

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



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Peace Talks Remain Ambiguous

The backdoor talks between the Taliban and US representatives in Qatar's capital have led to worries and contradictory reports. The content of the draft agreement, which is likely to be signed between the two sides, is unclear to the public.

The ambiguity of the agreement has generated concern for a number of individuals and groups. Afghan officials seem concerned about the outcome of the talks. Their marginalization in the talks is infuriating. Above all, with the upcoming presidential elections, a number of individuals still doubt if elections are conducted since it was said earlier that the Taliban and their US interlocutors supported an interim government. However, Afghan President Muhammad Ashraf Ghani held his ground and insisted that elections would be conducted. Presidential candidates, including Ghani, continue their presidential campaigns.

Afghan women are worried and fear if the return of the Islamic Emirate curtail their freedoms. Women also feel themselves sidelined in the talks. Generally speaking, almost all Afghan women air their concern when they hear about the return of the Islamic Emirate. Women politicians and activists find their positions more vulnerable to the Taliban's parochial mindset despite the fact that the Taliban claimed their mindset had been moderated.

Meanwhile, some political pundits are not optimistic about the outcome of the peace talks, or at least, believe that the 18-year conflict will not be ended through holding nine rounds of talks between the Taliban and US representatives. A political analyst Habiba Danish is cited as saying, "You know that the war in Afghanistan is not the war between the Afghan government and four Taliban fighters. Powerful, regional and beyond regional states are involved in this war. So we cannot expect an eighteen or nineteen year-long war to be settled in nine rounds of talks".

With the spread of rumors and disinformation, US Special Representative for Afghan Reconciliation Zalmay Khalilzad tweeted that "no one should be intimidated or fooled by propaganda! Let me be clear: We will defend Afghan forces now and after any agreement with the Talibs. All sides agree Afghanistan's future will be determined in intra-Afghan negotiations". He also denied discussing about an "interim government", which was reported by some media outlets.

As US and Taliban negotiators push to wrap up talks aimed at securing the withdrawal of foreign forces, disagreement remains about whether a pact will mean an end to the insurgents' fight with the Kabul government. US side has been pressing the Taliban to agree to peace talks with the Afghan government and ceasefire, but the Taliban seem to continue their fight against Ghani administration.

Meanwhile, it is said that the recent remarks by US President Donald Trump - who said that Washington was not rushing to pull out the American forces from the country - has slowed down the US-Taliban negotiations on finalizing a peace agreement.

With this in mind, although the ninth round of talks is said to finalize the agreement, the Taliban still haggle over hasty withdrawal of foreign forces.

A foreign analyst said, "The Afghanistan conflict is fiendishly complex, and such conflict are rarely resolved by high-speed, fast-track negotiations. Indeed, 'peace accords' in Afghanistan have a poor record of producing the results for which their architects had hoped". He also said that the 1988 Geneva Accords on Afghanistan did not lead to peace in Afghanistan. Overall, the backdoor talks have made people pessimistic and worried about the outcome. Meanwhile, there are many worrisome and unconfirmed reports about the peace issue. If the content of the agreement is not released to the media or the public, false assumptions and mistrust will continue at national and regional level.

Bearing the brunt of militancy, Afghans are in limbo and highly frustrated with the conflict. They are hesitant about the presidential elections and peace agreement. Some prefer talks to the elections and vice versa.

People are not sure whether the Taliban will declare ceasefire after striking a peace deal with their US interlocutors. They are also concerned about a hasty withdrawal of foreign forces. The main cause for concern is that people are kept in dark. They have no idea about the content of the agreement, especially as the Afghan government has been kept sidelined. Simultaneously, Afghans fear that the Taliban will try to disrupt the elections and hamper their participation through targeting polling stations, as the Taliban have threatened so. Thus, casting their votes will jeopardize their lives and they are not even sure if their votes will make changes in the country. If the content of the US-Taliban agreement is not released to the public, there will be many ifs, ands, and buts.

Is Terrorism a Mind Game That We Face the World Around?

By: Rajkumar Singh

The famous English poet John Milton once wrote 'The mind is its own place, it can make heaven of hell and hell of heaven'. The term 'Terrorism' has recently been defined by Paul J. Smith, a security expert at the Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies, as a form of psychological warfare that is used to create extensive fear through the use of extensive force against non-combatant civilian military targets. It thrives in a milieu characterised by some festering and unresolved issue in an atmosphere of financial crisis and in situation where unlawful trade in narcotics and small arms. The possibility of proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) through the innovation of modern technology is more real today than it has ever been in human history. Weapons of Mass Destruction terrorism involves the most modern and the most extreme form of random violence. Nuclear, chemical and biological weapons are inherently terrifying; in most cases of their being used, the fear they would cause would dwarf the injury and death. Its dreadful nature creates its own dangers; of victims panic and try to flee, they spread contamination and disease still further. The effects of these weapons are also inherently random. The radius of injury depends on conditions that are impossible to control or predict with certainty. The use of these innovations for terrorist activities is limited only by the imagination of the terrorist. Every one is a potential target and this creates a climate of fear and suspicion within a society.

Terrorism defined by scholars and groups
Different scholars have tried to come to terms with terrorism depending upon their ideological moorings. Today terrorism is the new form of warfare then it is evident that politics for some states has become an offshoot of this deadly virus and has acquired its own autonomy. For example, Yonah Alexander, links terrorism with national security. To him, 'terrorism is the use or threat of violence against random or civilian threats in order to intimidate or create generalised pervasive fear for the purpose of achieving political goals'. But Paul Wilkinson makes a difference between political terrorism and other forms of violence. He defined political violence as "the systematic use of murder and destruction, and the threat of murder and destruction in order to terrorise individuals, groups, communities or governments into conceding to the terrorists' political demands". While the United States' Department of State defined it as a, "pre-meditated, politically motivated violence penetrated against non-combatant targets by sub-national groups or clandestine State Agents, usually intended to influence an audience." In the state of terrorism, nation found itself in a condition in which it is very difficult to provide security and the environment of development to its citizens in terrorist affected areas. In so many cases terrorists also run their parallel government in specific part of territory, in this situation governments face so many challenges for safeguarding territorial integrity and preserving sovereignty of the nation state.

On the other hand, terrorism has been analysed by several social science disciplines, intelligence agencies, militaries, law enforcement agencies, IGOs and NGOs and legislatives and judicial bodies. They all use different type of framework, institutional perspectives, requirements and dimensions. According to them terrorism seems to possess four key elements - I. cause (generally political), II. non-state entities with group dynamics, III. chosen place and IV. indiscriminate use of violence. When all these four key elements combine together they create an environment of psychological fear and terror, all these combined are known as terrorism.

Different forms of terrorism

In a nutshell, despite lack of consensus on what terrorism actually encompasses,

there are, however, certain features common to all forms of terrorism. For instance, terrorism, in all forms, is aimed to generate fear, panic and terror in the minds of the general public. It may be politically motivated or may emerge because of obscure ideologies or beliefs, the acts of terror may be perpetrated for political ends or for changing the cultural norms or religious ethos of a targeted country or a segment of population. Further, terrorism, unlike ordinary violence, employs inordinate lethal force against civilian targets to erode the political will of the targeted country, undermine the morale of the people, spread despondency and panic through catastrophic terrorist attacks. Moreover, terrorism is arbitrary and unpredictable as far as its effects are concerned. And it does not recognise any rules and conventions of war and geographical limitations.

Who is a terrorist?

Thus, a 'terrorist' is a person who indulges in criminal acts with manifestly political motive without exhausting legitimate remedies at his disposal for the redressal of his grievances. His acts may be organised or unorganised, sporadic or widespread, commanding public support or hatred. The decisive element is that he indulges in criminal acts without invoking legitimate remedies for his alleged grievance or suffering. The terrorist hypothesis is that the system itself suicides in response to the multiple challenges of death and suicide. Neither the system, nor power, themselves escape symbolic obligation and in this trap resides the only chance of their demise (catastrophe). In this vertiginous cycle of the impossible exchange of death, the terrorist death is an infinitesimal point that provokes a gigantic aspiration, void and convection. Around this minute point, the whole system of the real and power gains in density, freezes, compresses, and sinks in its own super - efficacy. The tactics of terrorism are to provoke an excess of reality and to make the system collapse under the weight of this excess. It indicates that terrorist actions are both the magnifying mirror of the system's violence and the model of a symbolic violence that it cannot access. By using violence and terror, terrorists disturb communal harmony in society, create fear and suspicion between communities. That is why they pose and direct threat to maintaining domestic peace.

In its latest manifestations, terrorism is violence for a cause and terrorists always want the world to know about their existence, their causes and the power they wield. From the ongoing discussions the theories of terrorism have been derived as 01. Terrorists are not born but created by particular sociological, economic and political conditioning processes, 02. Terrorism is not based on reason and is nothing but a series of senseless and mindless actions to create fear, 03. It is deliberate and systematic assault on civilians to inspire fear for political ends, 04. It is a method whereby an organised group or party seeks to achieve its avowed aims, chiefly through the systematic use of violence, 05. It is a weapon of the weak employed against powerful opponent not with the aim to defeat but as an attempt to show itself as all powerful and a good force with a view to change the balance of power.

To conclude terrorism is not an act, but, it is a thinking in which some people think that political objectives could be achieved by illegitimate use of violence. Its motivations are also changing. A new breeds of terrorist including ad hoc groups motivated by religious convictions or revenge, right-wing extremists and apocalyptic and millenarian cults, appear more likely than terrorist of the past to commit acts of extreme violence. Religious groups are becoming more common and are more violent than secular groups.

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Will the US-Taliban Agreement End War in Afghanistan?

By: Mohammad Zahir Akbari

In spite of ongoing peace negotiations between the United States and the Taliban, the bloody conflict in Afghanistan continues with increasingly heavy toll on the country's people. The recent suicide bombing by the Khurasan branch of the Islamic State (IS-K) at a wedding in west of Kabul, which killed more than 60 and injured close to 200, could be a stark reminder of Afghanistan's poor security situation. It also shows that the Taliban are not the only armed opposition fueling the conflict. Therefore, it seems that the U.S.-Taliban peace pact is unlikely to bring any respite in Afghanistan.

According to some analysts, the US-Taliban negotiations in Doha, in which the Afghan government is not a participant, are comparable to two previous peace processes: the Paris talks between the U.S. and North Vietnam that resulted a peace treaty in the January 1973 and the negotiations that led to the 1988 Geneva Accords, signed by the Afghan and Pakistani governments with the Soviet Union and the U.S. acting as guarantors. These two agreements were designed to enable the U.S. and the Soviet Union to exit with "honor" from wars they could not win, by bringing about, respectively, the "Vietnamization" and "Afghanization" of those conflicts. Both agreements failed to achieve their objectives.

By 1975, Soviet-backed North Vietnamese forces had overrun South Vietnam, humiliating the U.S. And in 1992, the U.S.-supported Afghan Islamic resistance forces, the mujahideen, brought about the collapse of the Soviet-installed communist regime in Kabul. The North Vietnamese soon succeeded in uniting their country and restoring peace, however, Afghanistan has fared much worse. The socially and politically divided mujahideen soon turned their guns on one another. And Taliban supporters took the opportunity to advance its interests by nurturing the extremist Taliban, who in 1996-98 conquered most of Afghanistan and subjected it to strict theocratic rule.

The Taliban in turn harbored al-Qaida, which carried out the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the U.S. That prompted America backed by its NATO and non-NATO allies, to intervene in Afghanistan with the aim of destroying al-Qaida and dislodging the Taliban regime. The U.S.-led forces quickly dispersed al-Qaida's leadership and ended Taliban rule, but failed to defeat either group decisively. The Taliban and elements of al-Qaida staged a comeback within two years of the U.S. intervention, and have tied down American and allied forces in a low-grade but staggeringly costly insurgency ever since. Now, after nearly two decades of fighting, the U.S. President Donald Trump desperately wants to disentangle America from a seemingly unwinnable war - preferably through a political settlement with the Taliban. Trump's Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation, Zalmay Khalilzad, has been engaged since September 2018 in shuttle diplomacy, in an eerie parallel with

the unsuccessful efforts of then-U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger to bring about peace in the Middle East following the 1973 Arab-Israeli War.

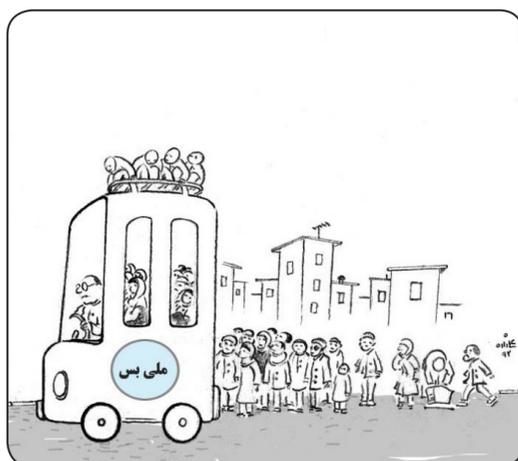
Khalilzad is about to end his ninth round of negotiations with Taliban representatives in Doha. Separately, he has had numerous meetings with the Afghan government and non-governmental leaders, as well as with regional and international actors - but not Iran, with which the U.S. is locked in a cycle of deepening hostility. He had focused on four interrelated objectives: a timetable for the exit of all foreign troops currently in Afghanistan; a commitment from the Taliban to prevent hostile acts being launched against the U.S. from Afghan soil; direct negotiations between the Taliban and the Afghan government, which the Taliban regard as "illegitimate" and a "puppet"; and a ceasefire across Afghanistan.

Although Khalilzad may finally manage to reach agreement with the Taliban regarding the first two aims, there is no guarantee that America's partner in the peace talks will help to realize the remaining two. The Afghan internal divisions and other political facts would give the Taliban upper hand in any power-sharing arrangement, particularly after U.S. and allied forces have left. And it is very doubtful that the Taliban, whether in power or as a partner in power, would be able to control other armed opposition groups, most importantly IS-K, or enlist the support of a cross-section of Afghanistan's diverse population. In the meantime, IS-K has loyalty to no one inside Afghanistan. The group became operational in 2015 and is said to have about 2,000 fighters (including some Taliban defectors), who are dedicated to creating disruption and chaos. They have been responsible for horrific attacks across Afghanistan, especially in Kabul and mostly on civilian targets.

Any withdrawal of U.S. and allied forces during Trump's current term, whether phased or otherwise, must be based on conditions on the ground. Otherwise, the consequences will be disastrous. Because of the way the peace process and the situation in Afghanistan have evolved, a hasty foreign-troop withdrawal would lead to a fiasco similar to those generated by the earlier Soviet retreat from the country and by the U.S. withdrawal from Vietnam.

Therefore, the U.S. and its allies must not leave Afghanistan in clutches of terrorist's networks and as they had committed should support Afghans more deceptively against any trouble-makers. If Afghan and American people wholeheartedly want to solve the problem of Afghanistan then nothing would be impossible and the interests of both countries would also be ensured. But Trump is in a hurry and thinks that a strong CIA presence in the country will manage to do what a large number of Western forces have not/have not been able to achieve. More likely than not, that will prove to be wishful thinking.

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