



Lecture Transcript

'Peacebuilding in Afghanistan'

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6 October 2020

Bismillah el Rahman el Rahim.

Thank you for that wonderful introduction. It's great to be back in an academic setting. I'd like to thank you, all your colleagues, the chairman. All the faculty members and the students, for this opportunity.

I'd like to thank my colleagues, especially Vice President Saleh and our other colleagues, the members of the Afghan Peace Delegation who have been doing a heroic job and all those present.

I'm going to focus on peacebuilding. You live in peace so maybe you don't have the appreciation of what peace means. Peace is a foundational capital. What do I mean by that?

Let me tell you a story. In 1977, it was Eid. My wife and I thought what should we do? We got on a plane and went to Badakhshan province and then flew to the remote district of Shoghnan. We walked for a week. We didn't know a single person in the district. But they allowed us to sleep on their roofs and they gave us hospitality and made us welcome.

Another day we got in a car, and drove through five provinces: Ghazni, Wardak, Paktika, Paktia, Khowst and Lowgar and arrived back in the middle of the night. At



that time freedom of movement for two 27-year olds was taken for granted, because of that, peace is economic capital.

We lost an estimated \$240 billion between 1978 and 2002 as a result of the war. The cost of what we've paid since 2002 has not been calculated.

It's human. Millions of us have become refugees. 10 million of us have returned back. Four million of us during the last five years. Can you understand the human cost of displacement?

The lack of continuity in natural capital, the destruction of our irrigation system during those periods. Each time we built a bridge, particularly a long one, we celebrated. Each time we built a paved road or connected places to electricity, it was a national celebration.

Can you imagine the destruction inflicted on the road between Kabul and Kandahar that was built at the cost of more than \$400 million?

It's political because peace gives you a horizon to think through and not worry about tomorrow. Peace removes turmoil and uncertainty out of the equation and it's social because it allows for freedom of interaction across the border.

So, in this regard, my first proposal to you because you're leading this institute, is that the advantage of peace and the cost of war is not sufficiently theorised and not sufficiently thought through, still.

We think that war is a condition that you grow used to. No, you don't.

My work begins usually at 4:30 or 5. Dr. Mohib, our national security adviser sends me the worst thing which is the figure of casualties and I need to have that hour to absorb that cost.



Every Afghan's life plans, horizons, thinking is disrupted by the cost of conflict. When you live with conflict for around 40 years, you don't get used to it. You don't accept it; you want to overcome it.

So, peace-making – what is peace-making? Peace-making is the art and discipline of state craft. What do we have at this moment?

First, we have the national will for peace. Our Loya Jirga of over 3,000 men and women met. It was convened in four days, it arrived at a solution to a problem that 50 meetings at the head of state level could not solve.

The Loya Jirga decided to provide the moral basis for releasing 400 people that had killed our fellow citizens and international partners. Among the prisoners were 40 of the largest drug dealers in the world that posed a threat to every family in the region and the world but the Taliban were adamant on their release, with the support of the United States. Our people had the wisdom to solve what could not be solved legally.

So, the will for peace - the people of Afghanistan, the Government of Afghanistan, have passed this test in flying colours and I'd like to thank the women and men and Afghan Peace Delegation that are representing this collective will and are guided by our constitution and the resolutions of Loya Jirga.

The second issue: peace is guided by a notion of the Endstate. What is that Endstate? A sovereign, united, democratic Afghanistan, at peace with itself and the world. And because this proposition is now strongly backed by the international community and the region. There is an alignment as to the type of peace that we desire.

Three, there is a strong regional consensus on a stable Afghanistan and an Afghanistan that would once again, articulated further down, be an Asian roundabout in a platform for regional and global cooperation.



And, let me thank His Highness, the Emir of Qatar and the Government of Qatar. Now, we have a host for peace negotiations and a host that is committed to making sure that an enduring peace takes place. I'd like to thank his Highness for the exceptional hospitality but particularly for assuring the people of Afghanistan that Qatar will be a force for peace, cooperation and stability.

And we also have a group of countries that are friends of peace, that at the present are working with our delegation and working with our people.

Fifth, we have a negotiating team that has the authority and the mandate of the people of Afghanistan. This is the first negotiating team that is not going to be micromanaged. We trust them.

The women on the team are incredibly strong and the men are incredibly dedicated. I'd like everybody to have an applause for them.

At the centre of the government, I'm pleased to say, it's an exceptional unity of thought and action. Vice President, Saleh, Mr. Atmar, Dr. Mohib, and other colleagues, a very big thank you. Each of us can finish each other's sentences. Each of us represent a unified stand.

What's peacebuilding? I'm not getting into the details peace-making, because if I get into that detail, I'll be second guessing them. They have my total backing.

When they encounter a problem, I learned to my great delight yesterday, they solve it in two hours. When our interlocutress, the Taliban, encounter a problem, it takes them two days to two weeks to get an answer. More power to you. And I hope they acquire the type of authority of our delegation so we can move the process forward.

I'd like to focus on peacebuilding. What's peacebuilding? The discipline of design, alignment and implementation.



We are cursed, and I say this with humility, by an inheritance of a culture of planning. In planning you think you know what the answer is. You don't think through how to tailor, how to stitch solutions.

In planning, everything is prejudged: "well this country doesn't have capacity, this country has the capacity." Well, what's the meaning of capacity?

A lot of judgements are made from one way of looking. My submission to you today is we need to change our perspective. And hence, I'm presenting a different Afghanistan to you.

Not the Afghanistan that bleeds everyday but an Afghanistan that dreams today – an Afghanistan with a vision.

So, in terms of design thinking, you take a problem to solve it. One of the fundamental questions of design thinking in the peace process is who is the victor of peace?

The people of Afghanistan.

War has no victors and the biggest winners of peace are the people. Not just the living generations, particularly five of the elder generations that have gone through sheer hell - my generation, the succeeding four generations, but the generations unborn. Peace is for the people that come.

So, the weight of six generations in the present, the weight of five generations in the future is in front of us. Therefore, we have to forge solutions that overcome the problems. The word impossible should not exist in the vocabulary of peacebuilding. We have to make the seemingly impossible possible.

Second is alignment. The question of alignment is simple. When you put a wall of bricks, if it's twisted, according to a proverb, it will be twisted all the way.

Alignment is about bringing state building, market building, peacebuilding and nation building together. You cannot operate in silos.



The fundamental heritage, the bad heritage of the 20th century is to think in silos. An engineer has to be an engineer; a social scientist has to be a social scientist. The art of the 21st century, by contrast, is to think holistically and to work together.

Just to give you one example. As a result of peace, at least 3-5 million more Afghans are going to return to Afghanistan. How are they going to live? How are they going to work?

90% of our population despite our effort live below \$2 a day. If we don't lift them out of need to a livelihood that they can think plan their future, there will always be a reserve army of labour for conflict.

So, it's important to think through alignment in a clear manner because alignment overcomes the problem of misallocation. Afghanistan is not suffering from shortage of resources; it is suffering from the misallocation of those resources.

Our roads are one example. Some of the most expensive roads in the world are built with the lowest quality. So, quality and quantity have to come together to enable us.

Then, it's the question of implementation.

Academic discipline, as you mentioned, I was honoured for 14 years, I was a teacher and it's in my nature and when I finish with this job, I'll be again hoping to teach.

My dream is to establish an institute in my ancestral village and I've already gathered the land to make it possible because I'd like to have an institute on Islamic studies – our deepest binding form of human, political and social capital.

Implementation brings space and time together. Time, meaning short term, medium term and long term. We have suffered from the tyranny of short term. Everything is short term. Immediate, you grab, you grasp, you accumulate, you fill your pockets.



Part of the corruption that haunts is because of short termism. If people thought that there was a long-time horizon, they would think through more about the consequences of their actions. Hence, the cause of the short- termism.

The other part is, if you don't own every inch of Afghanistan, you are not going to be able to make peace. I have had the honour to go 95 times since I'm president, to the provinces. In my youth, I walked most of the country, I rode on horses and the back of trucks.

During the transition, which I had the honour of leading, from international forces to security forces, I went to every single province of Afghanistan from three times to 10 times.

We have deep history we need to acknowledge and be able to mobilise. So, implementation is, first and foremost, about citizens. We, Afghans, have a great asset: sense of equality.

We have never had caste; we really don't care about class because how can the rich constitute a class. The money is short term. But we have deep senses of equality.

When the Vice President and I go, and even our other colleagues, you know what people tell us? We have come to tell you our problems.

Act on them otherwise we will not come back.

We are delighted that our people receive us and keep coming back. They know that we cannot solve every problem, but you have to solve some of their problems. It's that sense of commitment that gives you the ability to make peace.

Peace cannot be just achieved at the national level alone. So, regional connectivity is absolutely essential to peacebuilding. The future of Afghanistan is tied to the region, to the world.



The other part is global cooperation. Our conflict is not a civil war. Let me repeat, this is not a civil war. If it were a civil war, it would be over multiple times.

It's a regional war embedded in a global conflict embedded in the fifth wave of terrorism and a form of warfare between networks and states, that is not unusual but unprecedented because now virtual and social networks coincide, and of course you and your colleagues are working to understand this nexus.

So, given this. What is it that makes me optimistic? Our capitals and capabilities.

Let me highlight some of our capitals and then some of our capabilities and then return back to peacebuilding. First, we are an immense beneficiary of what happened a billion years ago: our geology.

Our geology is worth one trillion dollars at least. We are the Mendeleev table. Just take rare earth. 14 of the 18 elements of rare earth exist in Afghanistan. We are called the Saudi Arabia of lithium.

The largest unexplored and undeveloped iron mine, etc. So, there is this immense national wealth that the collision of two continents produced that give us the Hindu Kush mountains, the physical backbone of the unity of our country.

Then, Kabul was a lake separate from the subcontinent. Its collision gave us the largest copper mine; 90 copper mines exist between Kabul and Lowgar province alone. This is incredible.

The other part of this, unlike Iraq and other countries, Allah has been enormously kind to Afghanistan. Our natural resources are extremely even-handedly distributed. Furthermore, the 10 poorest provinces of the country have some of the richest resources of the country in terms of its geology. Our geology is made for national unity.

In other countries, a mountain divides. In Afghanistan, Hindu Kush unites. Every valley of it is a valley of connection.



Second is our geography. Iqbal, the poet laureate of Pakistan put it best: “Asia is but a body of water and earth; the heart of which is the Afghan nation. From its accord, the accord of Asia, from its discord the discord of Asia.”

For 200 years, our location has been a disadvantage. Today, the largest single transformation in the history of humankind is the integration of the Asian continent into an Asian continental economy.

Afghanistan is right smack in the middle of it. We’re the shortest route between Central Asia and East Asia, West Asia and South Asia.

If our geology is worth a trillion, in my judgement, in the next 100 years our location is going to be multiple trillions of dollars. Infrastructure now is going to unite it and bring it together.

Third is our ecology. Simple factors: sun, wind, water.

Sun: potential of 220 thousand megawatts of power from sun. Wind: potential of 75,000 megawatts of power from wind. Water: besides the life sustaining qualities, five rivers, every one of our neighbours depends on our waters. But more important – equally important, 23,000 megawatts of hydro-power.

When you put the ecology and again, I’d love to be able to be your guide as a tourist guide to Afghanistan of the future. These are some of the most beautiful locations, ranging from 300 meters to 7,700 meters. Every ecological possibility except Mediterranean is there.

God has blessed us.

Human beings have to make sure that the future generations and our friends can take care of our natural capital for the wellbeing of the current and future generations.



The other part of this is culture. We have been a centre of civilisation for over 2,500 years. The bronze age was probably invented in Afghanistan. Our gold collection from that period is one of the largest. We've known states for over 2,500 years.

Every province of Afghanistan or every region of Afghanistan has the distinction of having been the centre of an Empire. Our civilisation, interactive. Our Buddhist, our Greek, our Hindu, our Kushan and other civilizations were periods of flourishing of human imagination.

But the most binding part of our culture is our Islamic belief. It's a 99.99% Muslim country. Islam unites us. The networks of Islamic discourse and practice and for the record we have the most Islamic constitution in the world. Article 1, 2 and 3. The character of state, not just society, is Islamic.

The other part of the culture is equally important and needs a mention. There is not a single linguistic community in Afghanistan that does not have a deep culture of conflict resolution.

In 2018, we and the Taliban agreed to a ceasefire. You know, every single one of us was jumping into the unknown. But you know what that experience taught me, the closest you can get to a controlled comparative experiment in politics.

Not Talib was molested, insulted, humiliated or fired upon. Instead, the people of Afghanistan, particularly the women of Afghanistan, engaged them in a conversation.

It shows an immense capacity to overcome the past and move forward toward the future. A society that has that type of deep moral reservoir of compassion for people who literally a week before were being killing us will succeed in making peace.

I remember a young woman; her name is Qudseyah. She had memorised half the Quran and was in the process of completing it. She was blown up to smithereens and she was the sole bread winner for her family. But her family, again, embraced the ceasefire, as did everyone else.



This is a deep reservoir of culture that needs to be utilised because peace-making is not just at the grand level of signing an agreement. It's being able to live together again and without that deep moral reservoir it becomes difficult.

Let me quickly go through some of the capabilities. We have one of the youngest populations in one of the oldest countries on Earth. Around 74% of our people are below 30.

Imagine, most of those people didn't experience what the five year of ruling of Taliban was. And the Taliban need to understand this generation. It's global in outlook. It's future oriented.

And like every generation, the fathers and sons have different perceptions and this generation has grown up with their mothers.

They have not just experienced under the stern command of their fathers in all male institutions. The fundamental nature of this generation needs to be understood. Yet, the tragedy is that we have six generations that are divided in experience.

So, the counterparts of each generation among the Taliban need to reconcile through the generational unity. And everybody must think through the process of reconciliation between and among generations.

Pain is a common feature for all of us. We need to overcome this. But hope is the stronger factor.

Our women. Last year, we had the first all Afghan Inclusive Grand Jirga of the women of Afghanistan. Please, understand two things:

One: throughout our history, women have been heroes. In 1880, when an Afghan army, for the first time in Asia, beat a British division, it was a woman who held the flag and urged the men to win their fame I the battle for Allah and Afghanistan.



Her name is Malali. She is the only woman for whom a medal has been coined. I hope a lot of more will be coined.

A second one is underway for our Queen Gawhar Shad. She was the wealthiest woman in all of the world six hundred years ago. Her Awqaf, her endowments, are still among the largest in Mashed.

I'd like to, therefore, bring to the attention of the world and our colleagues a central reality of today: the women of Afghanistan do not need someone to speak for them or write for them. They speak for themselves; they can represent themselves and not only do they represent themselves, they represent the future generations.

The poor. Our poor are situationally poor. They've not accepted the culture of poverty, which does not exist in Afghanistan. We don't think that poverty is your destiny. We are entrepreneurial. It's a situation that we are put in. It's lack of assets but it's not lack of will. These three groups --- the youth, the women, and the poor -- make the majority of our poor. Hence, our focus on their empowerment and participation.

Our quest is that our Taliban interlocutors address them, engage with them, understand them and make peace with them.

The market is another part of our strength. During Covid-19, and my congratulations to the State of Qatar for managing the challenge well, Afghanistan has been extraordinarily lucky, not only that we managed Covid-19 but also because we mobilised in time.

And I'd like to thank our friend, Sheikh Thahnun of UAE, for alerting us in early February to as what was coming. It was the first time that I heard the word: Corona economy in Abu Dhabi. Dr. Mohib: thank you for arranging the meeting.

We mobilised in earnest and as a result there was not a single food riot event in Afghanistan. The private sector, Vice President Saleh, thank you again for your



enormous work to ensure the functioning of supply chains and value chains throughout the period across the country.

In early 2001, when the Taliban were in power, the exports of Afghanistan were about \$10 million dollars. Our exports last year, for the first time, exceeded \$1 billion. So, understand now that the private sector is really functioning. They are entrepreneurs and there are world class sets of capabilities.

And last but not least, the state, as you kindly mentioned, has acquired capabilities. Not only Covid-19 is a demonstration of this. In 2011, around 150,000 international troops were in Afghanistan. Less than 10,000 international troops are in Afghanistan today.

Since January 2015, our heroic security and national security and defence forces have not only been guarding our freedom but ensuring global security. Their sacrifice, their commitment is a source of our pride and assurance. Dr Mohib, as national security advisor, let me thank you and all of our National Defence and Security Forces.

Every single person in the Afghan national security and defence forces is a volunteer, for we have not resorted to conscription. That's an indication of patriotism. Do you think that they fight in order to earn \$200? No, because they believe in the future of our country and are proud of their role as the guardians of our constitution and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan.

The 5000th person graduate from Sandhurst in Kabul this year It's called Sandhurst in the desert, the wrong appellation because Kabul is a lovely valley. It's a different set of security forces because of their capacity and infrastructure and others qualities. Just two illustrations.

We are providing for the first time in our history, food packages to 4.5 million households. The national meal program which will cover 90% of the population of Afghanistan.



And, there was a flood in the province of Parwan that devastated the canal. Parwan is one of the major centres of the grape industry resulting in raisins and other fruits and vegetables.

We would've lost the season and the livelihood of people. People thought that the earliest this would be repaired would take 50 days.

It was repaired in 8 days.

The state now has the capacity to design, to think, to act because we have formed a unique partnership between a national construction company and 3000 small and medium firms.

What is more important is the Loya Jirga. Do you think that a state that did not have the will and capacity could convene a gathering of free Afghans, 3300 of them, and think that it could get a decision from them?

Show me a society that can be convened nationally within four days and reach agreement through free and intense debate in three days. That is a reflection of the degree of alignment between the state and society.

Our conflicts have never been about separation. There's not been a single group in Afghanistan that has raised the slogan of separating. Our conflicts have been about controlling the centre and that brings us to our key asset: the republic. The Islamic republic of Afghanistan is the framework within which all Afghans can see themselves.

In this regard, the republic solves the problem that had haunted us in the past: succession. Succession now takes place through the free will of the people.

The proof: for the first time, power was handed without conflict from my predecessor to me. We have no blood ties. That free will of the people is fundamental to this.



Let me conclude: the people and the government of Afghanistan are ready to overcome the past. We have the will, the capital, the capabilities, the desire and readiness.

This means that we must have, and I hope it has been demonstrated, the compassion, commitment and courage. Compassion to understand each other, to acknowledge our common pains.

But more importantly compassion for the generations of our youth, our women, our children. And compassion for our common Islamic faith. Killing of one person in our holy religion is the killing of humanity.

Islam is a religion of peace, we need Umm Salama and the path of peace of Hodayba.

Courage because it takes jumping into the unknown. Conflict is very easy. It becomes an automatic course. We must be responsible for people who die because of our orders.

And commitment because the road is difficult, but we have to take the road less travelled.

Second, we must put the citizens at the centre.

Peace in Afghanistan cannot be a peace of the elite.

Peace in Afghanistan cannot be the peace of one group.

Peace in Afghanistan cannot be the peace of factions.

Peace must be the peace of the people.

Because people are suffering. Therefore, we must put the people first and do what our constitution, our religion and our morals command us to do. We are servants.



I pride myself with the title that my people give me: the first servant of the country.

And this means managing is important. How do you provide food to the people? How do you make the market function? How do you create investment?

You know, we've been fortunate in ensuring that Australia's most famous billionaire, is now committing to produce 20,000 megawatts of power and convert our metals into green industry with zero carbon emission.

Afghanistan could become a leader in green energy and green industry. That requires a different type of imagination to achieve. But if we are confining ourselves and defining ourselves narrowly.

Leadership means two things simultaneously; we need to have the ability to overcome the past. The Afghan people are not prisoners of the past. We want to live.

The past is about dying and we have died enough. We must live. We must embrace living. In order to embrace living, we must have the discipline of building a future together. A future that every Afghan can identify with.

And this means, in the weeks and days to come we have to have the courage to declare a national ceasefire so that we can proceed to make peace politically and not under the barrel of the gun.

I hope my fellow citizens forgive me, but we have a proverb: you cannot force an Afghan to go to heaven, but you can persuade him to go to hell.

The path of persuasion is the right path, and that's if the courage, commitment and compassion to make peace and then build peace is mutually arrived at and reciprocated.

Thank you.