

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



August 28, 2018

## Ifs and Buts over Russia's peace Talks on Afghanistan

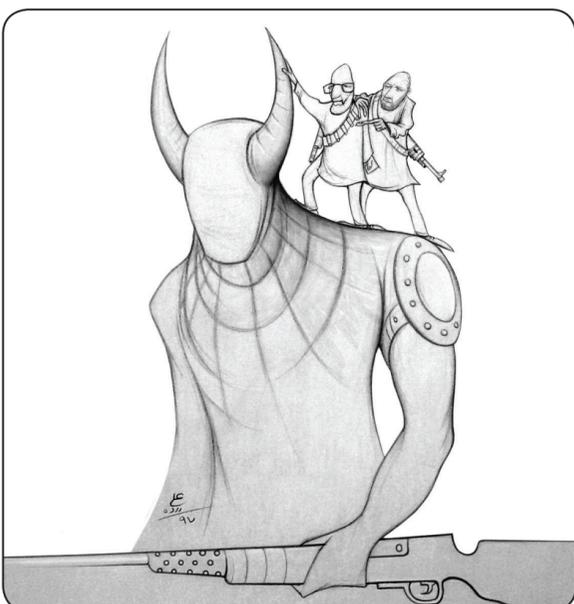
Last week, Moscow called for the second phase meeting of 12 nations and Taliban to push forward the process of national reconciliation for 17-year war. The twelve nations were consist of US, Afghanistan, Russia, Pakistan, China, Iran, India, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. According to reports from the ToloNews, Taliban has already confirmed to attend the meeting in Moscow but both Kabul and Washington have refused to participate in the meetings. On the other hand, Russian Foreign Ministry said that the conference scheduled for September 4 will take place, even if the Kabul representatives do not attend. The first meeting of the Moscow Format was held on April 14 last year, with the participation of representatives of Ashraf Ghani's executive, but without promising results. Refusing to participate in the meeting, officials from ministry of foreign affairs said, "any peace process must be carried out under the leadership of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan." They added, these initiatives will not work and nothing will be achieved until the nation considered and accepted as the main actor. "The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan cannot attend such a meeting when the Taliban do not have a commitment for peace negotiations," Afghan Deputy Foreign Minister Nasir Andisha said in a statement Friday. He said the Afghan insurgents have "disrespected internationally sanctioned principles and rejected the message of peace and direct negotiations" with Kabul. Thus, the State Department spokesman confirmed that the United States would not take part in the meeting scheduled for September 4, saying the talks were "unlikely to yield any progress toward" a peace. The Taliban spokesman, Zabihullah Mujahid, said Thursday that a Taliban delegation would attend the Moscow meeting and discuss the group's position. "We do not know why Kabul and American are not taking part," he said. For the Taliban, it might seem reasonable to engage with a variety of regional governments in an effort to resolve the Afghan conflict, since numerous efforts to begin domestic peace negotiations have failed in recent years. "Kabul and U.S. refusal to attend the Moscow meeting has no importance to us. We will attend," Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid told The Associated Press. The Taliban has always insisted that they want to negotiate with the United States, while Washington has maintained that only Afghans can be involved. Lately, though, U.S. officials have indicated they would be willing to participate in such talks. So, it seems that the Taliban would be in dilemma between two competing concerns. The June cease-fire made clear a nationwide yearning for peace and exposed insurgent fighters to fellow Muslim civilians who begged them to end the war. That apparently disturbed hard-line Taliban leaders and commanders, who reportedly worry that their troops could lose the will to fight.

Russia's Foreign Ministry has criticized Washington's refusal to send delegates to Moscow-hosted peace talks on Afghanistan after Interfax quoted a U.S. State Department spokesperson as saying the United States would not take part in the September 4 meeting. A statement from the Russian ministry on August 22 said Washington's "refusal to attend the Moscow meeting on Afghanistan show that Washington has no interest in launching a peace process in Afghanistan." "We have learned with regret from the United States Department of State's statement that the Americans will not take part in the Moscow meeting," the ministry said. With regret from the United States Department of State's statement that the Americans will not take part in the Moscow meeting, the ministry said. "Admittedly, this step does not cause great surprise."

"The U.S. has tried to bring Afghanistan to peace on its own, and it didn't work either," Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova told reporters Thursday in Moscow. "Therefore the international community now has to take care of this matter collectively, because the U.S. actions [are not] improving stability in the region in this situation." Russian officials also expressed disappointment that the Taliban did not accept Ghani's offer of a second truce after a successful three-day cease-fire in June that brought Taliban fighters into peaceful contact with Afghan civilians and security forces. The insurgents did offer to release several hundred prisoners but never responded directly to Ghani's proposal of a three-month truce.

On the other hand, Russia was recurrently accused for providing support to the Taliban as a counterweight to the Islamic State, and Afghan officials have voiced concern that the Moscow conference would serve to further cement the Kremlin's ties with the Taliban rather than prodding the insurgents to settle the Afghan conflict. Russian officials have always denied having any motives or role in abetting the Taliban. Recently Mohammad Hanif Atmar, the national security adviser, reportedly told Alexander Mantytski, Russia's ambassador, that Kabul appreciated Moscow's support for the peace process and called upon it "to put pressure on the Taliban to begin negotiations with the Afghan government", the Afghan official's office said earlier. Mantytski said Moscow was ready to help Afghanistan make "the peace process a success", Atmar's office said but did not clarify how it could achieve that.

The Russian Federation and US are undoubtedly powerful states and influential in the Afghan political equations. They can play a positive role in the peace process in Afghanistan and should avoid any gambling reactions which may lead to creating enemies for the country. We have more foes than friends at the regional and international level, and this is the government's job to maintain its friends and make more ones to overcome the problems made by the rivals. Russia is no more the Soviet Union that occupied Afghanistan and not probable to remain neutral about issues happening in its neighboring. So, if we fail to balance our relationships between the rival powers, we may experience further unpleasant consequences.



## Uncertainty & Entrenched Insurgency Questions Ability of Government to Carry Out Parliamentary Elections On Time

By Mohammed Gul Sahibzada

An air of uncertainty is prevailing across the country due to checkered peace process between Government and Taliban and for that matter, hasty offer by Government to achieve ceasefire with insurgents without first thoroughly analyzing prior events and setting up the modalities for such a deal; ongoing tussles between Government and political parties concerning demands to reform electoral process, weak response by Government to so called powerful, disqualified parliamentary candidates, who continue to disrupt normal functioning of IEC and IECC offices in most of the provinces and lack of coordination and unity of purpose inside Government security apparatus. In the face of this gloomy picture, people of Afghanistan have started to question the ability of Government to organize and undertake the most important national event – general parliamentary elections in October 2018.

Relative calm and peace is critically important for carrying out elections across the country. Government continues to fail on pledges and promises that it made to provide security and safety for its subjects. At this point in time when Taliban insurgents have become way more emboldened, organized and spread almost across the country with their shadow government in rural areas, and the group's subsequent recognition at regional and international levels, it seems hard to believe Government will be able to provide leveled playing fields for the people of Afghanistan to go to ballot boxes and cast their vote to elect their preferred candidates for Parliament, without substantial agreements and ceasefire deals with Taliban insurgents. Taliban have gained the ability to disrupt normal life anywhere in Afghanistan – including the heart of capital Kabul – as the rockets / missiles fired on Presidential Palace during first day of Eid holiday is a case in point. Free and fair elections is the only democratic mechanism to transfer power to real representatives of the people, but in the event elections are tampered with by factors such as insufficient security, threats, suppression and absence of law and order, elections simply become a vehicle for powerful, influential armed groups to manipulate this important pillar of democracy to suit their vested interests and fraudulently push their own candidates to the threshold of power. Cases of fraud and manipulations were rampant in previous elections, and the reason was disruption of electoral process by Taliban insurgents. Keeping in view the time left for the day to cast vote, it is clear that Government has no plan to carry out military operations in provinces under siege, such as Kunduz, Ghazni, Farah, Helmand, Faryab and many other provinces to wipe out insurgents from population centers in cities and rural areas. This task was before the Government right after the fall of Kunduz city two years ago, Farah city three months ago and with the most recent case, Ghazni province. But the job was not done, and, government is trying to push for major national events without possessing the required space, writ and power to maintain peace and stability to undertake such events – one including upcoming general parliamentary elections in October this year. People of Afghanistan know these realities, and therefore, they question Government's ability and will to seriously embark on these national events.

Though President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani has reportedly asked his entire security cabinet to 'render their resignations' which later was refuted by the Presidential Palace. The Palace claimed that the resignations of Minister of Defence, Minister of Interior and Chief of NDS were not accepted. The resignation of Mr. Hanif Atmar as National Security Advisor on 25th August 2018 authenticates a critical move by Government for possible major reshuffles of security portfolios at the senior most levels in near future. The Government has not shaped up its security apparatus, which matches existing challenges in the country and is competent of providing safety and security. Some of the major issues within Government security apparatus included lack of coordination, and defined roles, accountability and lines of command and control at almost every level – especially in the Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Interior, National Directorate of Security and in the way how sensitive security related information was shared and acted upon. A case in point in Ghazni province was reported by Washington Post reporter in Kabul, who was live on TV, 'In the midst of fighting when reinforcement arrived in the city, the army was handing over American guns to police contingents in the frontlines, and the police was using Rus-

sian weapons (AK47) – they did not know how to use American weapons – hence reinforcement was completely futile...' This event occurred during attack on Ghazni province by thousands of Taliban insurgents, which almost had taken over the entire province.

Political parties have locked their horns with Government to demand to bring changes to electoral system before upcoming parliamentary elections. They want IEC to shift the present system to more like a multi-dimensional representative (MDR) system. Among arrays of other demands, political parties want the entire nation to undergo biometric registration before they go to vote in the upcoming elections. This is a demand not achievable during the time left for the elections. While the tussles with political parties continue, those candidates who were disqualified by IECC during the process of vetting and perusal of complaints against candidates have started to block entry to offices of IEC and IECC almost simultaneously across the country. They have shut down IEC and IECC offices for more than ten days, and demanded their names should be reinstated before they disperse and allow IEC and IECC workers to attend offices. Thought Government has forcefully cleared IEC main offices in Kabul, it is yet to take action against those in the provinces. IEC has missed almost all the milestone dates it had set out in the beginning of ongoing electoral process, which certainly strain operational and logistical capability of IEC to organize for the elections day within the pre-set date. As of this date, IEC has not come up with a new date for elections day. This situation and lack of explanation by Government and IEC to address concerns, has created more confusion among the people of Afghanistan, and gave way to rumors that 'Government is deliberately delaying elections to, first reach a truce with Taliban and then announce a new date for elections in order to give room for Taliban representatives to participate in elections as well...', and 'Government wants parliamentary elections to set back a bit and organize it along with Presidential elections in March 2019...'. These types of rumors sap confidence of voters and candidates equally to enthusiastically participate in the ongoing electoral process. Government and IEC should come up with a concrete plan and explain to the people to brush off these negative rumors. Government should know it is confronted with entrenched insurgency, which is well trained and know how to maneuver politically and diplomatically against it. Recent advances on the part of Taliban at regional, national and international levels in diplomatic and political fronts merely stamp approval on this reality. Therefore, Government should come out of its comfort zone, shoulder responsibility for its failures, be honest and clear to its citizens and prepare a new, robust plan with commitment, backed by logical reasons and supporting data to rebuild the trust it lost due to events that brought in embarrassment to the Government and the country. Government should bring in people with knowledge and experience in the field of building state institutions and security apparatus in the country, including election security management. UNAMA has been requested to coordinate and lead international efforts for Afghan led and Afghan owned elections. In spite of continued international efforts, the situations slipped towards the prevailing uncertainties. UNAMA and UNDP who are actively engaged in the election process need to make their efforts more robust, objective, professional and tailored to Afghan context. Election process and more, the election security management is whole of government approach. The then Senior Deputy Minister of Interior for Security Murad Ali Murad released the election security plan in the last week of March 2018. International experts of UNAMA and UNDP handling with election security should have analyzed the plan for its relevance and completeness so that the present situation should have been avoided.

Resignations at ministerial levels do not help the nation much. The system and organization of the state institutions are to be strengthened and made inclusive and professional. Government of Afghanistan should consider seeking enhanced, strengthened and cost effective international support through Afghan suited regional and international mechanisms so that experienced, skilled and tested gurus are roped in to assist the Government in its efforts of rebuilding state institutions and ushering effective governance.

Mohammed Gul Sahibzada is the permanent writer of the Daily Outlook Afghanistan. He can be reached at [mohammed.g.sahibzada@gmail.com](mailto:mohammed.g.sahibzada@gmail.com)

## A Man for All Diplomatic Seasons

By Gordon Brown

Kofi Annan will be mourned on every continent. Under his leadership of the United Nations, internationally shared goals for development (the Millennium Development Goals) were agreed for the first time. But there were other important firsts that occurred on Annan's watch: The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria was created; \$100 billion of African debt was forgiven; aid to the poorest countries rose fast; the Responsibility to Protect principle moved from one man's aspiration to unanimous endorsement by the United Nations General Assembly; and the first steps toward the Paris climate agreement were taken.

These were just a few of the causes that Annan championed. His achievements confound those who write off the UN as a mere talking shop.

I remember attending, at his invitation, a meeting of the Kofi Annan Foundation in Geneva and discovering how in his retirement he was advising, in one way or another, a half-dozen countries in Asia, one or two in Latin America, and the majority of countries of Africa on human rights, elections, or poverty alleviation. For that reason, no single assessment can do justice to the breadth and depth of the successes of a leader who brought the UN's decision-making out of smoke-filled rooms and into the twenty-first century.

Each advance made during Annan's ten years as Secretary-General owed everything to his personal commitment, determination, and faith in the future. And it is a tribute to the moral force of his vision that he made progress at a time when the Security Council was split on almost every major issue – as on Iraq – and the UN's major financier, the United States, did not view him with affection.

Soft spoken, personally modest, gentle, and almost self-effacing, Annan was both a UN insider, promoted from within the organization's ranks to be the first African to hold the office of Secretary-General, and an anti-establishment campaigner who galvanized and mobilized the international NGO community to force change on often-reluctant states.

Of course, the new global order he sought has been long delayed by great-power rivalries, nationalism, and protectionism. Despite his good intentions, the UN failed to prevent the genocide in Rwanda before he became

Secretary-General, as well as the wars in Bosnia, Iraq, and, more recently, Syria, where for a time he was a peace envoy. But even when it came to peacemaking, he was more than a witness to history. His charisma made him friends everywhere, and his patience rivaled that of a saint. Despite setbacks and disappointments, he persevered, and ultimately changed our view of what international cooperation could make possible.

Supported in his Foundation's work by his wonderful wife Nane, Annan continued to champion, in his retirement, the environmental, democratic, and anti-poverty causes he had made his life's work – and he never gave up. I recall working with him ten years ago as he labored night and day to bring together both sides after Kenya's disputed presidential election and post-election ethnic violence. Annan's mediation undoubtedly prevented the loss of more lives.

In the last few months, I talked with Annan about Myanmar and the path-breaking proposals put forth by his Advisory Commission on Rakhine State, which, even now, offer the best chance of reconciliation and an end to the crisis that has been destroying lives in that strife-torn country. He loyally supported the international work to fill a gap in the global architecture for development, by backing the Education Commission's plan – along the lines of The Global Fund – to create a \$10 billion International Finance Facility for Education to achieve the Sustainable Development Goal on universal education.

Even in the last few months of his life, Annan was, as ever, active and available to help – advising on the elections in Zimbabwe, championing youth leadership with his program to inspire a new generation of internationalists, and calling for more attention to human rights and democracy through the recent reports and conferences run by his foundation. Annan's journey is over. But the legacy of this leader of leaders will live on in the impact his work continues to have on the lives of people on every continent.

Gordon Brown, former Prime Minister and Chancellor of the Exchequer of the United Kingdom, is United Nations Special Envoy for Global Education and Chair of the International Commission on Financing Global Education Opportunity. He chairs the Advisory Board of the Catalyst Foundation.

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

Vice Chairman / Editor: Moh. Sakhi Rezaie

Email: [outlookafghanistan@gmail.com](mailto:outlookafghanistan@gmail.com)

Phone: 0093 (799) 005019/777-005019

[www.outlookafghanistan.net](http://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.