

Conditionality of Aid as a Counterproductive Factor in Peacebuilding in the Afghan Context

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Abstract : The August 2021 resurgence of Taliban as a ruling force in Afghanistan once again challenged the global community into dealing with an unprecedentedly unlike-minded government. To express their disapproval of the new regime, Western governments and intergovernmental institutions have suspended their infrastructural projects and other forms of support. Moreover, the Afghan offshore reserves were frozen, and Afghanistan was disconnected from the international financial system, which impeded even independent aid agencies' work. The already poor provision of aid was then further complicated with political conditionality. The purpose of this paper is to investigate the efficacy of conditional aid policy in the Afghan peacebuilding under Taliban rule and provide recommendations to international donors on further course of action. Arguing that conditionality of aid is a counterproductive factor in the peacebuilding process, this paper employs scholarly literature on peacebuilding alongside reports from International non-governmental organizations INGOs who operate directly in Afghanistan. The existing debate on peacebuilding in Afghanistan revolves around aid as a means of building democratic foundation for achieving peace on communal and national levels and why the previous attempts to do so were unsuccessful. This paper focuses on how to recalibrate the approach to aid provision and peacebuilding in the new reality. In the early 2000s, amid the weak Post-Cold War international will for a profound engagement in the conflict, humanitarian and development aid became the new means of achieving peace. Aid agencies provided resources directly to communities, minimizing the risk of local disputes. Through subsidizing education, governance reforms, and infrastructural projects, international aid accelerated school enrollment, introduced peace education, funded provincial council and parliamentary elections, and helped rebuild a conflict-torn country. When the Taliban seized power, the international community called on them to build an inclusive government based on respect for human rights, particularly girls' and women's schooling and work, as a condition to retain the aid flow. As the Taliban clearly failed to meet the demands, development aid was withdrawn. Some key United Nation agencies also refrained from collaborating with the de-facto authorities. However, contrary to the intended change in Talibs' behavior, such a move has only led to further deprivation of those whom the donors strived to protect. This is because concern for civilians has always been the second priority for the warring parties. This paper consists of four parts. First, it describes the scope of the humanitarian crisis that began in Afghanistan in 2001. Second, it examines the previous peacebuilding attempts undertaken by the international community and the contribution that the international aid had in the peacebuilding process. Third, the paper describes the current regime and its relationships with the international donors. Finally, the paper concludes with recommendations for donors who would have to be more realistic and reconsider their priorities. While it is certainly not suggested that the Taliban regime is legitimized internationally, the crisis calls upon donors to be more flexible in collaborating with the de-facto authorities for the sake of the civilians.

Keywords : Afghanistan, international aid, donors, peacebuilding

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