

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



August 13, 2018

### International Youth Day 2018

Today, i.e. August 12th is being celebrated as International Youth Day around the world. Basically, the day was endorsed by United Nations General Assembly on 17 December 1999, by accepting the recommendation made by the World Conference of Ministers Responsible for Youth (Lisbon, 8-12 August 1998) that 12th August be declared 'International Youth Day'.

Different countries are being a part of the day in their own ways and they discuss and highlight the issues of the youngsters and even appreciate their achievements. This year's theme for the day is "Safe Spaces for Youth". The theme is to highlight the fact that youth need safe spaces where they can come together, engage in activities related to their diverse needs and interests, participate in decision making processes and freely express themselves. While there are many types of spaces, safe spaces ensure the dignity and safety of youth. Safe spaces such as civic spaces enable youth to engage in governance issues; public spaces afford youth the opportunity to participate in sports and other leisure activities in the community; digital spaces help youth interact virtually across borders with everyone; and well planned physical spaces can help accommodate the needs of diverse youth especially those vulnerable to marginalization or violence.

Young people form one of the most important strata of the society. The condition of the young people within a country basically predicts the future of the nation. If youngsters within a society are properly educated, have required skills and are properly compensated within the social and economic lives, the prosperous future of the society can be guaranteed.

Though it is said that youngsters have the capacity to change the destiny of a nation for the better, often it is forgotten that they require proper care and nourishment before they are able to do so. A nation, if interested in cashing maximum from the potentials of its youth, must as a first step strive to take care of its youth. It has to make sure that it makes all the arrangements so that the potentials of the youth are used for positive purposes, like the development of country as a whole; otherwise, the same potentials can be used for the negative purposes and can, therefore, have negative consequences on the development of the nation.

Investing and investing appropriately on youth is like planting a tree. If the tree is properly watered and is taken care of, it would definitely produce tasty and juicy fruits but if it is left without enough attention, it would lose its life before it becomes a tree. Therefore, the nations require investing appropriately on their youth and their economic planning must have a large share for them. Ultimately, they would give back thousand times more than what is invested on them. The example of the youth in the developed countries can easily approve the claim. The youth in such countries are mostly involved in the betterment of their nations as they are given their basic rights and attention they deserve. For the underdeveloped and the developing countries the youth are a hope - a hope for a developed future. They are basically an opportunity that has to be availed. Such countries need to realize that the only way they can bring about prosperity and development is through the most energetic stratum of the society.

Afghanistan is also one of the countries that can benefit from its youth to a great extent as its 60 percent population is below the age of 25. Many of them have the tendency to bring about positive changes in the society as they seem tired of instability and war. However, there are many others who have been victimized by the ongoing conflicts and instability and do not see any hope to come out of the quagmire. However, Afghanistan has an opportunity to use such a large number of human resource for a better tomorrow.

Without the contribution of the youth in Afghanistan it would be very difficult to see a healthy transition towards a democratic country and better economy as youth can have the real understanding for such a system and can work for it, while the old generation did not have such an opportunity as they were going through civil wars and chaotic instability.

However, without a comprehensive strategy it would be really difficult for Afghanistan to make any achievement regarding the development and the improvement of the youth and their roles within the society. Promises alone and separated actions would not bear any fruit and the youth would remain in the situation that is not favorable for their growth and capacity enhancement.

Afghanistan has to prepare itself for providing job opportunities to this large number of people, which is the only way to make them play positive role. Every year a large number of youngsters complete their education and strive to find employment so that they are able to earn a livelihood and at the same time support their families and country. They should be provided opportunities so that they are able to play a positive role in the society instead of becoming a burden or part of problem.



## What Can Afghan Government and Taliban Learn from Columbia's Peace Deal with FARC?

The experience of Colombia's peace with FARC has always been the subject of Western experts working on the war in Afghanistan due to the characteristics of Afghanistan's war akin to Columbia's war.

By Hamidullah Bamik

It is argued that the insurgent movement with a political rivalry to mobilize dissenters to enter the community is a substitute order that rebels attempt to fundamentally change the infrastructure of society. The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Columbia (FARC) and the Afghan Taliban insurgents can be put into such socio-political context.

The FARC, with the full name of Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (in Spanish was formed in the 1960s as the armed wing of the Communist Party of Colombia. The FARC officially separated from the Communist Party of Colombia in 1980 but continued its guerrilla war against the Colombian government. The war between FARC and the Government of the Republic of Columbia lasted 55 years and left dead approximately 250,000 people.

Columbia's Peace Process  
The Government of the Republic of Colombia has made three major and important attempts to build peace in the last thirty years, especially in the mid-1980s and late 1990s, but all failed. But peace efforts that began in Havana, the capital of Cuba in 2012, came to fruition five years later. Ultimately, these efforts culminated into the signing of a peace agreement between the Colombian government and FARC on November 24, 2016.

The Columbia's peace agreement with FARC was rejected by less than one percent in a referendum on October 2, 2016. The results of the referendum showed that 50.2 percent of voters opposed the agreement. But later, many Colombians who were anti-FARC rebels became their supporters. To strengthen further the peace and stability in Columbia, the Colombian government allocated 10 seats to FARC in 2018 and 2022 in the Columbia's Congress elections.

The success of the peace talks between the Government of the Republic of Columbia and FARC is derived from their mutual agreement on key issues. First, they reached a reciprocal agreement on development of rural areas, especially those areas that were damaged more than other areas during the conflict. Second, they talked about the elimination of drugs and reducing high poverty rates in the peace process and agreed mutually. Third, the Government of the Republic of Columbia concurred with political participation of FARC members in the political process. Hence, they could successfully end their chronic conflicts that took many Colombians' lives.

Afghanistan's Peace Process  
In November 2001, the Taliban regime was overthrown entirely by the United Nation forces led by the US. Subsequently, the Afghan government and the international community stepped up their efforts to support various plans to undermine the expansion of insurgents and ultimately bring them to the peace process. These efforts include programs such as Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR 2003-2006), United Nation supported Afghanistan New Beginning Programs (ANBP) and its successor the Disbandment of Illegal Armed Groups (DIAG 2005).

When the US President Barack Hussein Obama put forward the idea of looking for moderate elements among the insurgent groups in March 2009, the official peace talks in Afghanistan became more important. Unfortunately, all the above peace efforts have not been effective in stabilizing Afghanistan and failed to pursue a meaningful engagement of the involved countries in Afghanistan's war in the peace process.

Recently, the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan declared two truces with the Taliban to encourage them to join the peace process. But unluckily, the Taliban groups not only did not welcome the Afghan government's ceasefire, except the first truce but also responded with atrocity and intensifying their insurgency. Political experts are inclined to argue that the experiences of the Colombian government's peace deal with FARC insurgents can aid Afghanistan in reaching a permanent peace deal with the Taliban groups.

The Similarities of Afghanistan's and Columbia's War

According to Foreign Policy, the current Afghan war is reminiscent of the Drug War in Colombia and requires a Colombian plan for its termination. The insurgency in Afghanistan is nurtured by an ideological war that is being conducted to bring Afghans under the banner of religion. Conversely, in Colombia, FARC fought with the central government for lucrative sources of money and ways to smuggle drugs. However, it is argued that despite having ideological roots, narcotics is the main financial source of Afghanistan's insurgent groups.

In 2016, the Global Witness reported that the warlords and Taliban's earnings from a small Badakhshan region are equal to the total income of the Afghan government's natural resources sector. The report adds that in 2014, armed groups from two mining areas of Deodarra in Kuran and Munjan districts in Badakhshan province earned about \$20 million. It echoes that the ongoing war between the Taliban and the Afghan government is also a war on controlling natural sources like the war between FARC and the Colombian government. Thus, the experiences of the Government of the Republic of Columbia in its peace talks with FARC can help the Afghan government in its peace talks with the Taliban. The Afghan Taliban groups like the FARC in Columbia, are dwindling in Afghanistan. They still have their local supporters in Afghanistan. Theo Farrell, the professor and executive dean of law, humanities, and the arts at the University of Wollongong, Australia argues that the availability of social resources and the elements that drive and enable military adaptation were the main reasons of Taliban's successful resurgence after 2001. It projects that still, Taliban groups have a large number of adherents among the Afghan communities. Undoubtedly, they will support the Taliban if the group joins in peace talks with the Afghan government and forms its political faction as did the FARC in Columbia.

The FARC opened negotiations with the Colombian government after decades of armed conflicts. Many of FARC insurgents like the Taliban groups did not believe in the usefulness of the talks with the Colombian government at the beginning. But they tested their trust and succeeded in this regard. Likewise, the best option for the Afghan Taliban to put into practice their demands is joining the negotiating table with the Afghan government.

Columbia's Peace Process Takeaways for Afghanistan's Peace Process  
Perhaps the most important innovation to come out of Columbia's peace process has been the inclusion of victims. Delegations of victims from both sides of the conflict were invited to come to Havana to recount their experiences. In other words, the Colombian peace process was the first in the world that included a formal role for victims of the conflict - they got to interact directly with the negotiators. The inclusion of victims gave the Colombian government's peace process its best chance of success. Likewise, Afghanistan's government can emulate the similar way for succeeding in the peace process with the Taliban. The Afghan government should invite the representatives of the victims of war to negotiating table so that they can share their stories and gain confidence that their voices are heard in the peace process.

Last but not the least, the need for a comprehensive and lasting peace in Afghanistan requires creating a national and international consensus on the peace process with the Taliban. This is what Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos did about peace with the FARC rebels. Initially, a national consensus regarding peace deal was created inside Columbia. Then the Colombian government reached an international consensus for peace with the neighboring countries, the regional and international powers. Similarly, the Afghan government should reach a unanimous agreement on peace talks with the Taliban inside Afghanistan, then with Afghanistan's neighboring countries, regional and international powers. Doing so, the Afghan government might be able to close the war and insurgency chapter of Afghanistan's modern history.

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### Taliban Fighters Storm Ghazni Province

By Mohammad Zahir Akbari

Last Friday night, Taliban fighters attacked from four side Ghazni city which is one of the most strategic location in Afghanistan. They intensely attacked, burnt, bombed and destroyed several police checkpoints, bridges and seized control of different parts of the city. According to Tolo news, the clashes between security forces and Taliban started at around 2.00 AM, and have been continuing up to now (Saturday afternoon). There is no accurate report about total consequences of war in Ghazni as journalists cannot enter the city; as much as reflected in the media some public buildings and the telephone network have destroyed, water and electricity have been cut off while the war still continued in parts of the city. The Afghan Journalists Safety Community said on Friday that Taliban have burnt the Ghazni branch of state-run media, RTA, and killed one of its technical staff, Mohammad Dawood Jan.

"The Taliban have been dropping missiles near residential, public and commercial areas. There has not been a single minute of silence for the first eight hours," said a senior government official in Ghazni on Friday. Local residents said Taliban fighters were walking openly in the streets in parts of the city. Ghazni police chief General Farid Ahmad Mashal said the Taliban seized several parts of the city, which has been under threat for months.

It seems that both sides have suffered heavy casualties in the ongoing heavy war but as Najib Danish, MOI spokesman said on Saturday afternoon that only 26 security forces were killed and wounded. While officials claimed that around 150 attackers had been killed or wounded from the insurgent group. Several dead bodies of Taliban militants remained on the street after the government pushed back the Taliban from some parts of the city, the police chief said.

He said the bodies of 39 Taliban militants were recovered beneath a bridge in the southern edge of the city. Air strikes called in to quash the offensive also killed dozens of Taliban, he said. Defense Ministry spokesman Mohammad Radmanish said the army helped the police and the city was under control of government forces.

On the other hand, Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid issued a statement on Friday saying multiple attacks were launched overnight in Ghazni. As many as 140 Afghan soldiers and police had been killed and a large quantity of weapons and equipment had been seized, he said.

He said only three Taliban had been killed and eight wounded. Inside Ghazni city, residents were staying indoors making independent verification of the different claims impossible. While, O'Donnell said initial reports indicated minimal casualties among security forces. "This is another failed Taliban attempt to seize terrain, which will result in another eye-catching but strategically inconsequential headline," he said.

The Taliban also claimed that they had downed the "enemy" helicopter in

Ghazni but Radmanish said it was not immediately clear if the helicopter had been hit or crash landed due to other reasons. They (Taliban) targeted the vehicles.

Landmines were planted, bridges were destroyed, they also opened fire on us. Many drivers had been hit," said Abdullah, a driver. "We stranded for two hours in Sayed Abad district. Clashes were ongoing in Chashm-e-Salar, so we returned," said Mohammad Zia, a driver. Finally, they blocked Kabul-Kandahar Highway that connects Afghanistan's capital Kabul to the southern city of Kandahar after the group launched an overnight attack on Ghazni City.

These attack came amid growing hopes of talks to end 17 years of war in Afghanistan and less than two weeks before the Eid al-Adha festival, when the government in Kabul had been considering offering a ceasefire. In June, a three-day truce over the Eid al-Fitr holiday brought unprecedented scenes of unarmed Taliban fighters mingling with security forces in Kabul and other cities, offering a glimpse of peace and fueling hopes of negotiations to end the war.

This is sensitive time as Taliban are intensifying a series of operations during preliminary peace discussions with U.S. officials and on the eve of election to show their ability to inflict severe damage on Afghan forces. Just last week, an attack on an army post in Uruzgan, a province bordering Ghazni, killed dozens of soldiers, adding to what one U.S. report called the "shockingly high" casualties taken ever since NATO ended its main combat mission in 2014.

By and large, the Ghani province is still under serious threats; Mohammad Ali Alizada, a member of parliament representing Ghazni people warned, "if we do not take urgent action against fragile condition a vast tragedy may take place in the city." He also blamed the government for inability and inattention to Ghazni province while threats were frequently reminded to the government officials. He stressed that large number of insurgents newly entered in the city and occupied civilian houses, from where they keeping up fire on security forces.

However, the President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani hold an urgent high level meeting of the Commander-in-Chief meeting after a coordinated the attack. The Office of the President, ARG Palace, in a statement said the high level meeting of the Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces was organized and chaired by President Ghani in the Ministry of Defense.

The statement further added that the meeting was attended by leadership of the national defense and security institutions and the security situation of Ghazni, Farah, and Zabul provinces were reviewed. So, it is hoped to take serious action against critical condition of Ghazni province as soon as possible. Mohammad Zahir Akbari is the permanent writer of the Daily Outlook Afghanistan. He can be reached at mohammadzahirakbari@gmail.com

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