

Peacebuilding in Afghanistan: the Peace Jigra

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1. Introduction

Afghanistan, a South Asian nation shares borders with China, Iran, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Jammua and Kashmir controlled by Pakistan. Since 1997 these neighbours of Afghanistan became the Six of the “Six plus Two” group (the two being United States of America and Russia) in a series of informal meetings facilitated by the United Nations on many issues of the conflict in Afghanistan.

Afghanistan today has a population of 33.6 million.¹ It is a multi ethnic society with the largest ethnic group Pashtun accounting for 42% of the population, and the rest comprise of 27% Tajik, 9% Hazara, 9% Uzbek, 4% Aimak, 3% Turkmen, 2% Baloch, and 4% of others. All of these groups are Muslims, 80% are Sunni Muslims and 19% are Shia Muslims.²

Since the end of World War II, Afghanistan had remained one of the poorest and least developed nations in the World. The main reason for that status is continuous conflicts and fighting in the country. Afghanistan’s last monarch Zahir Shah who came from a long line of Pastun rulers ascended to the throne in 1933. He was deposed in the coup of 1973. In the early period of the 20th century the country experienced a cycle of coups and countercoups. In the height of the Cold War, on 25, December 1979 justifying their action on Brezhnev Doctrine, Soviet forces entered Afghanistan and took control over the capital, Kabul using internal rivalry in the country.

The Brezhnev Doctrine which was originally published in an article in the Soviet newspaper *Pravada* stipulated in no uncertain terms that a communist state was within its rights to intervene in international affairs. When Babrak Karmal obtained power in Afghanistan as a result of a coup he had the backing of the Soviets to emerge as the leader of Afghanistan. To protect the dependent regime, the Soviet Union moved over 80,000 troops into Afghanistan. This military invasion of Afghanistan by the

¹ The Fund for Peace website, “Country Profiles: Afghanistan” <http://www.fundforpeace.org/web/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=457&Itemid=910>.

² *Ibid.*

Soviets in 1979 was justified by the Brezhnev Doctrine.³ They did it in the assumption that the Afghan communists were about to face an open revolt that would drive Afghanistan into the Western orbit. In the backdrop of the Iranian revolution the Soviets were also concerned about a fundamentalist Islamic regime's rule of the country. Soviet incursion into and eventual invasion of Afghanistan contributed to the decline of country's and region's stability in South Asia.

Later the Soviets were to pay a heavy price for this attempt on imperial expansion or repeating the same kind of mistake that the United States made in Vietnam. About 14,000 soldiers died and more than 50,000 were wounded. The occupation was a drain on Soviet economy, a "bleeding wound" in Gorbachev's words.⁴ The Soviet involvement in Afghanistan also resulted in Soviet isolation from the Islamic world. Saudi Arabia condemned the Soviet action and sent volunteers to fight with Afghans.

During the Soviet occupation political hostility to the Karmal's regime and the presence of foreign troops led to an armed resistance movement dominated by militant Muslims or Mujahedin. The Mujahedin rallied together in Pakistan to form an alliance against the Soviet forces. Entangled in the cold war politics it was the United States of America or its allies who provided military aid to the Mujahedin. With ample military funding well trained Mujahedin fought in their own mountainous terrain (Afghanistan is popularly known as a land of mountains) which was ideal for guerrilla warfare. Soviet forces even though they had superior military equipment found it impossible to cope with the Mujahedin guerrilla fighters who knew their land so well.

In this backdrop, when Mikhail Gorbachev became the leader of the Soviet Union in 1985, he announced that he will withdraw troops from Afghanistan. In 1988 and 1989 the Soviets withdrew from Afghanistan leaving the pro – Soviets Afghan government and Mujahedin in a protracted conflict to win control over the country. In 1996, Kabul, the capital of Afghanistan finally fell under the control of a Pakistan backed Taliban militia to end the civil war. Most parts of Northern and central Afghanistan remained under the control of the ethnic Tajik dominated Northern Alliance.

Yet the problem in Afghanistan was far from over. Next, attention of the world was drawn to the Taliban in Afghanistan immediately after the terrorist attacks on the American world trade center on September 11, 2001. The biggest strategic miscalculation of the Taliban was the decision to provide a safe haven to Osama Bin Laden and his al-Qaeda terrorist network. The United States, led a military campaign to

³ Doron Zimmermann and Andreas Wenger, *International Relations: from the Cold War to the Globalized World* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2003), p. 120.

⁴ *Ibid.*

overthrow the Taliban and eliminate Osama bin Laden and his al- Qaeda network. The US and its allies were joined by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) forces in 2006. Since then NATO has taken responsibility for security across Afghanistan. In 2008, at a NATO heads of states summit in Bucharest, they pledge a “firm and shared long-term commitment”⁵ in Afghanistan saying that peace keeping mission in Afghanistan is their top priority. The conflict continues and peace is still elusive in Afghanistan.

2. Brief History of the Conflict since the Soviet Withdrawal

The Taliban first appeared in religious seminaries/Madrassas in refugee camps for displaced Afghans during the Soviet occupation. The refugees came in their thousands to study in Pakistan madrassas where they were trained in warfare and the concept of Islamic Jihad. These Jihadis were known as Taliban, a word which literally means students or trainees, and has roots in Arabic. The Taliban, an extremist movement led by Muslim religious scholars (Ulema) emerged as a substantial political force in the early 1990's in northern Pakistan following the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan. In 1992 when fighting intensified, the government of Mohammed Najibullah who replaced Kamal in 1987 as the President of Afghanistan also fell. Then Burhannudin Rabbani was declared the President in July 1992.

A predominately Pashtun movement with its foundations in Kandahar, the Taliban came to prominence in Afghanistan in the autumn of 1994. Mullah Mohammed Omar, a Muslim cleric set up the Taliban movement of students who took up arms to end the chaos in Afghanistan. Growing in strength they first captured Kandahar, then Herat and much of the Southern and Western Afghanistan and advanced to Kabul.

In September, 1996 the Taliban took Kabul. President Rabbani joined an opposition alliance (United Front or the Northern Alliance). The Taliban now controlled 90% of Afghanistan, with the alliance holding territory only in the North. The Taliban brutally executed the former President Mohammad Najibullah and his brother on 26 September after abducting him and his brother from the United Nations Office in Kabul where he took refuge for 4 years. This was done despite the request from the Secretary General of United Nations to Taliban to allow Najibullah to leave the country. The Taliban's promise to the Afghan people was to restore peace and security and enforce their own austere version of Sharia, or Islamic law once in power. In 1997 Pakistan and

⁵ BBC News website, “Afghanistan/Timeline” <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/1162108.stm>.

Saudi Arabia recognized Taliban as the legitimate rulers of Afghanistan. Later United Arab Emirates too recognized the government of the Taliban making it the only three countries of the world to recognize the Taliban regime of Afghanistan.

Islamist movements were often opposed by both the military and entrenched establishments. The urban elites also worried that Islamic governments would crush democratic institutions. The status and rights of women were also threatened by more extreme Islamist movements. The threat was particularly real in Afghanistan where radical Taliban banned women from the workplace. In keeping with their own particular interpretation of Islamic law, the Taliban even sought to enact laws forcing women to wear veils and all covering burka in public and men to grow beards. They disapproved of girls aged 10 and over from schooling and similar disdain for television, music and cinema.

Next the attacks on UN personnel in Taliban held areas began. When 4 -5 personnel of various UN agencies were killed the UN demanded that the Taliban stop providing sanctuary and training for international terrorists and their organizations. Also in August 1998 there were terrorist attacks on United States embassies in Nairobi, Kenya and dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania which claimed hundred of lives. The United States indicted Osama Bin Laden for 1998 embassy bombings and demanded that the Taliban faction which US never recognized as Afghanistan's legitimate government, handover Bin Laden to authorities to be brought for justice. The US also retaliated by launching a missile attack at suspected bases of Osama bin Laden. The next two years saw the United Nations imposing sanctions on the Taliban regime in the form of air embargo and financial sanctions to force the Taliban to handover Osama bin Laden for trial.

Apart from the suppression of women the Taliban extremist doctrine also resulted in the destruction of giant Bamiyyan Buddha Statues in 2001. This was done mainly in defiance of international efforts to save them.⁶ This left them in a state of isolation and strong condemnation by the international community.

Still it is the terrorist attacks on 11 September, 2001 on US soil which sealed the fate of Taliban and the al Qaeda movement. The same day NATO council keeping up with the article 5 of the NATO charter declared that the attack on US is considered as an attack on all NATO nations. President George W Bush immediately announced a war on terrorism. Hence one of the biggest operations of the United States war on terrorism commenced to bring Osama bin Laden and al- Qaeda to justice.

⁶ *Ibid.*

3. Human Security at present

Years of conflict and instability has taken toll in the country's development or rather lack of it. Even without the hard data according to the Failed States Index (FSI), the Afghan population is among the hungriest, most illiterate and destitute in the world. In the year 2009, an estimated seven million people remains hungry throughout the country.⁷ It currently stands among the poorest countries in the world with weak political, civic, economic, legal and military infrastructures. The FSI 2009 shows that all of Afghanistan's social indicators have worsened or stayed the same during the past year. The Human Development Index (HDI) which looks beyond Gross Domestic Production to a broader definition of well being places Afghanistan among the poorest countries of the world. The HDI rank Afghanistan at 181st out of the 182 countries with data.⁸

Afghanistan has a high population growth rate of about 2.69% per year. The Human Poverty Index (HPI) which work out the proportion of people below certain threshold levels in each of the dimension of HDI - a living a long and healthy life, having access to education, and a certain standard of living ranks Afghanistan 135th among the 135 countries for which the index is calculated. Lack of access to education during the wars and Taliban policy of discouraging women going to school resulted in low levels of literacy and the large scale illiteracy in turn continues to contribution to infant mortality, malnutrition, poor health and finally to low economic production and growth. With the school system largely destroyed, with no significant industrialization in the country and most of large irrigation projects damaged, the country's economy was ruined. It has so far had no significant peace for the ruined economy to recover. The economic indicators shows that in 2009 as many as 18 million Afghans lived on less than \$2 a day and five million Afghans living under the poverty line. Its unemployment rate is 40%. Hence prior 2001, in such improvised society it became fairly easy to raise an army by any provincial leader. A soldier could be recruited for the payment of a meal. Poverty is also a contributing factor for the presence of so many militant groups in the country.

Some figures emerging from Afghanistan are astonishing in terms of today's developed health care and education. The infant mortality rate is 152 deaths per 1000 live births. According to the HDI 2007 the life expectancy in Afghanistan is 43 years with more than 45% of the population under the age of 14. The adult literacy rate is a

⁷ The Fund for Peace website, "Country Profiles: Afghanistan," *op. cit.*

⁸ *Human Development Report 2009*, "Country Fact Sheets: Afghanistan" <<http://hdrstates.undp.org>>.

mere 28%.⁹

Another unique problem in Afghanistan is the large number of orphans. There are about 400,000 orphans in the country. Malnutrition affects almost half of the country's child population, as reported by the UNICEF.¹⁰

The above data shows us that human security conditions in Afghanistan at present are the worst in South Asia and in the world. Displacement, landmines, disease, unemployment and poverty remain some of the country's most serious human security conditions. In the late 1990's the people of Afghanistan, already suffering from the brutal effects of the ongoing conflict also experienced a series of natural disasters. In February and May 1998, there were earthquakes in Afghanistan that killed more than 7000 persons and affected the livelihoods and shelter of a further 165,000 persons. Then in the same year in the month of June some 6000 people were killed in severe flooding. Since 1992 protracted drought has affected another 2.5 million people. But it is mostly the protracted conflict that destroyed the economy and the infrastructure of the country such as the irrigation systems, schools, roads, cities and even the agricultural land which were used by the conflicting parties to plant landmines.

It is easy to understand why so many Afghans are fleeing their country. The Afghan refugee problem began with Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. When the confrontation started about 3 million refugees fled to Pakistan and another 1.5 million to Iran. After withdrawal of the Soviets in 1991, when civil war between various factions continued and the number of civilians fleeing the country increased steadily. By 1990, there were 6.3 million Afghans in exile, 3.3 million in Pakistan and 3 million in Iran making the Afghan refugee problem, the world's worst refugee crisis. Today there are 4 million Afghan refugees in Pakistan. Now there is also a second generation of Afghan refugees in Pakistan who have never been to their motherland.

As Afghanistan faces these challenges of nation rebuilding, world leaders from seventy nations gathered in London on June 28th 2010 to take part in the deliberations at the London conference on Afghanistan. In the agenda, was the discussion on ending of the conflict and rebuilding the country. Recognizing the challenges faced by President Karzai, the need for more resources to be invested in developing Afghanistan was agreed upon. It was also proposed to set up a trust fund to provide foreign aid to the country, and use it to persuade former Taliban members to denounce violence and enter the mainstream life.

As Barnett Rubin states "it is worth paying a modest price to protect self

⁹ *HDR, 2009, op. cit.*

¹⁰ UNICEF Press Center, 4 August 2005 <www.unicef.org/media_27853.html>.

determination and human security of the people of Afghanistan. Our own security depends on it.”¹¹ For us in South Asia it is a necessity that Afghanistan is rebuilt quickly and its people enjoy basic human security. The failure will pose a considerable threat to world’s most populated sub continent.

4. Bonn Agreement 2001

On 9th November 2001, President Bush addressing the UN General Assembly pointed out the necessity of uniting against terrorism. When two days later Kabul and Herat fell, “Six-plus-Two met on 12 November at the UN. This meeting was chaired by the Special Representative of the Secretary General of Afghanistan Lakhdar Brahimi, former Foreign Minister of Algeria. It became apparent that some sort of international consensus was being reached on the future of Afghanistan at this meeting where rivals of power agreed to come together to work for a stable Afghanistan and get rid of the Taliban. Then the UN organized a meeting of Afghan political leaders in Bonn, Germany.

Next, from November 27 to December 5, 2001, a conference took place in Bonn to map the future of the Afghanistan under UN auspices, chaired by Lakdar Brahimi. Eighteen countries acted as observers including Afghanistan’s neighbours. After nine days of intensive negotiations, the UN sponsored talks in Bonn culminated in the signing of an Agreement on a provisional arrangement in Afghanistan, pending the re-establishment of permanent government institutions.

The remarkable achievement of the Bonn conference was that the participants were,

Determined to end the tragic conflict in Afghanistan and promote national reconciliation, lasting peace, stability and respect for human rights in the country;

Reaffirming the independence, national sovereignty and territorial integrity of Afghanistan;

Acknowledging the right of the people of Afghanistan to freely determine their own political future in accordance with the principles of Islam, democracy,

¹¹ Barnett Rubin, “Afghanistan Threats to Human Security,” adapted from a speech delivered in Tokyo, December 15, 2010 at the International symposium on Human Security <http://essays.ssrc.org/sept.11/essays/rubin_text_only.htm>.

pluralism and social justice.¹²

Security Council endorsing the Afghanistan agreement on interim arrangements pending the re-establishment of permanent government institutions unanimously adopted resolution 1383 (2001) and thus declared its willingness to take further action, on the basis of a report by the Secretary-General, to support the interim institutions established by the Agreement.¹³ In a press release very next day, Security Council announced the determination to help the Afghan people end the tragic conflicts in their country and promote national reconciliation, lasting peace, stability and respect for human rights. The Security Council also called on all bilateral and multilateral donors, in coordination with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Lakhdar Brahimi, United Nations agencies and all Afghan groups, reaffirm, strengthen and implement their commitment to assist with the rehabilitation, recovery and reconstruction of Afghanistan, in coordination with the Interim Authority and as long as the Afghan groups fulfill their commitments.¹⁴

Secretary-General Kofi Annan warmly welcomed the accord as “an important step” towards lasting peace and the return of legitimate authority in the country and assured the Afghan people that the United Nations “stands ready to help them reach peace, stability and prosperity.”¹⁵

James Dobbins, the US representative in Bonn, attributes the agreement to the following factors:

- The high level of competence displayed by the international civil servants and Afghan leaders who participated in the Bonn conference and oversaw the implementations of the agreement;
- War weariness among the Afghan people;
- The presence of an internal resistance movement;
- The active support of Afghanistan’s neighbours – Russia, Iran, India and Pakistan for the Bonn Agreement; and
- Modest, limited US objectives for Afghanistan¹⁶

The Bonn Agreement, which is essentially a series of agreements was aimed at ending the conflict in Afghanistan by promoting national reconciliation, lasting peace, stability

¹² “Agreement on Provisional Arrangements in Afghanistan pending the Re-establishment of Permanent Government Institutions” <www.afghangovernment.com/AfghanAgreementBonn.htm>.

¹³ Security Council 4434th Meeting, Press Release SC/7234.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Press Release, SG/SM/8068.

¹⁶ Former US Envoy to Afghanistan reviews Bonn Agreement Success <www.america.gov/st/washfile-english/2005/October/20051006144849cpataruko.969109.html>.

and respect for human rights in the country. The agreement included establishing institutions like the judiciary, the army and the police force, the constitutional commissions, the election commission, banking, the drug enforcement directorate and disarming and demobilization of militias, drafting of a new constitution, fighting terrorism, drugs and organized crime, repatriation and resettlement of refugees, and other related subjects. The agreement sought to find a solution to the country's monetary crisis by authorizing the establishment of a new central bank capable of accounting procedures for the issuance of currency. For the first time Afghan authorities were to establish a human rights commission. The entire process supported to establish a multi-ethnic, fully representative government, elected through free and fair elections by the people of Afghanistan.

Under the general provisions of the Bonn Agreement, an Interim Authority was established upon the official transfer of power on 22 December, 2001. The Interim Authority was to consist of an Interim Administration presided over by a Chairman. What is noteworthy of the Bonn agreement is that it mentions administration rather than government. Its implication is that it is a temporary measure, limited nature. It explains that the role of the administration is actually to administer – to provide services.

Having proven the Afghan delegation of his capacity and sincerity Hamid Karzai became an acceptable candidate to Head the Afghan Interim Authority (AIA). He was a Pashtun leader, acceptable to Pakistan. On 22 December in Kabul, the internationally recognized administration of President Rabbani handed power to the new Interim Afghan Administration headed by Karzai. Hamid Karzai was born in Kandahar in 1957. After his western style primary and secondary education in Kabul, fluent in English language he had his university education in India. In 1982 he joined the Afghan National Liberation Front (ANLF) and worked to liberate Afghanistan from the Soviet invaders. He was sympathetic to Taliban at the beginning but the assassination of his father by the Taliban made him wary of the Taliban. Father's death made Karzai to emerge as a leader, strong Pashtun leader from Kandahar, the former stronghold of Taliban. Karzai and his family lived in exile some years and was back in the country to play a key role in the oust of Taliban from their final stronghold of Kandahar in 2001. In June 2002, Hamid Karzai was endorsed as Head of State by Afghanistan's Loya Jigra.¹⁷ The first election, styled in western democracy in the post – Taliban Afghanistan was held in 2004. It was held in the war torn country despite insurgents in action with much help from USA and the international community.

¹⁷ BBC News online, "Hamid Karzai: Shrewd Statesman" <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/2045606.stm>.

5. Presidential Election of 2009

The first Presidential election, styled in western democracy in the post – Taliban Afghanistan was held in 2004. It was held in the war torn country despite insurgents in action with much help from the USA and the international community. It was accomplished not merely because of military presence but also because of the willingness and commitment of the Afghan people who wanted a democratically elected government.

On 20th August 2009, Afghanistan held its second Presidential election. On a visit to the USA Hamid Karzai wrote that “this September, Afghanistan will hold its second parliamentary elections in the past five years. As I write, thousands of Afghans including a great number of women, have registered to campaign. Our democracy has steadily taken root. Our people jealously guard their democratic achievements.”¹⁸ Independent Election Commission (IEC) noted that 17 million voter registration.¹⁹ The major political parties among the many were: the National United Front of Afghanistan (UNF); National Democratic Front (NDF); Payman-e-Kabul comprising former Leftist and Maoist groups and the Afghan Social Democratic Party (Afghan Mellat). It may be correct to assume that the main objective of the most of these parties were to strengthen the democracy. According to IEC there were 44 candidates.²⁰ The top two Presidential candidates were Hamid Karzai and Dr. Abdullah Abdullah.

When the votes were counted both Karzai and Abdulla claimed victory. As a result a serious crisis developed and with allegations and complaints the international actors had no option but to get involved to avert a disaster in Afghanistan’s new found democracy. The USA sent Senator John Kerry, Chairman of the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee. He met Karzai and Abdullah separately stressing “the necessity of a legitimate outcome.” After much telephone diplomacy of the US Secretary of State, Hilary Clinton, Defense Secretary Robert Gates, the British Prime Minister Gordon Brown among others it was decided to conduct a run-off on 7 November due to fraudulent conduct of the election. On 1 November, Dr. Abdullah withdrew from the run-off leading to IEC cancellation of the run-off and Hamid Karzai was declared the President of the Afghanistan for the second time. Despite the credibility crisis it is still

¹⁸ Hamid Karzai, *The Washington Post*, 9 May 2010 <www.washingtonpost.com>.

¹⁹ Humera Iqbal, “Afghan Presidential Election and its Implications for the Region,” *Regional Studies*, vol. xxviii, no. 2, spring 2010, p. 59.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

remarkable that the fragile democratic process emerged victorious.

President Karzai gave new hope and willingness to bring a positive change to his country with the help of the international community. In his inaugural address, Karzai speaking in Dari and Pashto to reach out to the largest ethnic groups of the country outlined six main priorities of his government. These were good governance; security; peace and reconciliation; economic development; regional cooperation; and foreign policy affairs. In the same speech he emphasized the need for building a secure and self-sufficient Afghanistan. His speech reflected a shift in his stance against the Taliban. From being an anti-Taliban he shifted to become a conditional accommodator of them. For this purpose he offered to hold a Peace Jigra. Karzai managed to convince the International community of his commitment for peace in Afghanistan and as a result at the London conference held on 28 January 2010 the International community declared its support for Afghan-led peace efforts by pledging to provide a \$500 million pay-for-peace proposal.²¹

6. Jigra in Afghan Society

A “jigra” is a Pashto word and means “large assembly” or “grand council.” The institution which is centuries old, is similar to the Islamic “shura”, or consultative assembly. Jigra is the traditional and a unique forum to Afghanistan for resolving disputes between tribes or discussing problems which affects communities. It is said that jigras are as old as the civilization of Afghanistan and they have become a national and regular feature for deciding matters of common concern.

The Loya Jigra which has taken place over the years has two kinds. One is at times of national crisis people themselves call upon to deliberate and discuss matters of war and peace. The second is when the ruler of the land is compelled to consult the people on matters of crucial importance such as enactment of fundamental law. Since mid 18th century Loya Jigras have become a regular feature in Afghanistan. There have been Loya Jigras called upon by the ruler at the beginning of the World War I in 1915 to maintain neutrality in war, then in 1923, 1924 and 1928. In 1941 a Loya Jigra was convened to deliberate the position of Afghanistan in World War II. A jigra was convened again in 1955 and the last before the Soviet occupation in 1977. Since then in the 1980's and 1990's jigras were not called upon.

After the fall of Taliba, the Bonn agreement on Afghanistan brought the Loya

²¹ CNN news, 28 January 2010.

Jigra back as a forum for discussion. Since the overthrow of Taliban there have been two Loya Jigras. Although jigras are a Pashtun system of political decision-making since December 2001 it has been used by the Afghan government for all Afghan ethnic groups. The AIA called upon an emergency Loya Jigra to be convened within six months of the establishment of the AIA. On 13 June 2002 the emergency Loya Jigra elected Hamid Karzai who served as the Prime Minister since December 2001 as the Chairman of the Afghan Transitional Authority (ATA) for a period of two years.

It was also decided that a constitutional Loya Jigra will be convened within 18 months of the establishment of the transitional authority, in order to adopt a new constitution for Afghanistan.²² It has been the practice of the Afghan governments to use jigras to reach consensus with parliamentarians and civil society groups on controversial or problematic policy issues. The 502 member Constitutional Loya Jigra presented the new constitution of Afghanistan on 4 January 2004. The 162 article Constitution provides for a presidential form of government with a bicameral parliament, Meshrano Jigra (upper house) and Wolesi Jigra (lower house). The constitution of Afghanistan recognizes the Loya Jigra as “the highest manifestation of the will of the people of Afghanistan.”²³

7. Peace Jigra 2010

Hamid Karzai, when inaugurated as President for the second term on 19 November 2009, announced his plan for grand council on Peace. President Karzai in the same speech stated that one of his main priorities would be to achieve security across Afghanistan within five years. On 9 May 2010 following the London conference in January and on a visit to the United States of America he wrote that “my government is convening a Consultative Peace Jigra – a historic forum of the Afghan people – to chart a way forward for engaging those who fight against us. Fifteen hundred representatives of the Afghan people will deliberate and advise us on reconciliation and reintegration.”²⁴ Formally it is named the Afghanistan’s National Consultative Peace Jigra (NCPJ) or shortly Peace Jigra. For this end, a Peace Jigra would be organized as a means of bringing different and competing parts of Afghan society together.

The concept of sustainable peace is a situation where there is no physical

²² “Agreement on Provisional Arrangements in Afghanistan pending the re-establishment of Permanent Government Institutions, *op. cit.*

²³ *Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan*, Article 110.

²⁴ Hamid Karzai, *The Washington Post*, 9 May 2010.

violence, no unacceptable political, economic, cultural forms of discrimination, and where there is high level of internal and external legitimacy or support, self sustainability and propensity to enhance the constructive transformation of conflicts. Peacebuilding to achieve sustainable peace as Lederach points it is something much more than post conflict reconstruction. That is peacebuilding must encompass, generate and sustain the full array of processes, approaches and stages needed to transform conflict toward more sustainable peaceful relationships. Therefore rather than treating peace as stage in time or a condition, it must be treated as a dynamic social construct.

The Peace Jigra or the traditional assembly of elders is a peacebuilding approach that was identified by the Afghan leaders. It is a national conference as in accepted established political development and government measures tools. It is of a political nature which could increase the local peace capacity. Mirwais Yasini, the deputy speaker of the Afghan parliament stated that Afghanistan must have to have a jigra because there is no military solution to the Afghan conflict. He further stated that dialogue is the only solution to the conflict in Afghanistan.²⁵ With the Afghan government initiating the Peace Jigra, different groups have taken part at the first meeting on June 2 - 4, 2010. In the opening address at the Peace Jigra, Karzai speaking to the delegates said that “Afghan nation is looking at you. They await your decisions, your advice, so that you can show the Afghan nation the way to reach peace, to rescue Afghanistan from this suffering and pain.”²⁶ This was first major public debate on how to end the war. The Secretary General of the United Nations issuing a statement congratulated the Government of Afghanistan and the participants of the Consultative Peace Jigra on the process and outcomes and further stated that this is a significant step towards reaching out to all Afghan people.²⁷ *The New York Times* of 31 May, 2010 reported that western nations involved in Afghanistan welcomed the national peace council to start a new chapter in Afghanistan’s political life. In a joint news conference, then the NATO commander, Gen. Stanley A. McChrystal, and the senior civilian representative Mark Sedwill emphasized that the west supported the Peace Jigra. President Obama too publicly and explicitly supported the Peace Jigra keeping to the US position on reconciliation. The hope for success of the Peace Jigra lies in this fact that all parities (NATO, Karazi and Taliban) agree that the war in Afghanistan can be won by fighting alone.

The Peace Jigra was organized as a means of bringing different and competing

²⁵ Aljazeera website, <www.Aljazeera.net/news/asia/2010/06/02>.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Secretary General SG/SM 12937.

parts of Afghan society together. For this purpose it was officially open to all. It was therefore an inter-Afghan jirga. The composition of the Peace Jirga was as follows. From the Ulemma council (a group of religious Afghan scholars and leaders who debate religious matters) 155 members participated. Then civil society representatives, district and provincial officials, tribal leaders, groups representing Afghan refugee committees in Iran and Pakistan, women's rights activists, some 300 women, businessmen, members from the upper house of parliament, 200 members of the international community and some former warlords making altogether a 13 different groups to participate in its first meeting. The total number was 1600.²⁸

According to Lederach's pyramid style approach to peacebuilding, the participants represented all three types of actors he described in the pyramid style peace building exercise. All three types of actors in the three levels of the pyramid were represented in the first Peace Jirga. From bottom up, at level three the refugee camp leaders, community leaders were invited. Then at second level, middle range leadership was represented by civil society representatives and finally at the top level the top leadership of the country was at the conference. According to Lederach's model for sustainable reconciliation in divided societies, the Peace Jirga has all three types of actors represented. In the absence of various approaches to peace building in the country the Peace Jirga needs to provide prejudice reduction at level three and act as a peace commission at level two. It is not yet clear about level one approach where high level input should be made.

At the first three day conference a long list of recommendations were made. All the details are yet to emerge but among the recommendations were the following:

- Taliban to be removed from international blacklists;
- Taliban to be released from jails, both Afghan and International;
- Taliban to distance themselves from al-Qaeda;
- End NATO house searches and bombing;
- Taliban to end their attacks;
- Government to establish a framework for negotiations with the Taliban;
- A peace council to be formed drawing in provincial leaders;
- For all sides to remove conditions that could harm the peace process.²⁹

The main objective of the Peace Jirga was to provide a forum through which a variety of views could be expressed without violence and intimidation. From the above

²⁸ Robert D. Lamb, Mehlaqa Samdani, and Justine Fleischner, "Afghanistan's National Consultative Peace Jirga" <<http://csis.org/publication/afghanistans-national-consultative-peace-jirga-0>>.

²⁹ CNN report by senior international correspondent Nic Robertson, June 4th 2010.

recommendations it looks as if it was achieved to a certain extent. As the experts in peacebuilding points out, one of the most important steps in the exercise of peacebuilding is that all relevant actors need to participate.³⁰ Hence at this initial stage in peacebuilding in Afghanistan the Peace Jigra was successful in bringing together the relevant actors. The critics may point that the Taliban did not participate but individuals with ties to the Taliban participated. Hence there is some success to record. Also on positive side is that the international communities publicly supported the Peace Jigra. Therefore, it may just be able to have adequate funding and build institutional capacity to keep the promise to former combatants.

In Afghanistan however, there may be many doubts on the success of the National Consultative Peace Jigra. But the key reason for offering a public forum for Afghans to voice their concern and expectations about reconciliation was to build domestic and international consensus for negotiating framework for the Kabul Conference in July 2010.

8. Conclusion

Since 2001, with gradual development of democratic institutions, especially holding two presidential elections within a matter of five years shows the optimism and hope in Afghanistan for peace. Similarly it is important to keep in mind when establishing sustainable peace in a country where tribal laws and cultural traditions are deeply ingrained in the polity that their hold of the people is far too stronger than the writ of the central government. As Lederach points out socio-cultural resources or people and culture are the greatest resources for sustaining peace in the long run.³¹ Therefore, the all Afghan Peace Jigra seems to be the way forward for to build sustainable peace in Afghanistan.

It is also necessary to keep in mind that this deeply religious traditional society in its optimism for peace do not stretch far enough to accommodate western style of thinking. Like many other South Asian nations, in Afghanistan too western ideals are not easily adopted. Therefore, where stumbling blocks occur it is worthwhile for the Afghan government to look towards non Western peace makers such as the Peace envoy who took part in many of the discussion of the two fractions in Sri Lanka, the Japanese

³⁰ Luc Reyhler and Thania Paffenholz, *Peacebuilding: A field Guide* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2001), p. 537.

³¹ John Paul Lederach, *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies* (Washington, D.C.: United States Inst of Peace Press, 1998), p. 9.

Peace envoy Yakushi Akashi.

It is also important in the process of sustainable positive peace building not to depend totally on foreign aid. I do not agree with the thesis put forward by some that Afghanistan needs Marshall Plan style of investment for stability.³² Of course human security is very important and minimizing the human suffering and poverty alleviation are necessary goals. If human security is taken care and special attention is paid for education it is very likely the Afghans themselves will rebuild their country. Even if large scale donor funding is not the only answer, as Lederach points out “without adequate resources, explicit preparation, and commitment over time, peace will remain a distant idea rather than a practical goal.”³³

³² Saira Yamin, *Peacebuilding in Afghanistan: Revisiting the Global War on Terrorism*, RCSS Policy studies 43, p. 50.

³³ Lederach, *op. cit.*, p. 87.