

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



April 20, 2019

Trust Deficit and Escalated Militancy Hamper Peace Process

The United Nations has delisted the Taliban's leaders as terrorists - despite the Taliban's announcement of spring offensive - due to the Washington's request as the sixth round of talks between the US and Taliban representatives is going to be held in Qatar this month. With the escalated militancy, the upcoming talks are less likely to end the 17 years of conflict in Afghanistan and mapping out an all-agreed framework for peace and stability will be a long route.

On the other hand, as Kabul government is preparing to convene Consultative Loya Jirga on Peace, Afghan political leaders, including CEO Abdullah Abdullah, said they would not participate in the Jirga, which indicates a political friction between Ghani's administration and political leaders. With this in mind, the Jirga which aims to bring about a national consensus will be proved futile.

Perhaps, former President Hamid Karzai could have persuaded Abdullah to send his delegation for intra-Afghan dialogue to Qatar, which is going to be held between Afghan political and Jihadi leaders led by Karzai and the Taliban's leadership.

Ironically, the Taliban have called on people not to participate in the Consultative Loya Jirga although US Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation Zalmay Khalilzad has urged Kabul government to form a national and inclusive team for negotiating with the Taliban - which is the Jirga's main objective.

"It is less likely that the insurgents agrees to a power sharing arrangement or inclusion in the elections if it is deeply immersed in radical ideology and perceives the stalemate in its favor. With less than five months left for the next round of presidential elections in Afghanistan, the government is also less likely to accept any settlement other than inclusion of insurgents in the elections," said Omar Sadr in his research paper titled "Political Settlement of the Afghanistan Conflict".

Amid peace talks, the tug-of-war continues between Kabul government and the Taliban as both sides announced spring attacks. Considering Taliban's violence, Khalilzad tweeted that "the quickest way to prevent casualties is to agree to a ceasefire" adding that the Taliban should discuss ceasefire at the table and he would "press for the case". It is still doubted if US negotiators could persuade the Taliban to declare ceasefire and include Afghan government in the talks.

It is aptly said that "if you're not at the table, you're on the menu". As Kabul government has been sidelined in the talks and has no role in the decision-making, it is vulnerable to the Taliban's unmitigated violence. Thus, Washington should broker peace talks between the two sides in the upcoming negotiation and push the Taliban to declare truce.

I have constantly doubted the Taliban's bona fide intention for peace since talks led to no palpable result in Afghanistan. The Taliban have intensified their attacks to bargain for higher price at the table with their US negotiators and Afghan Jihadi and political leaders.

After all, the gap between Afghan officials will deal a strong blow to the peace process. This gap has grown wider with the approach of presidential election as political leaders, including heads of National Unity Government, are running for office. Currently, President Ghani and CEO Abdullah have adopted two different approaches towards peace process. Strongly denying the establishment of interim government, Ghani urges the Taliban to participate in the presidential election. Nonetheless, Abdullah said earlier that he would agree with the idea of interim government if it led to peace and stability in Afghanistan. Abdullah also denied to put his weight behind Consultative Loya Jirga, which will be led by Muhammad Umer Daudzai, Ghani's Special Envoy and CEO of the High Peace Council.

President Ghani's political opponents believe that Ghani seeks to capitalize on Jirga as presidential campaign; whereas he signaled his intention for supporting peace process through forming a national and inclusive team. The Afghan government has been the main critic of the US-led backdoor peace talks, which led to a cold relation between Kabul and Washington, especially following the harsh remarks of Hamdullah Mohib against Khalilzad.

In spite of the fact that all three sides, Kabul, Washington, and the Taliban, believe in "military stalemate", war continues unabated in Afghanistan. With the ongoing peace discourse, the Taliban rank-and-file sustain heavy casualties on day-to-day basis as the Taliban leadership announced its spring offensive.

The Taliban's intensified attacks, their refusal to hold talks with the Kabul government, and the political friction between Afghan officials are great obstacles before negotiations. Regional and international stakeholders have to put much pressure on the Taliban to declare ceasefire and hold direct talks with Ghani's administration.

The Urgency of Having Cohesive Position at Negotiating Table and Battlefield

By: Mohammad Zahir Akbari

During the few last days there were tumultuous meetings between political figures fighting on preparing list of participants at the Doha Conference and also the leadership of peace council. Finally, a lengthy list of 250 delegates finalized to meet the Taliban in Doha this week, including different classes from political parties to independent political figures, jihadi leaders, religious scholars, members of parliament and the high peace council are listed to attend the so-called "intra-Afghan" dialogue with Taliban representatives in the Qatari capital of Doha, but there is no clue what would be agenda and what criteria are to shape the discussion. However, two few days ago, the U.S. Special Envoy for Afghanistan Reconciliation, Zalmay Khalilzad, called on Taliban to agree for a comprehensive truce which the quickest way to reduce violence and casualties.

The 250 delegation readiness welcomed by Taliban spring offensive with 250 Taliban fighters attacked on Kunduz city from different sides wanted to capture many cities and districts. As quoted, Kunduz Police Chief Brig. Gen. Manzoor Stanikzai said that almost "250 Taliban militants, including foreign nationals", were involved in the attack on Kunduz city but they were faced with "strict resistance" by Afghan forces and their attack was "thwarted". The Kunduz city, in the north of Afghanistan, came under Taliban attack hours after the group announced its so-called spring offensive, local officials said Saturday this week.

Over the past several years such lessons repeatedly taught by Taliban but seemingly no one has learnt enough yet. They taught us that peace is not obtained through begging but through strong and united position against terrorists; our main concern is why the list is not inclusive at least half of Afghan population must have been included from all over the country! Unhappily, the big national issues such as the identification of negotiation red lines, the internal coherence of the participants and mechanisms of talks with extremist groups are not prioritized. Other concern is that Taliban would likely to reject the meeting, as the militants had agreed with a 150-man delegation only.

From one hand, they show their readiness for peace talks, on the other hand, they destroy schools victimizing dozens of Afghan innocent youths. Using bomb and suicide attacks against their land and people become their logic and intellectuality. It seems that they do not satiate except with bloodshed and terror. Earlier they had described the upcoming Afghan Loya Jirga for Peace as a tool of "the invaders and their stooges" using "for their own malicious objectives". "The superficial 'Grand Consultative Jirga will be no different than the Jirgas and resolutions passed by the supposed 'Loya Jirgas' during the end years of the communist regime or that of the year 2013 which approved the extension of occupation and auctioning of Afghanistan under the security agreement," Zabihullah Mujahid wrote a few days ago.

Refusing to peace talks with government, as elected represen-

tative of people, shows that they do not believe in peace until now, each time their representatives have participated in the peace talks, the group has intensified its brutal and horrifying attacks that killed thousands of civilians and security forces. Each time their supporters have spoken about the Taliban's presence before the negotiating table, or the Afghan government has shown a flexible response to this group, they have responded with suicide attacks and killing more people.

Anyway, we need to have serious and strong both in battlefield and also on negotiation table. We are as strong as we are united and as weak as we are divided. It is very vital that all peace negotiators have single voice and stance; otherwise, It is predictable that Taliban and their supporters will enjoy hearing different conflicting voices from the Kabul delegation that participates in the conference. Unfortunately, everyone is following its own personal goal; neither the government institutions are convergent, and nor the opposition parties have a pre-defined coherence and specific platform. The opposing voices from the opposing side of the Taliban in The Moscow Summit showed that there are no criteria for our politicians, and there is no central point on which they all have consensus. Some were looking for an interim government or acting government, and others showed tendencies towards Islamic Emirate of Taliban. Seemingly, the delegation to Doha, Qatar, has a very heterogeneous composition while they are several times more than the group participated at the Moscow conference. In this case, the possibility of rising contradictory and conflicting voices from the Afghan delegation to the Taliban is very high. It is more likely that every political leader and representatives of the political parties would try to state strange statements violating many of the principles set forth. In addition, there might be some individuals among the participants that would be in favor of the Taliban and its regional advocates and thus violate the agreed principles. It must be notified that the Afghan people have come to a universal agreement on many issues such as maintaining the constitution, preserving the political system, preserving human rights and civil liberties and the media freedom and these principles are emphasized as the red lines of government and people of Afghanistan.

Given that we are in the sensitive phase of the history of the country, efforts should be made in order to have serious and strong position both in battlefield and also on negotiation table. Specifically, we need to state joint and common views to the conference by Kabul delegations so as to properly represent the government and people of Afghanistan. The single positions at the Doha Conference, not only keeps them up and bring them under a large umbrella but also increase the chances of negotiation success. Thereupon, both Taliban and its supporters give serious consideration to the other side, otherwise they will never be taken seriously, and each will return to the country alone and shamefully.

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The Monetization of Garbage

By: Stephen Nwaloziri

As a child growing up in Lagos, Nigeria, in the late 1990s, I remember women roaming through my community and chanting in Yoruba, "onigo de of Anra bata rubber ati ayo 'on jo." This translates as "The bottle peddler is here! We buy rubber sandals and leaky (aluminum) pots." Some families would separate their waste, because they could give some of it to these women for cash.

There are far fewer of these peddlers nowadays, perhaps because bottling companies are no longer recycling the bottles that the women gather. But a large-scale effort along these lines to monetize waste in Lagos, if properly coordinated and funded, could potentially have a huge impact on the city's garbage problem. And what works in Lagos could hold lessons for many other cities - and not only in the developing world.

In Lagos, action is urgently needed. The city has a population of about 22 million and, as the World Bank has highlighted, is heavily polluted. Especially in poorer areas, residents who can't afford to pay for waste collection come out in the dead of night to dump their garbage on the streets or in the water. As a result, the city's slums are littered with paper, household waste, and plastics.

By outsourcing most of the actual waste collection and management to some 375 private companies, the Lagos Waste Management Authority, an arm of the Lagos State government, has helped to reduce waste significantly. But much more can, and must, be done. Unless people are given incentives to monetize their garbage and minimize the amount that reaches landfills, the pollution problem will continue to fester. Three options in particular look promising.

For starters, Lagos could introduce a green-exchange program like the one established in the city of Curitiba in Brazil. There, residents bring their waste to designated local centers in exchange for bus tickets or food. Many workers in Lagos are already switching from cars to state-run commuter buses because they cannot afford the cost of fuel. If poorer people in particular could receive bus tickets for their waste, life would be easier for everyone. There would be less garbage on the streets, roads would be less clogged, and people wouldn't need to wait for waste trucks to get

rid of their rubbish. In addition, households would be more likely to separate waste if the city gave food stamps or fruit to those that recycled a certain amount of metal, clean plastic, or oil waste, for example.

Second, Lagos could reduce its plastic waste by working more closely with bottling companies and other manufacturers. This could involve public-private partnerships that require each company to operate a recycling center where consumers can bring used plastics. Citizens will feel motivated to recycle their plastic waste at centers bearing recognizable brand names, especially if a reward program is involved. No bottling companies currently have recycle-for-reward programs in the Makoko community of Lagos, where I grew up. Introducing such schemes would certainly help to cut the amount of plastic waste that is generated or discarded.

Lastly, campaigns to raise environmental awareness would encourage better waste management. By showcasing ordinary citizens being mindful of waste and their environment in everyday life, such efforts can inspire others to do the same.

My current work in Berea, Kentucky, at The Greenie Project, a non-profit student initiative which I started, shows how environmental awareness can spread. Our film "The Carlbergs" chronicles a local family that hosts huge contra-dance events in their home in a sustainable way - by using silverware and ceramic plates instead of disposable plates and cutlery, and by recycling. The film has inspired other groups and small businesses in the community, such as Berea Coffee and Tea, to be more sustainable. Similarly creative and locally relevant approaches would work well almost anywhere.

That includes Lagos, where the waste problem hits the poor particularly hard. To address it, we should create the right incentives, as the bottle peddlers in my part of the city did two decades ago. Monetizing waste will encourage poorer communities to participate, and awareness campaigns can help to show just how easy it is to be green. The result will be a cleaner, more livable city that serves as an example for others to follow.

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