

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



April 23, 2019

Doha Conference is Vital to Advance Peace in Afghanistan

A first round of Afghan-to-Afghan peace talks that had brought hope and optimism about ending the 18-year conflict in Afghanistan was postponed. The main cause of the postponement was rejecting the list of the delegation the Afghan government had prepared based on intensive discussions with the Afghan politicians, civil society and media representatives. However, according to Sultan Barakat, director of Qatar's Center for Conflict and Humanitarian Studies, the organization sponsoring the talks, reacted to this issue saying, it showed that Afghans needed to further build consensus as to who could participate in the conference.

According to the political observers, the talks that were scheduled for The April 19-21 between Afghan and Taliban representatives were considered a significant first step toward finding a negotiated end to the war in Afghanistan and the would pave the way for withdrawal of U.S. troops to put an end to America's longest war.

Inclusion of Women in Taliban's list

Taliban had announced that women would be part of their delegation for the first time in Qatar talks on the future of Afghanistan. This dramatic change in the Taliban's approach to women was embraced warily both in Afghanistan and out of the country. Taliban as a group notorious for its strictly conservative attitude to women's rights, the move represents a step towards addressing demands that women must be included in the talks. These women were from inside and outside the country that have supported Taliban and have been part of the struggle of the Islamic Emirate. One of the main causes of such dramatic shift in Taliban's stance on women's right is that, though, Afghanistan remains a deeply conservative country, especially in rural areas; there have been major advances in women's rights since the U.S-led campaign of 2001 that toppled the Taliban government. Currently, many women fear that if the group regains some power, many of these gains could be erased.

Secretary of State Michael R. Pompeo trying to break up the stalemate

When Afghan government announced that it would not accept the list prepared by Qatar's Center for Conflict and Humanitarian Studies, it received a mixed response. Many Afghan politicians and normal people considered Qatar's act as interfering in internal affairs of the country and wanted the Afghan government not to accept such a list. The United States (US) Special Envoy on Afghan peace process Zalmay Khalilzad expressed his disappointment over the postponement of the scheduled inter-Afghan talks in Doha. He said that was in touch with all parties and encouraged that everyone remains committed to dialogue. He also said, dialogue was and always will be key to a political roadmap and lasting peace. There was no alternative. The U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo during an unannounced trip to Afghanistan on Monday renewed calls for peace talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban in order to step up the process. The U.S. Secretary reassured Afghan government of the United States support, facilitation and participation in these discussions. He clarified that any talks would be "Afghan-led and Afghan-owned." He also made it clear that the region and the world were all tired of what was taking place Afghanistan in the same way that the Afghan people were no longer interested in seeing war.

Doha conference in Qatar is an important opportunity for Afghanistan that can help the country to put an end to the conflict here. However, negotiating with the agenda of other countries will not ensure the national interests of Afghanistan. Afghan government must reassure the Afghans and international community that it supports fully any initiative to lead to a durable peace to put an end the suffering and destruction in the country. However, any peace initiative for Afghanistan must be based on an "Afghan-led and Afghan-owned." process.

Meaningful Attacks on Centers of Education, Technology, Culture and Faith

By: Mohammad Zahir Akbari

On contrary to the white hopes for reaching peace, yesterday the capital city of Afghanistan witnessed a complex attack by at least four gunmen after months of relative calm. According to government officials, at least seven people were killed and eight civilians were wounded in the attack on the communications ministry in center of Kabul underlining the continued security threats despite efforts to open peace talks with the Taliban. According to media reports, a suicide bomb was detonated at the entrance to the multi-storey building housing the ministry in a busy commercial area of the city, followed up by gunfire which could be heard over a mile away.

"We saw a gunman trying to break open an office door and as we were running out, he was trying to shoot us and he started shouting 'I will kill everyone here'," as quoted said Syeda Rashid, an office administrator in the ministry who escaped with several of her colleagues. She said at least six women had been wounded. Television images showed people fleeing after gunfire and explosions began near the 18-storey government tower. The area around the building was sealed off by police as at least three attackers battled security forces for several hours before the attack was finally suppressed in the late afternoon, Interior Ministry spokesman Nasrat Rahimi said. While security forces were able to rescue hundreds of ministry workers, others were trapped inside for hours while the battle continued around the building. The interior ministry said in a statement that more than 2,800 employees of the Ministry of Communications and Technology, the Ministry of Information and Culture were evacuated during the clearance operation. Several young children and staff at a childcare centre for ministry employees were also evacuated. "We were having lunch when we heard the explosion," as quoted said Rabia, who worked at the childcare centre. "We grabbed the children together into the safe room and just waited till the security forces arrived," she said.

Police chief Gen. Sayed Mohammad Roshandil said the bomber blew himself up outside the Telecommunications Ministry, clearing the way for four gunmen to enter the building and the heavily guarded government compound. The explosion was also close to the heavily fortified Serena Hotel, one of the very few hotels still used by foreign visitors, in one of the main commercial areas of the city. The operation marked a return to the kind of complex attacks in an urban centre that have killed hundreds of people in Kabul and other Afghan cities over recent years. There was no claim of responsibility but the Taliban issued a statement denying any involvement. Many such attacks have been claimed by the radical Islamic State group. Prior to Saturday's attack, Kabul had been relatively calm as U.S. officials have held a series of meetings with representatives from the Taliban

to try to agree the basis for a peace settlement and an end to more than 17 years of war.

The attack came one day after the cancellation of scheduled talks between Taliban representatives and Afghan politicians in Doha, the capital of Qatar. The talks, which had been scheduled for April 19, were considered a significant first step toward finding a negotiated end to the war in Afghanistan and the eventual withdrawal of U.S. troops. It also comes the week after the Taliban announced its annual spring offensive. However, The Taliban insurgent group in a statement rejected their involvement in today's attack. The militants now control or influence about half the country, and last year was the deadliest yet for civilians. Both Taliban insurgents and the Islamic State group are active in eastern Afghanistan and have previously claimed attacks in Kabul while no other group has yet claimed responsibility for the attack except a flag of Daesh is seen at the scene of the clashes yesterday.

President Ashraf Ghani condemned the attack; saying in a statement that the enemies of the nation were trying to create terror among the people by targeting civil servants. "the enemies of Afghanistan have conducted a terrorist attack." "Once again they have created fear and have killed or wounded a number of innocent countrymen," the statement read. The most recent attack in the city was on March 7, when three people were killed by rocket fire and dozens more were wounded at an open-air political gathering to commemorate the national unity martyr, Abdul Ali Mazari, who was martyred by the Taliban in 1995.

Anyway, the terrorist groups who carry out their actions under the mask of religious justification, they have meaningfully targeted Centers of Education, Technology, Culture and Faith. In past years, many terrorists attacked carried out under name of ISIL targeting religious circles in Kabul, Nangarhar and Herat and as results thousands have been sacrificed. the mosques of Imam Zaman and Baqer al-ulum in Berchchi and the Mosque of Imam-Zaman in Khair Khana, as well as the mosque in Gardez-Paktia and the mosques of Javadia in Herat; Attacks on Ministry of communication and technology or ministry of culture and information, which is equivalent to attacks on culture and technology, is very similar to the aforementioned attacks.

Lastly, the experience which gained within few last years shows that flexibilities and talks with terrorists would not work without military pressure. The insecurity crisis has really tired the people and it reached in the level that no one is safe. Therefore, we should not allow the terrorist groups to use the peace process as opportunity of launching brutal attacks in the country.

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It's Time for a Green EU Deal

By: Michel Barnier

"Green New Deal" has become the talk of the town in many of the world's capitals. Having recently emerged in the United States, the idea pays tribute to the visionary economic-recovery program launched by President Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1933. But Europe can – and must – deliver it as well.

Europe has long been committed to the environment, introducing its first joint program back in 1972. In 2005, the European Union established the first emission-trading scheme, which remains the world's largest carbon market. And in 2015, the EU took the lead in negotiating the Paris climate agreement, and committed to cutting its own greenhouse-gas emissions by 40% from 1990 levels.

But these steps, though important, do not address the scale of the challenge now facing the world. Bees and other insects are disappearing, while microplastic pollution has become ubiquitous. Rising temperatures could cause ice to disappear from the Arctic by 2050, and will worsen the fires, droughts, and floods Europe is already experiencing. And as air pollution increases, so will deaths from respiratory diseases.

And yet there are also grounds for optimism. More and more people are willing to act and to adapt their lifestyle, like the students and others taking to the streets of Stockholm, Prague, Brussels, and Milan every Friday. Businesses also increasingly see the benefits of the new green economy. It is politics and politicians, both national and European, that are lagging behind.

Now is the time to build on grassroots momentum and make Green Europe the number-one priority for the coming years. Doing so requires focusing on three main areas.

First, Europe must become a carbon-neutral economy by 2050. If we want to limit global warming to 1.5°C relative to the pre-industrial era, we have no other choice: EU net carbon-dioxide emissions must come down to zero by mid-century. That means investing massively in future mobility, energy-efficient buildings, and renewables, and in key technologies such as hydrogen batteries, new generations of solar panels, and green chemistry. It also means applying strict CO2 emission limits to new passenger cars, public transport, and commercial sea and air transport. And it means making Europe, together with our car industry, the first electric-vehicle continent by 2030. Second, Europe must take the lead in the responsible use of resources and become a truly circular economy that minimizes waste. Today, eight billion tons of materials are processed into energy or products annually in the EU. Only 0.6 billion tons – a mere 7.5% – originate from recycling. We must do much better. In addition to delivering on our plastics strategy, we should focus on four priorities: food waste and the bio-economy, textiles, construction, and fast-moving consumer goods. For example, we can begin with an EU initiative to fight the planned obsolescence of household appliances and electronic devices.

Third, we must do much more to protect biodiversity. According to the World Wildlife Fund, wildlife populations have fallen by an estimated 60% globally since 1970. Next year's United Nations conference on biodiversity in Beijing will be decisive. Once again, the

EU should lead the way. We need to strengthen EU legislation on the protection of species, as well as an ambitious plan for the blue economy and the preservation of our seas. And we must launch a real debate with – and not against – our farmers, reviewing our standards and modernizing the Common Agricultural Policy to accompany this green transition.

This massive shift will not happen if its costs fall disproportionately on those least able to bear them. All EU measures should therefore be designed to minimize social costs. At the same time, we need to keep pushing for effective global cooperation, while protecting ourselves from unfair competition. There is no point in having strict EU rules on pesticides or forest management if our imported food and wood is produced in unsustainable ways.

The three objectives could become the pillars of a Sustainability Pact at the heart of the EU's new policy cycle. In some respects, this should be as important as the Stability and Growth Pact that applies to member states' public finances. Our ecological debts are no less a cause for concern than our fiscal debts!

To achieve its goals, a Sustainability Pact would require concerted action on climate, trade, tax, agriculture, and innovation. The EU must not be afraid to use its regulatory powers. For example, expanding the scope of ecodesign legislation and of extended producer responsibility for the post-consumer phase of a product's life could accelerate pro-environmental innovation.

Massive investments will be required, too. The European Commission estimates that the EU will need €180 billion (\$203 billion) in additional investment each year to meet its commitments under the Paris agreement. This is an achievable target. The European Investment Bank is already the world's largest multilateral provider of climate finance. In addition, the EU's forthcoming budget and its Investment Plan – which has a track record of leveraging private-sector investment – could further boost Europe's green firepower.

The financial sector also has a critical role to play: through climate-related financial disclosure, we can stimulate the world's biggest financial institutions – such as Norway's sovereign wealth fund and BlackRock – to take a long-term view and avoid what Mark Carney, the governor of the Bank of England, has called the "tragedy of the horizon." And, although EU member states might resist it, we must have a debate on taxes and subsidies on fossil fuels, and on the mainstreaming of sustainability in public expenditure.

For such a transformative green program to succeed, we must set aspirational goals and embrace "moon-shot missions." At the same time, we will need to agree on detailed roadmaps with member states and the European Parliament, and hold in-depth discussions with regions, cities, businesses, trade unions, and civil society.

Not everything can be done overnight. But we can no longer close our eyes and lungs to what is happening to our environment. The best time to launch a Green EU Deal was years ago. The next-best time is now.

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