**Afghan peace talks—another attempt**

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I just saw a picture of Asad Haqqani, son of late Jalaluddin Haqqani with Former President Hamid Karzai in Moscow during the Afghan Peace Conference. This meeting held on March 18, 2021 is an initiative by Russia which has resulted into a joint statement of the extended troika on peaceful settlement in Afghanistan. Pakistan also became a part of this peace conference. It has been resolved that the Afghan government and the Taliban must negotiate peace and the Afghan Taliban should not launch the spring offensive. It was also resolved that Afghan soil should not be used against any country.

The US and China also attended it and there was an undertaking by the US regarding the withdrawal of American troops. Now the next meeting on this subject will be held in Turkey in April. Time passes so quickly that now the same Taliban are coming into a position to dictate their terms.

After becoming the interior minister, upon my first visit to Afghanistan, I met Hamid Karzai, the then President of Afghanistan and delivered to him a letter from President Zardari. Hamid Karzai has termed Haqqani as a bad Taliban and was not prepared to talk to them. Time has its own power to take over the events that today Hamid Karzai had to warmly meet Haqqani to negotiate the settlement.

[Greece records highest daily number of COVID-19 cases](https://nation.com.pk/24-Mar-2021/greece-records-highest-daily-number-of-covid-19-cases)

I feel that the US will not withdraw the American troops on May 1 as committed. This will again create huge gaps between the US and Taliban.

The US is expected to scrap any proposal or deal from Russia and we see the Afghan leadership today stands divided, which is detrimental for peace. Let us have a look at the recent history of Afghanistan which shows that peace has become a dream and everyone around the world hopes for peace, yet within months, it ends with more bombs and drone attacks in Afghanistan.

It was tragic to see the once modern city converted into ruins. I had seen these ruins and miseries of Afghan brothers when I travelled through Kabul during my exile to Europe and it was pathetic to see the condition and terror on the faces of the Afghan people. I am witness to fights that were ignited by the then President Rabbani and PM Gulbuddin Hikametyar. Both were installed by the US in a hurry and I remember all the meetings by all stakeholders in the Governor House, Peshawar. It was a mistake by the Americans to install the Afghan National government in a hurry which actually resulted in facilitation of the emergence of the Taliban and then Al Qaeda.

[Pfizer starts testing oral anti-viral drug for COVID-19](https://nation.com.pk/24-Mar-2021/pfizer-starts-testing-oral-anti-viral-drug-for-covid-19)

Along with a journalist friend of mine, I stayed in the city of Kabul inside the hub of the Taliban in a school where we slept on the hard floor for two nights under a stair gap.

The Pakistani Taliban (Punjabi Taliban) from the south of Punjab were there to fight the northern alliance after two weeks of training. During the last few days, I later shared my room with two Punjabi Taliban from Rahimyar Khan.

My statement as interior minister about Punjabi Taliban was in fact due to my personal interaction with them. I survived, as my face was not known to them and I was living among them under the guise of a journalist reporting from the Afghan war zone between the Taliban and the northern zone.

My purpose of mentioning this is to prove that Afghanistan is hosting multinational fighters under the garb of Afghan Taliban. Previously, these Taliban were operating under the command of Mullah Umer whom I had met in an official meeting along with General Naseer Ullah Babar, the then Interior minister before the fall of the PPP government.

[Prince Harry gets job at Silicon Valley mental health coaching start-up](https://nation.com.pk/23-Mar-2021/prince-harry-gets-job-at-silicon-valley-mental-health-coaching-start-up)

There have been several tries to bring peace in Afghanistan by the world but the Afghans are determined to first oust the American troops. The “one step forward, two steps backward” saga continued until 2013, when the Taliban sent a message to Washington to reopen peace talks and also agreed to meet the Afghan Government with the efforts of Pakistan.

Through intermediaries in Qatar, the Taliban planned to open a political office in Doha dedicated to negotiations but again miscommunication took place as the Taliban leaders knew that the US and Afghan officials did not want to address them as representatives of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. But based partly on discussions with Qatari officials who had already agreed that they could use the title; when it opened, the office displayed the flag of the Islamic Emirate. The United States, on the other hand, were assured by the Qatari government that the office would not describe itself as part of the Islamic Emirate, and demanded that Qatari officials remove the flag, in response to which the Taliban closed the office and cut off all contact with Washington and Kabul.

[Broadcasting from Mars](https://nation.com.pk/23-Mar-2021/broadcasting-from-mars)

The Quadrilateral Coordination Group (QCG), comprising Afghanistan, China, Pakistan and the US, took a much-needed initiative in December 2015 and became operational in January 2016 when it met officially for the first time. Just before the fourth round of QCG discussions in February, the then Pakistan army chief Raheel Shareef travelled to Doha to persuade all Taliban factions and groups to return to the negotiating table. The QCG also could not prove to be a balanced and efficient mechanism to bring lasting peace to Afghanistan like all other former breakthroughs as it effectively blocked Russia and Iran, two of the most important players in Afghanistan, from the negotiating table.

In December 2016, Russia hosted talks in Moscow on Afghanistan with both Pakistan and China followed by two further rounds of talks in February and April 2017 including India, Iran, the Central Asian states, and the Afghan government whereas the US refused to participate. These talks for future regional efforts to address the conflict also failed. Despite facing the various past setbacks, Russia again took forward the Afghan peace initiative it started a couple of years ago this year. The regional powers including Russia and China have genuine stakes and concerns regarding Afghan peace, stability and just like Pakistan they need to play a greater role to put an end to this decades’ long conflict making the poor people of Afghanistan suffer.

[Congo’s Sassou Nguesso re-elected president](https://nation.com.pk/23-Mar-2021/congo-s-sassou-nguesso-re-elected-president)

In October 2018, the newly-appointed US Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation Zalmay Khalilzad travelled to Doha to explore the potential for peace talks in a meeting with the Taliban. On October 25, 2018 Pakistan finally released former Taliban deputy leader Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar after nine years of detention as the Taliban emir appointed Baradar to lead peace talks and the group’s political office in Doha. Hence the US and the Taliban began overt bilateral negotiations in Doha, agreeing to discuss US/NATO military withdrawal, counter-terrorism, and a ceasefire while the talks continued for over the next eight months.

In August 2019, the US and the Taliban signed an “agreement in principle” on counter-terrorism and military withdrawal and an eventual ceasefire. There continued many ceasefire agreements between the Afghan government and Afghan Taliban until August 2020 when President Ghani declared he lacked the authority to release 400 specific Taliban prisoners and called for a Loya Jirga, or traditional national assembly; the assembly approved releases clearing the way for talks.

Finally, in February 2020, the US and the Taliban signed an agreement in Doha in which all foreign forces were supposed to quit Afghanistan by May 2021. The signing of agreement goes to the credit of General Qamar Javed Bajwa, the army chief and his key General General Faiz Hameed, DG ISI. Taliban negotiation teams and the Afghan government gathered in Doha, Qatar, in September 2020 to commence peace talks meant to reach a political settlement to the conflict again. Only a few people know that Ashraf Ghani, Hamid Karzai and Zalmay Khalilzad were class fellows in Beirut University and supplemented support to each other in order to protect each other’s interests.

Ashraf Ghani came back and started his wholesale business in Dubai and the same was done by the Karzai family as well. Abdul Khaliq, the brother of Hamid Karzai, a genuine mujahid, lost his life, hence, Hamid Karzai was promoted as Mujahid and was supported by the US to be launched as President. He is a shrewd leader and has a role to play with his soft politics with a genius mind.

I met Ashraf Ghani last time in Istanbul and found him to be very humble and sharp, but he has been fully utilised. According to a new strategy and understanding, Maulana Gulbuddin Hikmatyar, with the training from General Babar, will use his influence on his Afghan colleagues and his personal friend Turkish President Erdogan. The Turkish President is from former JI Turkey, whereas he has been in the company of Hekmityar; let us hope that he will be able to come up with the right proposal. We in Pakistan want peace in Afghanistan and would like Afghans to lead peaceful lives. I hope Afghanistan brings fresh and young leadership with the ability to get the nation united.

I hope and pray that efforts of General Bajwa prove to be fruitful and he is able to win peace for Afghan brothers and sisters. It is the need of the time for all stakeholders in Afghanistan to demonstrate national unity for the larger interest of their nation.

The views expressed are solely mine and do not necessarily represent the views of my party.