CONFLICT FORMATION AND TRANSFORMATION IN AFGHANISTAN SINCE 1973

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Abstract

This paper will examine conflict conflagration in Afghanistan in the light of transformation process. Conflict transformation in Afghanistan means change in the nature, context, issues and players involved in the vicious cycle of conflicts, particularly since the overthrow of monarchy in August 1973. Four decades of armed conflicts in Afghanistan which involved local and external players not only caused enormous economic and physical destruction in that war-torn country but also became a source of instability in Central, South and West Asia. Not only armed conflicts in Afghanistan resulted into foreign invasions but also led to the exodus of millions of people to neighboring countries and outside the region thus generating new set of conflicts involving Afghan Diaspora. It is the sustained level of armed conflicts in Afghanistan since 1973 and its lethal implications on the local people and the neighboring countries which needs to be analyzed in the context of transformation of conflicts at different levels. From any standpoint, in the last four decades, there has been more negative and violent transformation of conflicts in Afghanistan than positive transformation of conflicts. Four decades of political turmoil, civil war, efforts for peace, reconciliation and foreign invasions in Afghanistan wouldn't have continued without the existence of internal fault lines in that conflict ridden country.

Key Words: *Afghanistan, conflict formation, conflict transformation, Afghan diaspora.*

Introduction

No country in modern history has undergone so much of transformation in conflicts as Afghanistan. Located at the cross roads of Central, South and West Asia and with a landlocked geographical setting, Afghanistan emerged as a state on the map of the world in 1747. With a history of more than 200 years but unable to modernize its state and societal

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structures, Afghanistan is the only country which has experienced foreign invasions and occupations by three major powers: Great Britain, Soviet Union and the United States during nineteenth, twentieth and twenty first century. The nature of conflicts in Afghanistan, which also reflect its tribal feuds, social backwardness, warlord-ism, ethnic and sectarian contradictions and conservative nature of society cannot be understood without analyzing internal and external dynamics which shape conflicts at different levels.

Conflict transformation in Afghanistan means change in the nature, context, issues and players involved in the vicious cycle of the conflict, particularly since the overthrow of monarchy in August 1973. Four decades of armed conflicts in Afghanistan which involved local and external players not only caused enormous economic and physical destruction in that war-torn country but also became a source of instability in Central, South and West Asia. Not only armed conflicts in Afghanistan resulted into foreign invasions but also led to the exodus of millions of people to neighboring countries and outside the region thus generating new set of conflicts involving Afghan Diaspora. It is the sustained level of armed conflicts in Afghanistan since 1973 and its lethal implications on the local people and the neighboring countries which needs to be analyzed in the context of transformation of conflicts at different levels. From any standpoint, in the last four decades, there has been more negative and violent transformation of conflicts in Afghanistan than positive transformation of conflicts. Four decades of political turmoil, civil war, efforts for peace, reconciliation and foreign invasions in Afghanistan wouldn't have continued without the existence of internal fault lines in that unfortunate country. As rightly argued by an Afghan writer:

> *Afghanistan is one of the world's most conflict ridden countries, displaying a complex interaction of internal and external conflict lines that have devastated the country in the past three decades. Internal ethnic, religious, geographical, and political cleavages have launched transformation process in the twentieth century. Violence has dominated in Afghanistan since the mid of 1970s.*[1]

This paper will examine conflict conflagration in Afghanistan in the light of transformation process by responding to following questions:

1.   What is conflict and conflict transformation?

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1   Hamidullah Ataee, "Conflict Transformation and Afghanistan," in *Conflict Transformation and the Challenge of Peace*, ed. Moonis Ahmar (Karachi: Program on Peace Studies and Conflict Resolution, Department of International Relations, University of Karachi in collaboration with the Hanns Seidel Foundation, Islamabad, 2011), 91.

2.   What is the nature of conflicts in Afghanistan and why that country is in a state of armed conflicts since 1973?

3.   How the conflicts in Afghanistan have transformed since 1973 and why there has been a negative and violent transformation of conflicts in Afghanistan?

4.   What are the issues which impede the positive transformation of conflicts in Afghanistan and how these issues could be resolved peacefully?

5.   To what extent external players are responsible for the negative transformation of conflicts in Afghanistan?

6.   Why the local stakeholders are not committed to the positive transformation of conflicts in Afghanistan?

7.   How a positive transformation of conflicts in Afghanistan can ensure peace, stability in that country and in Central, South and West Asia?

Furthermore, the paper will link the conceptual paradigm of conflict transformation and the conflicts in Afghanistan and highlight how in the last four decades, deepening of armed conflicts in that country diminished hopes for peace and augmented the negative transformation of conflicts.

Conceptual Framework

Conflict is rooted in human nature and is as old as the history of mankind. It means different meaning to different people but at one point there is a consensus that without seeking a better understanding of conflicts at different levels, it will be rather impossible to aspire for a peaceful and stable world. Conflict ranges from variation and incompatibility among people to clash of interests at the individual, group, national, state, regional and international level. According to *The Oxford Dictionary and Thesaurus*, conflict means, "a state of opposition or hostilities," "fight or struggle," "clashing of opposite principles," "the opposition of incompatible wishes or needs in a person."[2] *The Penguin Dictionary of International Relations* defines conflict as,

> *…a social condition that arises when two or more actors pursue mutually exclusive or mutually incompatible goals. In International Relations conflict behavior can be observed as war both as a threatened outcome and as an existential reality and bargaining behavior short of the violent idiom.*[3]

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2   Sara Tulloch, ed., *The Oxford Dictionary & Thesaurus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 299.

3   Graham Evans and Jeffrey Newnham, *The Penguin Dictionary Of International Relations* (London: Penguin Books, 1998), 93.

Likewise, James Schellenberg in his book, *Conflict Resolution Theory, Research and Practice* argues that, "conflict resolution may occur through self-conscious efforts to come to an agreement, or it may come by other means, environmental change and the influence of third parties."[4] Since some conflicts are of a very complicated nature and cannot be resolved easily, therefore, one tries to regulate or lower the intensity of conflict at various levels. Therefore, "A conflict is destructive when the parties in it are dissatisfied with outcomes and they feel that they have lost as a result of the conflict. It is "productive" if the parties are satisfied with their outcomes and feel that they have gained out of the conflict."[5] Conflict is a wholesome term which has several dimensions, dynamics and facets. It may be negative, positive, micro, macro, inter-state, intra-state, at low intensity and high intensity.

As far as conflict transformation is concerned it can be defined in several ways. There is not one general or a comprehensive definition which can explain the basic characteristics of conflict transformation but those who attempt to take into account social, cultural, political, sociological, economic, psychological and biological aspects of conflict can come up with a better description of conflict transformation.[6] The most simple and logical definition of conflict transformation is given by John P. Lederach in the following words:

> *Conflict transformation is to envision and respond to the ebb and flow of social conflict as life – saving opportunities for creating constructive change processes that reduce violence, increase justice in direct interaction and social structures, and to respond to real – life problems in human relationships.*[7]

According to Lederach, conflict transformation can also be defined in terms of 'constructive change processes' as

> *...it emphasizes the capacity of the transformation of approach to building new things. Conflict transformation begins with a central goal: to build constructive change out of the energy created by conflict. By focusing this*

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4   James Schellenberg, *Conflict Resolution Theory, Research and Practice* (New York: State University of New York, 1996), 9.

5   Harun-ur-Rashid, *An Introduction to Peace and Conflict Studies* (Dhaka: The University Press Limited, 2005), 53.

6   Moonis Ahmar, ed., *Conflict Transformation and the Challenge of Peace* (Karachi: Program on Peace Studies and Conflict Resolution, Department of International Relations, University of Karachi in collaboration with the Hanns Seidel Foundation, Islamabad, 2011), 23.

7   John P. Lederach, *The Little Book of Conflict Transformation* (Pennsylvania: Good Books, 2003), 14.

energy on the underlying relationships and social structures, constructive changes can be brought about. The key here is to move conflict away from destructive processes and toward constructive ones. The primary task of conflict transformation is not to find quick fix solution to immediate problems, but rather to generate creative platforms that can simultaneously address surface issue and change underlying social structures and relationship patterns beyond intractability.[8]

While defining conflict transformation in the context of peace, Lederach argues that, "conflict transformation views peace as centered and rooted in the quality of relationships. In this sense, peace is a process structure, a phenomenon that is simultaneously dynamic, adaptive and changing in essence, rather than seeing peace as a static end state, conflict transformation views peace as a continuously evolving and developing quality of relationship. It is defined by international efforts to address the natural rise of human conflict through non-violent approaches that address issues and increase understanding, equality and respect in relationship."[9] Peace is considered as an end, and like conflict resolution and management, conflict transformation is considered as a means to accomplish that end.[10] Lederach's conviction about conflict transformation is reflected from his contention that,

Conflict transformation is accurate because the core of my work is indeed about engaging myself in constructive change initiative that include and go beyond the resolution of particular problem. It is scientifically sound because the writing and research about conflict converge in two common ideas: conflict is normal in human relationships and conflict is a motor of change. And transformation is clear in vision because it brings into focus the horizon toward which we journey namely the building of healthy relationships and communities, both locally and globally. The process requires significant changes in our current ways of relating.[11]

Supporting the rationale of conflict transformation, it is argued that conflict resolution and management only promote an ideal solution of issues which cause threat to peace and stability. Whereas, conflict transformation talks not about the resolution but promoting the positive development which can help lower the intensity of a particular conflict. One can point out the fact that the road to conflict resolution and management also passes through the transformational process, whether negative or positive. Without a positive change in the attitude, behavior and actions of parties to a particular conflict, there cannot be any

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8   Ibid.,

9   Ibid.,

10   Ibid., Moonis Ahmar, 24-25.

11   Ibid., John P. Lederach, 4-5.

headway as far as the management or resolution part of conflict is concerned.[12] Therefore, transformation precedes en management and resolution.

Another definition of conflict transformation is given by Hugh Miall, who states that, "conflict transformation is a comprehensive approach, addressing a range of dimensions (micro to macro issues, local to global levels, grassroots to elite actors, short-term to long-term time scales). It aims to develop capacity and to support structural change rather than to facilitate outcomes or deliver settlements. It seeks to engage with conflict at the pre-violence and post-violence places, and with the causes and consequences of violent conflict, which usually extend beyond the site of fighting."[13] To what extent structural change within human beings can help the process of conflict transformation depends on the nature of conflict, the players and other stakeholders in the conflict and the role of societal forces. Lederach broadens the definition of conflict transformation when he argues that:

"our definition uses the term envision and respond. Envision is active, a verb. It requires an intentional perspective and attitude, a willingness to create and nurture a horizon that provides direction and purpose. A transformational perspective is built upon two conditions: a capacity to envision conflict positively, as a natural phenomenon that creates potential for constructive growth and a willingness to respond in ways that maximize the potential for positive change."[14]

But, in order to envision conflict positively four things which matter are: change of heart, flexibility, tolerance and positive human relationships. Many a times, parties to a conflict cannot pursue a positive approach because they are a victim of their parochial mindset and interests. And one way;
"to promote constructive change on all those levels is dialogue which is essential to justice and peace on both an interpersonal and a structural level. It is not the only mechanism but is an essential one."[15]

Lederach also focuses on creative change in the process of conflict transformation by arguing that, "rather than concentrating exclusively on the content and substances of the dispute, the transformational approach

12. bid., Moonis Ahmar, 25.

13 Hugh Miall, "Conflict Transformation: A Multidimensional Task", Bergohf Research Center for Constructive Conflict Management, accessed on November 25, 2010. http://www.berghof-handbook.net/documents/publications/miall_handbook.pdf.

14 Ibid., John P. Lederach, 15.

15 Ibid., 21.

suggests that the key to understand conflict and developing creative change processes lies in seeing the less visible aspects of relationship. While the issues over which people fight are important and require creative response, relationships represent a web of conflict. It is out of this relational context that the particular issues arise and either become volatile or get quickly resolved."[16] Conflict transformation in a positive manner cannot take place if human mind is not creative and supportive to resolve issues faced by people who wield power. If the human mind lacks imagination, creativity, positive and a forward looking approach, the process conflict transformation will be a non-starter.

The Nature of Conflicts in Afghanistan

The definitional and conceptual paradigms of conflict and conflict transformation can however be applicable according to the nature and transformation of conflicts in different parts of the world. No country is devoid of conflicts but if conflicts are violent in nature; jeopardize past and present of people and threaten their future, the situation may have dangerous implications.

That is exactly what the situation in case of Afghanistan is. Called as the hub of conflicts and still unable to get over its orthodox, conservative and tribal background, Afghanistan's predicament lies in the absence of a leadership capable of putting things in order and seeking ownership to issues which are responsible for the outbreak of violent conflicts in the last four decades.

An historical account of conflicts in Afghanistan would reveal that since 1747 when Ahmed Shah Abdali (Durrani) integrated fragmented units under the umbrella of an Afghan state till today, state and societal structures remained in conflict with each other resulting into the periodic outbreak of violence. Afghanistan is 266 years older than Pakistan but in view of its national characteristics it has still not been able to settle down as a nation state. Weak central authority and autonomous regions in the countryside compounded the predicament of Afghanistan and provide a fertile ground to neighboring and other countries to intervene thus deepening the level of conflict in that conflict and crisis ridden country.

Amin Saikal, Professor of Political Science, Australian National University, Canberra, gives a detailed account of contradictions of the state and societal structures of Afghanistan responsible for the negative transformation of conflicts by arguing that:

> *Rare is the country that has sustained as many blows and such hard blows, as has Afghanistan since its foundation as a distinct political unit in 1747. Yet the country has managed to survive and to retain some form of sovereignty and territorial integrity, despite numerous wars and invasions*

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16 Ibid.

and swings between extremist ideological dispositions, ranging from tribalist value – systems to Marxism-Leninism and Islamic medievalism. It is the only country in that world that has experienced military occupation or intervention by Great Britain (twice in the nineteenth century) and the United States of America (since 2001). Domestically, Afghanistan has witnessed periods of both remarkable stability and violent turbulence, which have succeeded one another in a seemingly haphazard manner.[17]

Symbolic sovereignty exercised during the monarchial rule in Afghanistan failed to eradicate causes which deepened conflicts in that country because of two main reasons. *First*, all the Afghan monarchs since Ahmed Shah Abdali till Zahir Shah were able to maintain control in most of the cities and towns but the countryside remained out of their ambit. Even during the long reign of Zahir Shah (1933-1973) who tried to seek legitimacy for his rule failed to achieve the goal of national integration. *Second,* external intervention, whether in the form of British or Soviet undermined the authority of various rulers of Afghanistan. Furthermore, as pointed out by Jeffrey J. Roberts in his book, *The Origins of Conflicts in Afghanistan*:

> *Afghanistan is not a homogenous national state but a conglomeration of tribes and ethnic groups. The population of Afghanistan includes the Persian speaking Tajiks, whose lands in the Oxus plain are among the most fertile in Afghanistan. The Turkic-speaking Uzbeks and Turkmen of the northwest, along with the Tajiks, rank among the most anti-Russian people who inhibit the barren Central Highlands, remain alone among Afghanistan's major ethnic groups in professing Shia's Islam. The Nuristani, formerly known as Kafirs, remain all isolated in the mountains of the southeast, and the Baluchis and Baruhis. The predominant ethnic group in Afghanistan comprising roughly half of the population is the Pashtuns. The Pashtuns are mainly divided in two groups, the Durranis and the Ghilzais.*[18]

Ethnic landscape of Afghanistan tends to pose a serious question about the viability of the Afghan state because of the divide between the religious nationalism of (a segment of) Pashtuns in the south and south east of the country and Tajik-Uzbek nationalism in the north and center of Afghanistan. Sectarian divide also exposes the vulnerability of Afghanistan because of Shia population composed of Hazara community in the Center and in the West of Afghanistan. Amin Saikal views structural contradictions in the Afghan society by arguing that,

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17 Amin Saikal, *Modern Afghanistan: A History of Struggle and Survival* (New Delhi: I. B. Taurus, 2004), 1.

18 For further information see, Jeffrey J. Roberts, *The Origins of Conflict in Afghanistan* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2003), xiii.

"Afghanistan's politics and society in modern history have been shaped by interaction between variables with which few other countries had to cope. The variables of royal polygamy, major power rivalry and ideological extremism, have not all been of equal weight with equal impact on the process. However, their confluence, in conjunction with certain peculiar geo-strategic aspects of Afghanistan as a traditional, ethno-tribal and a crossroad, land locked Muslim country, has played a determining role in the evolution of the Afghan state and politics and in influencing the material life and psyche of its citizens as well as the country's relevance to the outside world".[19]

Therefore;

"most political conflicts in modern Afghan history have not begun as disputes over such issues as the direction of development, religious belief, constitutional rights or social issues. Rather, they have stemmed from the attempts of dominant communally based elites to accomplish a high degree of centralization of power with the help of foreign patrons."[20]

Some of the factors which transformed the nature of conflicts in Afghanistan since 1747 till today are:

1. The conservative and tribal nature of Afghan society which gave little space to the enlightened rule of King Amanullah and King Zahir Shah. While the royal family of Afghanistan, because of the policies of King Amanullah, tried to modernize, the countryside remained heavily conservative and influenced by the clergy.
2. Modernization and some development in Afghanistan was merely limited to Kabul and the elites failed to transform Afghan society from ultra conservative to modern and liberal. Masses remained uneducated and backward to a large extent and in view of the influence of clergy were unwilling to transform their lives.
3. Exposed to foreign intervention of foreign powers during 19th, 20th and 21st centuries, the nature of conflicts in Afghanistan transformed as armed resistance against foreign occupation became an integral part of their culture.
4. Sufferings of women and youths in Afghanistan because of armed conflicts and foreign military interventions deepened frustration and anger in Afghan society thus diminishing hope for a positive transformation of conflicts in that war torn country.

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19 Ibid., Amin Saikal, 231.

20 Ibid., 9.

5. Gun culture and warlord-ism further provided space to those groups who benefited from decades of violence and armed conflicts.
6. The lack of a vibrant Afghan civil society to counter intolerance, militancy, extremism, radicalization and violence generated conflicts against political opponents, sectarian and ethnic minorities.
7. The failing nature of Afghan state which promoted and deepened conflicts at various levels.
8. Weak justice system which denied any possibility of conflict management and resolution.
9. Absence of 'cultural enlightenment' which promoted conservative and orthodox mindset and precluded any hope to transformation as a progressive and modern country.
10. Failure to promote the culture of tolerance and dialogue which deepened the state of conflicts in Afghanistan.

Tracing the multi-dimensional nature of conflicts in Afghanistan, Asia Report of International Crisis Group (ICG) under the title, "Afghanistan: The Long, Hard Road To The 2014 Transition" argues that,

"ethnic and tribal rivalries have further complicated matters, with local religious leaders, tribal elders and strongmen frequently relying on competing customary law practices to resolve disputes, often without regard to Sharia or constitutional requirements. The country has consistently failed to progress toward a constitutional order that allows minorities, women and other vulnerable individuals to join the majority in influencing public policy and to enjoy fair application of the law".[21]

Unfortunately, Afghanistan missed several opportunities to modernize its infrastructure, educational system, economy and society. The process of modernization unleashed by King Amanullah failed to reach logical conclusion because of violent protests against his policy for the emancipation of women launched primarily in Pashtun areas in October 1928.[22] The long rule of King Zahir Shah from 1933-1973 could have transformed Afghanistan as a modern state but conflicts ranging from '*Pashtunistan*' dispute with Pakistan and conflict with Sardar Daud,

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21 International Crisis Group, "Afghanistan: The Long, Hard Road to the 2014 Transition" Asia Report No. 236 (Kabul/Brussels), October 8, 2012, 6. Accessed on Juy 11, 2013. http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/asia/south-asia/afghanistan/236-afghanistan-the-long-hard-road-to-the-2014-transition.aspx,

22 Ibid., 87. Pashtun chieftains demanded that King Amanullah close all schools for girls and abolition of all reformist laws, restoration of the veil and Sharia law.

his first cousin, on matters of statecraft made it difficult for him to take swift measures to neutralize the influence of clergy on the Afghan society.

Conflict Transformation since 1973

The coup launched by Sardar Mohammad Daud on July 17, 1973 against King Zahir Shah when he was visiting Italy, abolished monarchy and Afghanistan was proclaimed as a Republic[23]. Daud's coup, which was almost bloodless, was led by the *Parcham* faction of People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) and ended a phase of conflicts but generated new type of conflicts in the country. Before 1973, conflict between monarchy and political parties having ideological leanings reflected contradictions in the Afghan society. The loss of grip over power by King Zahir Shah and the nexus between Sardar Daud and the pro-Socialist PDPA created a void which was not filled even after the overthrow of his rule.

As long as Afghanistan was a monarchy, it was a buffer between pro-socialist PDPA divided into *Parcham* and *Khalq* factions and Islamists. After the toppling of monarchy, the ideological conflict between Islamists and leftist groups, which was somehow peaceful, transformed as violent and President Daud was termed as pro-left and pro-Moscow. After the July 1973 coup, there was no force which had some authority over tribal and ethnic groups of Afghanistan to prevent the outbreak of a vicious cycle of conflicts. From July 1973 when Zahir Shah's monarchial rule was abolished till April 1978 when President Daud was assassinated in the PDPA led military coup, the Soviet influence grew substantially in Afghanistan. When President Daud tried to marginalize PDPA and the pro-Soviet elements within the Afghan military the outcome was bloody coup which not only killed Sardar Daud but also plunged Afghanistan into an endless state of violence and armed conflicts culminating into the Soviet military intervention on December 27, 1979.[24] Following phases of conflict transformation since 1973 depicts the structural and societal contradictions in Afghanistan and the predicament of successive Afghan regimes since 1973 to maintain peace and stability in their country.

Phase One (1973-1978)

This phase marked the deepening of polarization in the Afghan society on ideological grounds because of the growing rift between PDPA and Islamist parties, particularly *Hizb-e-Islami* and also between the *Parcham* and *Khalq* factions of that party. When President Daud tried to assert his position independent of socialist groups it was too late. A faction of Afghan military led by left wing *Khalqi* officer launched a

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23 Ibid., Ataee, 93.

24 Ibid., 94-95.

bloody coup in the early hours of April 28, killing Sardar Daud and most of his family members. Noor Mohammad Taraki from the *Khalq* faction of PDPA became head of the new Afghan government.

Phase Two (1978-1979)

This phase marked the violent conflict formation between the PDPA government and the Islamic groups who resisted and condemned the reforms after the *Saur revolution* terming the new regime as Communist and godless. This phase also saw transformation of conflict between the *Khalq* and *Parcham* factions of PDPA after a brief unity following the assassination of *Parcham* faction leader Mir Akbar Khyber and the arrest of several *Parcham* and *Khalq* leaders by the regime of Sardar Daud in April 1978.[25] Furthermore, in this phase, the involvement of Pakistan and the United States to support what they called "Afghan Jehad" against the pro-Soviet regime in Kabul got an impetus. Several thousand refugees from Afghanistan poured into Pakistan and Iran following the intensification of fighting between Afghan forces and the Islamic groups. The assassination of Noor Mohammad Taraki in a coup launched by Hafizullah Amin, another PDPA leader from the *Khalq* faction, marked the weakening of PDPA regime culminating into the overthrow of Amin's regime in a Soviet backed coup on December 27, 1979 and the installation of Babrak Karmal, a *Parcham* faction leader as the head of the Kabul regime. Because of internal conflicts and infighting, the PDPA regime lost a valuable opportunity to transform Afghanistan from a backward and conservative to a progressive and a modern state.

Phase Three (1980-1989)

This phase deepened the level of violence and armed conflicts in Afghanistan for nine years because of Soviet military intervention. Conflict formation and transformation in Afghanistan during this phase was primarily rooted in the escalation of Afghan Jihad backed by Pakistan, United States, its allies and several Arab-Muslim countries. Najibullah, who replaced Babrak Karmal as the head of the pro-Soviet regime in 1986 tried to de-escalate conflict by pursuing a policy of national reconciliation and by forming a broad based government in Kabul. The Afghan Jihad was launched regardless of ethnic, tribal and feudal characteristics of Afghan society and targeted Soviet and the Afghan forces. Yet, Pashtun and non-Pashtun resistance groups fought under separate commands. The signing of Geneva accords on April 14,

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25 *Chronology of Conflict and Cooperation in Afghanistan: 1978-2006* (Karachi: Program On Peace Studies and Conflict Resolution, Department of International Relations, University of Karachi, 2006), 1-3.

1988 [26] by Pakistan, the Kabul regime, UN and guaranteed by the United States and the Soviet Union paved the way for the phased withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan by February 1989 and ended an important phase in the Afghan conflicts.

Phase Four (1989-1996)

This phase marked stalemate in Afghan conflict because despite the withdrawal of the Soviet forces from Afghanistan and the attempts made by the Afghan Mujahideen groups to occupy Kabul, pro-Moscow regime of Najibullah remained in power. The Soviet disintegration in December 1991 however deprived Najibullah of Moscow's support and it was toppled in April 1992 by the Mujahideen groups. After ousting Najibullah's forces from Kabul and establishing their control on the Afghan capital internal contradictions among the Mujahieen groups and leaders particularly between *Hizb-e-Islami* (led by Gulbadin Hekmatyar) and *Jamiat-e-Islami* (led by Burhanuddin Rabbani and Ahmed Shah Masud) deepened. Several attempts made by Saudi Arabia and Pakistan to mediate and de-escalate conflict between the two groups failed and Afghanistan was plunged into a violent civil war killing and injuring thousands of people. During this phase, Kabul saw worst rocket attacks from the forces of Gulbadin Hekmetyar who were occupying mountainous positions in the vicinity of Kabul and wanted to occupy the capital. Armed conflict between Mujahideen groups created disillusionment in Afghanistan and the opportunity was seized by Taliban who took control of Kandahar in late 1994 and Kabul in September 1996.

Phase Five (1996-2001)

This phase marked rapid conflict transformation in terms of actors, issues and role. After defeating Mujahideen groups and war lords, Taliban enforced their tutelage in 90% of the area of Afghanistan. Changing conflict dynamics during Taliban rule included armed conflict between Tajik-Uzbek dominated Northern Alliance and the Taliban regime, conflict with religious minorities and Hazara Shias. Although, Taliban claimed that they had controlled lawlessness and enforced peace, their rule marked enormous ruthlessness, transformation of Afghanistan as a hub of international terrorism led by Al-Qaeda culminating into the U.S. led attack and the dismantling of Taliban regime following the terrorist attacks in New York on September 11, 2011.

Phase Six (2001 onwards)

This phase witnessed the longest and the most diversified foreign military presence in Afghanistan following the U.S-British attack on Taliban regime; the dismantling of the Taliban regime and the installation

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26   Ibid., 82.

of pro-West regime of Hamid Karzai. Conflict formation and transformation during this phase centered around three things: *First,* conflict within the Karzai regime on ethnic grounds as the Pashtun community resented the dominant and influential position of minority Tajik and Uzbeks. *Second,* conflict between the coalition and the resistance groups primarily led by the Taliban. *Third,* conflict between the Karzai regime and Pakistan over what the former alleged the launching of cross border infiltration by Al-Qaeda groups particularly from tribal areas. The United States also alleged about the presence of what it called "safe heavens" of Al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups along Pak-Afghan border. The proposed withdrawal of NATO forces from Afghanistan in 2014 is expected to cause further instability as the resistance groups will gain ground resulting into the outbreak of civil war reminiscent of 1992-1996. The current phase in Afghan conflicts will be quite painful for both Pakistan and Afghanistan because even if a fraction of U.S. forces remain in Afghanistan beyond 2014, insurgency will continue and the complete withdrawal of foreign forces will, as stated earlier, plunge Afghanistan into a new phase of violent civil war.

From all the six phases discussed above, it seems, there has been more negative than positive transformation of conflicts in Afghanistan in terms of issue, player, rule and role transformation. All hopes of positive transformation of conflicts were subverted not primarily because of external players, but by the major domestic stakeholders, namely Mujahideen groups, Taliban, war lords, political parties and clergy. For instance, in the second phase (1978-79) had the PDPA regime been wise and tactful in pursuing reforms, the majority section of the Afghan population wouldn't have been alienated. Conflict between the *Khalq* and *Parcham* factions of the PDPA regime was also noticeable in that phase which eroded the idealism generated as a result of the *Saur revolution*.

Likewise, in phase four when the Soviets withdrew from Afghanistan, there should have been the positive transformation of conflict but the mess created as a result of infighting between and among the Mujahideen groups led to the outbreak of civil war and large-scale destruction of buildings. In fact, the National Museum of Afghanistan in Kabul was not looted and destroyed during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan but during the fighting to seek control over Kabul by the Mujahideen groups. Instead of giving the people of Afghanistan a break from years of violence and war, Mujahideen leaders were more interested in capturing power by all means. In the sixth phase, after the dismantling of Taliban regime, there was a hope for building a new Afghanistan and for the positive transformation of conflict, but the outbreak of insurgency against foreign forces and the Karzai regime by the Taliban led to the new formation of new conflict in that country.

Therefore, one can say that systemic and structural contradictions in Afghan society; the fragile nature of Afghan state and

the presence of foreign forces in Afghanistan diminished hopes for a positive transformation of conflict for peace and stability.

The following table will depict the process of negative and positive conflict transformation in Afghanistan since 1973.

Process of Negative and positive Conflict Transformation in Afghanistan

S. No	Time Line	Issues	Players	Actors Results
01	1973-78	Ideological conflict between left and right wing groups. Conflict between PDPA and the Daud regime	President Daud, PDPA, *Jamiat-e-Islami.*	Negative conflict transformation
02	1978-79	Outbreak of *Saur Revolution* in April 1978 and the rise of counter-revolutionary forces led by *Jamiat-e-Islami* and *Hizb-e-Islami*	Noor Mohammad Taraki, Hafeezullah Amin, (PDPA *Khalq* faction) Burhanuddin Rabbani (*Jamiat-e-Islami*) Gulbadin Hikmetyar (*Hizb-e-Islami*), Soviet Union, Pakistan, United States.	Negative conflict transformation
03	1979-89	1. The Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan and the launching of Afghan Jihad and the launching of CIA's biggest covert operation to support Mujahideen groups. 2. Launching of Policy of National Reconciliation by President Najibullah in 1987	Soviet Union, the Kabul regime, Mujahideen groups, Pakistan, Iran, China, UN.	1. Negative conflict transformation. 2. Positive conflict transformation as a result of Najibullah's Policy of National Reconciliation and the signing of the Geneva accords in April 1988.
04.	1989-1996	Armed conflict between Najibullah regime and the Mujahideen groups continued after the Soviet military withdrawal. Rise of Taliban and their hold over Kandahar in late 1994 and on the Afghan capital in September 1996 transformed the nature of conflicts.	Najibullah's regime, Burhanuddin Rabbani, Ahmed Shah Masud, Gulbadin Hikmetyar, Taliban, Pakistan, India, Iran, Arab countries, OIC, India.	Negative conflict transformation
05	1996-2001	Taliban rule followed by	Taliban, Northern	Negative

		conflict with the Northern Alliance, Iran and later on with the United States on the issue of allowing Osama bin Laden/Al-Qaeda foothold in Afghanistan.	Alliance, Pakistan, India, Central Asian neighbors of Afghanistan and the United States	conflict transformation
06	2001 onwards	1. Dismantling of Taliban regime and the beginning of a new era in Afghanistan 2. New conflict formation and transformation in Afghanistan because of the launching of insurgency against foreign forces in Afghanistan	1. Taliban, U.S and its allies, Pakistan, Northern Alliance, 2. Karzai regime, Taliban groups, U.S and its NATO allies, Pakistan, Iran and India	1. Positive conflict transformation 2. Negative conflict transformation

The Way Forward

Forty years of sustained armed conflicts in Afghanistan have played havoc with the state and societal structures of that war devastated and impoverished country. There is no quick fix solution or a short cut to deal with the Afghan predicament because of the complicated and intricate nature of conflicts in Afghanistan. Yet, some of the realities like conflict fatigue and ripe moment may transform Afghan conflicts from negative to positive. Enormous physical and material destruction along with the displacement of millions of Afghans caused since 1973 will surely compel major local stakeholders to bail out their people from decades of violence and bloodshed. Is there any indication for the positive transformation of conflict in Afghanistan or that country would remain in a perpetual state of insecurity and instability in the years to come? Four major indicators will transform conflicts in Afghanistan, more in a negative, than in a position direction.

First, the withdrawal of U.S/NATO forces from Afghanistan will put a question mark on the possibility of controlling the level of violence and armed conflicts. Even if Washington decides to maintain a part of its forces in Afghanistan beyond 2014, the situation would remain volatile because of the absence of a stable political process in that country. In order to pre-empt the surge of violence and insurgency in post-2014 period, it is reported that "America is holding drawn out negotiations with Mr. Karzai over the role and status of American troops who stay beyond 2014."[27] *Second,* the failure of Afghan political parties and groups to do their homework in dealing with post-1914 scenario in Afghanistan will further complicate the already messy situation and sustain standoff

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27 "Afghanistan Yankee beards go home," *The Economist* (London), March 2, 2013. Also see news item, "Sufficient troops to remain in Afghanistan: US general," *Dawn* (Karachi), February 10, 2013.

on reaching a comprehensive agreement on resolving issues which can ensure peace and stability. *Third,* if there is an effort to promote Afghan identity and nationalism by those Afghan groups who are concerned about the future of their country and considers the assertion of patriotic, nationalist feelings as the only way to prevent further armed conflict and bloodshed in Afghanistan, one can hope some sort of positive change thus reducing the intensity of conflict. *Finally,* the role of external players, particularly the neighbors of Afghanistan in shaping and transforming conflicts cannot be undermined. How Pakistan, Iran and the Central Asian neighbors of Afghanistan can help the process of peace and stability in that country will provide a break to Afghan people from decades of violence and armed conflicts?

All the four indicators examined above will determine the way forward in the Afghan conflicts in the years to come and will also provide an opportunity for the neighboring countries to play a positive role. Fundamentally, the issue is how the people of Afghanistan, who have suffered endlessly in 40 years of violent conflicts in their country, will get a break from the vicious cycle of violence or their lives would remain unchanged? History teaches the lesson that those nations who are unable to learn from debacles are marginalized and remain in a perpetual state of chaos and disorder. The dynamics of conflicts in Afghanistan proves that past is not different from the present and future remains uncertain in view of fault lines in the state and societal structures of that war torn country.