

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

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Why Taliban Resist Ceasefire?

The US officials and Taliban representatives have resumed their negotiations in the Qatari capital of Doha to end the conflict in Afghanistan. In the ongoing backdoor negotiations, in which the Afghan government is still not at the table, the Taliban and their US interlocutors are most likely to focus on the four issues – US troop withdrawal, guarantee from the Taliban side not to shelter terrorist networks, intra-Afghan dialogue, and ceasefire – which have been discussed in the last meetings.

Prior to the seventh round of peace talks, the US Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation Zalmay Khalilzad said in a tweet that a comprehensive peace agreement included four inter-connected parts: “counter-terrorism assurances, troop withdrawal, intra-Afghan negotiations that lead to a political settlement, and a comprehensive & permanent ceasefire.” He added that in the seventh round of talks, the US sought “a comprehensive peace agreement, NOT a withdrawal agreement.”

This week, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said during a trip to Kabul that the US was close to wrapping up the draft agreement with the Taliban on counterterrorism. He hoped a peace agreement could be reached before the upcoming presidential election.

However, the Taliban leadership is said to be under pressure from their military commanders not to agree to a ceasefire before achieving their objectives. The Taliban militant fighters, who are reeling from sustaining heavy casualties within the last few months, are likely to seek revenge rather than accepting ceasefire. If the Taliban persist on their past stance in the ongoing negotiations, peace talks will reach a stalemate.

Although a regional consensus have not been achieved, this time a larger number of states have vowed to support the peace talks. Recently, with the emergence of mutual trust between Kabul and Islamabad in the wake of President Ghani's state visit to Pakistan, Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan also reaffirmed his commitment to supporting “Afghan-owned” and “Afghan-led” talks.

For productive peace talks, both national and regional consensus is needed. That is, Afghan officials and political figures, including heads of political factions, have to reach a national consensus. Last month, President Ghani held a grand council in Kabul with politicians and tribal, ethnic and religious leaders to achieve a national consensus. However, the gap between the government and politicians lingered as high-ranking politicians, including CEO Abdullah Abdullah boycotted the council. Thus, national consensus remains elusive.

If the US negotiators fail to broker the intra-Afghan dialogue in the seventh round of talks, regional consensus is needed to be formed to break the stalemate. Regional stakeholders need to put their weight behind the talks to push the Taliban to come to the table with the Kabul government.

As a result of the several rounds of the peace talks between the US and the Taliban leadership, the Taliban negotiators had been delisted from the UN blacklist and a number of the Taliban prisoners were released by Ghani administration. Nonetheless, the Taliban have taken no practical step towards peace and stability in Afghanistan, which is an unfair play at the table.

The Taliban still push for the withdrawal of the US and NATO forces and establishment of Islamic Emirate. But Khalilzad already replied that the US sought a comprehensive peace agreement, which would include all the issues. Meanwhile, head of Afghan High Peace Council Mohammad Karim Khalilzad said that Islamic Emirate would not be acceptable to Afghan people.

Political pundits believe that since the Taliban military commanders and their rank and file support militancy, it would be hard for the Taliban leadership to declare ceasefire. In other words, the Taliban would be divided if they declare truce. Their militants and ideologue individuals would bite the hands that feed them through turning the guns to their leaders. It is because the Taliban radicalized their militants in seminaries and taught them only how to pull the trigger without saying a word about peace. Now they wonder how to justify their years of fighting and ask their militants to put down their arms. It is believed that lack of agreement between the Taliban military leadership and political leadership is the main obstacle before reaching a comprehensive agreement. It should be noted that the Taliban militants also get financial interests via illegal activities such as smuggling narcotic drugs, collecting taxes, under the religious term of Oshr, from those who live in the Taliban dominated areas, and extorting money from truck drivers. Hence, reaching an agreement would jeopardize their self-interests. Therefore, they resist ceasefire.

Necessary Lessons to Learn from The Long Controversy of Parliament

By: Mohammad Zahir Akbari

After 41 days controversy and fourth round election inside parliament, finally Mir-Abdul Rahman Rahmani won the parliament speaker position with winning 136 votes. For the second time, some of the top government officials congratulate this position to Mir-Abdul Rahman Rahmani. Mohammad Ashraf Ghani, Abdullah and also the second vice president Moh Sarwari Danish congratulated his position as a speaker of national house. The second vice president hoped that the new speaker and new members of parliament would make efforts for peace, prosperity and peaceful coexistence in the country. He said, “The government of Afghanistan would make its serious contribution in the approval of fair and democratic law. Pointing to the ended tensions, the CEO, Abdullah Abdullah also hoped that representatives of people may perform their responsibly without any farther delay.

The new chairman of Parliament, Mir Rahman Rahmani, is son of Haji Qalandar-khan who was born in 1962 in Bagram district of Parwan province. He graduated from Bagram high school in 1979 and continued his studies in Russia and graduated from the Russian military university in 1983. Mr. Rahmani has served as head of the Social Council of Bgram people and has reached the rank of General in national army. Mr. Rahmani was also chairman of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Parwan province. He is considered as a major trader in the country, and most of his wealth comes from providing transportation services and fuel contracts with the government and US forces. He is married and was a member of parliament in the previous round of parliament.

As aforementioned, the long tension of parliament has ended with voting mentioned personality but we need to reassess and learn from the mistakes made in the house. First lesson that we should learn is to recognize the faces that fueled the tensions inside the parliament. Unfortunately, some PMs showed a very unprofessional and illegal behavior within the nearly two months period of time. The social media networks repeatedly posted photos and ironic comments which embodied a very shameful scene of physical and verbal clashes in the newly inaugurated parliament. Some members of parliament have not only attacked on each and other but also attacked on chairs and tables of parliament and broken some of national facilities begged from foreign countries. They have not only blamed for distribution of huge amount of bribes but also blamed for spread of hatreds among the nation. Eventually, everything finished with paying respect to the rules of the game.

The second but important lesson that we can learn from nearly two months brawls and shameful scandals is victory of rationality versus the emotion. This victory should be a good lesson to all extremist groups regardless of their belongings to any race, color and types of

faith. Everyone should understand that nothing is above than law and rule of the game. Electing the head of parliament and its acceptance by all PMs is a clear message to all of us, especially those who receive orders of war and destruction from outside of the country. They must understand that there is no way except accepting each other on basis of democratic rules and meritocratic principle.

Unfortunately, the behaviors of parliamentarians have seriously damaged the feeling of peaceful coexistence and national unity. Ethnicization of politics and the hatred project among peoples was profoundly prevalent. There were some individuals who thought that they would achieve their personal desires through spread of hatreds and ethnical hostility. But in the end, everyone was compelled to accept each other and make the final decision based on collective wisdom and majority votes. There were many nations in the history that killed one and other for the sake of racial superiority but finally compelled to accept one and other. So, the most important lesson from the extreme controversy is to respect the rule of law.

The third lesson that we should learn was the show of a heroic action by Kham Mohammad Wardak. After he lost the election against Mir-Rahman Rahmani, not only he congratulated his opponent but also have him sit on his new seat. He asked all PMs to help him in his future duty. Such behavior is rarely showed by Afghan politician that is why many of the people, especially the social media networks have warmly praised his behavior. The people of Afghanistan will not forget such braveness and attitude. One of the main reasons that Hamid Karzai could satisfy people during his 13 years presidency was his opened mindedness and good behavior. Several times he embraced his angry critic in large gatherings. However, no ethnic group is entirely white or black and we should always make our judgment on the basis of individual background and meritocracy.

Lastly, we will have another democratic national exam in a very near future; we have presidential elections in the near future while learned a lot lessons from controversial elections of 2014 and 2018. Today, when our country is engulfed with many social and economic crises, to a large extent, we are responsible as we never voted on the basis of meritocracy and national interests; we voted for ethnic, color and language belongings which is a serious ethical crime in our culture. Unfortunately, very few people are aware that a corrupt leader would corrupt the whole nation while a righteous and patriotic leader would make a righteous nation. That is why, neither we reached the national unity and nor to the peace and prosperity. In fact, we would be responsible in front of our conscious and also in front of future generation if we do not learn from the past mistakes!

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How to Save the Internet

By: Shamel Azmeh

In a scene in the US sitcom Silicon Valley, digital startups compete for funding by presenting their ideas. In each presentation, company founders repeat the Silicon Valley mantra of “making the world a better place.” One founder pledges to make the world a better place through “software-defined data centers for cloud computing,” and another via “scalable, fault-tolerant distributed databases with asset transactions.”

Although the idea of the Internet “making the world a better place” is often ridiculed today, it's easy to forget that this decade began amid optimism that new technologies would connect people, broaden access to information, and generate abundant new economic opportunities.

Coming from Syria, I experienced some of these potential benefits. In a country with limited space for debate, the Internet provided citizens with a forum to learn and discuss. And, following the 2011 Arab Spring protests, it played an important role in documenting events and sharing information. As millions of Syrians subsequently fled the country, the Internet became the only means of connecting them. A Syrian comedian joked that “Syrian society exists only on Facebook,” illustrating how the Internet became the only tool for people scattered around the world to maintain a sense of solidarity.

Today, however, governments around the world are considering policies that would undermine the Internet's openness and global reach. And they have many tools at their disposal. The Chinese authorities, for example, use a range of measures often collectively referred to as the “Great Firewall of China.” Other countries, such as Indonesia, Brazil, Russia, India, Turkey, and Nigeria, have considered – and some have implemented – similar measures in recent years. Russia's “sovereign Internet law” is just one recent example of this trend.

These policies take different forms. Some states are implementing “data localization” policies, which require data to be hosted in a particular jurisdiction. Other states are adopting tools and regulations that provide them with greater control over different aspects of the Internet. A recent debate triggered by the European Union's new copyright directive prompted the establishment of a “Save Your Internet” movement to lobby against some of its more controversial provisions. This growing divergence of policies and regulatory frameworks threatens to create an increasingly balkanized digital world.

While this threat is real, it would be wrong to dismiss every policy that interferes with the Internet as an authoritarian attempt to undermine democracy. The increase in Internet policies is also a response to two other major changes in recent years.

First, the Internet's economic importance has grown exponentially, driven by a higher number of users and the growing adoption of digital tools. E-commerce, cloud computing, online advertising, digital payments, Internet infrastructure, and the number and range of con-

nected devices have all grown rapidly in recent years. These trends are likely to continue with the expansion of technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI) and the emergence of the Internet of Things. This means that a growing share of economic transactions will either take place or be mediated via the internet, placing the network at the heart of our economies.

Second, the Internet is no longer an open arena where startups compete to introduce ideas and create new businesses. Companies such as Google, Amazon, Facebook, and Alibaba have become huge, market-dominant businesses, and are globalizing their activities by expanding – and acquiring firms – worldwide. As Shoshana Zuboff argues in her new book, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*, these platforms are building a technological and organizational architecture that aims to lock in far-reaching control over the digital economy.

As this economy continues to expand, the global tech giants' dominance threatens to aggravate existing economic and technological inequalities. An example is the extraction of value by digital platforms through their intermediary roles, whether in transportation, accommodation, retail, or media. More generally, the technology gap – a key factor driving global inequality – could widen as digital giants in advanced economies move further into new areas such as AI and seek to occupy an infrastructural position in and across economies. The very low level of tax revenues that digital firms often generate in the countries where they operate further exacerbates the problem.

Many governments will therefore come under increasing pressure to protect national economies, including through policies that disrupt the global nature of the Internet. Far from being an exception, China's success in creating homegrown digital firms such as Alibaba and Baidu will be seen by other countries as a model to follow. Authoritarian governments will find it easier to justify measures that allow them greater control over the internet.

So far, efforts to fight Internet fragmentation have focused on pushing for international trade rules that would limit governments' ability to intervene in the digital economy. But some emerging and developing countries rightly fear that such measures will entrench the technology gap by making digital giants even more powerful. And even if such rules are enacted, it is not clear how effective they will be in limiting the trend of digital fragmentation.

Rather than simply criticizing every interventionist Internet policy, therefore, those wishing to save the Internet should focus on countering the underlying trends that are prompting many of these measures (or that could be used as justifications for them). Saving the global Internet requires limiting the growing concentration of power in the digital economy and preventing the Internet from becoming another engine of inequality.

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