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

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Pursing Peace Process 'Shared Responsibility'

Since terrorist groups are a threat to the entire globe, regional and global stakeholders have to put their weight behind the Afghan peace process to find a negotiated settlement to the conflict, in which the US-led NATO forces are involved for 18 years.

This time, the US officials are optimistic about more active and constructive engagement of Pakistan to the negotiations. In his visit with the US President Donald Trump, Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan said that terrorist groups took the lives of 70,000 people in Pakistan. It has been reiterated several times that terrorism is a common threat to both Afghanistan and Pakistan. And Trump urges for the bigger role of Islamabad in Afghan peace process. Khan reaffirmed Pakistan's commitment to continue to support the process in good faith adding that a peace deal with the Taliban was closer than it had ever been. He called pursuing the process "a shared responsibility".

Afghanistan has declared its full preparation for the talks and said that it had a clear roadmap for talks. "The Afghan government has a clear roadmap for the peace process. One of the main principles of this process is its all-inclusiveness," President Ghani's spokesman Sediq Seddiqqi is cited as saying.

But the ifs and buts of peace talks continue and women's rights and liberties still remain a cause for concern. A former MP Fawzia Koofi said, "We are very concerned whether Afghan women will have the current liberties after a peace deal with the Taliban. The United Nations' role in these talks is very weak."

Simultaneously, doubt and mistrust also continues about the outcome of peace talks. Earlier, Pakistan's former ambassador to the US Husain Haqqani said in his interview with TOLOnews, an Afghan media outlet, that "the Taliban's real intention is to talk to the Americans, have an agreement that will result in an American withdrawal and after that, go ahead and take Afghanistan by force". Haqqni also said that the Taliban would have recognized the legitimacy of the government in Kabul "if they were sincere about peace". He said, "I think if the United States announces a withdrawal and Pakistan gets a lot of concessions thinking that Pakistan has helped that peace process but there is no real peace," Haqqani is cited as saying.

But Sediqqi said that the return of the Taliban as a regime is not possible adding that Afghanistan was different than 18 years ago.

It is not a problem for Kabul or Washington if Pakistan is seeking concessions in the Afghan peace process but she has to play her role actively in ending the conflict and brokering talks between the Taliban and the Kabul government.

In June 2018, Pakistan was placed on the gray list due to its "strategic deficiencies" in the anti-money-laundering and terrorism financing regime pushed by the US. Political pundits believe that Pakistan needs US help to stave off the looming threat of being blacklisted by the Paris-based terror financing TATF.

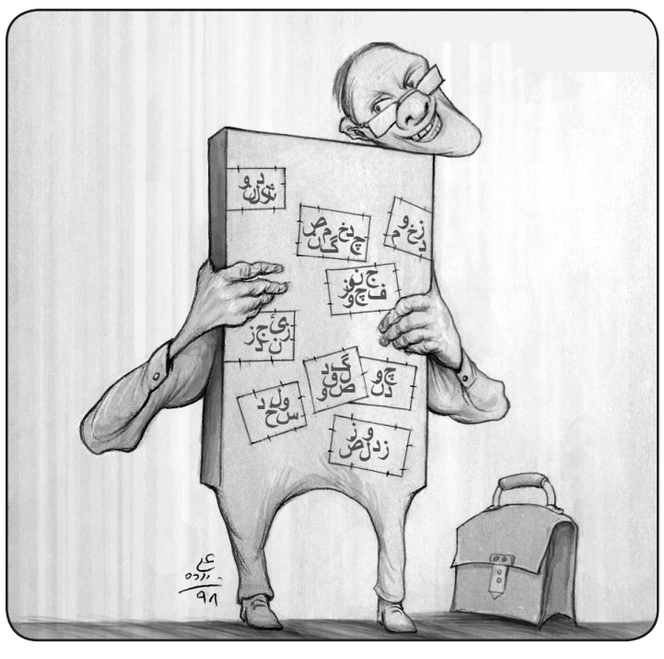
Pakistan played a role in the peace process through releasing the Taliban co-founder Mullah Baradar from Pakistani prison. Khan pledged playing more role and meeting with the Taliban to urge them negotiate with the Kabul government.

Trump seeks to wrap up US military involvement in Afghanistan and get an agreement between the Afghan powerbrokers and the Taliban in time for his November 2020 re-election bid since he called himself a "problem solver" in his August 2017 speech declaring his South Asia policy.

Pushing for negotiated settlement to the conflict is a shared responsibility of not only Afghanistan, Pakistan, and the US, but of the entire global stakeholders. All states have to play active and constructive role in the process to mitigate regional instability.

Regarding the Taliban's approach, the Taliban are unwilling to say to their military commanders that they will negotiate with the Afghan government. With this in mind, the Taliban leadership urges that it will not talk with the Kabul administration as a government. It is understandable that it is hard for the Taliban to justify it ideologically for their militant fighters and military commanders.

After all the cynical view and optimism, will peace talks come to fruition? It is believed that peace talks have entered a crucial phase and it is likely to bear the desired result if regional and global stakeholders and Afghanistan's neighboring countries engage constructively and play their role responsibly in the process. Peace talks are a shared responsibility for global stakeholders. They need to put their energy and sincerity to find a negotiated settlement to the conflict.



Women: From Silent Majority to Active Majority

By: Mohammad Zahir Akbari

Almost ten year ago, the former president of Afghanistan, Hamid karzai, said "the silent majority has become active majority." He said this because, at first round of the presidential elections, he won the election mainly by female votes; in fact, he wanted to appreciate and thank the women but indirectly it could express the deplorable condition of women at that time. Most men were not ready to allow their wives to take part in social activities, but due to reaching privilege and power allowed them to vote for favorite candidate of their men. It was the first experience for Afghan women who were not literate even they could not recognize the election signs and could not read name and slogans of the candidates. Their choice was not based on political understanding, but it was on the basis of obedience and satisfaction of their men. They neither were aware of their rights and nor were able to understand its impact on their future. For this reason, their votes were used in favor of men and did not make much difference to the status of women after those elections.

Now, after nearly two decades that they have much experience from the past years, women are no longer compelled to voting for men or in favor of men, they vote for the future of their sons, daughters and country. Fortunately, the political changes and upgrade of literacy level made them able to know their rights and understand the meaning of voting and elections. Previously, the candidates were easily able to deceive them with alluring promises or with offering a little gift such as a veil or a packet of chocolate, but in the current situation, the candidates need to have specific goals and programs to attract women votes. However, there may always be some uncommitted men or women who knowingly or unknowingly trapped by money.

With presence in social and political arena, women have stabilized their positions in election campaign, peace talks, civil society, economic activities, scientific works, cultural and other activities. Meanwhile, the government and non-government leaders also understand effectiveness and efficiency of women in the country. In the current atmosphere of country as the presidential election campaign became highly competitive women can play determining role in this competition. Each Afghan woman's decision and vote can be effective because most women are free and independent in exercising their inalienable right to choose their candidate and this is actually a great achievement for women and men of the country.

When it is said that elections are one of the most important features of a democratic system and it is based on the will of the people, women certainly include them and have the same status and social identity as men of the society and have the right to select and be elected. In election process, women can participate in several levels such as leadership, management, membership in election teams and as voters; in Election Day, they are free and independent to use and choose their own candidate. So, there is no religious and legal limitations for women to prohibit their role for the future of their country and their family.

Women have sufficient managerial and leadership skills and abilities that can play effective role in management and leadership of the electoral process in the country. Fortunately, despite so many challenges they are taking parts in different levels of leaderships and management, but there are other barring factors which affect success or failure of women leadership in implementation of the electoral process. For example, from the beginning election process, including the official launch of election campaigns, identification and completion of polling stations throughout the country the security threat was a big concern which could / can challenge the process at any time.

Other issue which always challenges the election and other national decision making is lack of clear statistics in Afghanistan. Unfortunately, we live in a country where has never been an accurate statistics about its population, about eligible voters and about stickered Tazkera (Identity card). In addition, there are many national and foreign interferers who may try interrupting the process in one way or other way. So, it is difficult for any men or women to produce a clear result from an unclear situation.

Therefore, everyone in country including political leaders and normal citizens are responsible to support the national process, especially the election which is full of challenges. Election is a great opportunity for the country, especially for women to lay a good foundation for a stronger system based on democratic values, human rights and international norms and standards. It is high time to cross from the ethnic based culture to democratic and meritocratic culture. It is not possible unless everyone believes that any inequalities, including ethnic, racial, linguistic, gender and other social monopolies are destructive. No nation has been able to build an advanced and democratic political system with backward culture and neither we would be able to do so unless crossing from this step.

We should also believe that women comprise half of the population and they cannot be chained at home. They should take part in development and reconstruction process of the country; there are no logical reasons to stop them from social activities except their own weakness pertain to low level of their education. Therefore, it is said if a woman is educated, a generation is educated but if a women is uneducated then a generation will be weak and left uneducated.

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Fighting Violence with Evidence

By: Rachel Locke and Steven David

In last year's Pathways for Peace report – the result of a joint study by the United Nations and the World Bank – UN Secretary-General António Guterres warned that the world is facing a "dramatic resurgence" of conflict, which has caused immense human suffering and significantly undermined global order. If the world is to achieve the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – and protect millions of people from deadly violence – urgent action must be taken to reverse this trend.

It is not just conflict that is on the rise. According to new research by the Small Arms Survey, 589,000 people – including 96,000 women and girls – suffered violent deaths in 2017. That is 7.8 deaths per 100,000 people, the second-highest rate since 2004. This increase has been driven primarily by an upsurge in homicides.

On current trends, violent deaths will increase by more than 10% by 2030, reaching 660,000 annually. If conflict-related deaths continue to rise – owing to the eruption of new armed conflicts or the escalation of existing ones – and countries' homicide rates start to regress toward those of the worst-performing states in their respective regions, over a million people will be dying violently each year by 2030.

Are we prepared to accept a reality in which one-third of all women experience physical or sexual violence in their lifetimes? Do we ignore the one billion children who are victims of serious violence each year? Can we simply look the other way when homicide is the fourth-leading cause of death for young people globally? And this is to say nothing of the indirect consequences of violence, including for economic development.

The primary purpose of the international order established in the aftermath of World War II was to promote and maintain global peace and security. Similarly, a key imperative for national governments is to provide security to their populations, including by maintaining a monopoly on the legitimate use of force. Even at the municipal level, mayors and other city leaders often make violence reduction a central tenet of their campaign platforms and are judged by voters according to their ability to address violence effectively and fairly.

As we advance towards 2020, many are questioning whether our international, national, and city governing structures are up to the task. If we agree that this scale of violence is not acceptable, the very good news is that we have the tools to make a change.

More than ever before, the world possesses the knowledge, tools, institutional structures, legal instruments, and data-collection capacity to achieve the SDG16 target of reducing significantly "all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere."

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which encompasses the SDGs, provides a basis for cooperation among countries from all regions and income groups. By promising to "reach the furthest behind first," it encourages targeted efforts to support countries and communities whose path to sustainable development is currently blocked by violence, insecurity, and injustice.

Success will require multi-sectoral, evidence-based approaches to violence prevention, which use data to determine the scope of the problem, identify risk and protective factors, guide implementation, and enable the monitoring of impact and cost-effectiveness. Fortunately, frameworks for such action already exist. For example, the Global Status Report on Violence Prevention identifies six "best buy" strategies for preventing interpersonal violence. UN Women, in cooperation with several other international organizations, has proposed a framework for action to reduce violence against women. A similar group identified seven strategies for ending violence against children.

Researchers have also described evidence-based interventions for reducing violence in urban areas, including "proactive engagement with the police and other civic partners to enhance legitimacy and build social cohesion." In some cases, such measures caused homicides to drop by over 50%.

This growing body of research into how best to tackle violence is shaping comprehensive strategies at sub-national, national, and regional levels that respond to the needs of countries and regions with different burdens of violence. These strategies blend targeted actions to reduce the worst forms of violence in the short term with longer-term efforts to build more peaceful societies. To be effective, they must account for the interconnected nature of threats; indeed, the best-designed solutions prevent multiple types of violence.

Violence is a preventable epidemic. If we bring to bear our collective knowledge about reducing violence and conflict in the places that need it most, we can halve global violence in the next ten years.

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