

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

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Taliban Delegation in Pakistan

A Taliban delegation from the Qatar political office is in Pakistan to have talks with Pakistani officials over Afghanistan's peace process and some demands of the Taliban from the Pakistani government. The Afghan government has confirmed the travel of the Taliban high-profile delegation to Pakistan; however, there are confusions over the mission of the Taliban delegation and if they are going to talk over peace negotiations with the Afghan government. In a statement sent to the media, the Taliban said that the delegation will hold talks with Pakistani officials over Afghan refugees in Pakistan, border issues and Taliban's demand for release of Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, a top Taliban member arrested by Pakistan in 2010. However, Afghan sources have also said that the delegation have arrived on Pakistan's invitation and will hold preliminary talks with Pakistani officials over peace in Afghanistan. Despite the Taliban's official statement claiming the aim of the visit to be issues other than the Afghan peace process, it is obvious the Taliban delegation has come to Islamabad to talk with Pakistani officials over peace negotiations with the government of Afghanistan. Pakistan is believed to have been trying to engage with the Taliban leaders and persuade them to come to the table of peace negotiations with the Afghan government. As a member of the four-nation initiative coordinating peace efforts in Afghanistan, Pakistan has committed to invite Taliban leaders and exert pressures over them to join the process. However, exactly when the Taliban was expected to take part in a pre-planned peace meeting in Islamabad, the group refused to join the four-way peace initiative, dealing a major blow to the months-long effort of Afghanistan, Pakistan, China and the United States. The visit of the Taliban delegation seems to have taken place in request and under pressures of the Pakistani government, trying to bring the Taliban leaders to table of peace negotiations. Shortly after the conclusion of the four-way peace plan, Pakistan called on the Taliban to join the process, and later observers and media reports suggested Pakistan were trying the exert pressures on the group to take part in the process. The Taliban refusal to join the peace talks and the group's massive bombing in Kabul city led the Afghan officials to take a harder stance against the group and distance itself from considering Islamabad as a mediator to persuade Taliban to join peace talks. However, Pakistani officials insist the country was committed to play its part in the efforts to kick-start the peace process. Despite the start of the bloody fighting season, the four-way peace initiative does not seem to have become dead and the efforts to revive the stalled talks continue by the members of the four-nation coordination group. Despite toughening stance in the fight against the Taliban, President Ashraf left the door open for the Taliban to join the talks, tacitly saying only some parts of the Taliban were "murderers" and irreconcilable. He was explicit in saying that the Afghan government will be always prepared for talks with those Taliban who care for lives of Afghans and are willing to negotiate peace in the country. The change in tone and policy of the Afghan government against the Taliban would definitely not weaken the peace process rather it would further strengthen the position of the Afghan government in the future peace talks with the Taliban and other militants. It is premature to say if the recent relatively successful government campaign has had any impact on Taliban to soften stance and approach the Pakistani government for taking in the peace talks with the government of Afghanistan. However, it could be that the Taliban may have somehow tasted their recent military setbacks. A robust military campaign will undoubtedly boost government stance and help it to negotiate from a stronger position when the peace process start in future. The Afghan government needs to realize the points of its strengths and wait for the right time for resumption of peace talks along with leading a strong military campaign against the Taliban. Only a failure to make gains on the ground will force the Taliban to see peace talks as an option for having a future role in the future of the country. Pakistan is said to have contacted the Taliban in recent months and warned the group either to join the peace process or face consequences. The Taliban is believed to have denied so far Pakistan's recent pressures. However, the Taliban cannot afford defiance of Pakistan's formal stance in the peace process and the country's call on the group to join the process. Afghanistan claims that Taliban senior leadership reside in major Pakistani cities and enjoy security and services there. The government in Islamabad can simply expel the Afghan Taliban from the country or detain them. However, both Pakistan and Afghan Taliban are not considering this as a possible scenario as both needs to talk and cooperate over the Afghan peace process. Pakistan needs to prove its sincerity in helping Afghanistan's peace process. Pakistan must remain committed to its pledge to put pressures on the Taliban for peace talks or take military action against the group's leadership in the country. It is important for both countries to avoid deterioration of relations and work closely on revival of the peace process.



Why Not Learn from India?

By Hujjatullah Zia

People exercise their rights and freedom under true democracy in India. There are no barriers for practicing one's culture and beliefs. One does not fear having his/her life lost on the grounds of their caste, color or creed. Democracy form the cornerstone of peace and prosperity in India. You can see churches, mosques and temples in your surroundings - where people pray and perform their religious rituals. Extremism, which is the root of violence and bloodshed in many countries, has no room in that multi-ethnic country for two major reasons. Firstly, the ideologues are able to express their thoughts and feelings and act upon them without barriers. There are no restrictions ahead and they are entitled to practice their beliefs freely but on the basis of not curtailing others' liberty. Secondly, the government focuses the bulk of its attention on public security and prevents from the infiltration of the radical groups. It is self-explanatory that security plays the most crucial role in a country and paves the way for other activities such as getting education, making business, employment, investment, etc. But whenever people's rights and freedoms are at stake, the public will show no tendency towards the said issues. Indian nation lives with peace in a violent-free country and there is a sense of hope and trust in the air. There seems no gap between the state and nation. The government does its best for the citizens' protection and betterment and interacts with them through conducting outreach programs. Freedom of expression is widely practiced among the public and officials do not mind being criticized by media or an individual. Media, which symbolize freedoms of thought and speech, hold the strongest sway in India. Citizens can have their say to the officials and vice versa through media. Such exchanges of thoughts and words will remove suspicion between the state and nation. Moreover, it is believed that freedom, mainly freedoms of beliefs and expressions, is one of the basic elements of democracy. Election, which is called the "festival of democracy", in India is conducted very transparently to ensure the rights and dignity of the citizens. Each and every vote is considered significant for the government and people are facilitated - does not matter if one lives in a distant place to take part in election. Indian Deputy Election Commissioner Umesh Sinha, whom I had a meeting with on Wednesday, appreciated the citizens' active participation in presidential election in 2014. In terms of women's role, he said that women outnumbered men in 16 areas in 2014 and their partaking was beyond imagination. It is crucial to see that Indian's Election Commission is fully independent and the officials work under its order during elec-

tion. To mobilize the public and strengthen motivation, facilitation and participation, the government launches Systematic Voters' Education And Electoral Participation (SVEEP) for the citizens. Moreover, SVEEP spreads awareness for people and encourages them to deem vote as an obligation for being citizens. Needless to say that in a democratic country, election symbolizes the active and direct participation of the people of a nation to form a government. It is universally accepted that for a democracy to work as one, it is citizens to elect their leaders and representatives and, in turn, rule themselves. The election represents the general will of the people, as expressed in their votes. The voting population expresses its choice of candidates, political parties and government through exercising their franchise at regular intervals. The vote of electors crystallizes into the mandate of the people. The voters are the main stakeholders in a democracy and they vote with the belief that government, as the main arbiter of the future of the country and its people, will provide every citizen the best possible policies to build a better country, a better community and a better life. They also believe that it will work in the most efficient way to widen their economic, and social welfare, alleviate poverty and reduce the gap between the rich and the poor, build infrastructure and ultimately improve the quality of life. The legitimacy of the entire democratic system of a government depends on the efficacy and effective working of the electoral mechanism - which is conducted well in India. If the verdict of people, which forms the basis of legitimacy of the political system, is vitiated by unethical methods, the faith of the people in the electoral system gets eroded and ultimately destroys the very foundations of democracy. Democracy and elections are inextricable. In the Indian context the emphasis has always been on creating a social order in which the people, by casting their votes without any coercion or inducement, make decision about their government. When India got its independence in 1947, planning and organizing general elections to elect a representative government on the basis of universal adult suffrage was highly appreciable. India can be an example to our country and we have to learn all the positive aspects from our neighbors - be it India or any other countries. Since democracy is practiced in the best way in India and people live in peace, irrespective of their religious, racial or sexual backgrounds, let's keep it a paragon of democratic country for our own country and the government will have to protect the rights and dignity of the citizens in a better way.

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Ban the Bomb Tests

By Des Browne, Daryl G. Kimball, and Kairat Umarov

The Nuclear Security Summit process, which concluded earlier this month in Washington, DC, shows what can be achieved when political leaders come together to concentrate on a global problem. The six-year initiative, focused on preventing nuclear terrorism, produced important outcomes on eliminating, minimizing, and securing dangerous nuclear and radiological materials. Unfortunately, however, the nuclear threat is still far from being neutralized. The dangers posed by terrorist groups are growing, as are the risks from competition and conflict between nuclear-armed states. Strong leadership and global cooperation must also be deployed to address other urgent nuclear dangers, particularly the threat of further testing and proliferation of weapons. There are few bright signs on the horizon. On the contrary, almost every nuclear-armed state is either expanding or upgrading its nuclear arsenal. There are no active negotiations to regulate, cap, or further reduce nuclear stockpiles. Russia and the United States have each deployed more than 1,800 strategic warheads on several hundred submarines, bombers, and missiles - far more than is necessary to deter a nuclear attack. Many of these weapons can be launched within minutes, increasing the risk of miscalculation. Meanwhile, North Korea could soon be able to arm ballistic missiles with nuclear warheads, a development that would pose a significant threat to all of Asia. Given the grave dangers, it is in every country's interest to halt further nuclear competition and eliminate the risks associated with the world's remaining stockpiles of some 15,000 nuclear weapons. As US President Barack Obama and Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev noted in separate statements during the Nuclear Security Summit, a key element of an effective global risk-reduction strategy must be to bring the 1996 Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) into force. If existing nuclear powers cannot conduct tests, they will not be able to try out new, more sophisticated warhead designs. Similarly, without test explosions, newer nuclear-armed states will have a far more difficult time developing and fielding smaller, more easily deliverable warheads. The CTBT has near-universal support. With 183 state signatories and a de facto test ban in place, the treaty is now a key component of the international nuclear nonproliferation system. It has established a taboo against testing (violated since 1998 only by North Korea) and slowed the global arms race. And yet, nearly 20 years after its adoption by the United Nations General Assembly, the CTBT is not valid international law - large-

ly because the US has not ratified it. The US Senate's rushed and highly partisan 1999 vote against ratification - and its failure to reconsider the treaty since then - has given the seven other states that must ratify the CTBT a reason for delay. As a result, the door to further nuclear testing remains open. Last fall, US Secretary of Energy Ernest Moniz and US Secretary of State John Kerry suggested that the Senate revisit the issue. Unfortunately, President Barack Obama does not have enough time left in office to launch the time-consuming education and outreach campaign needed before bringing the CTBT to the Senate for another vote. But his administration could intensify the necessary preparatory work - for presenting new information, answering detailed questions, and dispelling old myths and misconceptions - before he leaves office. Even if the next US president and Senate do reconsider ratification of the CTBT, a vote may not happen for several years. In the meantime, it is essential that world leaders seek ways to encourage ratification by other CTBT holdout states and to reinforce the de facto global moratorium on testing. The G-7 foreign ministers' declaration on April 11 in Hiroshima - "No state should conduct a nuclear test explosion and all states should sign and ratify the CTBT without delay" - is a good start. No one knows that better than Japan and Kazakhstan, which have suffered from the terrible effects of nuclear detonations. As their respective foreign ministers, Fumio Kishida and Erlan Idrissov, warned in September, business as usual will not suffice. Kishida and Idrissov have invited their counterparts to a ministerial-level meeting in Vienna on June 13 to explore options for bringing the CTBT into force. They will encourage key holdout states to reaffirm their support for the global testing taboo and to pledge that they will consider ratification "at the earliest possible time." As we approach the 20th anniversary of the CTBT, members of the UN Security Council and the General Assembly can take further steps to ensure that nuclear testing remains off-limits. For example, they could pursue the adoption of a new Security Council resolution and a parallel General Assembly measure calling on all states to refrain from testing and urging quick action on ratification. Such an initiative would reinforce the global norm against testing and stimulate movement by holdout states. Just as leaders have cooperated at the Nuclear Security Summit to prevent nuclear terrorism, we need renewed cooperation and leadership to end nuclear testing once and for all. (Courtesy Project Syndicate)

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