

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Most Kind

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How Afghanistan May Achieve Sustainable Peace?

Political conflicts in any country can only be solved through political dialogue. However, to put an end in long conflicts like the one in Afghanistan, some of the egregious sources of hostility must be successfully resolved. Political talks and agreements rarely hold if they are not strongly backed by different groups involved. Many past peace deals have fumbled because deep-seated suspicion and hostility remained, dividing people along ethnic, language and religious lines.

Taking Afghan Government on Board

Afghan government has not been part of the five rounds of the US and Taliban peace talks. This has created some questions at the national and international levels; though, the US has repeatedly said that the peace talks are held at international and national levels and Afghan government, Afghan politicians and Civil Society Organizations will be involved at the national level peace talks.

As intra-Afghan dialogue should be inclusive with representation from Afghan government, it is necessary for the US to take the Afghan government on board in the peace process. The US envoy for Afghan peace talks Zalmay Khalilzad has acknowledged that, there was consensus that intra-Afghan dialogue should be comprehensive and inclusive with representatives from the Afghan government, women, young people, and civil society. Therefore, the US also shall take all the necessary measures to find how the international community can best support Afghan government in a peace process lead the government and owned by Afghans.

Comprehensive and Inclusive Intra-Afghan Dialogue

Afghan government must ensure representatives from women, young people, and civil society in the talks. Conflict studies show that the root of many conflicts across the world can be traced to exclusion. These findings suggest that by working to lessen the distance that can exist between the state and wider society a durable peace can be built, as a result, it is important to ensure that all individuals and groups – particularly those who are frequently marginalized, such as minority religious groups, youth and women – are brought in to the peace building process.

Experience shows Peace building is a complex process which cannot be monopolized by one single group – there must be inclusivity at all stages, from the top to the very bottom. If peace talks are monopolized, the peace that is constructed will not last, nor will it be just.

Afghan conflict resolution experience show that standing against the trend of exclusion in society requires a concerted effort to ensure inclusivity at all levels of the peace building process, with particular attention to marginalized groups, so that all opinions, interests and needs can be considered.

Based on this, Afghan government is trying to include all sides in the peace talks. As part of a series of initiatives, a conference 'Components of a sustainable peace' was organized on Tuesday and attended by 400 people including representatives of civil society and media outlets from 34 provinces of the country. Speaking in the conference, President Ashraf Ghani said, Afghan government emphasized on ceasefire and conditions made for a comprehensive peace dialogue.

A sustainable peace requires convincing all parties involved in the conflict in Afghanistan to come together and see if there is an agreement to overcome violence in the country. Afghan government must try to convince all the parties, including the Taliban to come together to see if Afghans can find a way to reduce the violence.

However, Afghan citizens also shall stress prevention of deals that could damage the freedom of speech, religion, human rights, civil rights, guarantees from countries engaged in the peace process and the role of inter-governmental organizations in the process.

Political dialogue is the only mechanism to put an end to political conflicts. Political dialogue is a long-term effort. Negotiations will not bear fruit overnight. And they are deemed as essential to the process of building sustainable peace. In the context of Afghan peace talks it is necessary the talks be comprehensive and inclusive to ensure a durable peace. Ultimately, we want a peace deal to respect the totality of the constitution, and respect the freedom of speech, religion, human rights, and civil rights in the country.

Stoltenberg: NATO Fully Supports Afghan Peace and democratic valuesBy: **Mohammad Zahir Akbari**

Last week, the Foreign ministers of NATO's 29 member countries had meetings in Washington to mark the alliance's 70th anniversary and discuss security threats, including Russia and Afghanistan. In regard to Afghanistan, the NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg stressed on serious efforts and supports to find a peaceful solution to the conflict in Afghanistan, reported by multiple sources. On Wednesday During a rare address in the US Congress, he promised that the Alliance would remain in Afghanistan to fight terrorism and support the peace process and protect the democratic values hardly achieved in past eighteen years.

He said that NATO has created the conditions for social and economic progress in Afghanistan with bringing education and human rights to women and girls. Their rights must be preserved. The NATO Secretary General mentioned that over a thousand have paid the ultimate price and many more have been seriously wounded, adding that "we honor their service and their sacrifice". Before this, the US President Donald Trump said that the Afghan war has been an "endless war" but pointing to the Afghan peace talks emphasized that lots of positive things are happening in Afghanistan. Meeting with Stoltenberg at Whitehouse on Tuesday, Trump labeled the war in Afghanistan "ridiculous and unfortunate" adding that 19 years have passed since the war began. Trump said the US and its NATO allies have made great strides in Afghanistan and are working to end the long-lasting war.

"NATO will remain in Afghanistan to fight terrorism and to train Afghan forces. Our goal is not to stay there forever and we have no goal to have a permanent presence in Afghanistan. We should not stay any longer than is necessary," Stoltenberg added. "We went in together. We will decide on our future presence together. And when the time comes, we will leave together," he said. He said NATO fully supports the Afghan peace process and that it should pave the way for reconciliation. "NATO fully supports the peace process. It must pave the way for Afghan reconciliation. There can only be peace if Afghanistan stays free from international terrorists. And for peace to be sustainable it must build on our achievements," he added.

Stoltenberg, meanwhile, said the Taliban cannot win on the battlefields and that it is better for the group to sit with the Afghan government at the negotiation table and find a political settlement. Stoltenberg said the only way that can bring a settlement in Afghanistan is political options and that the US and NATO support Afghanistan Security and Defense Forces and these forces will never lose on the battlefields to the Taliban. "There can only be peace, if Afghanistan stays free from international terrorists," he said, adding that "And for peace to be sustainable it must build on our achievements." Later, on Thursday, he also had a press conference ahead of the

NATO Foreign Ministers' meeting in Washington D.C. where he said the alliance wants a peaceful solution to the Afghan conflict and that they strongly support the efforts that would end to such a solution. Stoltenberg said the role of NATO in fighting terrorism will be assessed and the US Secretary Mike Pompeo will update the participants on Afghan peace talks. "We will also assess NATO's role in the fight against terrorism. Secretary Pompeo will update us on the peace negotiations. And all NATO Allies strongly support the efforts to find a negotiated peaceful solution to the conflict in Afghanistan, to the war in Afghanistan," Stoltenberg said.

He said NATO allies are consulting closely on the situation of Afghanistan and that the US and the alliance together are assessing Afghanistan's situation and will make decisions on their future presence. "So we are doing an assessment together with the United States because the United States is a member of NATO. So we will discuss the situation in Afghanistan later on today," he said. He said US Special Envoy for Afghanistan Zalmay Khalilzad has updated NATO on peace talks adding that they want a sustainable peace in Afghanistan. "To have Afghan reconciliation, we need, of course, to have the Afghan government to be part of that. And therefore the talks which are now taking place is only the first stage," he added. The NATO chief said the next stage has to be Afghan reconciliation in which the Afghan government should be involved.

These show a general agreement in terms of ending war and preserving the past eighteen year's achievement. Similar to these, recently the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Maria Mogherini also pledged to support from Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process with preserving the achievements attained in past eighteen years. During her visit from Kabul, she pledged that the European Union will continue supporting the Afghan peace process and that there should be a ceasefire in order to move forward the peace talks.

Along with this, Afghan government and people have always emphasized on ending war but have stressed on preserving past achievements; According to Afghan people, the achievements of past eighteen years must be preserved and the constitution should be considered as the basis of peace process. Peace must lead to stability and security; if the peace does not provide people with security and stability, it will not be sustainable. People do not want to victimize the two decades achievements and democratic system for unclear peace as there is no real peace without democracy. These are the values that no one is ready to lose in Afghanistan. In addition, Afghan citizens want the government to have a strong presence in the negotiation as representative of them.

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NATO's Stoltenberg ParadoxBy: **Bogdan Klich**

As it turns 70, NATO is facing its most severe challenges since the Cold War ended nearly three decades ago. The Alliance has been rocked by Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea and its invasion of the Donbas region in eastern Ukraine; US President Donald Trump's stinging criticism; and the United Kingdom's Brexit-fueled metamorphosis into Little England. Despite these setbacks, NATO has significantly strengthened its commitment to Central and Eastern Europe in recent years. Yet it needs to do more.

True, the United States and its European NATO allies disagree on important issues such as defense spending, trade, climate change, and the 2015 Iran nuclear deal – as the Alliance's current secretary general, Jens Stoltenberg, acknowledged during a recent visit to Warsaw. But, as Stoltenberg correctly pointed out, military cooperation within NATO is better than it has been in years. This "Stoltenberg Paradox" is arguably most evident in NATO's progressive strengthening of its Eastern flank, including in Poland.

Stoltenberg justifiably highlights NATO's recent reforms. For example, the Alliance has built up its new Very High Readiness Joint Task Force. In addition, NATO has developed a series of large-scale military exercises along its Eastern flank to show Russia that the Alliance treats its obligations toward each member state seriously. This is especially important for Poland and the Baltic states, all of which have a border with Russia.

The rotational deployment of multinational NATO battalions in the Eastern flank countries has also demonstrated the Alliance's resolve. This Enhanced Forward Presence has included the transfer of American military personnel and equipment to the region.

As a result, there are now 4,400 US troops stationed in Poland. This marks a great leap forward from the initial agreements signed by Poland's then-foreign minister, Radek Sikorski (regarding a missile defense base in the town of Redzikowo), and by me as defense minister (regarding a permanent US Air Force establishment in Łask).

The allies took another step forward at the NATO Summit in Brussels in July 2018, when they approved the new NATO Readiness Initiative, or "Four Thirties." The initiative requires the Alliance to have an additional 30 mechanized ground battalions, 30 air squadrons, and 30 combat vessels ready to deploy within 30 days. This is at the heart of NATO's current doctrine of "deterrence by rapid reinforcement."

And yet a key question remains unanswered: will allied deterrence prevent possible Russian aggression during those 30 days? NATO's existing forward-deployed forces would not be able to provide protection, especially if Russia seized the Suwalki Gap (on the Poland-Lithuania border) or one of the Baltic states before reinforcements arrived. The Alliance must do more to resolve this "30-day gap."

Trump's interventions, meanwhile, have raised other, knottier political questions. His statement that NATO was obsolete shook many in Europe

and was a gift to Russia. And whereas Trump demonstrates a business-oriented approach, the Alliance is based on the binding principle of "all for one, one for all." Without it, NATO would not exist. The UK's decision to leave the EU further deepened European concerns.

But fears about the transatlantic alliance are not an excuse for Europe's policymakers to float wildly unrealistic proposals, such as a European army independent of NATO.

French President Emmanuel Macron's idea of "strategic autonomy" seems equally nebulous. Macron recently proposed a European Security and Defense Treaty – a kind of defensive Schengen agreement – and the creation of a European Security Council that would include the UK after it leaves the EU. This concept would establish an alternative structure to NATO and go beyond the EU's Common Security and Defense Policy, which is just being rebuilt.

Faced with new threats, Europe should use the mechanisms and tools it already has. These have been on the table for a decade, but only in the past three years have policymakers been willing to use them.

For example, in 2017, EU leaders established the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) to increase defense collaboration among member states, and invoked the EU's "solidarity clause" at France's request in the wake of terrorist attacks in that country. Furthermore, the EU signed a declaration of cooperation with NATO last year, and has agreed to create a European Defense Fund. All of these initiatives will strengthen Europe without undermining the Alliance.

Furthermore, the EU can continue to improve its military capabilities without having to create new structures that go beyond its existing legal framework. For starters, European leaders need to decide on the future of the EU Battlegroups, which have been on duty for years but have so far never been deployed. They should also seriously consider expanding the EU's existing Military Planning and Conduct Capability in order to have a fully-fledged EU Operational Command in place after 2020. The EU has undertaken over 30 military, civilian, and mixed missions, and the bloc plans to be even more active internationally under the recently adopted EU Global Strategy.

All those initiatives within the legal framework of the EU would strengthen Europe without undermining the role of NATO. And this should be our principle for long-term strategy and policy.

NATO enters its eighth decade amid continued disagreements between the US and Europe. We must hope that the Stoltenberg Paradox disappears, and that the Alliance further strengthens its military efforts to deter possible Russian aggression while reducing political tension between American and European allies. Poland and the rest of NATO's Eastern flank will be watching closely.

Bogdan Klich, Minority Leader of the Polish Senate, was Poland's defense minister from 2007 to 2011 and a member of the European Parliament from 2004 to 2007.

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