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

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Afghan Peace Process: Multiple Players with Conflicting Agendas

Peace building is a process of strengthening a society's capacity to manage conflict in non-violent ways. However, conflict is natural in society and can lead to positive change. On the other hand if conflict is not well managed, it can also descend into violence.

As the experience of the conflict prone countries, especially the developing countries show peace building needs to enhance trust between individuals and between groups in a society. Further, it needs to restore the legitimacy of state institutions. Peace building is about bringing together the different actors that are engaged in the rebuilding of a country. The role of the people from inside and outside a conflict-affected country is vital in peace building. Thus, they need to work together to understand their different views, and define priorities. Such an approach enables a better alignment of national policy-making, external assistance, and local priorities.

It is crystal cut that peace building is about deep, long-term transformations. This requires an integrated approach engaging a diverse range of actors to ensure a sustainable peace. To end the war in Afghanistan, the US and Afghan government must adopt the same policies.

According to war strategists, what always goes against the US is its preoccupation with war. Washington fights multiple wars at the same time. These Wars have drained the US human capital and resources. As a result, the US has wasted too much blood and treasure since the end of the Cold War. It is also an unrealistic desire to keep its hegemony intact forever even at the costs of the other nations.

Therefore, it seems that the US has changed its South Asia policy in Afghanistan, and has decided to defend its interests in some ways, such as- the use of diplomacy, negotiation, mediation, and politics instead of war in Afghanistan.

Based on this policy shift, it has started direct peace negotiations with Taliban that once the US attacked them because they supported the terrorist groups that threatened its national interests from Afghanistan.

Based on this, the US started direct talks with Taliban led by the US Special Envoy to Kabul and in the last round of talks in Doha which lasted 6 days, led to a framework for a peace including a commitment by the Taliban not to allow terrorists to use Afghan territory to mount attacks on the US and allies; an agreement by the US to pull out troops, but contingent on what remains a stumbling block of Taliban agreement to talk with the Afghan government, and a permanent ceasefire.

Russia Afghan Peace Talks

Following direct talks between the US and Taliban, considering the complicated geopolitics of Afghanistan, Russia initiated an Afghan intra peace talks aimed at catalyzing an end to a 17-year war and burnishing Moscow's credentials as a regional power broker.

However, the meeting appeared to yield no significant breakthroughs, although participants agreed to gather again at an undetermined date. Though, the participation of the Taliban marked the Islamist movement's first official visit to the Russian capital and its highest-profile diplomatic foray in years. Many hold that Taliban has been the main winner of this round of intra Afghan talks in the absence of the Afghan government and it just added to their legitimacy.

If the US has symbolically lost the war in Afghanistan, then it is needless to become more aggressive in an attempt to defeat whosoever comes in its way to safeguard its image and prove its hegemony. The best course of action lies in contributing to the Afghan peace without resorting to war.

The US assumes that Peace in Afghanistan cannot be established through war. Afghanistan history tells us that there is no military solution to the problem. And peacemaking is only possible through negotiations and dialogue. Thus, military action will exacerbate the situation in Afghanistan, pushing the country again into the vortex of violence. However, the US must not seek a rushed peace deal with Taliban, and shall consider the concerns of all walks of Afghan citizens to ensure a viable peace.

Reactions against Moscow Summit

By: Mohammad Zahir Akbari

These days, the Moscow summit is at the forefront of media news and public attention. From the top public media bases up to social media networks are full of comments, debates and analysis. Apart from the intentions behind the Moscow summit for Afghanistan, it reminded a bitter historical experience being hard for Afghan politicians to make political consensus on national agenda. Unfortunately, our emotions have always overruled on our wisdom. For example, due to personal detestation from Ashraf Ghani it is very easy in Afghanistan to proceed against the whole national interest and political system. When we talk about government dignity it is usually mistaken with Ashraf Ghani's dignity.

On the other hand, in Afghan political culture when a tribe takes the power they consider themselves as though the absolute owner of the country; they think as if all the people are his/her personal sheep and can decide about whatever comes to his/her mind. They try recruit or trust on those people who belong to their own particular circle or family. While neither these are acceptable in 21 century and nor the dignity of government is equivalent to dignity of an individual. The real criteria must be national interests, and accordingly the empowerment of government institutions must be like redline for every politician. It is natural to have disagreements among various groups but when it comes to national interests we must forget about the personnel differences. The government weakness and strength directly influence the whole nation, and so it should not be deemed like the property of any solitary person.

Fortunately, in the eve of Moscow summit there were some mature stances in the country. Following the disclosure of invited names for this summit, the reactions were interesting. Despite the anticipations that a long queue could be set up behind the Russian embassy gate in Kabul, many important political figures opposed the summit for the reason that it would legitimize the Taliban group. Zulfiqar Omid wrote in his face-book that he was invited to the summit, but he preferred not to attend; "my participating in such a summit would contribute to legitimatization of a terrorist group who have killed thousands of our innocent youths". Thus, some of the presidential candidates stood against the meeting, even though they were not happy with the president.

Consequently, an absolute consensus was established at the national level against the Moscow summit which was mainly initiated by Taliban and Taliban supporters. Almost all analysis was at the axis of an obvious principle that compromise with a group who still persist to oppose all human rights and citizenship values is a sort of disrespect to the blood of hundreds and thousands of people were martyred in the path of independence and freedom of the land. The understanding of this situation is very simple. Anyone who has lived in Afghanistan understands that having problems with political faces, including having problems with the leadership of the current government, should not lead to any mistakes. In particular, the Moscow summit which took place in the presence of the Taliban and hosted by Russia. The Afghan people have not forgotten that the destruction of the Afghanistan which was caused by the Soviet Red Army. A number of those who have been very fond of attending Moscow summit they got their fame from the same fight, fighting against Soviet Red Army and Taliban.

Most notably, the role of the former president in facilitating the participation of some of the country's political figures in Moscow summit is noteworthy. The former president of the country, who must defend the new achievements and interests of people, very simply accepted a dubious call and raised a lot of questions. He was expected to be the centerpiece of national consensus and unity in the country but practically he jeopardizes this position and degrades it to the zero point. Are the unsatisfied brothers satisfied but the Afghan people do not know or another golden opportunity, this time from the East, knocked the door of the president? If some of the other political figures who have painful heart of the current government leaders are justifying going to the Moscow summit with the fuss of their rivals, what is the former president afraid of? What did he feel when he flew to Russia from the "Hamid Karzai International Airport"?

The Afghan people have never forgotten the black era of the Taliban regime. A lot of blood has been spilled by this group that has not yet been dried up. Two weeks ago, dozens of youths were killed in a Taliban attack carried out on a military center in Maidan Shahr which resulted tens of families were hurt and may added to the number of orphans and windows of the country. There is no miracle that the Taliban have changed. Nothing has changed, and the Taliban will not be satisfied with anything other than the emirate government. The former president also knows this very well. So what has made him move fast towards Moscow? What will be the cost of the Afghan people's struggle for several decades and the democratic achievements which are parts of of Karzai's presidency?

The fact is that the Moscow summit was an important test for Afghan politician but not for the people of Afghanistan who have always sacrificed themselves for the sake of freedom and human values. It was an important test for our politicians and political elites. Afghans have historically proved that, at the level of political leadership, they have never been able to create a national consensus on a legitimated system and a political structure. The overwhelming acceleration towards Moscow summit illustrated this historic reality in its most explicable state and reminded a bitter historical experience.

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Financial Stability in Abnormal Times

By: Kenneth Rogoff

A decade on from the 2008 global financial crisis, policymakers constantly assure us that the system is much safer today. The giant banks at the core of the meltdown have scaled back their risky bets, and everyone – investors, consumers, and central bankers – is still on high alert. Regulators have worked hard to ensure greater transparency and accountability in the banking industry. But are we really all that safe?

Normally, one would say "yes." The kind of full-blown systemic global financial crisis that erupted a decade ago is not like a typical septennial recession. The much lower frequency of systemic crises reflects two realities: policymakers respond with reforms to prevent their recurrence, and it normally takes investors, consumers, and politicians a long time to forget the last one.

Unfortunately, we don't live in normal times. Crisis management cannot be run on autopilot, and the safety of the financial system depends critically on the competence of the people managing it. The good news is that key central banks still, by and large, have excellent staff and leadership. The bad news is that crisis management involves the entire government, not just the monetary authority. And here there is ample room for doubt.

To be sure, if the next crisis is exactly like the last one, any policymaker can simply follow the playbook created in 2008, and the response probably will be at least as effective. But what if the next crisis is completely different, resulting from say, a severe cyberattack, or an unexpectedly rapid rise in global real interest rates, which rocks fragile markets for high-risk debt? Can anyone honestly say that US President Donald Trump's administration has the skill and experience to deal with a major collapse? It is hard to know, because the only real crisis the United States has experienced so far during Trump's presidency is, well, Trump's presidency.

US Federal Reserve chair Jay Powell and his team are first-rate, but who will be the other adults in the room if an externally generated financial crisis threatens? The Fed cannot begin to do everything on its own; it needs both political and financial support from the rest of the government. In fact, the Fed has less room for maneuver than it had in 2008, because the 2010 Dodd-Frank financial reforms sharply restricted its ability to bail out private institutions, even if the entire system might otherwise collapse. Will a gridlocked Congress deliver? Or perhaps Steven Mnuchin, who produced Hollywood movies prior to becoming US Treasury Secretary, can use insights from his acting role in the 2016 movie "Rules Don't Apply."

Europe has issues that are similar, or worse. With populism fueling deep distrust and divisions, financial resilience is almost certainly far lower than it was a decade ago. Just look at the United Kingdom, the other major global financial center, where the political elite have taken the country to the edge of the Brexit cliff. Can they really be expected to handle competently a financial crisis that requires tough political decisions and agile thinking? The UK is fortunate to have very good staff in its Treasury as well as its central bank, but even the brightest boffins can do only so much if politicians don't give them cover.

Meanwhile, across the English Channel, deep division over eurozone burden sharing will make it difficult to implement a cogent policy for dealing with a bout of severe stress. A significant rise in global real interest rates, for example, could wreak havoc in the eurozone's balkanized debt markets.

But won't it be another 20-40 years before the next big financial crisis, leaving plenty of time to get ready? One hopes so, but it is far from certain. Even if regulations have been successful in containing risks to banks, it is likely that major sources of risk have simply migrated to the less regulated shadow financial system.

What we know for sure is that the global financial system continues to expand, with global debt now pushing $200 trillion. Better financial regulation may have helped contain the corresponding growth in risk, but it is not necessarily shrinking.

For example, although big banks do seem to have less risk "on the books," regulators must work hard to monitor risky debt that has migrated to the shadow financial system and can inflate quite quickly, as we learned the hard way in 2008. Regulators are quick to point to banks' higher buffers of "liquid" assets to fight runs on deposit and debt-rollover problems. Unfortunately, assets that are "liquid" in normal times often turn out to be highly illiquid in a crisis.

Policymakers are right to say there have been improvements in the system since 2008. But the piecemeal reforms that have been enacted fall far short of what is most necessary: requiring banks to raise a larger share of their funding through equity issuance (or by reinvesting dividends), as economists Anat Admati of Stanford and Martin Hellwig of the Max Planck Institute have argued. Unfortunately, an inexorably growing financial system, combined with an increasingly toxic political environment, means that the next major financial crisis may come sooner than you think.

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