

In Search of Peace for Afghanistan

Historical Letters of President Najibullah
and Dr. M. Hassan Kakar

A Collection of Essays

Edited by Jawan Shir Rasikh
with a Foreword by Lakhdar Brahimi

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Jawan Shir Rasikh

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Cover illustration—President Najibullah's and M. Hassan Kakar's original letters in Dari (courtesy of Kakar's family).

CONTENTS

Dedication	ix
Foreword	xi
Preface and Acknowledgement	xv
Prefatory Note	xviii
Map	xix

Introduction	1
<i>Jawan Shir Rasikh, Kawun Kakar, and Janan Mosazai</i>	

Part One. The Najibullah-Kakar Correspondence in Perspectives

1. President Najibullah's Correspondence with Dr. M. Hassan Kakar: A Historian's Perspective	27
<i>Timothy Nunan</i>	
2. Reflections on the Difficult Transition to Peace	37
<i>Barnett Rubin</i>	
3. Eminent Contemporaries: The Current Relevance of the Najibullah-Kakar Correspondence	55
<i>Scott Smith</i>	
4. A Historical Perspective on Forty Years of Conflict in Afghanistan	69
<i>Barmak Pazhwak</i>	
5. Afghanistan Peace Process: What Can Be Learned From Past Efforts?	81
<i>Belquis Ahmadi and Makhfi Azizi</i>	
6. Peacebuilding and Reconciliation: Lessons from the Najibullah-Kakar Correspondence	94
<i>Shaida M. Abdali</i>	
7. The Specter of Overture: Comparing 1986–1992 to the Present Intra-Afghan Peace Talks	102
<i>Masih Khybari</i>	

8. 1990, 2021, And Fleeting Opportunities <i>Johnny Walsh</i>	114
9. Ingredients of Peacemaking in Afghanistan: Lessons from Najibullah's National Reconciliation Policy <i>Nasir Andisha</i>	126
Part Two. State-Society Relations in War and Peace Making Contexts	
10. Democracy by Decree? Najibullah's Controlled Multiparty System <i>Thomas Ruttig</i>	137
11. Revisiting Reconciliation as State-Building in Afghanistan <i>Dipali Mukhopadhyay</i>	150
12. Imagining the Historical Nation: Afghanistan as a Dialogical Project of Nation-Making <i>Omar Sharifi</i>	161
13. New Publics and the Challenge of Peace in Afghanistan <i>Robert Crews</i>	175
14. Strategic Communications and Public Messaging: Lessons from the Najibullah–Kakar Letters <i>Tanya Goudsouzian</i>	189
15. Post-Conflict Development: Charting a New Agenda <i>Sayed Madadi</i>	200
Part Three. Global and Regional Contexts, Actors, and Factors	
16. Hybrid Insecurity and Actors and Factors in the Conflict in Afghanistan <i>Dawood Azami</i>	218
17. Some New Thoughts on Pakistan's Role in War and Peacemaking in Afghanistan <i>Afrasiab Khattak</i>	247
18. The Najibullah–Kakar Correspondence: Historical Parallels and Divergence <i>Radha Kumar</i>	263

19. Substantive Peace in Afghanistan: Ending the War; Not Transforming It <i>Nilofar Sakhi</i>	271
20. Afghanistan's Quest for Peace: What to Learn from the Past? <i>Farkhondeh Akbari and Timor Sharan</i>	282
21. What will Peace Look Like in Afghanistan? <i>Ben Acheson</i>	299
22. The Mindset of Peace Negotiations in Afghanistan <i>Aref Dostyar</i>	310
List of Contributors	319
Appendix A	325
Appendix B	366

To Those Who Have Been Striving for Peace in Afghanistan

FOREWORD

Lakhdar Brahimi

*Former Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary General for Afghanistan,
1996-1997, and 2001-2004*

When the Soviet Union at long last agreed to withdraw its troops from Afghanistan in 1989 but was still supporting its government, President Najibullah had a plan for reconciliation for his country. He explained and defended it in the letters to Professor Hassan Kakar published in this volume. As an Afghan academic, having opposed Soviet military presence in his country from day one, Kakar suggested a fundamentally different plan.

Najibullah's plan made sense as long as Soviet support was available to him. When the Soviet Union ceased to exist, he was in trouble. The United Nations' plan submitted in 1992 by Benon Sevan, the then Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary General, contained elements from Najibullah's plan and ideas from the Mujahedin factions. It resembled the ideas put forward by Kakar. Najibullah accepted it readily. So did the Mujahedin factions and Pakistan at first. The United States and the Soviet Union had seemingly offered their support to Benon Sevan's plan. But the Soviet Union was fast disintegrating and the United States simply lost interest in Afghanistan. When Benon Sevan arrived in Kabul to take Najibullah away to India, as the first step in the implementation of his plan, he found that the Mujahedin had changed their minds and Najibullah had been betrayed by practically all of his supporters: he was not even allowed to reach the airport and leave with Benon Sevan in the middle of that fateful April 1992 night. That was the end of Najibullah's role in Afghanistan's affairs and the beginning of his personal tragedy.

When I suspended my first mission in Afghanistan, in 1997, I warned the Security Council that I was giving up in protest for their lack of interest in Afghanistan and the little support I was receiving from them. I also warned them that they were wrong to neglect Afghanistan in such a manner because it was far away, poor and of no great strategic importance to anyone. That was wrong, I said, because even a conflict in such an unimportant country may well spill over far and wide one of these days. As we know it did, on 11 September, 2001.

When the then United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan called me back immediately after that tragedy, there was, all of a sudden, a huge interest for Afghanistan. It was taken for granted that that would translate into strong and lasting support for the United Nations peace plan. The Bonn Conference was a success largely because of that level of international interest. It served Afghanistan and International Community well. We naturally were fully aware that each major power had come with its own agenda to Bonn and it was the duty of the United Nations to do its best to provide all of the support it could to the people of Afghanistan. And that is what we did as representatives of the United Nations and the international community.

In Bonn, I told the Afghan participants several times that they were not fully representative of the diversity of the people of Afghanistan. I also told them that if we do come up with a good agreement, and then you go back home and reach out to all those who are not represented here, nobody will remember that the participants did not represent all of the people of Afghanistan.

The Taliban were naturally not present in Bonn. They had not been invited and I believe that if they had been, they would have refused to come. Although they were controlling almost 95% of the country on the eve of 9/11, they had been routed by the might of the US War machine. Many were killed; some were detained; others crossed into Pakistan. But, the overwhelming majority were not accounted for; they just melted down back in the midst of their communities. To those who said that it could be very constructive to seek the Taliban out, both the new leadership in Afghanistan as well as the foreign powers represented in the country were unanimous: the Taliban are gone; they have been defeated; they do not exist anymore. And that was that.

I was told not long ago that Taliban leaders were open to and made peace overtures to the new Afghan government of President Hamid Karzai, although it is unclear if the efforts were pursued seriously and through trusted sources. It is clear though that the new Afghan government and its major international allies didn't prioritize peace with the Taliban at the beginning. Be that as it may, we know today that those who, in the early days of the implementation of the Bonn Agreement said the Taliban were not going to disappear and suggested - too timidly perhaps - to seek them out should have been heard. Perhaps the agreement's implementation could have been better - it had mechanisms to make the government more inclusive.

Despite all the work of so many people these past years, the country fell back into war. Lessons to learn from the past are many. The little I picked up during my personal involvement in peace making tells me that there is nowhere an exhaustive list, a check list of sorts, that would offer the perfect road map for resolving a conflict that does not exist. It is now well known that "no two conflicts are alike." The central requirement is, each time, a good, comprehensive understanding of the conflict - and that is easier said

than done. We know always much less than there is to know. There is an almost endless list of questions to answer to try to understand a particular conflict: what is this country, its past, its present? Who are the groups involved and their leaders? Who are the victims? Nor is it possible to stop at what is actually happening inside the country concerned. There invariably is a vitally important regional context and a wider, international context. Even the so-called international community will be different from one place to the other, from one conflict to the next. For Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran and India are more important than the whole of Europe, Africa and Latin America put together. For the Congo, little Burundi is more important than Japan, Indonesia and all of Eastern Europe.

In this connection, again in my personal experience, outsiders seem to find it difficult to resist the temptation of projecting their own likes and dislikes, their own prejudices, perhaps even their fantasies, into the equation. There is a tendency – natural perhaps, but on the whole rather negative – to pass hasty judgments and to rush to conclusions and even solutions that have little to do with the hard realities of the situation.

Contributors to this volume -Afghans and non-Afghans, academics and practitioners - bring an impressive amount of wisdom and experience to the literature on Afghanistan. Let us also take a close look at who is doing the analysis here: some internationals, yes, some veterans of Afghanistan's long wars – but mostly a new generation of Afghans, most of who were born around and or after 1990 when Najibullah and Hassan Kakar corresponded. They include Kakar's son, Kawun Kakar, a lawyer who worked for the United Nations Assistance Mission for Afghanistan after 2001, when I was the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in Kabul. There are so many others, men and women, who have studied in the world's best universities to search again peace for Afghanistan.

When people ask me how to work for peace, I say, there is no substitute to listening to the people. That is the ultimate test of the quality of what one has learned from experts, books, and reports. So I will stop talking and just suggest that we listen to other writers who study the various aspects of war making and peacemaking efforts in Afghanistan.

PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This volume is the result of dedicated, solid, and volunteering work put in by many people and institutions, both from inside and outside Afghanistan.

The project started first with a conversation in Kabul a year ago between Kawun Kakar, Janan Mosazai, Omar Sharifi, and Jawed Ludin, about Najibullah–Kakar letters exchanged in 1990 and the lessons they offer for peace in Afghanistan. The initial idea was to translate the letters from Dari into Pashto and English, and publish them for the public audience. At the end of that discussion, however, it was agreed to expand the initiative and have a wider call for papers based on the letters with the aim of a fresh and critical reflection on past and present of peacemaking efforts concerning Afghanistan. Not much later, Jawan Shir Rasikh was invited to join the conversation, and graciously accepted to lead the entire editing process.

As it is detailed in the introduction to this volume, the response from the contributors was overwhelmingly positive. We are immensely grateful to all of them for they made this volume possible. We also thank the Afghan participants of two pre-publication events held in late summer of 2020 in Kabul at Kakar History Foundation and Heart of Asia Society. Their insights on war and peace makings in Afghanistan were valuable for writing the introduction. We would like to take this opportunity to extend our collective gratitude also to author of the foreword to the volume, the always gracious Lakhdar Brahimi.

The production of such a volume requires extensive specialist and technical assistance that the following persons provided with dedication and patience: Maiwand Abbas, Mostafa Fata, Farhad Farhaad, Fabrizio Foschini, Baburzai Hiwaddust, Husna Jalal, Suleman Khplwak, Thomas Kraemer, Charlotte Maxwell-Jones, Sultan Sanjar Rasikh, Saifullah Sikandary, and Samiullah Zyar. We are grateful to all of them. In addition to the current English volume which is being translated into Pashto and Dari, a connected but separate independent volume with contributions in Dari and Pashto is simultaneously being published, with contributions by ten Afghan scholars and public intellectuals, including former and current members of Afghan Mujahedin and communist parties, civil society, and policy practitioners. We thank Zarin Anzoor and Khalilullah Afzali for overseeing the editing and translation of the Dari-Pashto volume.

We would like to extend our gratitude to several persons who also shared generously their time, expertise, and resources. Our thanks go to Ahmad Farid Tookhy whose inputs helped shape importantly the volume in the beginning. We also thank

Bashir Bakhshi, Faisal Chaudhary, Manizha Hakimi, Gran Hewad, Idrees Ilham, Abaceen Nasimi, Saman Nasser, Latif Salem, and Waheed Wafa for their generous time, either reading some version of the introduction to this volume, and or sharing their thoughtful views about it. Our gratitude also goes to Partha Chakrabartty for his superb copyediting of the essays. In a spirit of reflection, we thank Khwaga Kakar, Kawun's sister and the daughter of Dr. Hassan Kakar, for her personal and professional efforts, commitment, and labor to ensure that all goes well and efficiently with the publication of the volume, including its cover design. Last but not least, we are indebted to the Royal Government of Norway for their generous funding support for publication of this volume. In particular, we are grateful to Per Albert Ilsaas, the Norwegian Special Representative for Afghanistan, and Abdul Suboh Faizy, Senior Advisor to the Royal Norwegian Embassy in Kabul for their support.

We hope this volume proves a worthwhile contribution to the reflections, conversations, and debates on the current peace process concerning Afghanistan, and one to which, every Afghan woman and man looks at with utmost desire and hope for peace in their country, which we also believe is both more imperative and within reach now more than at any point over the past forty years.

Kawun Kakar, Jawed Ludin, Janan Mosazai, and Jawan Shir Rasikh

Kabul and Toronto, February 2021

PREFATORY NOTE

The contributors to this volume have used a variety of transliteration styles and spelling conventions in English from Arabic script based languages, such as Dari and Pashto. To make it easier for non-specialist readers, the editor has decided to standardize as necessary the use of non-Latin terms, such as 'Hasan' or 'Hassan' and or 'Najib,' 'Najibullah,' 'Najeeb,' or 'Najeebullah.' Diacritics have not been changed from individual essays when they were used. Common words, such as 'mujahedin,' are not italicized and translated. All translation and transliteration in the introduction to the volume are by Jawan Shir Rasikh and Kawun Kakar unless noted otherwise.



Map No. 3959 Rev. 7 UNITED NATIONS
June 2011

Department of Field Support
Cartographic Section

Map. Afghanistan; source: United Nations.

INTRODUCTION

Jawan Shir Rasikh, Kawun Kakar, and Janan Mosazai

‘If wars abound, so do peace efforts.’¹

The origin of this collection of essays lies in the discovery in 2019 of three letters of Afghanistan President Najibullah (1949–1996) and historian Mohammad Hassan Kakar (1929–2017).² The letters were exchanged in 1990, two years after the signing of the Geneva Accords of 1988, affirming the withdrawal of the Soviet forces from Afghanistan after ten years of conflict since the invasion of the country in 1979.³ In the correspondence, Najibullah and Kakar share a variety of views about the nature of ‘war and peace makings’⁴ in their country and the future of post-Soviet Afghanistan, in the context of Najibullah’s National Reconciliation Policy (NRP), and geopolitics of the then internationalized conflict in Afghanistan despite the Soviet withdrawal from the country a year earlier.⁵

¹ Kakar, *Soviet Invasion*, (1995), 106.

² The letters were found in early 2019 by Suleman Khplwak, a staff member of Kakar History Foundation, when the works, correspondence, and other historical materials of Kakar were being cataloged after being moved to Kabul from Concord, California, where he passed away in 2017. For more information on the Foundation, see www.kakarfoundation.com. For the original manuscript version of the letters in Dari (the Afghan Persian), see Appendix A to this volume; for their English translation, see Appendix B. Najibullah’s letters and Kakar’s letter are hereafter cited as NL and KL. All quotations from the letters in this introduction are based on the manuscript copy.

³ More later on the Geneva Accords and Soviet withdrawal.

⁴ In this introduction, ‘war and peace makings’ is used in plural as a heuristic for elucidating the simultaneity of war and peace in Afghanistan, meaning that while various types of wars (e.g., Soviet war, Mujahedin wars, Taliban wars, and ‘war on terror’) have been waged in Afghanistan during the past forty-plus years, there have been also a number of attempts to bring peace to the country, though unsuccessful yet.

⁵ The existing literature on war and peace makings in Afghanistan is taxing and in many languages. As of this writing (February 2021), a simple Google search in English, such as “wars in Afghanistan,” results in more than one million hits, while “peace in Afghanistan” results in close to three million hits; there are currently hundreds of active governmental, public, and private agencies, organizations, and programs dealing, often overlappingly, with matters of war and peace makings concerning Afghanistan both inside and outside the country. Only those works directly relied upon are cited.

Najibullah and Kakar exchanged a number of broad and specific ideas, including their collective recognition and emphasis on the possibility of making a lasting peace which “is in reality firstly the responsibility of every individual Afghan,” flaws of the NRP, the need for creation of an inclusive and self-determining governing national framework, and the future of millions of Afghan refugees and internally displaced persons. In addition to focusing on the domestic aspects of war and peace makings in Afghanistan, they recognize and emphasize the nature of foreign military and political interventions in Afghanistan, especially then by the Soviet Union and Pakistan (both countries “half” of the problem in Afghanistan as Kakar describes it), as impediments to peace.⁶ They both appreciate and emphasize that any resolution to the conflict in Afghanistan was also, as Kakar summarizes it, “in the end, in reality, beyond the power of Afghans, depended [rather] upon the foreign powers (*qudrat’ha-yi khariji*).”⁷ Moreover, while both Najibullah and Kakar agree that it was impossible to resolve the conflict in Afghanistan without foreign powers ceasing their interventions in the internal affairs of Afghans (*mauzu’at dakhili afghanha*), they concur that the Afghan people “could not wait for foreigners” to bring peace to their country, and that “it would also be a useless vanity not to seek the necessary assistance [to end] our national and human catastrophe,” which has become “nowadays a tragedy, to the extent that it appears irresolvable.”⁸

The three letters, two from Najibullah and one from Kakar, are together a total of forty pages in their original manuscript version. The first letter, which initiates this “dialogue” (*bahs*) as Najibullah calls his correspondence with Kakar, is dated Dalw 1368 (February 1990), and is five pages, while the second letter a “reply” as Kakar characterizes his letter to Najibullah, is dated June 12, 1990 (Jawza 22, 1369), and is twenty-nine pages. The third letter from Najibullah is six pages, and is dated Saratan 30, 1369 (July 21, 1990).⁹ However, after the second letter written as a response to Kakar in which Najibullah shows keen interest in the various ideas of the former, the correspondence thereafter ceases for reasons unknown.¹⁰

⁶ KL, 12-14.

⁷ KL, 4.

⁸ KL, 2.

⁹ To keep the calendric integrity of the letters, the mixed date system, namely the Afghan Hejri Shamsi and Gregorian calendars that Najibullah and Kakar use in their letters, has been followed. While it is now a standard practice in Afghan state internal and external legal and political affairs as well as across much of the Afghan society and public culture (e.g., local media) to use simultaneously a mixture of Islamic and Afghan Hejri Shamsi and Gregorian calendars, this was hardly the case in Afghanistan before the Soviet invasion of the country.

¹⁰ Kakar himself translated in 1990 into English Najibullah’s first original letter and his reply letter. Kakar’s translations of these two letters into English included to this volume were edited for corrections by Kawun Kakar and Jawan Shir Rasikh based on the original Dari manuscript copy of the letters also included to this volume. Najibullah’s second letter was translated into English by Ambassador Janan Mosazai.

The exchange of these letters, or even the discontinuation of the correspondence, might be best understood when put in the larger personal-political contexts in which these two elite but also socially and politically different persons—one a communist president presiding over a post-occupation battered country and another a non-party university professor residing in self-exile in the United States—had known each other prior to their correspondence. Indeed, both Najibullah and Kakar recognize in their letters, a “bitter past” (*guzasht-i talkh*)¹¹ “former times” (*sawabiq*)¹², and other past “roles of this and or that side” (*mas’uliyatha-yi ein ya antaraf*) in the lead up to and during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan,¹³ but they also say that it was time for them and all other Afghans to search for “a way out” (*rah-i birun raft*) to end the “bleeding crisis” (*buhran-i khunin*) in Afghanistan and, “pay attention towards building a fair, safe, and prosperous future for themselves and the future generations of [our] country” (*mutawajih-i sakhtan-i yak ayenda-i ziba, masun wa murafah bara-yi khud wa naslha-yi ayenda-i kishwar*).¹⁴

Neither Najibullah nor Kakar point explicitly in these letters to any previous personal and political relations, although in the immediate years prior to their correspondence in 1990, they both knew each other in a number of specific contexts. One context was the years (1982-1987), when Kakar was a prisoner in Kabul and Najibullah, prior to becoming president, led KHAD, the intelligence security agency of Afghan communist governments, the main organ responsible for purging the People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA, the communist party of Afghanistan) of party and non-party opposition and critics, including the alleged arrest, torture, and killing of an unknown number of people across Afghanistan. Najibullah and Kakar do not mention in this correspondence their interaction in 1982 when Kakar and several other professors from Kabul University, then the first battleground for Afghan nationalist, internationalist, and other religious and secular elites, including Kakar and Najibullah, were imprisoned as “anti-regime” by KHAD.¹⁵ As such, it might not be a coincidence that KHAD is mentioned by Kakar ten times in different contexts in his letter to Najibullah, describing KHAD as “a must thing to be dismantled” (*bayad az bain birawad*) as part of his nationwide and global reconciliation efforts and outreach to his enemies and critics

¹¹ NL, 1.

¹² KL, 2.

¹³ NL, 1.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Kakar was arrested for his opposition to the Soviet invasion and sentenced in 1982 to eight years, meaning that he would have finished his term the same year (1990) that he and Najibullah exchanged their letters. Kakar’s arrest was condemned by international human rights groups, including the Amnesty International, which designated him a “prisoner of conscience.” For details of the arrest of Kakar and his colleagues from Kabul University, see Elmi, *Sovietization of Afghan Education*, (1987), 5-6, and 29; and Weintraub, “Afghan scholar,” (1988).

in order to achieve the goals of the NRP.¹⁶ We also know from Kakar himself as he talks about it elsewhere that it was in January 1987 that Najibullah announced publicly his NRP, and when he was released by Najibullah from prison as part of a group of professors. In his quest for peace, Najibullah then established the High Commission for National Reconciliation (*Kamisun-i Āli Musalibe-yi Milli*) and, as Kakar says in the same context, he was invited to become a member of it.¹⁷

Moreover, to put these three letters in the larger context of the time, while Kakar could be one of the well-known intellectual Afghans who responded to Najibullah's call for reconciliation and peace despite their bitter pasts and different personal and political backgrounds, he was not the only person with whom Najibullah exchanged letters as part of his broader reconciliation and peace efforts. As a matter of fact, Najibullah sends on the same year the same first letter that he sends to Kakar to Mohammad Jamil Hanifi, the Michigan-based Afghan-American anthropologist.¹⁸ As several contributors to this volume highlight, in addition to Afghan intellectual elites, Najibullah also wrote directly to the last king of Afghanistan (Zahir Shah, r. 1933-1973), Ahmad Shah Masoud, one of the leading Mujahedin commanders, and a number of other Afghan and non-Afghan elite figures at the time. While these letters might be collectively revealing in the sense that how individual and collective Afghan political and intellectual elites both inside and outside Afghanistan on opposite sides of the conflict back then communicated and interpreted and or simply made sense of the historical and political fallout of the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan and Najibullah's reconciliation and peace efforts, the larger point that needs emphasis here is that in addition to the personal and political contexts and interactions of Najibullah and Kakar that were briefly introduced here, these letters have other temporal, political, and related contexts, as well as epistolographic aesthetics, epistolary stylistic features, and various moral elements whose examination in detail are outside the purview of this introduction.¹⁹

After the discovery of the letters in 2019 and a preliminary assessment of their contents, namely dealing with various aspects of war and peace makings in contemporary Afghanistan and, more importantly, showing the various attempts by Afghans themselves

¹⁶ KL, 18-20.

¹⁷ Kakar says he declined the offer, and instead went to self-exile after his release in 1987, first to Pakistan and then to the US in 1989. For other details of Kakar's release and invitation to join the reconciliation commission, see Kakar, *Soviet Invasion*, 95.

¹⁸ For Najibullah-Hanifi exchange, see Hanifi, "*Du sand-i tarikhi*," (2015).

¹⁹ For example, all three letters exchanged between Kakar and Najibullah are written in Dari, except a one sentence Pashto saying and a two-line verse from the seventeenth century poet Khushal Khan Khattak that Kakar includes in his letter. Najibullah's letters are composed on government letterhead with government seals, although Najibullah addresses his ideas in both personal and party language. Najibullah's letters are also written on Soviet-imported typewriters, which were then popular in Afghanistan's complex scribal bureaucracy, while Kakar's letter is written by hand in Shikasta Nasta'liq style.

on different sides of the conflict searching then for peace for their country, a diverse group of specialist scholars, public intellectuals, commentators, policy practitioners, and members of the civil society, both from inside and outside Afghanistan, were invited to analyze the letters and juxtapose them with other contemporary materials, peace plans, and peace processes. Additionally, in the conception of the volume, several Afghanistan-based scholars, public intellectuals, government and policy practitioners, journalists, and members of the civil society (several of whom are contributors to this volume), were also invited to two pre-publication reading and discussion events of the letters, held in Kabul.

The objective in both contributions to the volume and the reading of the letters in person was for the participants to analyze, historically or otherwise, the letters based on their own fields of expertise. There were several goals for this. One objective was to use the letters as an example to revisit and understand the reasons for the ‘failure’ of Najibullah’s NRP and other peace plans and processes, and the historical lessons for the current war and peace making processes. Not necessarily limiting the focus to NRP, the contributors were also invited to provide fresh analyses and insights about the pending American withdrawal from Afghanistan, the intra-Afghan peace talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban, and the immediate or long-term implications to Afghan society of these two unfolding but uncertain processes of simultaneous war and peace makings. Speaking specifically of time, the essays in the volume cover two different but connected periods of war and peace makings in Afghanistan, 1987–1992, and 2001–2021.²⁰

In the first period, most specifically by February 15, 1989, the Soviet Union had completed its military withdrawal from Afghanistan as per the terms of the Geneva Accords. These accords were a number of bilateral agreements signed in Geneva, Switzerland, on April 14, 1988, between the then Republic of Afghanistan and the Islamic Republic of Pakistan on the one hand, and the United States and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics on the other hand, then the main regional and international parties involved in the war inside Afghanistan.²¹ Like the contributors to this volume, many scholars, especially political scientists and others from the sub-fields of diplomacy

²⁰ It is useful to note that an organized discussion of periodization of wars or correlation between time and conflict in Afghanistan is beyond the scope of this introduction. We can say, for example, that 1979, the year that the Soviets invaded Afghanistan and one year after President Daud Khan (1973–1978) was overthrown by Afghan communists, is a traditional point of departure in many works on the beginning of modern conflicts in Afghanistan. This type of periodization, however, ultimately has also its epistemic origins in how *inqilab-i saur* or The Saur Revolution (April 1978) as Afghan communists called it, has been interpreted. For instance, see Newell, “Revolution and Revolt,” (1979); Hyman, *Afghanistan*, (1984).

²¹ The United States and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics were signatories to the second accord (*Declaration on International Guarantees*) and third accord (*Agreement on the Interrelationships for the Settlement of the Situation Relating to Afghanistan*) as co-guarantors and witnesses of the accords.

and conflict studies, have heavily studied these accords from different perspectives.²² However, it is important to note that many of them were skeptical, even from day one when the accords were signed, that they would be sufficient to bring to a lasting end the then ‘internationalized war’ inside Afghanistan.²³

For example, one year later after the signing of the accords, a scholar in a final analysis wrote, that “[b]y avoiding provision for self-determination, the Accords simply remitted the Afghan conflict to the battlefield—possibly making little difference to Afghanistan’s long-term political future, but imposing immense short-term costs on the Afghan people. The continuation of ferocious military exchanges well after the Accords came into force grimly confirmed what was obvious from the day the Accords were published—that for many Afghans, they offered only the peace of the grave” (dashes in original).²⁴ Other scholars and independent observers have called the accords “meaningless with regard to peace in Afghanistan”²⁵ and “noble, thorough, and, in part, fictional.”²⁶ Kakar also called the Geneva Accords when they were signed an international “compromise” on Afghanistan, which did not “represent” the will of the Afghan people as the primary victims of the then conflict.²⁷ The accords, as Kakar later expanded his initial characterization elsewhere, “helped the Soviets avoid paying war indemnities. More to the point, the accords—from which the resistance leaders [mujahidin] had been excluded—had no provision to stop the war...the accords in effect increased the chances of war and the destruction of an already battered Afghanistan.”²⁸

The Geneva Accords have recently attracted renewed attention from new Cold War studies scholars. Using declassified sources from the Soviet archives and other sources, including new ethnographic evidence such as interviews with both Russian and global

²² For example, among others, see Maley, “The Geneva Accords of April 1988,” (1989), 12-28; Córdovez, *Out of Afghanistan*, (1992), 243-364.

²³ In this introduction ‘war’ is not approached as a definitive empirical category. It is used in a broad historical-ethnographic human sense to appreciate and elucidate the logic and connection of different modern wars both in the Soviet and post-Soviet Afghanistan. Human in the sense that we also rely for understanding and interpretation of wars in Afghanistan on our individual and generational experiences of growing up with them during the past four decades both inside and outside Afghanistan. While ‘war’ and ‘conflict’ here are used interchangeably, it is important to note the need to make concrete historical and theoretical distinctions between conflicts and wars in modern Afghanistan in order to get an organized historical and legal sense about the nature of war and peace makings in Afghanistan, not just a descriptively political sense.

²⁴ Maley, “the Geneva,” 25.

²⁵ Westad, *The Global Cold War*, (2007), 377.

²⁶ Corwin, *Doomed in Afghanistan*, (2003), 10.

²⁷ Kakar, (in Pashoto), *Da Afghanistan pa Bab da Geno Jora*, (1988).

²⁸ Kakar, *Soviet Invasion*, 95. Since the literature on the Soviet withdrawal is vast, see, among others, the various essays in Saikal and Maley (ed.), *The Soviet Withdrawal from Afghanistan*, (1989). For a view of the withdrawal by Afghan communists, see Wakil, *Az Padshahi Mutlaqa ila Suqut-i jamburi democratic-i Afghanistan*, Vol. 2, (1395/2017); Tookhi, “*doctor najib allah wa khuruj-i niruha-yi nizami shurawi*,” (2009). For a more recent analysis, see Kalinovsky, *A Long Goodbye*, (2011).

military and intelligence veterans of the Soviet-Afghan war, the new works show that the accords were a political and diplomatic success to the Soviet Union and especially to its then leader Mikhail Gorbachev. Although Gorbachev, when he became the leader of the Soviet Union in 1985, was against the withdrawal if it meant a “[dis]honorable” defeat, he steadfastly pursued the withdrawal plan both at personal and policy levels to stop the “bleeding wound” as such that he had described the Soviet imperial venture in Afghanistan.²⁹ This was why Gorbachev firmly supported the end of the Soviet war in Afghanistan through, in the words of one scholar, “old politics, new diplomacy” many rounds of coordinated talks in Geneva between the Soviet Union and the United States at an international level, and between the Soviet Union and Pakistan and Afghanistan at a regional level.³⁰ To achieve an agreement to disengage from Afghanistan as soon as possible and to implement the accords in a way that would be symbolically honorable to the Soviet Union, the Soviet military and diplomats, especially the then KGB chief and foreign minister Vladimir Kriuchkov and Eduard Shevardnadze, also negotiated directly with President Najibullah as the head of the internationally-recognized Afghan government in Kabul, and at the same time reached out to various Afghan Mujahedin armed groups as parties to the conflict.

While the Soviets achieved what they wanted (exit from Afghanistan), several things stand out, especially how the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan was generally translated from historical and political perspectives at a global level as part and beyond the ending of the Cold War. One is that the Soviet Union welcomed the “honorable” conclusion of the war insofar it allowed them to disengage from Afghanistan, not to mention the fact that they left behind a pro-Soviet regime in power in Kabul (then the PDPA-dominated government of Najibullah), and which it continued to support militarily and politically for as long it could. The support to Najibullah’s government was provided in spite of the terms of the Geneva Accords that had barred all parties to the conflict in Afghanistan from intervening in Afghanistan, meaning that they would also stop supplying weapons and other support to all sides of the conflict. Anti-Soviet states, especially the United States, translated symmetrically the continued military, economic, and political assistance of the Soviet Union to Najibullah as a justification to continue military and political backing of their Afghan and non-Afghan Islamist clients, namely, the Pakistan-based *Abzab-e Haftgana-e Mujahedin Afghan* (Seven Mujahedin Afghan Parties), and the so-called Arab Afghans (e.g., Osama Bin Laden).

In addition to Gorbachev and the Soviet public, those in the United States and elsewhere who ideologically opposed the Soviet Union celebrated the exit of the “evil empire” from Afghanistan. It has often been said that the so-called bleeders—anti-

²⁹ Westad, *The Global Cold War*, 372-387.

³⁰ Kalinovsky, “Old politics, New diplomacy,” (2008).

communism and anti-Soviet American hawks, who were deeply involved in the war campaign against the Soviets in Afghanistan—viewed the Soviet defeat in Afghanistan as “revenge” for Vietnam.³¹ This sense of revenge from the Soviets or triumph over communism in general among the American political, military, and scholarly hawks, is best embodied in the conclusion that Louis Dupree, arguably then the most famous American authority on Afghanistan, offered on the Soviet withdrawal. Dupree writes triumphantly in 1989—in the genre of the ‘end of history’ thesis that one of his American contemporaries was formulating around the same time at a theoretical global level³²—in the last paragraph of what it seems to have been his last publication on Afghanistan, in which he couples his longstanding anti-Russian but rather myopic views of Afghans and Afghanistan in a post-Cold War world: “The Afghans stopped six centuries of Russian aggression which began with the Principality of Muscovy. Now Moscow has no place to go, and so can look inward and work to achieve Gorbachev’s announced goals of *glasnost* and *perestroika*. I am convinced of two things: the Afghans will decide their own future; and outside interference from any source will be rejected. Influences are already in place, but outside interference will not be tolerated. Ask the Soviets.”³³ Nevertheless, after the Soviet withdrawal, Najibullah held on to power for three more years.

During the period, in order to keep his regime from falling immediately in the absence of Soviet troops as was commonly predicted, Najibullah relied generally on a twofold open-ended strategy of war and peace makings. On the one hand, he relied on an ‘as much as can’ use of defensive military strategy against his internationally armed and funded Mujahedin opposition who were rejecting his legitimacy as the president of Afghanistan and planning to overrun his government militarily. On the other hand, he pursued a strategy of peace making through reconciliation with his opponents and critics. Yet, the critics were skeptical of his intentions and suspected that his national and global political and diplomatic initiatives were designed so that he might rule post-Soviet Afghanistan as a kind of “democracy by decree” as one contributor to this volume characterizes it. Whether ruling by decree and or ruling by party (*hizb*) as Najibullah and other Afghan communist leaders claimed to have been doing, the last three years of Najibullah’s government is both a critical and a contested period in the contemporary

³¹ For the formation of a class of American political and military avengers of the Soviets in Afghanistan during the then American war involvement in the country, among others, see chapter seven of the book *What We Won* (2014) by Bruce Riedel, who himself was deeply involved in the then American ‘secret’ war in the country.

³² For the ‘end of history’ thesis, see Fukuyama, “The end of History?,” (1989).

³³ Dupree, “Post-Withdrawal Afghanistan,” (1989), 47. It is useful to note that Dupree was jailed and deported from Afghanistan by the Afghan communists in 1978, alleging ties with the US military and security agencies. Apart from his oft-cited monograph, *Afghanistan* (1973), for Dupree’s other dealings in and out of Afghanistan prior and during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, see Allison, “The Goat Caught in Bushkazi,” (2012).

history of war and peace makings in Afghanistan. Najibullah's period of ruling in Afghanistan or more appropriately the very person of Najibullah has become the subject of fierce political contestation in Afghanistan since 2001. Najibullah has turned into a sort of historical nationalist hero to his supporters both for his reconciliation and peace efforts and his historically correct prediction and indeed repeated personal and public warnings, documented heavily in hundreds of televised speeches and correspondence, about violence and destruction that would take place in Afghan society if Mujahedin factional groups refuse to make peace with his government and come to power by force.³⁴

Nevertheless, Najibullah stuck firmly both personally—as we know from his private correspondences—and publicly with his NRP agenda, but he was overwhelmed soon after the Soviet Union disintegrated towards the end of 1991, two years after the Soviet troops had left Afghanistan. Neither Najibullah's irregular military push back, such as the defeat of the Mujahedin in summer of 1989 in the Battle of Jalalabad, nor his policy of NRP, helped him to complete his seven-year term as president of Afghanistan.³⁵ By the beginning of 1992, Najibullah was overpowered by combined political, military, and economic forces from inside and outside Afghanistan. When the Soviet Union collapsed, and Najibullah was left without a patron to sustain his regime, he was privately and publicly singled out by senior members of his own party, such as his go-between foreign minister Abdul Wakil, as well as the Islamist Mujahedin groups, as the single obstacle against a peaceful resolution of the conflict in post-Soviet Afghanistan. In the subsequent political and rapid social deterioration in Afghanistan, especially during the first few months of 1992 when it became certain that Najibullah had to give up power to a new non-communist “pre-transition” government, dubbed also as Council of Impartials, which was being planned by the United Nations (more later), Najibullah was stamped as the single “obstacle against

³⁴ Since 2001 Najibullah's supporters have become a vocal group of political and civil society critics (made up mostly of his former PDPA-Watan comrades and independent individuals), making a new case with the current battered Afghan public that Najibullah's period was one of the “best periods” in the past forty plus years of Afghanistan. This new intellectual and political return (*bazgash* as they call it) to a new type of historical politics, namely politics of opposition critical of both the current Afghan government and the Taliban as well as the American-led foreign military forces in the country, is however both inchoate and moot. For example, among others, see Akbari (ed.), *Siyasat-i musalib-i milli wa shakhsiyat-i doctor najib allah*, (2003); and Wadan, *Musalibeh-yi Milli*, (2013). Also see Ruttig and Adili, “The Ghost of Najibullah,” (2017); Wadan, “*mururi-i bar majmu'a-yi az abdul wakil*,” (2017); Akhbar-i Ruz, “*bazgash-i doctor najibullah ba sahna-yi siyasi afghanistan*,” (1399/2020); and Andishmand, “*musalib-i milli doctor najib allah chura nafarjam mand?*” (1399/2020). For a general critique by ‘New Left’ in Afghanistan of the neoliberal post-conflict development state and society after 9/11 in Afghanistan in the context of Afghanistan modern history, see Atiq Arvand, *Az Rayat ba Shahrwand*, (2020).

³⁵ Najibullah was elected in a Loya Jirga or Grand Assembly in 1987 for seven years as President. On Loya Jirga and production of political legitimacy and hegemony in Afghanistan, see Hanifi, “Editing the past,” (2004).

peace” (*mān-i musaliha*).³⁶ As a matter of fact, the United Nations as an international mediating body and foreign countries, particularly Pakistan, were planning for a good while, at least since the signing of the Geneva Accords, on removing Najibullah from power.³⁷ Unable to resist anymore the combined pressures, Najibullah resigned in March of 1992 under the auspices of what was then a new United Nations peace plan after the original peace plan of the Ecuadorian diplomat and UN representative Diego Córdovez had dissipated in air after the completion of the Soviet withdrawal.³⁸

The new UN peace plan known also as Sevan’s Plan—named after the then Armenian-Cypriot UN representative to Afghanistan Benon Sevan who succeeded Córdovez after the latter did his job to get the Soviet troops out of Afghanistan—failed even more miserably when Sevan could not fulfil his promise to Najibullah to fly him to India after he resigned at his behest.³⁹ Sevan’s Plan and other subsequent regional and inter-Afghan plans and accords, namely the Peshawar Accords of 1992, Islamabad Accords of 1993, and several inter-Afghan party peace making arrangements and agreements inside and outside Afghanistan (e.g., Mujahedin leaders even took an oath in Mecca, Islam’s holiest city, to stop their infighting) did not however result in peace in Afghanistan.⁴⁰ As several contributors to this volume also highlight, on the contrary, these accords further internationalized factional conflicts, political chaos and disorder, and within less than two weeks after Najibullah left the office of presidency and a power vacuum was created, the Afghan state collapsed from both inside and outside when Mujahedin factions—guided and supported by their foreign backers—moved rapidly into Kabul towards the end of April in 1992.⁴¹

With the collapse of the Afghan state, Afghan people had to bear once again as they did during the Soviet war, the internationalized factional conflicts, first between

³⁶ Wadan, “*mururi*,” Corwin, *Doomed*, 13.

³⁷ When Najibullah came to power and during the much of Geneva negotiations, Pakistani delegation’s principal position was that Najibullah had to be removed from power to bring peace to Afghanistan. They dropped this demand at the request of the US after the latter came to an understanding with the Soviets towards the final round of talks in Geneva to not insist on the change of government in Kabul when the Soviets leave the country. See the footnote below.

³⁸ Córdovez, *Out of Afghanistan*, 368-70.

³⁹ For the specificities of Sevan’s Plan, its failure, and the fall of PDPA-Watan government, see, among others, Corwin, *Doomed*, 1-147. After the failure of his mission in Afghanistan, Sevan became infamous for taking bribes from Iraqi authorities, while working in the United Nations Oil-for-Food Program. See the final ‘Third Interim Report’ of Independent Inquiry Committee into the United Nations Oil-for-Food Program, (2005).

⁴⁰ Peshawar and Islamabad accords were agreed under pressure of the Pakistani and several other regional intelligence agency chiefs in Pakistan between infighting Mujahedin parties to divide power among their factions. For the role of these intelligence agencies in determining and shaping these accords, see Kakar, *Soviet Invasion*, 99-103.

⁴¹ Najibullah and his brother Shahpur were brutally killed when the Taliban captured Kabul, and their soulless bodies were publicly choreographed in one of the country’s most well-known and historical public squares, Charahi-yi Aryana.

the various Mujahedin factions and, subsequently, between the Taliban and other groups like United Front, known also as the Northern Alliance, essentially a coalition of former Mujahedin parties based in various Hindukush Mountain towns, valleys, and enclaves in northeastern and northwest-central Afghanistan. Afghan people in the years between 1992 and 2001 not only witnessed the infusion into their already battered society of a variety of non-state militant Islamist actors (e.g., al-Qaeda, etc.) with global political agendas and directly intensified political and military interventions by regional neighboring states (e.g., Pakistan, Iran, India, etc.), but they also witnessed shockingly the destruction of the basic foundation of their civic life as a result of internationalized factional infighting among a variety of local Afghan Islamist parties (e.g., Mujahedin, Taliban, etc.), while the conflict itself became politically and otherwise year after year more disastrous, more bloody, and more catastrophic for Afghan people themselves as the primary victims.⁴²

It is the members of these former Mujahedin and anti-Taliban alliances, old and new Western-educated technocrats, and other newly emerged post-2001 Afghan political, intellectual, and religious elites, who make up many of the current Afghan ruling classes in the ‘new Afghanistan’ that is brought about after American-led global military intervention in the country in 2001. However, since 2001 under the framework of the so-called global war on terror, after twenty years of continued conflict, hundreds if not thousands of yearly ‘special’ military operations,⁴³ and various campaigns of informational war⁴⁴ in and out of Afghanistan, there is no peace in the country. As the twenty-year global war on terror in Afghanistan has entered its third decade without peace in the country, similar to the ten-year war that the Soviets fought, some now argue that history is repeating itself.

As of this writing (February 2021), actually not only is there active conflict nationwide, but also recently daily assassinations of members of the Afghan civil and political societies—namely targeted killing of journalists, judges, prosecutors, educators, aid workers, civilian state employees, and other individuals—have become a reality of

⁴² Among others, see Maley, *The Afghanistan Wars*, (2002), 168-283; Kakar, *Soviet Invasion*, epilogue.

⁴³ For the latest raids in the past two years by American forces and their local Afghan government and non-government mercenaries, see Quilty, “The CIA’s Afghan Death Squads,” (2020).

⁴⁴ The information war in and of Afghan society after 9/11 is complex in which a variety of older and younger social scientists, anthropologists, and other men of knowledge—both Afghans and non-Afghans—have deeply infiltrated into Afghan peoples’ bodies and minds including those of the Taliban “the enemy” (e.g., *Taliban Poetry*) either in the name of “winning” their hearts and minds, and or making them known to the American and other global military strategists, personnel, and groups involved in the current war on terror. For example, see, among others, Singer, “Winning the War of Words” (2001), or the many works of Alex Strick Van Linschoten and Flex Kuehn, available on their website, <https://www.firstdraft-publishing.com>. For a critique of this body of knowledge, see Price, “Human Terrain Systems, Anthropologists and the War in Afghanistan,” (2009); Hanifi, “Vending distorted Afghanistan through patriotic ‘anthropology,’” (2011).

life in Afghan society. While the no-one-taking-responsibility assassination campaign against various state employees, media community, and members of civil society at large has ushered a new era of terror, in particular in the urban areas (e.g., Kabul), where anyone loosely connected with government and or civil and political societies, feels that he or she could be targeted next. The impact of these recent killings is already quite damaging: many have started self-censoring themselves and restricting their activities, while those who can are leaving the country. This new wave of violence has added more fear and uncertainty to the widely-held understanding, both among the Afghan public and the ‘expert’ community, whether peace will come to Afghanistan not because but in spite of the so-called Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan signed on February 2020 between the United States as the global party, and the Taliban as an Afghan militant opposition party to the current war.⁴⁵

The end result of this elusive agreement, which is understood to have secret annexes that are not made public by the US and the Taliban, is not clear. According to the published terms of the agreement, all American and foreign military forces are supposed to leave Afghanistan by May of 2021. However, the new Democratic administration of Joe Biden in the US has publicly stated that it is “reviewing” the agreement with the Taliban.⁴⁶ While it is unclear whether the US will withdraw its military and security personnel and infrastructure as per the terms of the current agreement, what is clear is that Joe Biden is said to be in favor of ending the so-called endless American wars in the Middle East and in Afghanistan in particular.

Several things stand out amid the currently pending American withdrawal from Afghanistan. It is unclear if Biden will become a sort of Gorbachev of a new America, and will firmly and decisively commit as Gorbachev did to disengage once and for all from the war in Afghanistan. It is also unclear whether the Biden Administration will insist on keeping some type of military presence in the country, and in that case whether the Taliban will continue the peace talks with the current Afghan government.

⁴⁵ US State Department, “Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan,” (2020); for waves of violent attacks and assassinations since the signing of the agreement with the US that the Afghan government blames the Taliban for, see reports of the various media and conflict-monitoring agencies on the country during the period, such as the latest quarterly report produced by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, available on <https://unama.unmissions.org/killing-human-rights-defenders-and-media-professionals-afghanistan—new-un-report>.

⁴⁶ The Afghan government and critics have questioned the agreement for its various defects. For example, William Maley, who as noted earlier had pointed out the defects of the Geneva Accords thirty years ago for overlooking the self-determination of Afghanistan and not prioritizing peace in general in the country, has commented on the US–Taliban agreement as follows: “As a Professor of Diplomacy, I’m hard-pressed to think of a more-defective agreement in the history of diplomatic engagement than the one signed on February 29 (2020). Maybe the September 1938 Munich Agreement; maybe the January 1973 Paris Accords on Vietnam. Not many others.” See William Maley, @williammaley1, twitter.

While the current foreign forces cannot remain forever in Afghanistan, the Afghan sides of the conflict themselves have not only failed to move forward from their currently start-to-stop talks to start to prioritize peace over war, such as making ceasefire, in the battered and traumatized Afghan society, but also the current ruling elites are still deeply divided along their factional, class, and political-ideological lines about what kind of post-American Afghanistan they want.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, while this is a make-or-break question of the current intra-Afghan talks that the Afghan parties to the current war and peace making processes will ultimately need to answer, as of now as this volume goes to press, neither Afghan government and Taliban as local parties, nor the American-led international forces as a global party to the war, have reached an 'agreement' to result in peace to Afghanistan after forty plus years of internationalized conflict in the country.

It is therefore unknown what a formal American disengagement from Afghanistan exactly will mean in the short or long-term to the country. The long-term ecological-human and political consequences to Afghanistan from the global war on terror fought in the country on a much greater scale, and, so far, twice the number of years that the Soviets fought in Afghanistan, cannot be known as of yet. As far as a lasting peace in Afghanistan is concerned, however, neither invasions of Afghanistan nor withdrawals from it by global powers have been historically as such about Afghanistan and or about resulting in peace in the country. As a matter of fact, the US political and military leaders have insisted that they have been fighting in Afghanistan for their own 'national interests,' not Afghanistan's even if they say that they would like to see the country in peace. To put it in big historical perspective, at least since the nineteenth century, when Afghanistan gradually came into existence as an independent modern geographical-political entity, the country has been periodically under various global economic and military pressures, interventions, occupations, and withdrawals, for national and global concerns of the invading global powers. The British empire, for instance, in the nineteenth century invaded, occupied, and then withdrew from Afghanistan twice in the name of defending its crown colony of India in the so-called Great Game against the then Russian empire, resulting both times in devastation of Afghan society itself, even if Afghans 'won' the two imperial colonial wars against the British Indian armies.⁴⁸

Similar to the British Indian colonial interventions, the Soviet invasion of and withdrawal from Afghanistan led to periods of internationalized conflict, political

⁴⁷ For an introduction to the state of disunity among current Afghan elites, see Hassan and Wardak, "A house divided," (2020).

⁴⁸ For the British Indian colonial intervention in Afghanistan and imperial-colonial impoverishment of the Afghan society argument in the nineteenth century historiography of Afghanistan and the importance to understand alternatively from the conventional narrative the various modern imperial interventions in Afghanistan and their effects on the Afghan society, see, for example, Hanifi, *Connecting Histories*, (2011). For a review of this argument, see Rasikh, "Connecting Histories," (2020).

violence, and human and societal devastation in the Afghan society, the extent of which was unprecedented in modern Afghanistan and anywhere else in the Soviet-occupied world.⁴⁹ As a result of the Soviet-Afghan war, millions of Afghan people died, became orphans and widows, and formed the largest modern refugee population in the world. Indeed, the political and societal fallout after Soviet intervention in the short and long-term, such as the eventual collapse of the Afghan state three years after the Soviet departure, the subsequent beginning of internationalized civil wars in the country, and the destruction of much of the civic life in post-Soviet Afghanistan, were humanely and politically consequential to 'Afghan people' as the primary victims of them. One of the legacies of the Soviet invasion and withdrawal from Afghanistan is that the country itself as a nation-state has been ever since associated persistently with empirical categories and expressions of 'failed state,' 'war-torn country,' 'opium nation,' 'anti-women,' and a host of other empirical and pejorative expressions in the various national, regional, and global political and historical discourses of modern war and peace makings in the world.

The post-2001 period, when a combined American-led global military force intervened in the country, is however also different in terms of time and actors from the Soviet period when Afghanistan was invaded. While a comparative introduction of the two periods is not the purpose here and thus it is beyond the scope of this introduction, we would like to quickly note that the two periods are different in the basic sense of time, in that as of now, the US-Taliban agreement and the expected foreign military withdrawal from the country in general, and indeed even the future direction of the currently pending intra-Afghan peace talks between the Taliban and Afghan government and or the very administration of President Ashraf Ghani (whether it will naturally follow the historical precedent of the last PDPA-Watan government of Najibullah), look more like a bargain made on paper than an 'agreement' to lead to the ending of the actual conflict that is going on in Afghan society.

That having been said, before we conclude that all past efforts towards bringing peace to Afghanistan have been anything but successful, as Lakhdar Brahimi with many decades of global peace making experiences, including in Afghanistan, also cautions in the foreword to this volume, we turn our attention in the following pages to the various analyses and perspectives that this collection of diverse essays offers, which are critical to understanding key questions in the past and present of war and peace makings, and state

⁴⁹ It is important to note that after World War II Afghanistan was the first major theater of war for the Soviets, one in which they also used their latest weapons of war, as has been arguably the case with the war on terror in Afghanistan, wherein the United States military used on April 14, 2017 the largest non-nuclear bomb ever used in a conflict after WWII, the so-called MOAB or 'Mother of all Bombs.' It has been reported recently by Afghan media that the local residents of Mohmand Dara village in Nangarhar province, where the US military dropped its bomb, have developed many unknown diseases and agricultural lands are not yielding crops. For example, see Omeri, "Mother of All Bombs' Caused Illness, Ruined Farmland," (2019).

and society relations in contemporary Afghanistan. Why is there no peace in Afghanistan after forty plus years of wars? What has been the quest for peace in Afghanistan during this period? How can we distinguish between actors and factors of war and peace makings in Afghanistan? Why in particular Afghanistan-Pakistan historical and political relationships matter most in war and peace makings in Afghanistan (this question is the direct subject of a new critique in the volume by the political and human rights activist Afrasiab Khattak from Pakistan).

While Pakistan comes up in several essays in this volume as a factor and actor in various aspects of war and peace makings in Afghanistan, other contributors focus on other public, institutional, and policy questions, such as what are the current policy orientations regarding war and peace makings in Afghanistan, or what are the basic ingredients of reconciliation and peace plans? What about Afghan sovereignty and the historical and political nature of the Afghan state, governance, publics, and development agenda? How could we envision what peace will look like in Afghanistan in a post-conflict, post-American Afghanistan? These are some questions that this single volume in twenty-two short essays engages with to locate the historical and political themes of war and peace makings, and society in Afghanistan. Rather than theoretically new, the volume is designed to be reflective and perspectivist, each contributor offering one, or a variety of, perspectives about aspects of war and peace makings in contemporary Afghanistan. The contributors are some academic scholars, some insiders of the war and peace making processes, some longtime commentators, and others government and policy practitioners, and members of civil society. They each approach the above and other similar questions from their own career specialist background and field of study, namely historical and cultural, political science and development studies, and the sub-fields of post-Cold War and post-9/11 conflict studies.

The essays have been divided into three sections. The nine essays in section one focus on the correspondence between Najibullah and Kakar, politics and policies of peace making, and the broader similarities and differences between the previous and current peace making processes, specifically comparing and contrasting the then Geneva Accords and Najibullah's NRP, with the US-Taliban Agreement of February 2020 and the intra-Afghan peace talks. This is followed by six essays in section two, which deal with themes of state-society relations in the contexts of previous and ongoing war and peace makings in Afghanistan, such as state formation, nation-building, party system and politics (e.g., 'new publics,' mediascape, street politics), and post-conflict society and development. The third section focuses on the global nature and regional issues of war and peace makings and different processes and phases of peace negotiation and conflict resolution as a whole. Altogether, the seven essays in this section deal with the role of non-Afghan, regional state and non-state actors and factors and the nature and role of

wider regional geopolitics, to processes of war and peace makings in the country, while also providing comparative examples of successful peace negotiations and best practices in international conflict resolution, namely in Cambodia and Northern Ireland.

Section one begins with a historian's view of the Najibullah-Kakar correspondence by Timothy Nunan, whose analyses of the letters center on various national, regional, and international contexts in which they were written. Nunan maintains that some important differences and similarities, especially two (the future presence in Afghanistan of US security personnel and infrastructures after its exit and the role of Pakistan, similar to the Soviet Union's post-withdrawal personnel and Pakistan's role that both Najibullah and Kakar emphasize in their correspondence), exist between the situation then when the Soviets left Afghanistan and now, as the United States seeks its way out of the country. In the next essay, Barnett Rubin, who has been involved for over thirty years in various intellectual, policy, and institutional aspects of war and peace makings in Afghanistan, relies both on the letters from Najibullah and Kakar and several conversations that he had in 1989 and later periods with Soviet and Afghan specialists, including Kakar and various Afghan Mujahedin. Rubin's principal argument is that the transition in Afghanistan from war to peace is not going to be easy and, as such, Afghan people themselves will not be able to make it if they are not assisted by the international community. Scott Smith also argues in his essay that a variety of continuities, such as Afghanistan's relationship with the rest of the world, the structure of the peace process, and post-conflict governance system that both Kakar and Najibullah focused on in their correspondence, define the current ongoing peace process as well.

Through a collective reading of the letters and similar materials from other Afghan scholars and statesmen contemporary to Kakar and Najibullah, such as Abdul Rahman Pazhwak, Barmak Pazhwak argues in his essay that there have been serious efforts by Afghans to bring peace to their country, which need to be given special attention in the current peacemaking efforts. Belquis Ahmadi and Makhfi Azizi argue in their co-authored essay that hope alone cannot resolve the conflict in Afghanistan; rather, by reading the letters and comparing the past and present peace processes, Ahmadi and Azizi argue that the current parties to the conflict need to demonstrate strategic vision and genuine commitment to social justice, law and order, and long-term development plans to bring peace to the country, which was not the case in the past, including in the Geneva Accords and NRP of Najibullah. Therefore, according to Ahmadi and Azizi, there are lessons to be learned by those who are in search of peace for Afghanistan.

Shaida Mohammad Abdali's essay expands further this 'lessons to learn from history' *bahs* through a passionate and detailed reading of the letters from Najibullah and Kakar. Abdali suggests that any settlement of the conflict in Afghanistan will have dire consequences for both Afghanistan and the world if it falls short of learning from the

past blunders in previous peace making processes. Masih Khybari in his essay makes this *bahs* of ‘lessons to learn from history’ more contemporaneous by comparing and contrasting Najibullah’s peace and reconciliation efforts to ones that Ashraf Ghani is currently promoting as a scholar-president of the country. Khybari’s principal point is, however, that it is imperative to recognize reconciliation as a societal phenomenon rather than just a mere political accommodation, as it is also crucial for all parties in a successful peace process to have a collectively firm commitment to it, something that was absent in the previous and so far unseen in the current peace and reconciliation efforts concerning Afghanistan.

While genuine commitment to peace is central to making a lasting peace in Afghanistan, making a lasting peace is also a rare opportunity to take it seriously when different sides of a long chronic conflict like the one in Afghanistan come together around a table. This is an argument that Johnny Walsh makes in his essay. By analyzing comparatively the 1990 and 2020-2021 war and peace making efforts and highlighting that the current war in Afghanistan has run its course, Walsh maintains that the current parties, such as the United States, the Afghan government, and the Taliban, need to make “painful compromises” to not let the current opportunity to make a lasting peace in Afghanistan flee as it did during Najibullah’s time. This is a point with which Nasir Andisha also concludes his essay. Andisha analyzes the Najibullah-Kakar correspondence specifically in relation to domestic and foreign components of Najibullah’s NRP, such as demilitarization of Afghanistan and or permanent neutrality of the country in regional and global affairs, which Najibullah promoted as a way forward to establishing a lasting peace in Afghanistan, while Kakar rejects these ideas in his reply letter to Najibullah for various reasons, among which is that Afghanistan with its historically domestic and regional geographic and political vulnerabilities cannot afford to have such policies.

Section two of the volume begins with Thomas Ruttig’s essay, which situates both the Najibullah-Kakar correspondence and NRP in the context of Najibullah’s larger political reformist attempts to reshape the then PDPA-Watan dominated post-Soviet Afghan political system from a single to a multi-party-system of politics and governance. According to Ruttig, in doing so, the purpose was twofold for Najibullah. One objective was to lure into his new ‘controlled multiparty system’ the regime’s enemies and critics like Kakar and or the more powerful Mujahedin groups. Another goal was to shape the post-Soviet political system in Afghanistan in a way over which he will have the control. In Ruttig’s view, while this type of top-down approach to reconciliation and peace making could not bring peace to Afghanistan, it also could raise doubts as to whether Najibullah was honest in his reconciliation and peacemaking efforts.

The next contribution is by Dipali Mukhopadhyay. Approaching “reconciliation as state-building,” Mukhopadhyay maintains that the nature of Afghan state formation

and thus Afghan sovereignty, which both Kakar and Najibullah linked to reconciliation and lasting peace in Afghanistan, has fundamentally been paradoxical. As such, Afghan sovereignty is best understandable by its contradictions, including but not limited to gaps in the domestic sources of legitimacy for various Afghan states, while also foreign money, foreign influence, and foreign interventions have continuously shaped them, with the participation of the country's different rulers, regimes, and "many" of its people. The next essay, by Omar Sharifi, develops further the paradoxical notion of Afghan state formation that Mukhopadhyay formulates, by not only questioning the historical legitimacy of various Afghan states, but also by expounding the nature of interaction between the many Afghan states and the diverse populations they have been governing. According to Sharifi, while the Najibullah-Kakar correspondence might be a "rare" case in which an Afghan statesman and a private citizen discuss the past and future outlooks of their "imagining" historical nation, neither the many dynastic nor the non-dynastic Afghan states have historically been attached to their subjects and citizens and, as such, Afghanistan has been throughout its modern history a "dialogical project" of nation-making in progress, in which issues of state legitimacy, national identity, and nation as a whole are still classic problems of nation-building, despite the fact that there exists a strong sense of national attachment to Afghanistan among its inhabitants.

Section two concludes with three contributions. The first one is by Robert Crews, who reads the letters of Najibullah and Kakar, from the vantage point of global history, as a "revealing guide" to understanding the modern politics of Afghanistan and the wider region. Crews takes us beyond the analytics of Afghan state and nation-building into the understudied, in the case of Afghanistan, field of public culture and media, though as Crews notes this area of study is now changing with a number of exciting works by younger new scholars of Afghanistan. Crews' principal argument is here that despite the existence of extreme violence and poverty, Afghan politics and, thus, Afghan society, has been dramatically transformed since the Najibullah-Kakar exchange in 1990 by the emergence of a variety of diverse, discrete, and dynamic "new publics" with which those who are in search of an enduring peace settlement in Afghanistan must contend. The role of mediums, especially media (e.g., social media, twitter) and communication in general, is also addressed by Tanya Goudsouzian, though approached from a different angle. Comparing and contrasting how 'strategic communication' and public messaging in general were carried out by Najibullah and Afghan Mujahedin then, and Ashraf Ghani and the Taliban now, Goudsouzian shows that conflicts over power and influence in Afghanistan have not only been fought militarily in Afghanistan, but also in the airwaves of radios, in the pages and screens of newspapers and televisions, and in various propaganda rooms and networks of Afghan and non-Afghan intelligence agencies and spies, gauging and controlling the public and political opinions. In Goudsouzian's own

words, “nowhere in the world has the power of propaganda been more apparent in bringing down governments than in Afghanistan, where kings and presidents have been toppled through the clever use of tampered imagery and the spread of well-crafted lies.”

If the rationale—as this set of essays in this section considers—is that the way forward for an enduring peaceful settlement in Afghanistan is that the modern Afghan state and nation need to form some type of new public social contract in which multiple publics need to be appreciated and recognized for their individual and collective rights to rule amid and without violence and poverty, then Sayed Madadi in the last contribution in section two also argues that for such formulation to succeed and indeed even to survive in a post-conflict Afghan democratic society, diverse economic bases, beyond just creating employment opportunities, are required to be created and planned in any post-conflict development agenda for Afghanistan. This ranges from reform and development of the security and justice sectors in Afghanistan to long-term planning and realization of economic development and pluralistic public spaces beyond Kabul and few other urban centers.

The last section, section three, consists of seven essays. The first one by Dawood Azami, based on a number of sources including interviews with Taliban members, argues that the existing social science models in conflict studies—which often hypothesize and or worse prioritize one factor and actor over other—cannot explain all wars for modern conflicts by their current globalized nature, such as the one in Afghanistan, have become compounded by a variety of overlapping and competing actors and factors. Suggesting what Azami calls a “hybrid framework” to understand and overcome the challenges of modern conflicts, the current conflict in Afghanistan is best understood by taking into account its entire spectrum, namely the many local and regional-global actors and factors that shape it. The hybrid framework that Azami suggests is epitomized in the next essay by Afrasiab Khattak who offers an examination of Pakistan’s policy in different periods of war and peace making processes in Afghanistan. Khattak argues that the Pakistani military establishment has remained committed despite paradigm shifts in global and regional politics to its old geopolitical policy in pursuit of hegemony under the garb of ‘strategic depth’ in Afghanistan by supporting continuously various Afghan and non-Afghan armed proxies fighting in Afghanistan, even if this policy creates some troubles to Pakistan itself. Khattak breaks into four different phases the ‘Pak-Afghan’ historical and political relationship between 1947 and 2021, pointing to a variety of historical and political intricacies between Afghanistan and Pakistan, which must be addressed in the greater geopolitical context of the region than simply reducing them to fixed monolithic binary frameworks (e.g., ‘Af-Pak’). Khattak suggests that Afghanistan and Pakistan, and in fact the entire Southwest Asia region—by which Khattak means India-Pakistan-Afghanistan-Iran—needs a reset in their historical and political relationships to

'switch' from Cold War geostrategic contests to regional geoeconomics of competition and cooperation.

In addition to Azami and Khattak, Radha Kumar, Nilofar Sakhi, and Timor Sharan and Farkhondeh Akbari illustrate further in their individual and collective contributions the fundamentally multi-layered regional nature of war and peace makings in Afghanistan. By placing the Najibullah-Kakar correspondence in the context of the geopolitics of South Asia, Kumar maintains that Afghanistan at least since the 1970s has struggled "between competing great and regional powers on the one hand and competing local and regional factions on the other." Thus, any peace agreement for Afghanistan to last is dependent on a wider regional framework, as it has been true of settling other modern conflicts in the world, such as the ones in Northern Ireland, Bosnia, and Sudan. According to Kumar, Northern Ireland had the European Union as its regional framework, Bosnia got an economic compact leading to its membership in the EU, and the African Union functioned as a framework for Sudan. Unfortunately, according to Kumar, Afghanistan does not have such a regional framework, and the existing regional organizations and processes, such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, and the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process, have had either restricted and competing political agendas, and or have been fundamentally slow to impact the events in Afghanistan.

A wider regional framework for peace in Afghanistan is a point that Sharan and Farkhondeh also make in their co-authored essay. By analyzing Najibullah's National Reconciliation Policy and the peace settlement in Cambodia in 1991, Farkhondeh and Sharan draw three lessons, among which is that a consensus among non-Afghan regional and international actors is key to establishing peace in Afghanistan. Farkhondeh and Sharan argue that unlike post-Soviet Afghanistan, it was the change in the geopolitical interests of international actors, such as Soviet Union and China, that resulted in the withdrawal of political and resource support for the four local warring factions that, in return, resulted in meaningful peace negotiations and the enduring Paris Peace Agreements of 1991. Sakhi in her essay stresses that making peace is not an easy task, and it certainly has not been historically easy in Afghanistan due to various sophisticated political maneuvering by Afghan actors themselves. However, after discussing in detail a number of factors, such as lack of regional stability and cooperation among regional countries, that have prolonged the conflict in Afghanistan, Sakhi offers a compound national-regional perspective to consider to end—not to transform—the war in Afghanistan. One is, in Sakhi's own words, "no peace deal in Afghanistan will be sustainable if the interests of her regional neighbors, and in particular Pakistan, is not negotiated through a regional peace agreement;" and secondly, "peace will not be sustainable if Afghan political leaders do not have a plan for sustaining the state based on domestic revenues

to limit the international aid.”

If war by its historical and political nature has been going on in Afghanistan at a national-regional-global level as these essays argue from different perspectives and, as such, if peace also is only possible in Afghanistan when there is a national-regional-global peace agreement among Afghan and non-Afghan participants, then those who are in search of peace for Afghanistan may want to create a “visioning process” and “transform” their mindsets both in talks and actions both during and after peace negotiation processes. This is what Ben Acheson and Aref Dostyar argue in the last, but not least, two contributions in section three. By discussing the peace process in Northern Ireland and pre-imagining “what will peace look like in Afghanistan?,” Acheson argues that while no solution from Northern Ireland is automatically applicable to Afghanistan, what rival parties to the current war in the country need is a visioning process in which they would develop and commit to a shared vision that would be tangible and concrete, which was how the parties to the conflict in Northern Ireland envisioned the peace process, which led eventually to the successful peace accords of the Good Friday Agreement of 1998. Dostyar, in return, argues in his essay that this process could simply start for each party to the conflict in Afghanistan from transforming their mindsets. In Dostyar’s words, “mindset refers to how we view the peace process to ensure what we do is effective. The mindset question guides the manner in which we approach the content and process of negotiations, as well as the implementation of a potential peace. Our mindset towards peace talks has a direct impact on the substance, process, and outcomes of the negotiations.”

There is not one way to conclude this introduction, with one and or two ideas while twenty-two different perspectives are offered on different aspects of war and peace makings in contemporary Afghanistan, namely the multiple periods of military interventions in the country by two of the global hegemonic powers of the last century (the Soviet Union and the United States), different types of conflict and political violence committed by different Afghan and non-Afghan state and non-state actors, the existence of various politics and policies of reconciliation and peace plans, the notion of paradoxical and dialogical processes of state formation and nation-building, the emergence of various discrete and dynamic civil and political societies, the formulation of diverse agendas of state-building and development, and the enactment of a variety of envisioning and mindset of negotiations and peace makings. While we will leave that for readers to make for themselves from the individual or the collective essays, one basic takeaway we have from these diverse contributions is as follows: while the various past and present nature and aspects of war and peace makings in Afghanistan have been shaped and defined by a variety of historical and political contexts and actors and factors in and beyond Afghanistan, both in 1990 when the Soviet Union had just withdrawn its military forces

a year earlier after ten years of fighting without resulting in any peace in Afghan society and in 2021 as the United States-led NATO military forces are debating their expected withdrawal from the country after twenty years of 'war on terror' without ending either the 'terror' nor the 'terrorists' in the country, it is also time for those who are in search of peace not just to make the blunders of previous peace making processes, but also not to end the current globalized conflict in the country by starting new internationalized civil wars. As Najibullah and Kakar recognized and debated in their peace letters to each other thirty years ago, what is ultimately needed in the search for peace for Afghanistan is an inclusive, sustainable, and comprehensive peace agreement in which *establishing a lasting peace in Afghanistan* must be the first and last condition, as well as the first and last priority in any reconciliation and peacemaking efforts concerning the current national-regional-global war in the country, especially so in the currently pandemic-infected world in which no one could be immune not just from a natural disease that no one can see, but also from a human disease, namely war, without regards to where it occurs, where it not.

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