Quadrilateral Coordination Group (QCG) had gathered in Islamabad for negotiations in May 2016.

¹ Bew et al. (2013).

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