

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

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## How to Achieve Sustainable Peace in Afghanistan

The challenges that Afghanistan as a country in crisis faces are complex, multifaceted and vary due to the variety of different historical root causes of conflict and the different political, social and geographical contexts. Therefore, the strategies to address these challenges and effectively support Afghanistan on a path of recovery, development and durable peace are therefore diverse. What works in one country does not necessarily work in another. Nevertheless, there are some universally shared values, principles and key elements that have been found to be applicable for sustainable peace based on the best peace building lessons that Afghanistan may build on them.

### Managing the peace terms

Reaching to a consensus on peace terms – a key obstacle for most conflict agreements, has changed to one of the most challenging issues in the peace talks due to conflicting interests of the U.S. and Afghan governments, along with the Taliban. The Taliban's main demands include a U.S. exit from Afghanistan and share in the Kabul-based government. The United States seeks guarantees that the Taliban will not support transnational Islamist extremists. The Afghan government wants the Taliban to respect the rule of law.

The Taliban's demand for a U.S. withdrawal before a peace deal and ceasefire is likely to cause a deadlock. On the other hand, key Taliban leaders worry that if they back down, their credibility with their base of support will suffer. And if President Trump's hard-line foreign policy team agrees to a withdrawal, it will be considered as a concession to the Taliban. And the Afghan government has reason to worry about its own survival in case of a rushed U.S. departure.

Any power-sharing demands from the Taliban would be contentious. The Taliban worry that if they demobilize without a large share, the Afghan government will renege on agreed terms and inclusion of the Taliban will be difficult in a complex multiethnic country.

### What will spoil the process?

If the three parties can't surmount these problems, the Afghan context is ripe for another major obstacle to peace. Taliban might try to derail the process with violence – by launching a major attack in Kabul or assassinating a senior leader of the Taliban during the talks. The Afghan context is full of potential spoilers. These include factions within the Taliban, Afghan politicians, Pakistan, India, Russia, Iran, al-Qaeda and the Islamic State. These parties have different ideas about how the war should terminate and thus could jeopardize the peace process, causing the talks to break down.

### How to keep the talks on track

We believe that to reach a workable consensus, the United States has the most power to shape the terms that satisfy the Taliban. For now, the U.S. stance is that the terms are for the Afghan government and the Taliban to decide. Further, the US shall ensure that a peace deal in the absence of Afghan government will fail.

Considering the geopolitical importance of Afghanistan, the push for peace can only succeed if it is conceived as part of a new regional and international consensus on Afghanistan. Therefore, involving regional and international players is one the key factors of Afghan peace process.

To reach to a consensus in the peace talks, the U.N.'s help is needed to address the knotty problem of commanding responsibility for years of horrendous human rights abuses, civilian casualties and violations of the laws of war as prospects for a political settlement increase. As a result, Secretary General of the UN should consider options for establishing a specially designated team of U.N.-backed peace negotiators.

All these confidence-building measures are well within reach; every step could shorten the long march to peace in Afghanistan.

## Peace Stakeholders Have to Advocate Women's Rights and Freedoms

By: Hujjatullah Zia

Afghan women are one of the main stakeholders in the peace talks. The rights and freedoms of women are a serious issue in the reconciliation process as they fear that the return of the Islamic Emirate will undo the almost two decades of women's achievements in the post-Taliban administration.

During their regime (1996-2001), the Taliban approached women with misogynistic mindset and curtailed their rights and freedoms to a great extent. Afghan women were not allowed to play a role in social, political or economic arena. Treating women with disdain and pariah, the Taliban leadership was of the view that women had to live within the four walls. In case of coming out, they had to be accompanied by male chaperones.

Afghan women bore the brunt of violence under the Taliban's strict Sharia Law amalgamated with the tribal code of conduct. That is to say, women were the casualty of the sexual discrimination and their human rights and dignity were violated flagrantly. To put it succinctly, Afghan women suffered severely under the Taliban and their untold sorrow is evident to the world.

Now as peace talks emerge, Afghan women fear that they will backtrack if the Taliban seek to impose their warped mind on them. They believe that the Taliban will not uphold democratic principles and the equal rights and freedoms of men and women stipulated in the constitution, which was approved on 3 January 2004 in the aftermath of the Bonn Conference.

It comes as the Taliban have said they will amend the current constitution but also reiterated that they will no more downplay women's role in social, economic and political arenas. With this in mind, it is not clear which articles of the constitution the Taliban are proposing for amendments and whether the public consensus is important in this case. It is believed, however, that the Taliban will, certainly, resist the recognition of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Charter of the United Nations, included in the constitution. It is self-explanatory that the Taliban are not able to reconcile their ideology with democratic principles and human rights discourse; however, they have claimed that they will not appear with their past frame of mind. Notwithstanding the Taliban's claim, Afghans are highly skeptical of the Taliban morphing into a moderate group.

The Taliban pay lip service to the rights and freedoms of women since harsh mindset and tribal code of conduct hold strong sway in the areas under their domination. For example, reports said the Taliban flagellated men and women in desert courts, conducted in the tribal belts. Therefore, there is little room for optimism about the protection of women's rights and freedoms with the return of the Islamic Emirate. Similarly, not a single woman has emerged as the Taliban's representative in their negotiating team. It indicates that patriarchy is a highly deep-seated mindset among the Taliban. Afghan women have made great strides after the downfall of the Taliban's regime and the current constitution entitles men and women equally to participate in social, economic and political activities. Thus, there is no legal barrier to prevent women from running for provincial or presidential election. "Discrimination" and "distinction" between Afghan men and women are forbidden based on Article 22 of the constitution. Hence, one must not be discriminated on the grounds of one's racial, religious or sexual differences. With the support of the current constitution, Afghan women made great progress and do not want their achievements to be compromised on the table.

Afghan men and women paid heavy sacrifices for the past 18 years of achievements. Democratic principles and human rights and liberty were gained at the cost of tens of thousands of Afghans' life. Therefore, the peace stakeholders have to advocate the rights and freedoms of people at the peace table, which are recognized as "inalienable" and "inviolable" in national laws and international instruments. It will not be acceptable to Afghan people if the stakeholders put their years of achievements at stake in the peace talks. National consensus is highly significant in peace talks. The Taliban interlocutors have to support national consensus and do not strike a deal without the agreement of Afghan people. In a nutshell, it will be acceptable neither to Afghan men nor women to have their achievements undone under the terms of peace talks and again undergo the past suffering under the Islamic Emirate of the Taliban. There must be no mystery in the peace pact if signed between the Taliban and their interlocutors so that it must not be a loophole for the Taliban.

Hujjatullah Zia is the permanent writer of the Daily Outlook Afghanistan and freelance writer based in Kabul. He can be reached at zia\_hujjat@yahoo.com

## Role of Elections in Political Stability

By: Moh. Sakhi Rezaie

Democracy is considered as the best system of government by many of the states around the world; particularly, by the states that are developed and that have achieved political and economic stability. Therefore, it is imperative that this system of government must be pursued by Afghanistan as well, if it really wants to achieve stability and sustainability. In that pursuit, it must also ensure that different attributes of a democratic system are also taken care of. One of the most dominating attributes of democracy is the process of election. If elections continue democracy prospers. This claim can be strengthened by the evidences that lie in the history of greatest democratic states. American democratic history depicts a serious of elections, continued for more than two centuries. United Kingdom's history depicts even a longer continuation of series of elections and today both the countries enjoy a dominant role in International Political scenario. They both enjoy economic and political might and there are many countries that have been trying to adopt their systems so as to have justice and order in their systems. They are no doubt among the leading countries, with prosperity licking their hands as faithful and invincibility guarding their gates.

In true sense, elections let the public govern themselves; therefore, in a democratic state government is not anything beyond the General Will. People get the chance of listening the motives and mottos of the leaders and they get time even to analyze them properly. Afterward, they are given chance of casting their votes and choosing the leaders whom they consider capable enough to govern them. It is possible that the leaders who are chosen to form government may not be the best, but they are better than the ones who are not chosen by the will of the majority as every nation in the world have the right to choose what they think better for themselves, without bringing harm to others.

However, there are certain thinkers who believe that even though the elections continue the miseries of the people continue as there is no any change in their lives as a result of the elections. They argue that though the elections change faces of the rulers but do not change the lives of the common people who are being ruled. They basically relate to standard of living of the common people and their access to justice

and rights and claim that though elections continue, miseries prevail. However, it would be self contradictory statement to say that elections continue and miseries prevail because elections can provide opportunities to the people to choose the sort of government that they like for themselves. In reality miseries prevail because elections do not continue. It would be better to explain it in a simpler manner. In fact, every new election is a new step in the evolution of democracy and every new step is better than the earlier one. That's why we call it evolution. No matter, if the government after new election is corrupt. It is always better than the earlier one as the election before the earlier one had also contributed a little in the awareness enhancement, so will do this new one and the election after this one would have better decisions. People will have a chance to see what the chosen government has been able to offer to them. They can have the chance of not casting their votes to one who have not been able to serve them properly. So now, it would be wise to conclude that when elections continue miseries diminish, awareness enhances, democracy evolves and prosperity reigns.

It would be better to discuss the statement in context of Afghanistan. Recently, there have been different sorts of discussions regarding the upcoming elections in Afghanistan and continuously there have been discussions regarding the democratic system in Afghanistan and its outcomes so far. There are intellectuals who basically believe that democracy will not be able to lead Afghan political system and they even argue that Afghan society is not so far ready for it. But, it would be better to be more logical and scientific. The history of democracy in Afghanistan is very short and before blaming democracy for the miseries in our country, it would be better to ask ourselves, "Has there been democracy in real sense in Afghanistan?" Never! So, when there has never been democracy and elections have a very short history then how can we blame democracy for miseries?

In order to have a fruitful tree of democracy, we need to water it continuously with elections, safeguard it from the parasites of corruption, fertilize it with freedom of expression and above all avoid deforestation by dominance of dictatorship. Only then we would be able to have true democracy and would be able to stand strong against political and economic challenges.



Chairman / Editor-in-Chief: Moh. Reza Huwaida  
Vice Chairman / Exec. Editor: Moh. Sakhi Rezaie  
Email: outlookafghanistan@gmail.com  
Phone: 0093 (799) 005019/777-005019  
www.outlookafghanistan.net

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