# Center for Global & Strategic Studies

# Islamabad

## Role of Pakistan in Afghanistan Peace Process

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A momentous peace deal was signed on February 29, 2020, between the USA and the Taliban. The deal probably is the first move towards the intra-Afghan peace process which will end the protracted conflict and instability in Afghanistan.



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The deal culminated on certain commitments made by each side in order to ensure stability and peace in Afghanistan. These commitments include the US pledge to a gradual withdrawal of its all troops from Afghanistan, the Taliban to make sure no misuse of Afghan territory for terror purposes by any terrorist group, and also complete support during the intra-Afghan peace process. It's a hectic task to be done but the USA-Taliban peace deal has paved the way for it.

Pakistan proved its sincerity for bringing stability in Afghanistan by providing support and bringing Taliban to the Afghan peace process. It was only possible with Pakistan's mediation which brought two arch-rivals who embroiled in 19 years protracted war, to the negotiations table which resulted in a landmark peace deal.

Pakistan has done the job at its best, now it's time for Afghanistan to do so while sitting with the Taliban. As Taliban agreed on intra-Afghan dialogue under the USA-Taliban peace deal. Then, it's up to Afghanistan (government). How the intra-Afghan talks play out its highly important for Pakistan. This dialogue is aimed at providing a political mechanism for the future governance of Afghanistan. Pakistan will have to deal with that proposed new regime under geopolitical factors. Amid the intra-Afghan peace process, Pakistan would choose to play its role very cautiously.



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## Vindication of Pakistan's Pro-dialogue Policy

A confused and flawed US strategy in Afghanistan brought disastrous repercussions for Pakistan. These include radicalisation, violence, and economic fiasco. This peace deal between the USA and Taliban not only props up Pakistan's interests but also vindicates Pakistan's stance based on a policy of dialogue with Taliban.

Pakistan has been following consistently a policy differentiating between Taliban and Al-Qaida. Since the very outset after the 9/11 attacks, Pakistan stressed the USA drawing a line between Taliban and al-Qaida and tried to convince the USA for dialogue with Taliban government in Afghanistan. In response, Pakistan has been facing immense pressure and harsh difficulties from the USA, Afghanistan, and the international community as a whole due to its pro-dialogue policy towards Taliban.

Pakistan's consistent policy of pushing for dialogue has enabled Pakistan to force them for these peace talks. Because of the leverage Pakistan favoured and assisted the USA in bringing Taliban to negotiations table which culminated in the peace deal on February 29, 2020.

However, after 19 years period and having entangled into protracted civil war, the USA came to realise Taliban as a political reality that controls almost half of Afghanistan. Under this situation, Trump administration moved towards political dialogue with Taliban. Thus, it is the visible vindication of Pakistan's policy of pro-dialogue towards Taliban.



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## What's in it for Pakistan

The peace process in Afghanistan contains multiple benefits for Pakistan. Turmoil and instability are not in the interests of Pakistan rather Pakistan has been paying the cost of approximately $120billions economic loss as well as seventy thousand Pakistani lives. However, it has been making consistent efforts to bring stability there. As Afghan stability is directly tied up with Pakistan's security.

After the peace deal, in a recent meeting at Islamabad between Chief of Army Staff of Pakistan, General Qamar Jawad Bajwa, and US Special Representative for Afghan Reconciliation, Zalmay Khalilzad both agreed to work on "mutually agreed goals" while reviewing the progress in the peace process deal. They showed an utter desire to bring peace and stability in the war-torn state. Meanwhile "the matters of mutual interests, overall regional security situation including Afghan refugees issue, Afghan reconciliation process, and Pak-Afghan border management are important," said the ISPR.

Pakistan's Afghan policy contains two main objectives. First, Pakistan does not favour any hasty American withdrawal from Afghanistan unless setting up stability and power-sharing agreement. Otherwise, it will unleash a disastrous civil war among the divided and feuding polity of Afghanistan. As it has happened earlier in the 1990s in wake of Soviet withdrawal. Pakistan would not support such withdrawal which leaves all problems on the doorsteps of Pakistan. Thus, the stability across the Pak-Afghan border is the primary priority for Pakistan.

Besides, the India-bent (Afghan) government that provides space to India for creating a political, economic, and strategic sphere of influence in Afghanistan. If so, it will not be acceptable to Pakistan. It does not mean that an Afghan government creating enmity with India rather it must not have negative signalling towards Pakistan or become launching-pad for Indian strategic moves against Pakistan. India has initiated a strategy of encircling Pakistan. Official statement by Foreign Ministry of Pakistan, "Whomsoever the Afghans will choose, Pakistan is ready to work with that government" supports this stance. The current rough relationship of the Afghan government with Pakistan is open-secret. Thus, Pakistan's Afghan policy seeks maximum role and coordination in the intra-Afghan dialogue and minimum Indian influence.

## Intra-Afghan Dialogue

The current events moving towards the peace process is the ideal direction what Pakistan wants. Its's highly needed for Pakistan to be part of the ongoing intra-Afghan talks. Pakistan has legitimate security stakes in the talks. Pak-Afghan relationship is passing through ups and downs since the last few decades. The relationship remains a target of perception and misperception-based dilemma due to blaming and counter-blaming of cross-border terrorism and growing distrust. However, with the current peace process, that is being developed in the relationship.

Pakistan has endeavored to get rid of the false image of being portrayed with terrorism. Despite being blamed for "lies and deceit" by US President, Trump, Pakistan facilitated and mediated a landmark peace deal.

Therefore, the intra-Afghan talks must play out positively. If so, it would establish peace and stability across the Pak-Afghan border. Otherwise, it would be the worst scenario for both countries.

Particularly, it would have spillover impacts of intensifying conflict and instability in Afghanistan while intensification of cross-border terror, drug trade, and increasing refugees' crisis.

## Bringing All Together

Pakistan while convincing Taliban to sit for the intra-Afghan talks with the Afghan government, has created a win-win situation for all. Whether it's for the Afghan government, USA, or Pakistan itself. It will not only bring peace and stability across the Pak-Afghan border but also mend political fissures among Afghanistan, the USA, and Pakistan respectively. If the process crumbles, it will bring instability and disaster for decades-long in Afghanistan and as the region whole. Because there are many competing forces such as Iran, India, Russia and Pakistan.

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