

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

Daily Outlook
AFGHANISTAN
The Leading Independent Newspaper

April 16, 2019

A durable Peace Requires Meaningful Participation of Afghan Women in the Peace Talks

In a country like Afghanistan ravaged by war, social cohesion is usually worn-out. Populations are divided along multiple fault lines including ethnic and religious lines, with some specific communities denied access to social, political, religious or economic power because of how they identify themselves and are identified by others. These identities, which characteristically overlap, can include age, gender, race, ethnicity, religion and culture or language as well as physical, economic, and social status. Disintegration and competing identities within a society, coupled with real or perceived exclusion, can fuel violence and undermine peace building efforts as one of the most contributing factors to armed conflicts.

As a result, Building more durable peace in such societies, depends on healing the wounds and defusing the underlying tensions that have pulled apart the social fabric of a country.

Therefore, any successful and sustainable resolution of such a conflict preferably includes all those affected by the conflict – including women, victims, various ethnic groups, civil society, business communities, religious leaders, grassroots and many other stakeholders. A successful peace building in Afghanistan requires Afghans shall reconcile their differences and build a future together, in the country where they must live side-by-side.

However, the promotion of inclusion in peace processes does not come without challenges. In most cases, the armed and governmental parties to a conflict do not see the value of having an inclusive process. This has various reasons, such as the fear of sharing power with an extended group of stakeholders. Or the conflict parties may view civil society and marginalized groups as part of their constituencies, and think that they are therefore already represented during negotiations.

Other reasons for exclusion can be history or culture. In many countries and cultures including Afghanistan, women, for example, have historically been excluded from the negotiating table and indeed many other social, political and economic spheres of life.

The exclusion of Afghan women in peace processes will have serious repercussions for women's rights post-conflict. In Afghanistan, where women's rights remain precarious, the miscarriage to reliably address women's opportunities and rights can reinforce gender injustice. Including women at the negotiating table and in consultations beyond the formal talks is a necessary step towards a lasting and legitimate peace in Afghanistan. In other words, Afghan women shall have a formal role in peace talks. The inclusion of women as victims of the war, gives the Afghan peace process its best chance of success. This is based on the argument that the inclusion of women and their meaningful participation in peace processes is central to having a gender perspective in peace processes. Furthermore, a peace process is more likely to be successful and lasting when a combination of modes of inclusion are introduced throughout the process to ensure that all stakeholders are represented on the negotiations table.

Finally, the need for a comprehensive and durable peace in Afghanistan requires creating a national and international consensus on the peace process with the Taliban. The Afghan government should reach a comprehensive agreement on peace talks with the Taliban inside Afghanistan, then with Afghanistan's neighboring countries, regional and international powers.

Three Days of Peace: A Blueprint for Stability in Afghanistan

By: Gabriel M. Piccillo

On June 7th, 2018, the government of Afghanistan announced a unilateral ceasefire was to occur between the 12th and 19th of June for Eid al-Fitr, the Islamic holiday marking the end of Ramadan, Islam's holy month of fasting. The measure was adopted for the first time in four decades of fighting, instability, and unrest. Shortly thereafter, the Taliban agreed to implement a three-day unilateral ceasefire from the 15th until the 17th of June. During the overlapping days between the two ceasefires, the 15th through the 17th, the two sides honored their commitments, halting violence for the first time in 17 years. According to the United Nations Secretary-General's Special Representative for Afghanistan, Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, "Many Afghans reacted with jubilation [to the ceasefire and compliance]. Local government authorities invited the Taliban to lay down their arms and enter cities to visit their families. Some Afghan soldiers visited Taliban-controlled areas. Social media was inundated with photos of Taliban fighters embracing Afghan security forces." Though respect for the three-day ceasefire was progress and represented a desire to end the bloodshed, the peace was brief. The Afghan government called to extend the ceasefire by ten days to build on the Eid peace. Unfortunately, the Taliban declined the offer and returned to arms.

3,000 Islamic scholars from around the world gathered in Kabul days prior to the armistice, imploring the government to implement a permanent ceasefire in the name of what they described as Islam's peaceful values. "Islamic scholars convened in Kabul and issued a fatwa reminding us that the quest for peace is a commandment of Allah and a national imperative," said Afghanistan's President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani. It showed the power and influence wielded by religious scholars around violent conflicts driven by sectarian, religious, and political divisions. The days that followed the ceasefire announcement provided a glimpse into a new Afghanistan. One of compassion, courage, and strength, an Afghanistan tired of war and hungry for peace. The international community welcomed the Taliban and Afghan government ceasefire as a step toward dialogue, peace, and reconciliation.

What lessons were learned from the ceasefire by the Afghanistan government and international observers who closely watched the events unfold? Many argued previously that achieving security, dialogue and reconciliation was near impossible given the fragmentation that's characterized Afghanistan. According to the country's president, "The widespread jubilation across our country demonstrates the strength of the Afghan identity." While dialogue and peace between the Taliban and civilians is possible, reconciliation between the Taliban and the Afghan government is a more ambitious goal. If the Afghan government is unwilling to make concessions regarding the Taliban's political representation in the Afghan government or on the issue of US military involvement, progress through current measures is unlikely to succeed. And unfortunately, such concessions are unlikely given external opposition to an Afghanistan with increased Taliban influence. The ceasefire demonstrates that the people of Afghanistan are tired of war. They are willing to do anything to precipitate its end. Civilians welcomed Taliban leadership and fighters warmly. Many Taliban approached the ceasefire in a reciprocal manner. According to the Afghan President, "The cease-fire also showed that imagination and a quest for inclusion are more potent than bullets and bombs. Had we not followed the will and wisdom of the Afghan people and taken this first step toward peace, the stalemate that prevented us from speaking to and accepting each other would not have been broken." It is crucial that the Taliban, the international community, and the government of Afghanistan learn from the Eid peace and apply its lessons to bring about lasting peace in the future.

In June of 2018, the United States Department of Defense released a report de-

scribing US efforts to "enhance security and stability in Afghanistan" between December 1st of 2017 and May 31st of 2018. The report described changes in US policy given political, diplomatic, and military developments there. Afghan military and diplomatic efforts changed following US President Trump's August 21st, 2017 announcement of new U.S. strategy for South Asia. Per the above-referenced statement, the US's transition away from a time-based approach in Afghanistan "...sowed new doubt in the Taliban, as fighters and leadership recognized the US's commitment to Afghanistan and to transforming the ANDSF (Afghan National Security Forces) into a lethal force capable of defending its homeland." If the Taliban and its fighters accept they can't fight the US out of Afghanistan then they will value an alternate, peaceful path forward via dialogue and negotiations. As of May 2018, the Taliban continued to receive outside support for training, and equipment from countries including Pakistan, Iran, and Russia. Such nations must be reminded that by supporting the Taliban they are fueling the conflict and making peace unattainable. The US and its partners must continue to disrupt and dismantle Taliban supply-lines, weakening the group, and driving it to negotiation. Disrupting finances and destroying military resources supplied to the Taliban is as important as kinetic fighting. Per the above-referenced US DOD report, "We [the United States] continue to welcome any partner who supports a Kabul-led peace process without further destabilization of Afghanistan."

Afghan President Ghani invited the Taliban to peace negotiations without preconditions. The February decision corresponded with heightened US military pressure increased ANDSF capacity, and renewed confidence in the Afghan government led President Ghani. Openings for peace, like this post-Eid affair, have occurred only a few times during the war, the opportunity should not be squandered. It is unlikely the

Taliban and the Afghan government will find similar opportunities abounding in their future. The pressure is on the Taliban: it could end violence in exchange for heightened political influence. The United States and other armed forces in Afghanistan are a fact the Taliban must accept. It should recognize that the only path toward reduced foreign military intervention lies in negotiation.

According to the US Department of Defense, "The Afghan government now pursues a political settlement with the Taliban using a two-pronged approach that emphasizes increased military pressure to open the door for meaningful peace negotiations with reconcilable factions of the Taliban." Further, it is claimed in the same report that, "The Afghan government is aware that the offer alone is not enough; it must be matched by a carefully crafted plan for negotiating peace, and for reintegrating Taliban fighters into civil society."

According to president Ashraf Ghani, "Half of Afghanistan's population – around 33 million – is young enough to have never seen a day of peace. The milestones of their young lives have been marked by loss and violence. For 38 years now, peace in my country has remained a dream, a prayer on our lips." The Afghan people deserve to live in peace and tranquility. Future generations of Afghans should be able to enjoy the culture, history, and natural beauty that makes their country extraordinary. "For three days," President Ghani said, "it made no difference whether you were a Talib or an Afghan soldier; a woman or a man; a Tajik, a Pashtun or a Hazara. For three days, Afghans were united and elated by the possibility of peace. We rediscovered tolerance and acceptance within." Only through a willingness to dialogue in a spirit of compromise will the Taliban and the Afghan government deliver a peaceful Afghanistan to those who call the country home.

Gabriel M. Piccillo is Vice President for Conflict, Stabilization, and Reconstruction at the International Institute for Peace, Democracy, and Development (IIPDD), an Afghan-U.S. NGO. He is based in Washington, DC.

Ups and Downs in Complicated Relationship between Afghanistan and Iran

By: Mohammad Zahir Akbari

Historically, the formal relationship between Afghanistan and Iran started with gaining independence of Afghanistan from Britain by Ghazi Amanullah Khan, specifically after 1919. In 1920, Kabul sent a group of delegate to Tehran suggesting to friendship negotiation, exchange of ambassadors, and establishment of Afghan consulate in Mashhad and creating trade and postal relationship between the two countries. After a year, in 1921 Afghanistan signed a treaty of friendship with Iran when Iran was under the Qajar dynasty. In September 1961 the ties between two countries were broken off but resumed in May 1963. Prior to 1979, the year in which both Iran underwent the Iranian Revolution and Afghanistan was invaded by the Soviet Union, the issue of water rights of the Helmand River was an issue of great importance between the two nations. Disputes over the Helmand water are noted in the 1870s, flaring again after the river changed course in 1896.

In 1939, the kings of the two countries signed an accord to share water rights, but never ratified; this was repeated in 1973 with a treaty between the prime ministers of both nations, and again not ratified. Afterwards, the ups and downs in relationship between the two countries have been revived by the 1979 Iranian Revolution and issues related to the 1978-present Afghan conflicts (i.e. Mujahideen, Afghan refugees, and Taliban), as well as water dispute and also presence of United States.

It seems that the government of Iran is strongly against the American military presence in Afghanistan. Iran was one of the serious countries who opposed the strategic agreement between US and Afghanistan. Iranian officials often criticize specifically the American military in Afghanistan despite that there are also thousands of European and other peace-keeping troops present. Therefore, some political analysts express concerns over escalation of Iran-US tensions as a threat for Afghanistan. While, the United States has excluded Iran's severe boycott when it comes to dealing with trade relation between Iran and Afghanistan.

In the late 1990s, Iran considered the Taliban a national security threat backing anti-Taliban Afghan resistance forces, especially the northern alliance and almost attacked Afghanistan to punish the Taliban for killing its diplomats in northern Afghanistan but in December 2016, Iran's ambassador to Kabul, Mohammad Reza Behrami, sent shockwaves across Afghanistan by announcing that his government maintained contacts with the Taliban for "control and intelligence" purposes.

Eventually, the Iranian government confirmed that a Taliban delegation had visited Iran for negotiations saying that Tehran has used its limited contact to encourage and convince the Taliban to bring them to the negotiation table. It seems that almost all key players on the ground have their own relations with the Taliban following their own agenda justifying to encourage them for joining peace process. Meanwhile, Iran has been participating in Afghanistan-related international conferences at the highest level, including the Kabul Peace Process. Tehran also

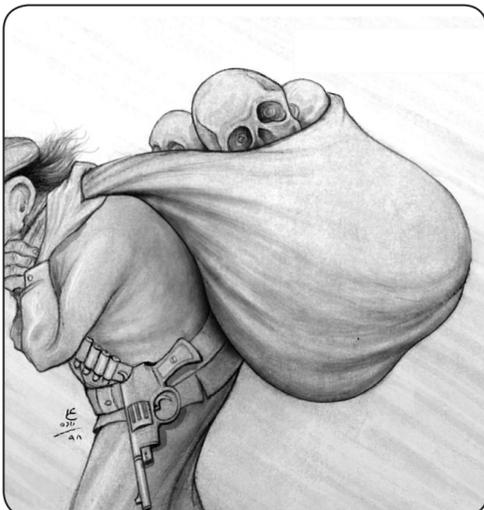
backed a temporary ceasefire announced by the President of Afghanistan and encouraged both sides to avoid violence and try to resolve problems through dialogue.

Nevertheless, the officials from both countries emphasize that the relation between two countries have not been influenced by any third party and this will be the case in the future as well due to an existing agreement between the two countries. Since 2001 The Islamic Republic of Iran has dominated around 5 million\$ to the people of Afghanistan and has relatively played constructive role in Afghanistan. Accordingly, the declared policy of Iran towards Afghanistan has always stressed on peace and stability and to achieve sustainable development in this country. They took part in many large constructive projects in Afghanistan such as Construction of the Khaf-Herat Railway, which connects Afghanistan's railway network to Iran, Central Asia and Europe, electricity supply to border villages in Herat and Nimrooz, road construction of the Doharoun-Herat road, Mahirood-Farah as well as the completion of the Herat Highway to Meymaneh in the north all have been carried out by Iranian contractors.

In addition, Iran has been hosting millions of Afghan refugees for almost four decades. Presently, a large number of populations of Afghanistan dwell in Iran, even though; it decreased due to recent economic issues in Iran. For Afghan, Iran has been a great source of income and repatriation of millions of dollars to their own country annually. According to Iranians, Iran is bearing a huge spending annually for the education of more than 380,000 Afghan refugee children in Iranian schools and 17,000 Afghans in universities at different levels. Importantly, 77,000 undocumented Afghan children were allowed to enroll in Iranian public schools based on a decree issued by Iran's Supreme leader in recent years. Three Afghan students, including a girl, have attained top ranks in Iran's highly-competitive nationwide university entrance exam for a Master's degree in the current year. However, there are many Afghans that are not satisfied from Iran due to experiencing bad conducts from Iranians.

Economically, the Trade between the two nations has increased dramatically since the overthrow of the Taliban government in late 2001. Mainly, Iran exports oil products, cement, construction material, carpets, home appliances, detergents, several food items and so on. Iran import nuts, carpets, agricultural products as well as handicrafts from Afghanistan. Afghanistan imports 90 percent of its needs, except agricultural products. With the construction of the Chabahar port, Iran played a unique role to give Afghanistan full access to seas and international waters. To facilitate such access, Iran provided Afghanistan's public and private sectors with sufficient facilities and preferential treatment to utilize this port. In fact, this was one of the extraordinary contributions to Afghanistan given the issues existed in the way to access the Karachi seaport in Pakistan. The first outcome of this policy was the shipment of Indian wheat cargos to Afghanistan last year.

Mohammad Zahir Akbari is the permanent writer of the Daily Outlook Afghanistan. He can be reached at mohammadzahirakbari@gmail.com



Chairman / Editor-in-Chief: Moh. Reza Huwaida
Vice Chairman / Exec. Editor: Moh. Sakhi Rezaie
Email: outlookafghanistan@gmail.com
Phone: 0093 (799) 005019/777-005019
www.outlookafghanistan.net

Daily Outlook
AFGHANISTAN
The Leading Independent Newspaperافغانستان ما
The Daily Afghanistan Ma

The views and opinions expressed in the articles are those of the authors and do not reflect the views or opinions of the Daily Outlook Afghanistan.