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Pashtuns and Pakistan Army: A Proposal for Equitable Collaboration

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The military has been the most dignified institution of Pakistan, but this trend has recently challenged by young Pashtuns, the second largest ethnic group in country. Pashtun Tahaffuz Movement has emerged as nonviolent group to counter military's security narrative in tribal areas. It claims Pakistan Army to be responsible for sufferings that Pashtuns have been facing in last four decades. Pakistan Army views PTM as a foreign agenda holder to destabilize Pakistan and deepen ethnic divides in it. To respond this cross-narrative, this paper proposes a six-element change process for equitable collaboration between Pashtun leadership and the Pakistan Army.

Introduction

Pashtuns are the second largest ethnic group of Pakistan and consist of 15.4 percent (25.6 million people) of the country's population (Encyclopaedia Britannica). To defeat the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the Pashtuns were recruited in the name of Jihad and Pashtun nationalism that later established Al-Qaida (1988), the Taliban (1994), and then Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (2007). "The resurgent Taliban are driven only partially by religion; they are motivated equally, if not more so, by the search for Pashtun dignity and revenge" (Ayoob, 2019). This scenario placed Pashtuns at a critical position in the hands of the Pakistani military and often in the cover-up of radical ideological religious leaders lusting for cash and control. The militancy rise in tribal areas, military operations, and the U.S. drone strikes to target Al-Qaida suspects affected Pashtuns profoundly with a loss of lives and living with generational trauma and fear. Hence, the Pashtuns remained victims, rather than perpetrators of violence that have been associated with their ethnicity.

The situation took a historic turn in 2018 when young Pashtuns joined together to demand justice for Naqeebullah Mehsud, a young Pashtun killed by police in a disingenuous encounter. This abruptly emerged as a critical nonviolent movement in (former) FATA (Federally Administered Tribal Areas of Pakistan) later named as the

Pashtun Tahaffuz* Movement (PTM).This movement emerged as a confrontation group to oppose the Pakistani military with grievances of missing Pashtuns, extrajudicial killings, and their intimidation by the Pakistani military. PTM offered a platform to young Pashtuns to express their grievances and discuss the trauma that they and their families have suffered in the last four decades. PTM started
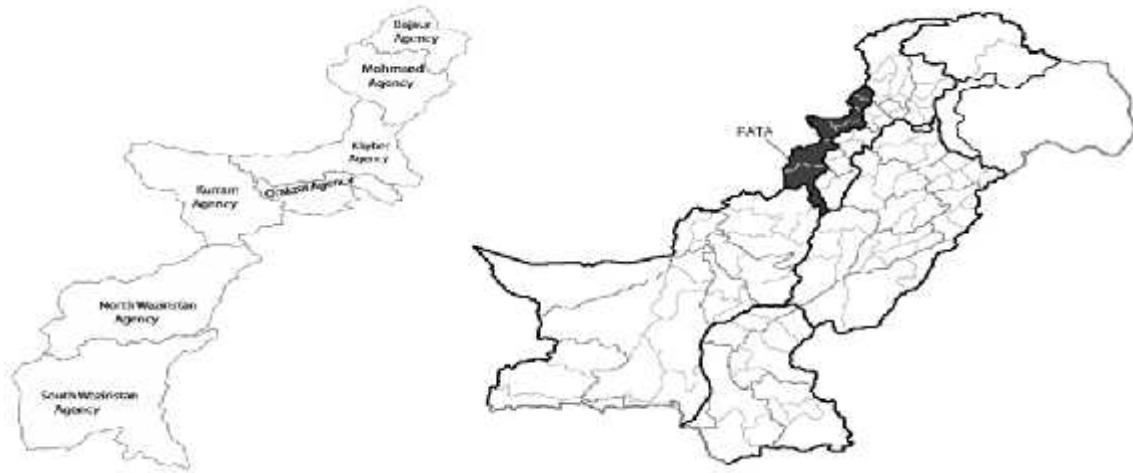

Figure 1: Map of Pashtun's tribal areas in Pakistan

expressing the Pashtuns' grievances by organizing various public gatherings around the country that attracted significant participation and multiplied the voice of PTM. The nonviolent and peaceful approach of PTM gatherings helped with its acknowledgement not only to the Pakistani national and security institutions but also to the global media and human rights organizations.

The Pashtun tribal areas of Pakistan, (former) FATA, came into the global spotlight after the U.S.-led NATO invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 (Zeb & Ahmed, 2019). More than five million people have lived there in FATA, and the area is stretched over around 27,000 square kilometers. Decades of war in neighboring Afghanistan and dragged involvement of the Pakistani tribal Pashtuns in that war left the region deprived of necessary and essential facilities and rights. The governance structure of the region kept locals at the mercy of Political Agents, single power figures to act in all powers ranging from judicial to financial decisions to agriculture for a particular area in the region (Alam, 2018). Over some time, it not only shattered the Pashtun values like *Pashtunwali*, but pushed them into extreme deprivations, radicalized perceptions, and generational sufferings (Yousaf, 2018). Pashtunwali defines Pashtun values as communal interdependence, traditional techniques of dispute resolutions, and honoring hospitality more than self (Global Security, n.d.).

Pashtuns' tribal areas have been the epicenter of 'great-game' between British and Russian empires in late 19th and early 20th centuries. To counter the Russian expansion and fear of Afghan-Russian conspiracy, British East India Company launched two wars on Afghanistan (1839-42 and 1878-79) that pushed (today)

Pakistan's Pashtun region in the middle of confrontation. Pashtuns viewing themselves anti-British rule fought alongside rulers of Kabul. Even after losing the war, constant attacks by Pashtun tribes against East India Company made British to utilize their divide-and-rule strategy by drawing the Durand Line between Pashtuns in Afghanistan and today's Pakistan. Later they implemented Frontier Crimes Regulation (FCR) to harness unlimited powers in their political agents or supporters. After the establishment of Pakistan in 1947, FCR remained active with refreshed ties with Pakistan's federal government. After 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the same Pashtun region was again epicenter to recruit and train Mujahideen and flowing money and weapons which shifted local power factors in the hands of Mujahideen commanders who belonged to the Deobandi and Salafi sects of Muslims. (Naval Postgraduate School, n.d.)

The PTM argues that the Pakistan Army is the only reason for the harms and trauma that the Pashtuns suffer today. It accuses the military of destroying tribal areas in various military operations and leaving Pashtuns to suffer from homelessness, poverty, and continued trauma through never-ending curfews filled with Pashtuns' humiliations at military checkpoints. It also claims that the Pakistani Taliban exists and operates in tribal areas under the attire of "peace committees" but reaping the radicalization and violence among the Pashtun youth. PTM has not only questioned the role of the military in Pashtun tribal areas and its securitizing but also projected the unfair narrative of associating tribal Pashtuns as terrorists and their security profiling. Their grievances further include extreme underdevelopment of tribal areas that embarrass young Pashtuns when they visit other parts of the country where development indicators are comparatively higher. (Yousaf, 2019a)

Instead of ensuring the fundamental rights of equal citizenship to various ethnic groups in the country, Pakistan has always placed Islam as the prime identity but left the ethnic and linguistic identities behind in the struggle for their fundamental rights in politics and the economy (Mir, 2018). The Pashtun belt has been a sanctuary for engineering wars in region and then the battlefield itself, which has resulted in the complete destruction of Pashtun society's social fabric like Pashtunwali. Thousands of people have perished. It has led to a shattered traditional economic system and the displacement of millions. (Muhammad, 2019)

On the other side, the Pakistan Army and its state institutions have a suspicious stance about PTM that it allegedly has foreign agenda and financial support aimed at destabilizing Pakistan. They quote the PTM leadership receiving protocols and support rallies in Afghanistan.

PTM is also named as the effort to disturb the 'all-well' image of the Pakistan army in-front of Pakistanis itself. All the media channels and newspapers were barred from covering news of the PTM activities or gatherings. Due to its nonviolent approach, PTM has also been linked to Bacha Khan, a common name of Abdul Gaffar Khan, who in current security narrative is considered among those who did not supported the idea of establishing Pakistan. Bacha Khan, also known as

Pakistani Gandhi, organized a nonviolent army of young Pashtuns against British colonizers in India's subcontinent.

The PTM leadership has repeatedly denied any affiliation with the anti-state agenda and the possibility of adopting a violent means to raise their demands for equal citizenship. PTM wants the state to recognize Pashtuns as equal citizens and grant them everything that goes with that, a PTM leader Ali Wazir is reported to say (Yousaf, 2019b).

Material and Methods

The intended goal of this study was to propose an equitable collaboration for the Pakistan Army and tribal Pashtuns, particularly PTM, to debrief Pashtuns' grievances in comparison with the security narrative by the Pakistani state. Considering the intensity of trauma endured by Pashtun victim families in connection with the communal harm and trauma, this collaboration proposal adopted nonviolent and trauma healing ways the military can collaborate equitably with Pashtun leadership to redress their historic grievances with the opportunity of a dignified citizenship. It urges Pashtuns to take the lead in the identification of radical narratives, often religiously manipulated, in their areas to strategize counter-narratives through public education.

Five key informant interviews were conducted with Pashtun activists currently living in tribal areas of Pakistan. The respondents were selected based on their proficient knowledge expertise on the region, but no past or active affiliation with any stakeholder or entity concerning this article. An in-depth analysis of peer-reviewed content was conducted with deeper insights of reviewing the citations and their associated publications. The authenticity of content was censured by citing the publications from peer-reviewed journals, government organizations, and credible think-tanks and media agencies.

Findings from content analysis and key informant interviews were transformed into the six-model design of an equitable collaboration (Frank Dukes et al. (2020) between Pashtun leadership and the Pakistani military. The six-models of equitable collaboration are being trauma-informed, inclusive, responsive, truth-seeking, deliberation, and adaptation. The design of engagement process is derived from key informant interviews in comparison with content analysis. The legitimacy and responsiveness of the engagement process were ensured through a rational approach built upon historical and contextually sensitive measures.

To understand the subject issue, the reader needs to understand the historic harm and trauma Pashtuns have been suffering in the manipulation of Islam and security narrative, allegedly backed by the Pakistani military during and post-Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. It provides a base in making sense of their current demands for equal citizenship and an opportunity without fear of intimidations and extrajudicial killings.

Analysis and Discussion

The sufferings of tribal Pashtuns can be traced back to the 1980s when the Soviets invaded Afghanistan, and that radicalized two generations of Pashtuns and switched their economy to extremism and terrorism (Dawar, 2019). The PTM holds the Pakistan Army responsible for most of their sufferings due to its alleged support of the militant factors like Taliban in FATA for its geopolitical interests. Contrary to the PTM, Pakistan Army has opposing narratives about PTM. This study has entailed an initial assessment of the situation for fact-checking of these opposite-end narratives. This initial assessment validates that majority of tribal Pashtuns have been suffering from extreme poverty with the highest infant mortality rate in Pakistan with 10 percent literacy rate among women and 36 percent among men. In last two decades, 10 military operations by the Pakistan Army against militant hideouts in the region not only displaced more than two million Pashtun but shattered local economic sources and an already limited infrastructure (Malik, 2018).

The case of Pakistan's tribal areas is sensitive in terms of underdevelopment, insecurity, and violent narratives. If we apply the *root narrative theory* (Simmons, 2020), the situation in tribal areas of Pakistan stands between the stories of political and military powers. The region has complex political interests for the military to sustain its influence in neighboring Afghanistan. In this regard, it has shaped a security narrative in the region fulfilled with misinterpreted Islamic teachings. Apart from outside the border, military power's interest in sustaining political power in tribal areas caused severe damage to Pashtun people and their territories.

Saikal (2010) concludes that Pashtuns in Pakistan has further been squeezed since 2001 by the Afghan concerns, Pakistan operations, and U.S. emphasis on both governments regarding militants in (former) FATA. "Many Pashtuns now see themselves as squeezed in by adversarial forces encroaching upon their religion, land, resources, honor, and cultural-social norms and values." Their livelihood miseries, narrowed worldviews, grievances on Pakistani state on their humiliations, and extrajudicial killings have further pushed them away from Pakistan but
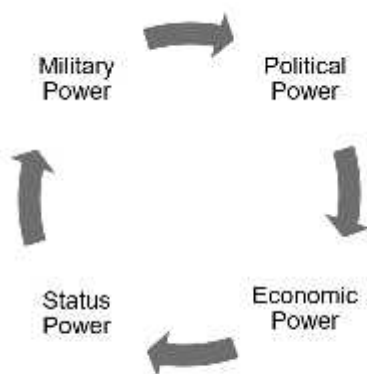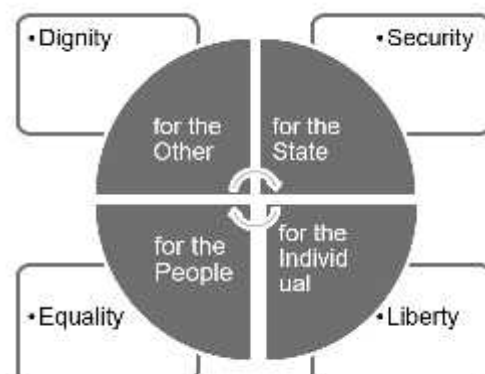
Figure 2: Types of Narratives (Simmons, 2020)

Figure 3: Types of Abuse of Power (Simmons, 2020)

vulnerable to the violent narratives of the Taliban. Muhammad (2019) views that

Pashtuns have been deliberately kept marginalized in pursuit of a security narrative built for filtered patriotism. Their deprivations have refreshed Pashtun nationalism to counter exploitative policies of the state and retaking their image from the fade of terrorists. Pashtun nationalist political parties trying to counter the security narrative have been on the hit-list of terrorists and barred to continue their political activities. Repeated attacks on their political gatherings, e.g., Awami National Party (ANP), indicates being challenged by the states' security narrative.

Pakistan has shaped itself as a security state where voices criticizing the state's narrative are treated as a threat to national security and often muted or punished. Its influence strategy in the region is also based on the security narrative rather than economic or other, and that exactly reflects inside its borders. National priorities are security-centric, rather than other indicators of development and prosperity, which pulls the prioritized focus and budget amounts to the security matters and its narratives inside and outside of the borders. Ultimately, the nation suffers from a shattered economy, severe religious and ethnic divides, and an extremist face to the world.

Situation Assessment

This study proposes an extensive assessment by a nonpartisan entity to dig deeper into the grievances of the tribal Pashtuns on their humiliations and terrorist labeling, and fact-checking of Pakistan Army's concerns associating the PTM with foreign agenda to destabilize the country. Being people-centric should be the base principle of assessment entertaining multi-level and multi-sectoral perspectives to search for common grounds between both parties. The human element should be the critical element of data collection by not relying only or mainly on the knowledge resources available online. The data collection process must not allow the element of judgment to compromise the genuine curiosity and reliability of the grievances and concerns expressed by both parties.

The authenticity of proposed assessment can create an opportunity for the Pakistani state to minimize the risks of challenging the process of collaborative change in the Pashtuns' tribal region, former FATA. The assessment should be principled to listen the voices of community trusted and diverse perspectives Pashtuns with an assurance of confidentiality and transparency. To achieve this principle, the nonpartisan assessment team should offer equal opportunity to the diversified voice of stakeholders identified through a snowball strategy centric to people's interest and peace for them. The compilation of findings should not be influenced by any factor from the Pakistani state, Pashtun leadership, or foreign entity.

Equitable Collaboration

The traditional approaches to dealing with conflicts and violence have been significantly effective. Pakistan's terror-hit Pashtun tribal areas have a widely accepted traditional circle process, called *Jarga,* to reconcile local issues. The

modified *Jarga* can help in this situation to bring Pashtun leadership to the dialogue table with the Pakistan Army to hear Pashtuns' grievances, analyze harms and destruction, and determining agreed solutions to redress grievances of Pashtuns and the concerns of the army. (Yousaf &Zad, 2020)

The findings of this study suggest that the grievances of tribal Pashtuns in Pakistan can be redressed through a collaborative change process with the modified concept of *Jarga*. Since *Jarga* is seen as the most trusted community space in the region, it can help to transform the adverse relationships between tribal Pashtuns and Pakistan Army but with the condition of no state influence on *Jarga* leadership and its structure in any form.

The leadership and decision-making structure of collaborative *Jarga* should have peoples' interest over their political ends, honesty in analyzing the root causes of violence and trauma among people and outlining just and satisfying solutions for both the tribal Pashtuns and the country's security interests. This collaboration should also aim to run a transformative process for the practicalities of governance structures in the region that are in a vacuum even after more than two years of FATA-merger with the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province.

The strategies of equitable collaboration proposed in this paper are derived from the toolkit on equitable collaboration. The success of the proposed change process will depend upon building a shared understanding of stakeholders around broader interests of peace and development for tribal Pashtuns. By realizing the situation complexities, the stakeholder parties (and their representatives) should be committed to completing the design of the change process and its implementation. (Dukes et al., 44)

Procedure for Collaborative Design

The equitable collaboration process comprises three levels of stakeholder engagement to develop their consensus to respond the identified reasons of conflict. In context to the subject study, these levels can be applied to modified *Jarga* structure and the delivery to collect the evidence-based findings of Pashtuns' grievances and harms to further design and monitor the implementation of solutions agreed between tribal Pashtun leadership and Pakistan army representatives.

Public Hearings

PTM views that everyday Pashtun people are bearing generational trauma due to their suffering with humiliations and losing relatives in military operations and activities. This study suggests public hearing *Jarga* as the first step to understand people's trauma stories and grievances. In this public hearing series, designated Pashtun leadership, along with military representatives, should have the opportunity to express their stories of grievances with the confidence of not being security profiled for future threats or harms. Where people do not feel secure to

express their grievances publicly, *Jarga* should have other options of public hearing such as receiving the confidential letters or social media tags or emails with proofs or verification of victimizations and victims. The *Jarga* executive member will have to define the processes and options for public hearings and advertise that for broader and trusted outreach publicly. The nonpartisan members in the *Jarga* executive body should have the prime responsibility of sorting and briefing the grievances reported through different methods adopted for public hearings. Confidentiality of victims and their stories must be the top priority, and their records should be in the confidential authority of nonpartisan members in the *Jarga* executive body. Parties at conflict, PTM and Pakistan Army, should have complete confidence in the findings and recommendations of unbiased members in the *Jarga* executive body. (Dukes et al., 44-45)

Though women are almost unheard in the region, but they have suffered the most particularly if their male family members were humiliated, went missing, or killed during a military operation or terrorist attack. Women only modified Jarga must part in this public hearing series to ensure inclusivity in documenting the grievances and trauma, and to take their inputs in how the future will look like.

Stakeholder Dialogues

Building from the results of public hearing series, a stakeholder dialogue series should be organized between Pashtun leadership and military representatives but in the presence of nonpartisan intellectuals. It will help to narrow the findings on Pashtuns' grievances and trauma to summarize recommended solutions and their delivery mechanism per local contexts. These dialogues should aim to restore a mutual confidence between the Pashtuns and the Pakistan Army without any factor of superiority, power, or influence. The adoption of a bottom-up approach of engaging leaderships from both sides will aid in strengthening mutual trust between both parties. The blame-games should be avoided in this process in the interest to find a common ground for peaceful and trustful future in the region. Opportunities must be sought to have the representatives of women only public hearings so that they can present their findings built from women concerns and stories of sufferings and trauma. The role of nonpartisan intellectuals is of critical importance at this stage to narrow down the findings from the process and stories from the victims (Dukes et al., 46).

Collaborative Change Process

Finally, the process will shift in summarizing the findings from a series of public hearing the *Jarga* and stakeholder dialogues to develop the acceptable options of redressing the grievances of tribal Pashtuns. At this stage, it will be vital to acknowledge there is no vested interest from any party in any solution or an option to recommend restoration of trust among the tribal Pashtuns and the Pakistan Army. The nonpartisan intellectuals' findings and recommendations should be acceptable, and they should not be influenced to altering or removing their recommendations.

This change process must also include women voices about their sufferings built from public hearings but strengthened during stakeholders' dialogue series.

The role of nonpartisan intellectuals is of critical importance at this stage in terms of finalizing the recommendations or solutions for the best interest of everyday people in the tribal Pashtun areas. It does not mean that there may not be space for healthy debate by the stakeholders to improve further the findings or recommendations in the interest of people and state. The *Jarga* advisory body will have a key responsibility at this stage to strategize the smooth roll-out of process and build consensus among both parties to agree to decisions for transformative change in Pashtun tribal areas of Pakistan. The participation of Pakistan Army Chief in the final *Jarga* of designing and agreeing process will serve as a strong gesture for Pashtuns that the army will hold to its words and support the agreement or declaration clauses. (Dukes et al., 47)

Elements in the Design of Collaborative Change

This paper suggests six-elements crucial in the design of equitable collaboration between Pashtun leadership and Pakistan Army.

Trauma-informed Design

The PTM claims that the Pashtuns in tribal areas have been suffering trauma for more than two decades and those need to be listened to, acknowledged, and redressed by the Pakistani state. In the proposed process of collaborative change, the stakeholders must entail the promise to stop humiliations, address victimizations, and cooperate to search for missing persons with public accountability (Dukes et al., 12). The equal opportunity to express grievances by the Pashtuns and concerns by the military should be the basic principle to build trust for fruitful dialogue towards consensus.

The victims or witnesses, including women, should have the least fear and no biasness to share their trauma stories. They must be provided a guarantee of safety from further victimization and trauma because of sharing their stories of grievances. This modified *Jarga* series will move step by step, from understanding harms and trauma of victims, leading towards the decision of mutual cooperation and no humiliation. The nonpartisan observers or monitor will take the prime responsibility to ensure a trauma-informed process. Pashtuns and the military would have to reimagine their mutual relationships in tribal areas in the broader interest of peace in region. (Dukes et al, 32-33)

Inclusive Design

Inclusion is another critical principle this whole process of collaborative change needs to adopt at all the steps in its operation. Beyond listening to the voice of victims, the opinions of witnesses should also be listened to for gauging the level

of fear among those other than victims. The representation of civil society activists, subject and geography specialists, and credible journalists should also be allowed. Since Pashtuns' tribal system comprises various tribes (or castes), the collaborative change process should assess and engage diverse tribesmen voices in the whole process to engage local support and ownership for change. Women should not be left behind, and they must be engaged in all three levels of this collaborative design. Any change step the stakeholders design, they must acknowledge the presence of women in their households and communities who bears the loads of grievances even if their male family members suffer.

A survey should be launched online via social media and in-person to engage the voice of those who might not have access to the *Jarga* location or time due to any reason such as lack of resources or the fear of being profiled for violence. The intellectual observers would have the prime responsibility to avoid any political biases in the surveys' responses. Women must be provided with confident voices to express their grievances as they suffer the most in the cases of their male family members' humiliations or forced disappearances, or extrajudicial killings.

Responsive Design

In the Pakistani context, and particularly when it comes to the state governance fragility, responsiveness is key factor to be considered in collaborative change process. As FATA reform discussion took many years and even when FATA merged, the governance systems have not transformed, and two years have already passed. Hence, the procrastination and extended delays in the change process will make the collaborative process meaningless or might even stop before reaping any fruit of the collaboration. The power position of the Pakistan Army is crucial in this regard that makes the process very responsive or just delays or ends it without any result.

Another factor of getting delayed would be further incidents against either the Pashtuns or the Pakistan Army. Radical factors can be played to blame one of the stakeholders to diminish the change process. Thus, trust matters the most. The nonpartisan observers' role will be crucial to keep pushing the key stakeholders to not stop the process and keep it moving until consensus is built around the terms of addressing Pashtuns' harms and tribal area development for equal citizenship of Pakistan.

Truth-seeking Design

The conflicts over sensitive issues invariably involve competing claims. The PTM claims that the Pakistan Army has not been telling the truth about grievances that the Pashtuns have been suffering in the war-torn region. On the other side, the military portrays that the PTM is misleading the Pashtun youth and serving as undercover agents with foreign agendas to destabilize Pakistan. The tragic factor here is the struggle of everyday people being preyed on between the conflicting narratives with no limited knowledge about the reality behind it.

This study urges truth-telling as a prime principle of equitable collaboration between the Pashtun leadership and Pakistan Army. They have to analyze factors around prevalent narratives to determine the realities of extended cooperation for tribal area development and redressing grievances of the Pashtuns. The Pakistan Army is accused of building a violent and jihadist narrative of the Pashtuns while the PTM is building a counter-narrative. Truth-seeking will help to heal the generational harms and trauma caused by violent stories to the Pashtuns (Dukes et al., 19). The principle of truth-seeking must have a prioritized focus in public hearings and dialogue series, and the role of the nonpartisan observer group is of crucial importance in documenting and reflecting unbiased stories in the collaboration process.

Deliberative Design

Though peace for the Pashtuns and a development in tribal areas would be the ultimate purpose of this collaborative change process, there should not be any already-outlined options or channels for settlement of disputes, grievances, or concerns. The findings in the public hearings and modified *Jarga* dialogue series must serve as the base to develop the deliberative design for change that will then be publicly representative, effective, and following current needs. A deliberative design will urge participants to share honest opinions and stories to be acknowledged through recommendations and actions in collaboration. A deliberative design will bring opportunities for storytelling, reflection, pairing, and sharing. Small group discussions among Pashtuns can be shared with the nonpartisan observer group. It will not only ensure public acceptance around collaboration terms and conditions, but will offer their ownership to the Pashtuns, building them as a key stakeholder in this change process.

Adaptive Design

This collaborative change process must not be imported, e.g., by the observer group, or influenced, e.g., by the Pakistan Army. Neither should it be pre-defined. It must be adaptive to the local contexts and the Pashtuns' grievances. The Pashtuns can be subject to the whole process, and the proposed collaborative change process must be centric to their grievances and adapted from the situation on the ground. The nonpartisan observers will have to keep incorporating the emerging stories of grievances and situation trends alongside the process towards establishing equitable collaboration. This process will have to be sensitive to the country's political contexts in an effort to filter any influence on slowing down or undermining the process for this collaboration.

Conclusion

The security narrative of the Pakistani state never has been beneficial for its people and the state itself. The Pakistan Army should rethink its power priorities to find ways out for equitable collaboration among state institutions and its people of

diverse ethnicities. The ambitious proposal of equal collaboration between the Pashtun leadership and the Pakistan Army depends upon six principles of the collaborative change process, i.e., trauma informed, inclusivity, responsiveness, truth-seeking, deliberation, and adaptation. To initiate the process, both parties must be sensitized for this collaboration in the best interest of the Pashtuns and the state, and this sensitization should be voluntary rather than forced. The state interests should at least be around a security narrative, but mainly centric to the people and their socioeconomic wellbeing. This process, and action plan derived from it, must be transformative to shift away from a security narrative for political power to a dignified and equality narrative for the people. This collaborative change process must have no space to be derailed. The plan must be concluded with peace, and that requires sincerity for the Pashtuns by the Pakistan Army due to its power status.

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