

From Conflict to Reconstruction: the Possible of an Impossible Conflict Resolution

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Abstract

Insecurity in post-9/11 Afghanistan continues to be a major obstacle in achieving postconflict domestic stability and security. At the heart of this security challenge is a three-decade old intra-state armed conflict that is still battling the postconflict reconstruction strategy to deliver a “peace dividend” – one that gains the Afghan population’s trust by convincing them that it is their strategy that will ultimately serve the people’s interests. Understanding postconflict reconstruction as a peacebuilding strategy where most of the available resources are focused on containing violence rather than addressing the roots causes of intra-Afghan unresolved conflict, this paper critically examines the framework of Afghanistan’s postconflict reconstruction strategy starting from the Bonn Agreement. Afghanistan’s ability to resolve its intra-Afghan armed conflict is considered to be a crucial factor in boosting Afghan domestic stability, regional security and thwarting transnational terrorism. I have a high opinion of the conclusion of this article as follows: the driving rationale behind this background is the question over whether internationally recognized efforts to bring stability are really facilitating conflict resolution. We argue that the postconflict situation represents a unique period where the opportunity to emerge as a stable society and the danger to revert into chaos overlap. Understanding the true nature of the Afghan intra-state conflict dynamics is critical.

Introduction

Armed conflict among Afghan factions has been a persuasive and seemingly an intractable problem for over 30 years. It was and is still continue to be a major threat for achieving lasting goals of reconstruction and domestic peace. Over the last ten years, postconflict reconstruction activities run parallel to the escalation and revival of armed conflict. Theoretically,

postconflict reconstruction activities are considered to have more positive impacts (in the parameters of previously successful cases) on level and intensity of armed conflict. Central to such view, the concept of postconflict reconstruction is double-decker goal; to end and simultaneously prevent relapse of large scale armed violence and rebuilding structures for lasting peace.¹

Provisionally, it is reasonable to go beyond the debate about preconditions on which the effect of postconflict reconstruction rest, such as comprehensive settlement, peace agreement, or cease-fire etc, we know comparative little about the underlying interactive behavior of the conflict and reconstruction in situation where such conditions do not exists.² This paper has sufficient interest in understanding this nexus and gauging the comparative potential of postconflict reconstruction program in improving the chances or conditions of ending or transforming intra-Afghan armed conflict and restoring domestic peace.

What are usually meant by ending/transforming intra-state conflict could be several different pathways, approaches and concepts but here we are assuming only two concepts:

*Resolving a conflict by addressing its dynamics and transforming structures on which a conflict survives and sustains itself;

*The second concept is about resolving/ending a conflict through engaging the opposing parties militarily with the purpose to defeat or pacify them.

Although both concepts require comprehensive planning and coherent strategies to achieve success, we assume the second concept being largely realized in early 2002 but could not complemented by political programs to shallow conflict through creating structural consensus. We shall develop on this understanding to clarify the interface between reconstruction strategy and conflict throughout this paper.

We intent to employing the analytical model, “inductive approach” illustrated by Elizabeth M. Cousens³ to identify domestic structures of conflict and drawing on theories of political and social power elaborated by Mark Haugaard⁴ to provide conceptual basis for analyzing the relationship. The developmental process of postconflict reconstruction strategy will be described to familiarize ourselves with the substance of the strategy. Broadly, this paper at the end attempts to paint a bigger picture of the relationship between postconflict reconstruction strategy and the major root causes of the intra-Afghan armed conflict.

While it is analytically significant to treat the postconflict reconstruction strategy as a ‘package’ of several components, it is not to claim to provide a comprehensive analysis of these components in all aspects. Our study is concerned with the overall impacts of the official strategy within the time frame of 8-10 years (starting with 2001-2009 during President Bush term) on the intra-state armed conflict which basically means *the intra-Afghan* armed conflict in this paper.

What is the current state of reconstruction program?

Afghanistan is not at all a new test case for strategies and projects of reconstruction and development planned and funded with the exclusive help of foreign expertise and assistance. In the course of time and assistances provided were meant towards achieving the desired stability in a similar manner of a nation-state, the country has been experienced the rise and fall of comprehensive projects of reconstruction and strategies in vein. As the case in point with current efforts of postconflict reconstruction by international community and particularly by the US represents the intertwine nature of stakes and symbolism. It is the security interests of the US and tokenism behind the obscure and not clearly defined purpose of International reconstruction assistance that mostly guided the postconflict reconstruction strategy to date.

It’s being 10 years of counter-insurgency warfare, substantial resources and bloodshed since the Afghan interim government was inaugurated in 2001-02, as part of larger postconflict reconstruction process, is believed to be futile at best. Due to the Neo-Taliban-led insurgency’s growth and momentum, the Afghan government repeatedly promised to attempt to reintegrate, reconcile and negotiate with insurgent groups and leaders as a shortcut to postconflict domestic peace and political stability but failed in their attempt to forge a new direction. It is a situation in which progress can hardly be made and the country is understood to be on a downside spiral. While persuaded the Afghan people in a manner to keep their “hearts and minds” believe that the Afghan postconflict reconstruction strategy backed by international community is up to the promise of improving security and resolving the intra-Afghan armed conflict. Unfortunately, this policy has clearly failed to induce any tangible effects to put a stable end to the raging intra-state armed conflict, and the promise of postconflict stability and peace seems to have become a lost hope.

Afghanistan is drifting gradually and armed conflict and violence has escalated significantly from 2002-2011, while being unconstrained by the surge of both the Afghans and foreign military forces. This raises the concern of postconflict peace as an elusive goal to be a desirable outcome of the much speculated strategy. Moreover, the stark reality that the conditions to allow the occupying armed forces to be withdrawn were never in motion, and that there is little realistic hope of such conditions to be created in the near future, keeps the Afghan people morale at a minimum. Although the overwhelming military power of multinational forces are instrumental in keeping the armed-peace since 2001, their presence is far from ideal in finding a sustainable alternative to ending the intra-Afghan armed conflict. If there is any concerning notion that can capture the essence of our paper, it is in principle, the *relevance* of a correctly implemented and enforced postconflict reconstruction strategy. The potential success or failure of current postconflict reconstruction strategy is tended to be heavily depended on how well such strategy can be implemented given the lessons of many failed strategies attempted in the country in the past.

Unfortunately, the likely implemented reconstruction program will not be a “panacea” in the case of Afghanistan, where the Afghan intra-state armed conflict has not been terminated clearly with visible outcomes. Rather, the ideal strategy is to search for a comparative ground of strength to create an environment conducive of strategic trade-offs in which armed violence is traded in for broader political inclusion and economic opportunities. In the absence of such strategic approaches, we argue that the overall process is anything but an unsustainable project. Perhaps it was due to the lack of a clear understanding of the conflict’s true nature and the way it was halted (or more precisely, overshadowed) by the US-led invasion of Afghanistan in 2001.

An overview

Reconstructing societies torn apart by virulent internal armed conflict presents an overriding challenge to the broader international community as well as to those local leaders who are seeking to overcome them. Afghanistan reflects one of the greatest displays of putting such a challenge to test on a new height. The essence of reconstruction challenge in post-2001 Afghanistan, is in its dual nature: first, a new type of reconstruction where an agreement among the victorious armed parties to the intra-state armed conflict were signed by excluding the ousted armed party from the agreement, thereby lacking a national comprehensive peace agreement that can bring and bind both victors and vanquished together which is a precondition for domestic stability and peace in Afghanistan. Second, the US military intervention resulted in the termination of factional armed conflict which had been fought prior to the intervention; however that termination in itself was short of settling the armed conflict decisively. And to date the factional hostilities that is not only continued but also increased substantially since then. Third, a peacebuilding process has been put in place as early as 2001-02 with the help and expertise of the United Nations, the World Bank and international community, unfortunately, the peacemaking elements and diplomatic arm in action is entirely missing. This is in direct contrast to the premise that both peacebuilding and peacemaking are indispensable for domestic stability and peace that need to be pursued simultaneous in complex situation as Afghanistan (see sharah, 2010 & Zia, 2000). Fourth, a three tier military forces (US-special force, ISAF, NATO & Afghans) are undertaking a full military operation as conceived necessary to establish a secure environment for domestic order and stability but to the surprise of many spectators that surge in security forces is not being translated into strength to prevent large scale deterioration in security and insurgency. Moreover, as no clear distinction could be drawn between the cessation of combat operation and the beginning of “postconflict” reconstruction, political stability has been difficult to be maintained given the continuous extension of war on terrorism and counter-insurgency warfare. All in all, the Bonn Agreement provided a road map for a postconflict political reconstruction in which *the establishment of a stable foundation* for the creation of a new Afghan government, economic development and social transformation triad was taken for granted.

With respect to our Initial understanding, the lack of a stable foundation is understandably weakened by a relentless focus built around the primacy of international military and security stabilization tactics: to build the Afghan security infrastructures to the level to be able to take over the fight from the NATO and ISAF forces in near term and to provide for domestic security and stability against unprecedented internal threats that the Afghan’s government is currently facing. The outcomes of such objectives raise doubt as if the whole issue in post-2001 Afghanistan was fundamentally a military-security problem. It become clear, however, that it is not on the battlefield where real success or failure of the postconflict reconstruction strategy will be determined but in efforts to influence and address crucial political problem; in our opinion this will serve the establishment of foundational bases for a strategic framework to resolve intra-Afghan political conflict.

In light of above scenario and ground realities, our belief regarding the current reconstruction strategy is based on two premises. First we contend that the post-2001 reconstruction strategy tends to lack a coherent *strategic* approach in an attempt to tackle the problem of intra-state armed conflict in general and its major root causes in particular, from at least two

perspectives. Initially the overall postconflict strategy tends to favor alternative goals of stability and security rather than grasping the core problem at the heart of Afghanistan's misery: the festering intra-Afghan armed conflict. Although the military intervention was instrumental in termination of the armed conflict among the Afghans armed factions (Taliban versus Northern Alliance) but far less from producing a lasting solution. The characterization of the problem as largely military-security problem ignores the fact that there is an internal conflict among Afghans faction raging for a quite long period of time, which has been intermingled with many other issues to the point that defied many attempts in past several occasion of resolving. Our initial observation is based on the conviction that a relevant strategy should correspond to the defining characteristics of problem, rather than to existing interests of intervening power. The post-2001 Afghanistan strategy clearly represents the overlapping sets of security stakes and symbolism of reconstruction that justifies and sustains the present approach toward no strategic goal in sight for a peaceful Afghanistan. The political interests of the US shapes security stakes and hence the primacy of pursuing security objectives contained in the parlous policy of "war on terror" and counter-insurgency. While the symbolism of reconstruction planted in the Bonn Agreement expresses the institutionalization of post-Bonn political order, the transformation of the Afghan fragmented society, symbolizing the legitimacy of the Afghan government and expansion of the Afghan state power as mean to midwife political stability. The particular difficulty in such approach that its overriding emphasis on (re)building Afghan national security institutions as a public good, is not a substitute for a coherent strategic approach to postconflict reconstruction.

In our views what is absent in the current approach is the primacy of addressing political problem before it could be meaningfully complemented by institutional, social and economic components of stable peace. In our initial observation, political stability through institutional means is short of success as long local political problem among Afghans is in limbo. The crux of our observation is that such investment in **security** institutions is to merely reinforce the bare survival of the post-Bonn process which in itself is by no means able to produce political conditions required for the resolution of conflict to establish a lasting peace. In this sense, merely keeping the integrity of the Bonn framework is deeply problematic.

The intrinsic difficulties in planning to build and develop a new Afghan security infrastructures and institutions are to ignore the dilemma of durability. Afghanistan neither possessed such security infrastructures in the past nor does it have the means to sustain in the future. It is like to stretch Afghanistan far beyond the limit of financial and governance elasticity to keep those security infrastructures sustained over time regardless of considering the situation of increasing armed resistance and immense pre-existing challenges. Building an army to build peace is an obvious mismatch preferred by those who chose to focus on alternative goals of stability and security rather than on the problem of conflict. Secondly, the postconflict reconstruction strategy did not develop a *responsive* approach to the ground realities of intra-Afghan armed conflict while a 'political space' was created in 2002-03 by the overwhelming military intervention. A period of relative calm and modest stability receded by full-blown insurgency and violence.

We assume that the major role of postconflict reconstruction strategy is the distinction and exceptional treatment of conflict and its resolution over other priorities and tasks.⁵ Since the continuation of intra-Afghan armed conflict can significantly retard progress of postconflict reconstruction to deliver, the precedence of tackling the roots of armed conflict can be justified well in relation to other important tasks that signify a strategic approach to postconflict reconstruction efforts.

Thesis

The significance of our argument is that while acknowledging the fundamental value of the Bonn political arrangements and modest progress achieved to date in political reconstruction, the architecture set up in Bonn and successive structures is inadequate to provide a sensible chance of the kind of postconflict reconstruction strategy that will lead to a stable political settlement. Mostly importantly, the conditions that fueled the intra-state armed conflict prior to the US intervention are still very much evident: the absence of a minimum national political consensus among Afghan's political elites (particularly those who have an established patronage network of armed groups) on workable political system or political order. The current state of Afghanistan is clearly unsettled in the face of unending hostilities, the increasing divide between urban elite and impoverished peripheral masses, and the fragile nature of the post-Bonn political order.

A partial structural consensus among political elites has a number of functions. First, it can compensate for societal fragmentation and cleavages which have brought by the persistence warfare. Second, it can lead to a national agreement on how to deter the potential spoilers who will disrupt domestic order and stability from within. Third, political consensus can emerge as a foundation for a workable political system with the capacity to generate compromise and accommodation for wider participation of local actors.

We argue that the succession of the Afghan intra-state armed conflict is one of the formidable obstacles to the postconflict

reconstruction strategy. The root causes of the conflict are narrowly analyzed as fundamentally religious and ethnic that nothing can be done about them, which in essence missing the point. Although there may contain some elements of both, the intra-Afghan armed conflict is fundamentally wrapped in a “golden knot” of unabatable of local power struggles, competing structures of loyal patronage (Goodhand, 2002, 838), in addition to lingering grievances and greed. According a study that focused mainly on the patterns of local Afghan structure of insecurity noted that “the concentration of power at the local level is so strong that even the core institutions of the state are under siege by local interest” (Conrad, Schetter, & Rainer Glassner, 2009, 53). These structures of conflict were best captured in themes like “peripherization of the center” and “localization of power” in above mentioned study (Schetter et al., 40-42). As it is evident that conflict no matter how long persists is unlikely to overcome competing structures of interests, resolve lingering grievances, socio-economic inequalities, or individual lust for wealth and power, quite to the contrary, it may well exacerbate and reproduced them. Utopian idealisms as well as hard military realism as *the* strategies in post-2001 Afghanistan may lose much of its air due to the fact that they are simply irrelevant in the given contextual realities.

Does Afghanistan have its own postconflict reconstruction strategy?

The United Nations’ talks on Afghanistan, which was initiated in November 2001 at Bonn (Germany), brought together concerned Afghans parties from both inside and outside of the country. The aim was to chart a political “road map” for post-Taliban Afghanistan to land safely from 30 years of warfare and destructions. The Bonn Agreement was to provide an impetus “to end the tragic conflict in Afghanistan and promote national reconciliation, lasting peace, [and] stability”⁶. serving as a solid foundation for the realization of “postconflict” political transformation, the agreement was a show of early commitment of the US-led international community to restore “normalcy”, (M.D. Mike Capstick, 2008, 267) and getting back “sovereignty” to the Afghan government with an embedded meaning to provide Afghans with a sense of ownership. These features of the Bonn agreement as, though may have been symbolic, the Afghan government circulated its own National Development Framework (NDF) in 2002 demonstrating the initiative for postconflict recovery and reconstruction. Later on, these various official policy documents culminated into an interim plan in 2005 replaced by a fully elaborated and comprehensive document known as Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS) in 2006. Since then this development strategy become the core of what is known as the Afghanistan Compact (AC), presented to a donor conference in 2006.

Since Afghanistan remained one of the most impoverished and resource dependent country in the world, with its present circumstances it could not afford to sponsor major reconstruction efforts on its own.⁷ But also postconflict reconstruction is highly costly and complex endeavor; therefore, it is to a large degree conditional to, and subordinate to the level of hard-currency and availability of financial assets (Jones, 2009, 123). Taking this reality in perspective, the international community in order to back the Afghan reconstruction program resorted to *donor conference* approach apparent in successive conferences, first in Tokyo (2002), followed by Berlin (2004), London (2006), Rome (2007), Paris (2008) and lately in Kabul (2010). These were significant instances to enhance the renewed engagement between Afghanistan and international community. The endorsement of the Afghanistan Compact by the UN Security Council as “central strategic framework”⁸ for reconstruction meant to boost the perception of the Afghan ‘ownership’ of the reconstruction strategy.

The grand design of the Afghan National Development Strategy (ANDS) and the Afghanistan Compact (AC) was expressed with sufficient clarity in establishing the building blocks of the postconflict reconstruction strategy in three tiers; *security, governance and economic & social development*.⁹ The first, *security* pillar encompasses the efforts of multinational security forces to contain the insurgency and train/equip the Afghan national army (ANS) and Afghan national police force (ANP) to provide for its own security. The issue of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) and dismantling illegal armed groups were also part of this pillar to be dealt with. The second pillar of *governance* comprises of elements of institutional governance in terms of law, human rights, justice, and accountability of the Afghan government in delivering political good to the people. The third pillar is *economic and social development*, which includes the achievement of poverty reduction in line with Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and market-based economic growth. This last pillar as some described to be the “power nucleus” of the entire ANDS (Capstick, 2008, 268).

The articulation of the goals in each three pillars are done with adequate clarity that one would expect the reconstruction strategy to be grounded on a thorough investigation of Afghan domestic “fractures” of armed conflict, it causes and conditions generating insecurity and perpetuate the problem of intra-Afghan armed violence. However, the review of these documents and its impacts on the security situation reveal a different picture.

Our analysis reveals that the reconstruction strategy does not reflect the prevailing realities and patterns of conflict structures that feeding into conflict. The “lessons” from past experiences may have been stated clearly but not learned in

practical sense to be put into effect.¹⁰ As one observer remarked that the label of postconflict reconstruction may conceal the lingering “foundational issues” (Barakat, 2005, 144-145) to be worked out at the beginning of the ground work in order to formulate a clearly feasible and achievable strategy. Vested interests of local powerful holders, their patronage networks and illicit structures of businesses are the road block for implementation of reconstruction program in most of the countryside.

If there is a single thought that would summarize the difficulty experienced by previous reconstruction efforts, it would be important to note Mohammed Najibullah. Who else has truly sensed the hard-hitting reservation that “despite the fact that we have a profound strategy and comprehensive theory, we are weak in the tactical and practical sphere. Most of the grand thoughts and plans [envisaged] get drowned in mere words and remain on paper.”¹¹

The design of postconflict reconstruction strategy appears to be mostly dictated by the dramatic change in international political and security environment resulting from the 9/11 attacks. The National Security Strategy of the United States in 2002 take notes that “[t]he events of September 11, 2001, taught us that weak states, like Afghanistan, can pose as great a danger to our national security...”, “America is now threatened less by conquering states than we are by failing ones.”¹² Whether such a view was indeed reflective of reality or political “construction,” a unique situation of international solidarity and diplomatic agreement consolidated the concepts and doctrines of war on terrorism, at least in the context of Afghanistan. There was very little broad-based consultation with local Afghan groups (Goodson, 2006, 147) other than four groups brought to the Bonn talks in 2001.

The fundamental problem with such a strategy is that its design grown out of the priorities of international coalition rather than based on the real needs and realities on the ground. The entire focus of international intervention is thus preoccupied with how to address the threats to the national security of certain powerful individual states, which originates from the situation of intra-state armed conflict and state failure in Afghanistan. As a matter of political fact, international strategy in Afghanistan is not necessarily geared towards resolving the underlying root causes of the intra-state armed conflict, arguing that addressing the underlying sources of conflict is far beyond the limit of what international actors can realistically achieve.

Unfortunately the Afghan postconflict reconstruction strategy fall victim to tinkering in line with political traditions without any critical consideration of what great effect a well formed strategy can have. We contend that the Afghan postconflict reconstruction strategy merits a careful analysis by placing a premium on the inductive approach to the Afghan national concerns. It is of common belief that the eventual triumph in Afghanistan can be linked with the presence of *relevant* framework with a long-term vision to guide Afghanistan away from internal conflict, division and hostilities, and towards a path to becoming a functioning society.

Characteristics of intra-Afghan armed conflict

It is important to note that there are different accounts of the Afghan armed conflict and previous warfare which have been developed a life cycle of its own for over the three decades. In understanding such differences, it is important to look at macro factors, changing actors involved in war making, both internal and external. The range of issues and grievances emerged and ceased. A broad array of causes-effects, level of intensity, impact, dynamics and regional dimensions of the armed conflict further played into the complexity. At the same there are many sub-conflicts including ethnic and sectarian tensions, dislocation of state and societal structures, internal power-struggles and hostilities which do not let the wheel of conflict in to halt. The difficulty of understanding the conflict may also speak to the intermingled state of internal conflict with regional and international conflict in an awkward way.

Analytically, we can assume that the Afghan armed conflict is fundamentally intrastate in nature, directly involving both government forces and anti-government insurgents. This abstraction cost us to exclude several important factors for some analytical gain. If we conceptualize the government of Afghanistan as one party (which came into existence a result of democratic election in 2004), and categorize major sub-state actors as another party to the conflict, then by that very reason the intrastate armed conflict would inevitably occur involving sub-state actors- including all the major parties of present day insurgencies. It is useful to highlight for the sake of our conceptualization that the major force, dividing sub-state insurgents from the Afghan government is their inherent opposition and armed contestation of the very nature of the political arrangement resulted from the Bonn Agreement (2001). As the international political environment dictated the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, the Bonn Agreement bypassed all sub-state insurgent groups in direct consultation with the Northern Alliance (the opposition group who were fighting the Taliban and backed by the US-led international community). In our understanding, this exclusion-irrespective of whether it was right or wrong decision has significantly contributed to the resentment of some armed groups operating under the name of “Taliban”.

Since the US-led intervening forces constitute a major portion of the Afghan government’s fight against the sub-state

insurgent groups, it is equally significant to locate the position of intervening forces within the equilibrium of the intra-Afghan armed conflict. Some would disagree that the intervening forces are actually in the driving seat, rather than the official Afghan government. Michael Barnett et al., contends that the coalition force's successes of ousting the Taliban regime resulted in the desire for promotion of an Afghan government that "would join in the war against terrorism" (Michael Barnett & Christoph Zurcher, 2009, 41). However, efforts are now underway in hopes to put the Afghan government in a position to take greater responsibility for security governance. For the purpose of this analysis we assume the NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) and ISAF (International Security Assistance Force) forces to be one part of the Afghan government, assisting in its efforts to establish control and authority over the large swath of the country. This is due to the inseparable relationship between the Afghan government and the other multinationals forces. They derive their intimacy from the Bonn Agreement and other diplomacies such as the London Compact (2006) signed in partnership by the Afghan government and the international community. One can assume that the continued presence of multinational armed forces and their various military activities are in direct agreement with the Afghan government's consent as opposed to insurgent armed groups. According to the official mandate of ISAF and NATO forces, occupying soldiers are working to support and assist the Afghan government in consolidating and extending its authority and control (in reference to the officially-declared mission that NATO was assigned in Afghanistan).

So far, the US-led NATO military campaign of counter-insurgency and the level of intrusiveness are not without contention. We base our argument on the "strategic consent" that is fairly shared by both Afghan government and NATO forces. The fact that the Afghan government is weak in almost all fronts- lacking security institutions and forces to take over responsibility, it is in this context that the direct military campaign by NATO forces was to a large degree necessary and unavoidable.

In light of the above discussion points, we can provisionally define the intrastate armed conflict as such: when a recognizable insurgent organization challenges the government militarily with persistence acts of armed violence.¹³ Characterizing the Afghan armed conflict within this parameter illustrates obvious incompatibilities over the government's reign (how Afghans want to be governed, or who should have coercive power to do what, when and how?). However, this is also suggestive of competing interests between factional leaders, mostly notably warlords and ex- Mujahedeen commanders.

The exclusionary framework of the Bonn Agreement in the context of the "war on terror" or "counter-insurgency" prohibited the grand bargain for political inclusion of legitimate groups from where now ousted Taliban insurgents have been deriving their strength (in terms of support and recruits for insurgent activities). What is important as one observe notes that "hostile individuals do not create hostile populations-rather, hostile, populations will continue to create hostile leaders until the source of the hostility is alleviated" (ISAF PRT handbook, 2010, 03). A large swath of Pashtun population were left out of the political processes both at Bonn and afterward phases which resulted in dire consequences politically, affecting the outcome of political reconstruction (see for instance, Miliband, 2010) The secondary importance given to the participatory process in political arena undercut the possibility of including broader social forces, becoming a major source of grievances in the southern and eastern portions of the country. Secondly, the reconstruction design was posed as a massive developmental project that is not reflective of the failures of past reconstruction and peacebuilding attempts. Furthermore, the legacies of warfare and local politics were misinterpreted. The protracted armed conflict in Afghanistan fundamentally transformed the traditional nature of Afghan society and shifted the balance that existed among ethnic and regional communities for decades. The intra-state armed conflict happened to be the major source of deepening fragmentation along linguistic, ethnic, racial, sectarian and tribal lines that was less familiar with pre-war Afghanistan. The war of resistance against the Soviet Union intervention in the 1980s provided the much needed circumstances to become a motor of group allegiances based on locality and adherence. Overcoming such challenges is far beyond the scope of one particular time frame or design.

One of the main problems of the current reconstruction strategy with regard to tackling structures of conflict is that it overcapitalizes on the idea of "can do" reforms and "declaratory policy" to bring about much needed transformations in the Afghan society. The core problem is however lie not in the big cities that appear to reflect the successful gains, of transformation of the nation with symbolic legitimacy of political order underlying postconflict reconstruction. In our view, the problem precisely rests in preparing the ground work in villages where majority of the population are indifferent to change of improvement. One African commentator wisely notes while if the challenge for developed nations is "to reach the Moon," the challenge for us (in this case Afghanistan) is still "to reach village."¹⁴

This is not to say that our argument neglects the debate that to address all micro underlying causes of intra-state armed conflict are *the* responsibilities of the Afghans themselves. Eliminating all those underlying sources that pose threats to sustainable peace in Afghanistan are in essence the task beyond which the international community can realistically pursue. Such recognition is important to the central role of the Afghan local actors that will shape the future of Afghanistan.

Postconflict reconstruction strategy is all about priority. Designing an appropriate strategy in the light of country-wide circumstances and leaving strategy in the hands of Afghans is critical to enhance local leadership, institutions, and also addresses the conflict's root cause (The World Bank, 1998, 40-47).

In short, the decade-long (2001-2010) postconflict reconstruction strategy has tended to ignore or at best give insufficient attention on how to address sources of this conflict.

Is there a way out toward conflict resolution/transformation?

Despite some considerable critiques on the empirical validity of the term "causes", political scholars continue to make use of the concept. As Suganami argues, it is not about finding a *sole cause* conclusively for the conflict, but rather, it is the comparative weight of fundamental causes, (Suganami, 1996, 14). It is also about where one locates such causal factors in the context of the specific case study and environmental conditions.

For the purpose of this paper we will develop on the work of Vasquez and his conceptual assumptions about root causes of war. Vasquez (Vasquez, 2009, 42-51) formulates a very useful conceptualization;

*First that any war or what we call intra-state armed conflict results from a long-term process. This is important as he notes that armed conflict does not spin from a single factor, but rather evolve over time through a series of steps and processes. He also rejects the notion what he calls a "Newtonian model of mechanics" to apply in investigating the causes of particular armed conflict.

*The second important premise is that armed conflict develops by the interaction of several causal factors. Structural factors or systemic conditions can be deceptive as it assumes a static approach instead of dynamic. Linear approach in dissecting the causes of armed conflict is unsatisfactory since it takes individual human as object.

Vasquez research has certainly advanced the methodological difficulties in studying sources of intra-state armed conflicts and wars. Our approach is developed on his understanding of causal analysis.

Is participatory peace feasible?

The points that were raised in the argument part of this paper will be further illustrated here. We proclaim two important side-effects of the Afghan postconflict reconstruction strategy:

*The discriminative framework born out of the Bonn Agreement

*The irrelevancy of "deductive approach" as opposed to "inductive approach"

The discriminative framework born out of the Bonn Agreement

When the bombing campaign of multinational military forces ceased in late 2001 against the Taliban regime, three significant questions loomed large in the horizon for a new politically stable Afghanistan. First, was the internal armed conflict among Afghan factions over decisively? Or might return with unprecedented burst at some point at later stage? Second, were there reasons to be worried about the development of internally supported insurgency? Third, even if the outbreak of internally backed armed conflict did not re-appear as happened to be the case in 2006, on whose term peace and stability be restored in Afghanistan? None of these questions were raised among Afghans or international community to be seriously tackled in the process of getting to the Bonn Agreement.

Although heavy reliance on the use of military force has certainly worked to end the internally raged armed conflict between the Taliban and the Northern Alliance (NA) contenting for control of the country. However, more importantly, what was absent alarmingly, the commitment of major armed parties to a common political structure for the country. Soon after the signing of Bonn Agreement, the Afghan major armed groups with military capabilities were split into two camps; one that join and made the Afghan government with military, political and financial support of the US and international community, and another waiting in limbo to be finally brought-together in opposition to government. Rebellion to anti-government forces was a tactical strategy to resist the post-Bonn political design turned advantageous for reigniting massive rivalries and hostilities (mainly from 2002 to 2006). Meanwhile the US-led international military force that later joined by NATO forces in 2003, have been deployed with quite reasonable prediction to be engaged in for a long period of time. Nevertheless, leaving completely

uncertain the question whether Afghanistan that found itself in a unique situation would rebuild itself as a politically stable country or slipping back into unending cycle of violence and armed conflict.

To date, the international engagement both military and civilian delivers a great number of promises and achievement of multiple objectives necessary for a politically stable Afghanistan including the implementation of the Bonn Agreement. However, the engagement also invited a serious insurgency, enabling “legendary” spoilers to threaten the multiple achievements.

Firstly, the political framework of the Bonn Agreement which was followed by other decisions in effect prohibited the development of political and security conditions necessary to terminate hostilities at two strategic fronts; (A) The recoverable portion of active armed insurgents could be brought into the Afghan political process by creating “political avenues” and incentives for them, (B) The prevention of significantly large numbers of undecided or indifferent population could be spared to join these insurgencies, but no one bother with these ideas early on. As the case with Afghanistan in post-2001 illustrates, peace was pursued in the shadow of the larger scale international war on terrorism. Military strategies were closely integrated into the postconflict reconstruction plan as a continuum to be pursued together. The intended rationale would have been to use such force in support of peace and to influence the pay-off structures and incentives toward conflict resolution. As it is proved in Afghanistan time and again, the use of such a military threat and escalation policy is a high-risk strategy. Today, the heightened conditions of insecurity and escalated armed conflict would have alarm many strategists to hold back on that rationality. Escalating military pressures on insurgents in the hope of having them give in to negotiation may likely end up in protracted escalation (William I. Zartman et al., 2005, 04-14). Such protracted escalation, as seen in Afghanistan, may have exacerbated an already fragile situation characterized by old suspicion and mistrust among armed groups, laying new grounds for hostilities.

10 years into the signing of the agreement, the increase in armed hostilities is more likely to be resulted not from the failure of the reintegration of the former insurgents groups but rather, it could be argued that it resulted from the de-integration of the undecided groups of population who were mostly sidelined in the process. The perception of the exclusion and marginalization among the ethnic Pashtun may have been a force multiplier, however it is not the sole issue in explaining the increased insurgency in the south and east regions.

Since the counterinsurgency campaign has largely been focused in the areas where former Taliban and some other prominent insurgents groups resided, the side-effects of such focus incrementally overshadowed the positive effect of the counterinsurgency. The assumption that the current trajectory of events related to the counter-insurgency campaign pitched against the goal of promoting self-sustaining peace has some merits. The persistence escalation of conflict, the scofflaw of daily military activities, and the casualty deaths of civilians as a by-product of counter-insurgency warfare have largely been brought negative repercussions. Postconflict reconstruction strategies usually contain provisions on how to better reduce misperceptions, insecurities, and group animosities that have poisoned the political atmosphere. In contrast, misperception, insecurity and domestic animosities have rapidly been increased. John A. Vasquez argument that any political interaction accompanied by “intractable, conflictive, and hostile” behavior may offer clue how a particular armed conflict might recur or come about (John A. Vasquez, 2009, 44).

This is a common barrier in majority of rural Afghanistan preventing the emergence of conditions conducive to establishing the foundation for meaningful inclusion for the sake of participatory peace. One of the overriding functions of the postconflict reconstruction strategy is the principle of accommodation rather than exclusion (Rasul Bakhsh Rais, 2008, 49-51).

In light of the above discussion, one can raise the question in retrospect of whether the Bonn Agreement was the best deal that could be made under the prevailing international circumstances. From the Afghan perspective the answer is certainly no if haste was superseded by political wisdom. Certainly there was room for a more effective agreement that would fully open the political space for wider-reintegration and massive participation. Giving a credible opportunity for Afghans from all walks of life to participate and a high stake in political reconstruction would ensure as Sultan Barak notes “relevance and a sense of ownership” (Sultan Barakat, 2005, 30).

The argument that “a new and more inclusive internal political arrangement in which enough Afghan citizens have a stake, and the central government has enough power and legitimacy to protect the country from threats within and without” (David Miliband, 2010) may sound an ideal solution to replace the existing framework. However that idea will require painful re-arrangement and compromise but Afghanistan has certainly lost that ripe moment. Fast fix to the problem of political inclusion does not exist, but the choice of constantly re-negotiation was absent in action. However, this is also important to note that it would simply be unrealistic to assume that re-negotiations among Afghan insurgent leaders and other elites would magically heal and resolve the pre-existing legacy of factionalism and social disruption.

To understand Afghanistan today, we must integrate the major themes in the recent scholarly literature on that country, for Afghanistan is explained partially by the significant cleavages that divide its population (ethnic, linguistic, regional, sectarian, racial, and tribal, often overlapping); partially by the ideological struggle between traditional, modern, and Islamist forces there; [*] partially by the gulf between state and society that has both led to and been exacerbated by the state's reliance on economic rents for development and consumption; and partially by the varied and multifarious web of influences wielded by outside actors in the country. Above all, we must understand the depth and range of transformations that more than two decades of enormously destructive war have produced in Afghanistan (Goodson, 2001, XIII).

Goodson certainly expose the Afghanistan accumulated challenges that many would suppose as due to be dealt. But also there are others who argue that Afghanistan is "morass" or "graveyard of empires" by tracing the origins of the Afghan conflict back to centuries old historical events, which could not be changed. However there are important lessons and wisdom in historical literature that deserve consideration. We leave that part for another occasion.

The irrelevancy of "deductive approach" as opposed to "inductive approach" in address conflict resolution

At the eve of the Bonn talks, Afghanistan was completely devastated with almost no government, no public institutions, hardly any infrastructures, and an economy in ruins. Afghanistan was a collapsed state by all measures. 30 years of armed conflict and war fragmented and drained the Afghan society, wiping out most of the important human resources and social capitals that would be useful for the reconstruction process. Postconflict reconstruction seemed to be offering a way forward and the time was right to embark on the process. Given the large scale and magnitude of destruction and sheer variety of challenges, the conception that postconflict reconstruction activities could not be distinguished from that of developmental issues was widely believed. Since Afghanistan never achieved any meaningful development before the start of the late 1970's conflict in regards to self sufficiency, merely restoring the public institutions and economy to the point of pre-war situation would not only be self-defeating but dangerous as well. The perception of ground realities was that if Afghanistan was to achieve a semblance of normalcy, every aspect of economy, infrastructure, security, governance, and social development needed to be combined to postconflict reconstruction efforts. The World Bank's *approach paper* on Afghanistan suggested that a long-term development strategy should be embedded to the postconflict reconstruction package as both intersect in matter of time and function (World Bank, 2001, 17). Under the economic, political and social conditions Afghanistan was facing, the task of promoting political stability and the creation of an Afghan national spirit of unity would be difficult to achieve unless postconflict reconstruction efforts were paired with long-term economic and social developments.

The spirit of this thinking was deeply reflected in charting many initial policy documents on Afghanistan's postconflict policy. The World Bank's Approach Paper on Afghanistan (2001), the Afghan National Development Framework 2002 (ANDF), and Immediate and Transitional Assistance Programme for the Afghan People 2002 (ITAP) etc. are among the well known initial background documents from which ANDS and AC was erected. What was clear in these papers was the lack of nuance understanding of meaning of the similarity and overlapping nature of postconflict reconstruction and long-term development activities. As Graciana del Castillo asserts, postconflict reconstruction is not development as a "normal business" though they do share very similar characteristics (Graciana del Castillo, 2008, 12-14). Nevertheless, such similarities should not be misunderstood in formulating the strategy. Society torn-apart by persistent conflict and wars reveal the need for special treatment. Such societies like Afghanistan face a legacy of armed conflict deeply set in society, with disrupted social, economic and political infrastructures on top of the extreme level of poverty and severe underdevelopment. Under such circumstances, the "ethics of reconstruction" takes priority over the "ethics of development" as Castillo (2008, 1277) argues;

[P]ost-conflict reconstruction is a "development-plus challenge": countries emerging from protracted civil wars have to confront the normal challenge of socio-economic development while simultaneously accommodating the additional burden of national reconciliation and peace consolidation. The latter is essential so that former enemies can live with each other and address their grievances through political, institutional, and peaceful means.

The development principles stress the importance of fairness and inclusiveness on wide scale to include sensitivity in all areas of the population as much possible in implementation process. Taking such view as the World Bank proposed for Afghanistan that postconflict reconstruction "must be sensitive to the ethnic and economic fragmentation that has occurred in Afghanistan over the past two decades. This means that regional balance and equity considerations need to be an integral part

of the reconstruction strategy” (The World Bank, 2001, 14). It is an important view in relation to the wide-spread local grievances to be addressed. The Afghan National Development Framework has internalized this assumption uncritically that “through the creation of equitable income-generation opportunities” (NDF, 2002, 49) lingering tension and discontent are served better than establishing precedence for most needed task. This is a great idea, however to say it is simply not enough is to examine some of the realities in Afghanistan.

Some thoughts for conclusion

The framework of international engagement to be at odds, according to our observation, with the basic tenets of the postconflict reconstruction strategy that success must be made on the ground. Some commentators argue that the planning of “[s]trategy in a postconflict environment must be closely tailored to the particular characteristics of the country...”¹⁵ and the peculiar needs of the people in question. Since the use of military tools and capacities are not sufficient to impose peace, security and stability, from outside, the key to an effective postconflict reconstruction strategy lies in empowering the ‘right actors’ and focusing on the specific needs in a way to nurture the kind of internal mechanisms which have the potential to redress the long-standing public grievances, encourage reconciliation and political inclusiveness. It is argued that the fundamental challenge of the postconflict reconstruction endeavor lies *not* in the technical aspect—capacity building, coordination, execution—or developmental aspect like economic growth and modernization, but rather political one. A strategy that neglects the fundamental political question of what is required on the ground (in direct relevance to the particular nature and context of the given conflict) to assist the conflict ravaged-society to build a stable political system, will risk political failure. It is perhaps because, when the very strategy to reconstruct is tending to be subservient to the ‘operational capacities’ and ‘advocacy policies’ of intervening powers drawn in their Capitals (in the absence of local input) as the case of Afghanistan suggests.

Another significant problem that has been tested numerous times in the past but was not learned or reflected upon in the present postconflict peacebuilding strategy is vivid even after long 10 years of experience. For instance, the assumption that the postconflict peacebuilding strategy backed by a robust military force and tools of coercion can work well and offer an alternative where the consent of the internal parties do not exist, repeatedly failed Afghanistan in almost all the previous peacemaking efforts to bring peace and stability. In short, the obvious contradiction between the priority of international actors which are primarily orientated to contain—*not resolve*—the underlying sources of the intra-Afghan armed conflict tend to neglect the significant value of understanding the *role* the Afghan domestic socio-political context and the potential role its play in determining the outcomes of the overall postconflict peacebuilding mission. As a result, however, the very efforts to contain, in essence, led to the escalation of the intra-state armed conflict. Little has been learned about the complexity of the Afghan socio-political environment, as General Stanley A. McChrystal remarked in a leaked-classified military report in 2009 that led to significant changes in the US policy toward Afghanistan.¹⁶

Notes

- ¹ Oliver Ramsbotham et al., (2005), describe postconflict reconstruction as consists of two tasks; one is being negative—termination and avoidance of armed violence, second is being positive; reconstructing lasting peace (p. 195).
- ² Recently the general avoidance of scholarly debate about the “competing framework of reconstruction” in cases like Iraq and Afghanistan came under severe criticism from a handful number of studies, which they call it as indicative of disregarding continuity in postconflict reconstruction discourse. Lacher’s article is a good example of it, see for discussion: Lacher, W. (2007). Iraq: Exception to, or epitome of contemporary postconflict reconstruction? *International Peacekeeping*, 14 (2), 237-250.
- ³ For discussion on what is an inductive approach, see Cousens, M. E. et al., (Eds.). (2001), in reference list.
- ⁴ Haugaard, M. (1999). Power, social and political theories [In] Kurtz, R. L. et al., (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of violence, peace, and conflict* (2nd ed, Vols. 3, p. 107). London: Academic Press.
- ⁵ Cousens and Kumar well research book based on the argument that the supreme purpose of postconflict peacebuilding need to be reflected in every peacebuilding attempt that placing proper emphasis on the centrality of politics as a way forward to resolve internal conflict without armed violence. For details please consult Cousens et al., in reference list.
- ⁶ These words are stated at the opening paragraph of Bonn Agreement and constitute the overriding focus of the agreement. *The UN Talks on Afghanistan Bonn November/December 2001* can be accessed online: <http://www.afghan-web.com/politics/>
- ⁷ According to the latest UNDP human development report (2011), although Afghanistan is slowly climbing above the ladder of other least developed countries, it is still rank very high on multidimensional poverty index for developing countries, it stands at 95 out of 105.
- ⁸ For detail please refer to the; Report of the Security Council mission to Afghanistan, 11 to 16 Nov 2006 (S/2006/935).
- ⁹ The Afghan National Development Strategy and the Afghan Compact both consist of three pillars of security, including socioeconomic development. All these policy documents are available online provided by a diverse number of organizations, as well as the Afghan government.
- ¹⁰ A good start to clarifying such a point is to look at the *Afghanistan World Bank Approach Paper* (2001), particularly on the question of how to advise and prepare the international community for the postconflict reconstruction program in Afghanistan. This and such other internationally

produced documents like the United Nation *immediate and transitional assistance program for the Afghan people* (2002) were the background material from where the ANDS and Afghanistan Compact were derived.

- ¹¹ This sentence is quoted by William Maley in his 1987 article from the famous ex-President Najibullah who was expressing his concerns about the Soviet Union backed strategy that included huge programs of reconstruction and stability in 1986.
- ¹² The White House. (2002). *The national security strategy of the United States of America*, p. 04-07.
- ¹³ This definition as Paul et al., argues requires a careful examination of insurgents' motifs and by not accepting the validation of grievances at face value. Why some groups are willing to pay a high price for engaging in armed contestation with their government, may reveal some underlying context beyond the assumed narratives. Please see Collier, P. & Elliot, L. et al., 2003, 53-55.
- ¹⁴ Orr, C. R. (2001). The United States as nation builder: Facing the challenge of postconflict reconstruction. In Orr et al., (Eds.), *Winning the peace: An American strategy for postconflict reconstruction*, p. 24.
- ¹⁵ McChrystal, S. A. (2009). *Initial United States Forces-Afghanistan (USFOR-A) assessment*. August 30, 2009. New York Times.
- ¹⁶ This sentence is taken from, Thomas, Caroline. (1987). *In search of security: the third world in international relations*. Sussex: Wheatsheaf Books Limited. Which he quoted from an African expert which has similar meaning captured in following sentence; while other nations [developed nations] "aims to reach the Moon," we[less developed nations] "must aim to reach village."

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