

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



August 14, 2018

Paradoxes of Negotiations: Golden Lessons for Afghanistan

Negotiations is part of any conflict resolution; no party may deny negotiations, but there may be different approaches to negotiations by the warring parties based on their power in terms of the power balance between the parties. Amazingly, according to the conflict studies, since the early 1910s the majority of armed conflicts around the world have been ended through dialogue, negotiation and compromise. This trend, in terms of conflict resolution is in stark contrast to the dominance of military victories as conflict resolvers before that time. According to the military tradition before that, the military strategists held that, any warring party who enjoyed more power would win the war. While this change in conflict resolution may indeed be welcomed, negotiation is not clear-cut, or in indeed as favorable, a means of terminating conflict as it may look. As a matter of fact, dialogue between warring parties often does not directly bring peace closer, and negotiated settlements gave verified less stable and less long-lasting than military triumphs. In this article I will assess some of the paradoxes of negotiation and by doing so it will contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the efficacy of this measure as an approach to counterterrorism and counterinsurgency in Afghanistan.

Negotiations Can Spur Violent Motives

A government may choose to negotiate with terrorist groups in order to find a solution to end a conflict, to postpone an imminent defeat, or to force a way out of what I. William Zartman terms it "mutually hurting stalemate". It is self explanatory, the majority of struggles to counterterrorism aim to put the state and its security forces in a stronger position using the opportunities of the negotiation or even a temporary ceasefire. Further, negotiations with terrorist groups damage the legitimacy of the governments at the regional and international level. The violent attack of the Taliban on Ghazni city is a clear example of the paradox of negotiation with the terrorist groups. Taliban and their regional and beyond regional supports have assessed the situation from different angles. The government of Afghanistan is pushing peace talks using all national, regional and international apparatuses. Some political analysts argue that, as the United States has asked the Afghan government to pull back the ANSF from the remote areas and the direct talks of the United States with Taliban just has emboldened the group to increase its operations in different parts of Afghanistan and especially in Ghazni province.

Peace Process Can Spawn more violence

As pointed out about the Taliban, insurgencies are rarely monolithic in nature. In other words, members of terrorist groups have opposing perspectives on the aims that they pursue to achieve, the ideal ways of doing so, and the extent to which concessions can be made without betraying the final goals. Therefore, negotiations are virtually never seen as a positive development by all subgroups of the insurgent or terrorist organizations. This issue applies to the Afghan Taliban as well. There have been frequent reports on internal division between the Taliban leaders on whether to join to the peace talks with or not. This has led to the formation of splinter subgroups of the Taliban who view talks as a betrayal of principles of their movement.

Negotiated settlements are of limited durability

According to Adurey Cronin, the International security analyst, several general insights into the strategic effectiveness of negotiations can be deduced on the basis of historical experience. First, she finds that there is a direct correlation between the duration of a conflict and the likelihood of dialogue being opened, though negotiations only occur in roughly 20 percent of armed conflicts. Second, negotiations seldom lead to clear cut and uncontested results, instead taking the form of peace processes that can drag on for years. Third, even when negotiations are used as a method of conflict resolution, violent methods are usually pursued parallel to dialogue.

Negotiations are a means of reaching to an agreement to put an end to conflicts in a way that both parties have gains and a sense of victory. In the current world, negotiations are unavoidable and shape much of our day to day interactions with the more encompassing socio-political events that affect our lives. In terms of negotiations with the insurgent groups, what counts is that, the Afghan government and its international allies should not pursue the peace talks in a way that the Taliban think the Afghan government and its international allies has no other option but the talks. Because this approach not only does not end to peace but encourages the terrorist groups to intensify their attacks and add new demands in the conditions they set for such talks.

Taliban Attack On Ghazni City Debunks Ongoing Peace Process

By Mohammed Gul Sahibzada

Thousands of Taliban fighters attacked Ghazni city on 10 August causing heavy casualties on civilians, including children, women and men and destroying most of Government office buildings and vehicles and city infrastructure. This happened at a time when Afghan Government and its international allies - mainly the United States of America - have been bragging about progress in peace talks with insurgents. Even talks of renewed, short-term ceasefire were being quoted in the media during upcoming three days Eid festivities.

News about peace negotiations with Taliban insurgents has been frequent with optimism for permanent peace in round-table talks by so called experts on numerous TV channels. But what has not been talked about in this entire episode was the presence of a framework, strategy or comprehensive plan within which the Government would conduct so called peace negotiations.

It is now open secret that Afghan Government has no solid platform and strategy to engage with Taliban insurgents about permanent peace. Its response is spasmodic, reactive and based on shallow foundations. People of Afghanistan now understand that whatever so called peace negotiations took place, had been initiated and undertaken by countries which have bigger stakes in the process, and main instigators for their attempts to engage in peace talks with Taliban have been urges and policy priorities of their home countries' Governments. Factors that had temporarily prompted main players - including Pakistan - to respond to demands for peace, have devastating effects of punitive measures taken by the US Government against that country under a new South East Asia policy shift. This entire process has not only un-budged Taliban insurgents from their initial position, they were emboldened by the haste exhibited by the US and Afghan Government to broker a peace deal.

Taliban were granted the privilege to exclude Afghan Government from so called initial peace negotiations, thus they entered in direct talks with senior US diplomats.

As if the present hotchpotch was not enough, Uzbekistan has jumped into the foray and granted Taliban insurgents office or meeting venue in that country. One or two rounds of talks have been conducted in Uzbekistan between Taliban insurgents and Uzbekistan Government. It is clear that the motive behind Uzbekistan Government to engage in talks with Taliban is in their interest to use Taliban fighters to catch or destroy Uzbek fighters associated with Dae'sh or Islamic State and Al Qaeda operating inside Afghanistan.

This phenomenon has given a kind of political legitimacy to Taliban in the region, which would automatically render them a force to reckon with, and will give them more leverage when it comes to negotiation of any kind of deals with them. It seems Taliban insurgents are now seen as a unified force by neighboring countries and regional players who compete to gain more control and establish good relations with them.

Pakistan has emerged as the winner throughout the current debacle. They have successfully took advantage of the weaknesses of Afghan Government and managed to render Taliban an organized force, and encouraged neighboring countries including Iran and Uzbekistan, and regional powers such

as Russia and China, to engage with Taliban. Pakistan has cleverly maneuvered and slipped international attention away from her as if it isn't only Pakistan to support Taliban, others do as well!

Weaknesses of Afghan Government include lack of establishing Government writ in areas prone to insurgents' attack, absence of reliable intelligence network in Ghazni and adjacent provinces to feed timely information to military and police forces to nip any insurgent activities at the bud. Before this fateful attack by Taliban on Ghazni city, the insurgents had disseminated public notices to all passenger vehicles travelling between Kabul, Ghazni, Kandahar and Helmand provinces 'not to travel' twenty four hours ahead of their military operations. In addition, failing to notice movement of large number of fighters - more than two thousand five hundred - from adjacent provinces towards Ghazni is another failure on the part of Afghan intelligence and military prowess. This is huge failure when it comes to military standards on the part of Afghan Government. Waiting until attack takes place and then clearing things up, has always taken huge toll in term of human lives and resources in the past.

It is a shame that this area has not been corrected despite recurrent nature of similar methods used by insurgent fighters. Afghan military and police force need to uplift their operational and logistical response tactics, and establish strong and unshakable coordination and communication networks among them. Security strategy has to be re-oriented to focus more on how to prevent, delay and abort the attacks before they occur.

Present strategy is reactive where our security forces react to attacks to defend themselves and then counter attack. Re-orientation will change the whole mindset of the security system and then more brainstorming will take place on information gathering, analysis, planning, police skills and police tactics. Military and police tactics are different and both have to supplement each other. At a time when NATO Resolute Support and international partners are engaged in training and equipping Afghan army and police force, failure at this magnitude and scale is incomprehensible.

It is natural that a period of substantial calm between warring parties precedes any kinds of peace, truce or ceasefire. From the look of it, and the way Afghan Government is conducting peace negotiation with Taliban, brokerage of any types of truce, ceasefire and peace is a far cry.

Afghan Government and its international supporters are wide of the mark to count on the ongoing so called peace negotiation with Taliban. This group is mysteriously controlled by outside hands - especially our well known neighboring countries - which have created, recognized, and continue to support Taliban insurgents during last more than two decades now.

Afghan Government and its international allies should cut these mysterious hands off, and get genuine Taliban leaders to talk to them. Also, international community, Afghanistan's friends, regional powers - including India - should rally around the people and Government of Afghanistan at this critical juncture and challenging times so that this spat of blood sheds and destruction is put a full stop to, once and for all. Peace is the wish of all Afghans, and any attempts by spoilers, to exploit the process to reach a durable and long lasting peace, should be eliminated.

Mohammed Gul Sahibzada is the permanent writer of the Daily Outlook Afghanistan. He can be reached at mohammed.g.sahibzada@gmail.com

Yemen war challenges Saudi moral authority

By James M. Dorsey

Saudi conduct of its ill-fated war in Yemen coupled with Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's alignment with the Trump administration and Israel, and his often coercive approach to diplomatic relations, has opened the door to challenges of the kingdom's moral leadership of the Sunni Muslim world, a legitimizing pillar of the ruling Al Saud family's grip on power.

The cracks in Saudi legitimacy are being fuelled by the escalating humanitarian crisis in Yemen, described by the United Nations and aid organizations as the world's worst since World War Two; shocking civilian deaths as the result of attacks by the Saudi-led coalition; electoral successes by populist leaders in countries like Malaysia, Turkey and Pakistan; and the kingdom's inability to impose its will on countries like Qatar, Jordan, Lebanon, Kuwait and Oman.

An attack this week on a bus in the heartland of Iranian-backed Houthis rebels that killed at least 43 people, including 29 children returning from a summer camp, dealt a significant body blow to Saudi moral authority.

The coalition said it would investigate the attack that has sparked international outrage.

The attack was but the latest of multiple incidents in which weddings, funerals and hospitals have been hit by coalition forces in a war that has gone badly wrong and demonstrates Saudi military ineptitude despite the fact that the kingdom's armed forces operate some of the world's most sophisticated weaponry, according to military sources.

Mr. Trump reversed a decision by his predecessor, Barack Obama, to halt the sale of air-dropped and precision-guided munitions until it had better trained Saudi forces in their targeting and use of the weapons. An Obama official said at the time that there were "systemic, endemic" problems in Saudi targeting.

"Malaysia and other Muslim nations can no longer look up to the Saudis like we used to. They can no longer command our respect and provide leadership. The Saudis have abandoned the Palestinians, just like the Egyptians. The Saudis have moved much closer to Israel who are suppressing and killing the Palestinians," said Raja Kamarul Bahrin Shah Raja Ahmad, a member of Malaysia's upper house of parliament and the head of the ruling Pakatan Harapan (Alliance of Hope) coalition in the Malaysian state of Terengganu. "Perhaps Malaysia under the leadership of Dr Mahathir Mohamad should take the lead again in speaking up for the oppressed Muslims of the world. It is about time Malaysia again show the leadership that was once so much admired and respected worldwide," Mr. Bahrin added.

Malaysia has sought to distance itself from Saudi Arabia since the return to power in May of Mr. Mahathir, whose past Islamist rhetoric and stark anti-Israeli and anti-Jewish statements propelled him to prominence in the Islamic world.

Malaysia has in recent weeks withdrawn troops from the 41-nation, Saudi-sponsored Islamic Military Counter Terrorism Coalition (IMCTC) and closed the Saudi-backed King Salman Centre for International Peace (KSCIP) in Kuala Lumpur. Mr. Mahathir's defense minister, Mohamad Sabu, long before taking office this year, was already highly critical of Saudi Arabia.

In anticipation of investigations into allegations of corruption against former prime minister Najib Razak and his recent indictment, Seri Mohd Shukri Abdullah, Mr. Mahathir's newly appointed anti-corruption czar, noted barely a week after the May election that "we have had difficulties dealing with Arab countries (such as) Qatar, Saudi Arabia, (and) the UAE."

Speaking to Al Jazeera last month, Mr. Mahathir said that "we are disappointed that Saudi Arabia has not denied that the money was given by Saudi," referring to \$681 million in Saudi funds that were allegedly gifted to Mr. Razak.

Malaysia is but the latest Sunni Muslim nation to either challenge Saudi Arabia or at least refuse to kowtow to the kingdom's foreign policy as it relates to

its bitter rivalry with Iran; Prince Mohammed's tacit backing of US President Donald J. Trump's staunch support of Israel and pressure on Palestinians; its 14-month old economic and diplomatic boycott of Qatar in cooperation with the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Qatar; and the war in Yemen.

Like Mr. Mahathir in the past, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, despite his evolving autocracy, has emerged as an Islamist populist counter pole, his credibility enhanced by his escalating disputes with the United States, his often emotional support for the Palestinians, and opposition to moves by Mr. Trump like his recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. Mr. Erdogan's Turkey this week became the latest target of Mr. Trump's wielding of trade and economic sanctions as a means of bullying countries into submitting to his demands. Mr. Trump doubled metals tariffs on Turkey after earlier sanctioning two senior Turkish ministers in an effort to force Mr. Erdogan to release American evangelist Andrew Brunson.

Mr. Brunson has been detained in Turkey for the past two years on charges of having been involved in the failed 2016 military coup against Mr. Erdogan and seeking to convert Turkish Kurds to Christianity.

Mr. Erdogan has in recent years consistently thought to thwart Saudi policy in the region by positioning himself as the leader of a Muslim world opposed to Mr. Trump's Israel-Palestine approach and a de facto Arab alliance with Israel, maintaining close ties to Iran and defying US sanctions against the Islamic republic, supporting Qatar, and expanding Turkish influence in the Horn of Africa in competition with the UAE, Saudi Arabia's closest regional ally.

Mr. Erdogan has portrayed Prince Mohammed's vow to return Saudi Arabia to an unidentified form of 'moderate Islam' as adopting a Western concept. "Islam cannot be either 'moderate' or 'not moderate.' Islam can only be one thing. Recently the concept of 'moderate Islam' has received attention. But the patent of this concept originated in the West. Perhaps, the person voicing this concept thinks it belongs to him. No, it does not belong to you. They are now trying to pump up this idea again. What they really want to do is weaken Islam ... We don't want people to learn about religion from foreign facts," Mr. Erdogan said.

Echoing former US president George W. Bush's assertion of an axis of evil, Prince Mohammed charged in March that Turkey was part of a triangle of evil that included Iran and Islamist groups. The crown prince accused Turkey of trying to reinstate the Islamic Caliphate, abolished nearly a century ago when the Ottoman empire collapsed.

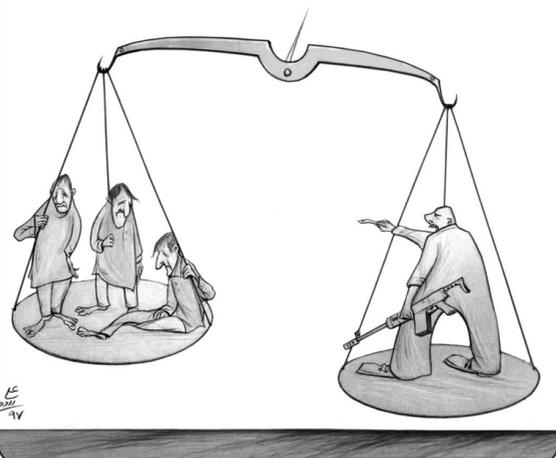
Similarly, Pakistan's prime minister-in-waiting appeared to be charting his own course by saying that he wants to improve relations with Iran and mediate an end to the debilitating Saudi-Iranian rivalry despite the fact that the kingdom has so far ruled out a negotiated resolution and backs US efforts to isolate the Islamic republic.

In a bow to Saudi Arabia, Jordan has backed the kingdom in its row with Canada over criticism of Riyadh's human rights record and refrained from appointing a new ambassador to Iran, but has stood its ground in supporting Palestinian rejection of US peace efforts.

Similarly, Lebanese prime minister Saad Hariri has reversed his resignation initially announced in Riyadh last year under alleged duress while Oman and Kuwait, alarmed by the Saudi-UAE campaign against Qatar, have sought to chart a middle course that keeps them out of the firing line of Riyadh and Abu Dhabi.

For the time being, Saudi Arabia is likely to successfully fend off challenges to its leadership of the Muslim world.

However, responding viscerally to criticism like in the case of non-Muslim Canada or, more importantly, two years ago to Muslim leaders who excluded Wahhabism and Salafism, the religious worldview that underpins the Al Sauds' rule, from their definition of Ahl al-Sunnah wal-Jamaah or the Sunni Dr. James M. Dorsey is a senior fellow at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, co-director of the University of Würzburg's Institute for Fan Culture, and co-host of the New Books in Middle Eastern Studies podcast.



Chairman / Editor-in-Chief: Moh. Reza Huwaida

Editor: Moh. Sakhi Rezaei

Email: outlookafghanistan@gmail.com

Phone: 0093 (799) 005019/777-005019

www.outlookafghanistan.net

The views and opinions expressed in the articles are those of the authors and do not reflect the views or opinions of the Daily Outlook Afghanistan.