

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

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**Pessimism and Optimism
about Intra-Afghan
Dialogue**

The recent intra-Afghan dialogue amidst the seventh round of talks between the Taliban and the US representatives in Qatari capital of Doha has generated hope for meaningful talks between the Taliban and their Afghan interlocutors. But the ordinary Afghans were disappointed as a result of the deadly terrorist attack in Ghazni province, which killed and wounded hundreds of combatants and non-combatants, including women and children.

The heavy casualties as a result of the attack in Ghazni outraged the public conscience and mounted Afghans distrust in meaningful talks. According to general belief, the Taliban signaled for talks and ushered in intra-Afghan dialogue, but carried out deadly attacks in Ghazni, which show the Taliban are not genuine at the table.

However, officials believe that the recent intra-Afghan dialogue have broken the ice between the Taliban and their Afghan interlocutors. In the two-day meeting, the two sides had reportedly discussed women's rights, freedom of the press, civilian protection, ceasefire, and withdrawal of foreign troops.

At the end of the talks, the two sides issued a "resolution" which included: Consensus on inclusive Afghan negotiations, being committed to a united and Islamic country, supporting the ongoing Doha peace talks, assuring that women's rights are ensured in political, social, economic, educational and cultural areas within the framework of Islamic values, building trust environment with observing the international humanitarian rights - including minimizing civilian casualties and respecting their fundamental rights, etc.

To allay the public concern, the spokesperson to the Taliban's political office in Doha Suhail Shaheen is cited as saying that the Taliban would respect freedom of speech, women's rights, and other human rights values within the framework of Islamic laws and principles. "We agree with freedom of the press within the structure of the Islamic principles." He also said, "Women have the right to get education in line with the Islamic principles and media should be neutral."

Notwithstanding Shaheen's statements, the public still view the Taliban with doubt and mistrust and do not believe that the Taliban's mindset would have undergone a considerable change. For instance, Shaheen repeatedly restricted all his words with "Islamic principles" as he would intend the Taliban's interpretation of the Islamic principles. The Taliban also back their radical ideology and their ongoing insurgency by religious tenets. With this in mind, if Shaheen means Islamic principles with Taliban's interpretation, it will not be acceptable to Afghan people.

The rights of women have been also discussed in the dialogue with the participation of some women representatives, however, Afghan women are still skeptical about the Taliban. They fear that the Taliban would restrict their rights and freedoms under those Islamic principles that they have always mentioned. To mitigate the public concern, the Taliban had better base the rights and freedoms of women on legal framework and Afghan Constitution, which has a specific committee for interpretation, since the constitution also supports Islamic tenets and endorsed with the participation of high-level clerics. Thus, if agreement is signed between the Taliban and their Afghan interlocutors, they have to use legal terms rather than religious terminologies, which would be complicated for being vulnerable to multiple interpretations and would leave a huge loophole for the Taliban to exploit the terms. The aforementioned topics discussed by the Taliban and their Afghan interlocutors had been so broad and expansive. That is, the two sides had to discuss and finalize fewer issues rather than unfolding broad range of topics without a definite conclusion.

Minimizing civilian casualties has been a highly significant and necessary issue discussed by the two sides and it is the main achievement of the intra-Afghan dialogue if the Taliban really do not violate their commitment in this regard. Hopefully, the two sides would agree on declaring ceasefire in the next round of intra-Afghan dialogue.

The dialogue has been ice-breaking and would have removed some mistrust and misunderstandings. The challenges would be solved if the Taliban and their Afghan interlocutors come to the table with clear demands and bona fide intention for peace.

The recent intra-Afghan dialogue has been the fruit of the struggles of Germany and Qatar, which co-hosted the meeting, and shows their active engagement in the talks. If regional stakeholders and Afghanistan's neighboring countries also engage more actively and constructively, the peace talks would come to fruition. Hence, the Afghan government welcomes the constructive engagement of all countries in the talks and their support for intra-Afghan dialogue.

Will the Dream of Afghan Peace be Realized?

By: Moh. Sakhi Rezaie

The notion of peaceful co-existence is, like all such notions in the social sciences, better understood contextually and thematically. Peaceful co-existence ensures economic prosperity for all social groups. In addition, it lends itself to manipulations and different usages. It is a good servant, indeed, a handy compass, at the control and command of its master. It serves the mighty as well as the weak, the big as well as the small. More importantly, it has been in existence since human settled experiences. In other words, the desire for peaceful existence is part of humanity and has dominated and continued to dominate international, national and local/community efforts at promoting the well-being of the people.

For a peaceful co-existence, the neighboring countries shall develop specific principles to protect and defend their independence. For example, China, India and Myanmar have issued five principles of peaceful co-existence as pillars on which to base their developmental aspirations.

The five principles were built around "mutual respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of member states; mutual non-interference in each other's internal affairs; equality of members; mutual benefit and peaceful co-existence. The popularity of these principles and their relevance in today's world can be seen from their almost unconditional endorsement by the United Nations in its charter.

Sustainable Development

The failure of traditional development strategies, which were basically (top-down), to meaningfully impact positively on the lives of the rural populace, has resulted in the search for, and adoption of an alternative development approach, which applies "bottom-up" strategy to development. As a concept, sustainable development is that development which meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It is development which protects the environment, advances economic prosperity and social justice. The practical implications of this orientation, is that sustainable development frowns at all activities that degrade or have the potential of degrading the environment, and demands that these activities

be stopped. It is, therefore, not surprising that sustainable development is fanatically environment-friendly and advocates and pursues activities and policies that are intended to renew and improve the environment. More importantly, sustainable development preaches, among other things, capacity-building among local beneficiaries of development projects, to ensure that these projects will continue in existence and remain functional even when external assistance is withdrawn or ceases. As a result, sustainable development cherishes and calls for effective broad participation as a means to sustain the development process, hence the actual meaning of the "bottom-up" approach.

Therefore, sustainable development is that development which meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. This scenario plays itself out only in conditions of peace and peaceful co-existence. Lack of peace or its converse, a situation of conflict, armed struggle, war and even threats of these, is not and cannot be conducive to development. Crises destabilize human settlements, economic activities, social interactions; conflicts unnecessarily raise tensions and create uncertainties. Apart from all these, conflicts destroy human lives, vital infrastructure, and natural resources.

Peace, on the other hand, promotes development in several ways. Under peaceful conditions people are more at ease and can easily activate their humanity. They can meaningfully think about their present conditions and ways of improving their future. They can invest in economic ventures, participate in social and political activities and think about future generations.

Peace ensures peaceful co-existence and sustainable development among the people and nations. The relative peace and harmony across the borders, and the opening and sustaining of the routes across the borders, is not possible without peaceful co-existence. Finally, we hope that the current peace talks lead to a durable peace in Afghanistan to enable the country to play its strategic role to connect the regional countries and beyond together. Peaceful Afghanistan means, peaceful co-existence and economic prosperity for the region and beyond.

Does the G20 Still Matter?

By: Jim O'Neill

When the G20 leaders held their first summit in late 2008, many welcomed what looked like a diverse, highly representative new forum for crafting common solutions to global problems. The group acquitted itself well in responding to the global financial crisis, and, for a while, its emergence as a forum for international policy coordination seemed like one of the only silver linings of that mess.

I was certainly among those applauding the G20's initial achievements. Since 2001, when I identified the rise of the BRIC countries (Brazil, Russia, India, and China) as a key feature of the twenty-first-century world economy, I had been calling for a major overhaul of global-governance structures. As I argued at the time, the continued dominance of the G7 (Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom, and the United States) was increasingly out of step with the complex world of the early 2000s. To this day, the G7's exclusion of China is a glaring omission, made worse by the presence of so many European countries, most of which share a currency and abide by the same fiscal- and monetary-policy rules.

Unfortunately, following the G20's summit in Osaka, Japan, last month, I cannot help but wonder whether that gathering, too, has lost its purpose. Indeed, the only relevant development to come from the summit was an agreement on the sidelines between US President Donald Trump and Chinese President Xi Jinping, who brokered yet another "truce" in their countries' trade war.

Part of the problem, of course, is that global governance in general has been marginalized, now that the US has abdicated its role as the custodian of the international order. But there are also issues with the G20 itself. On one hand, the group looks like an appropriate vehicle for facilitating global dialogue. Its membership represents around 85% of global GDP and comprises most of the leading emerging economies, including those that have not adopted Western-style liberal democracy. With the exception of Nigeria, Africa's largest economy and most populous country, the countries that one would expect to have a seat at the table do. And in the future, one could imagine Vietnam and a few others joining them.

On the other hand, while the G20 has been very good at issuing grandiose communiqués to acknowledge the existence of global challenges, it has proven utterly incapable of advancing

any solutions to them. To be sure, one could argue that it isn't realistic to expect a bunch of bureaucrats to fix everything that is broken in the world. If anything, it is the duty of activists, entrepreneurs, and other creative thinkers to pressure and persuade political leaders on the need for change. And yet, when it comes to problems that can be addressed only cooperatively at the global level, there is no alternative to bodies like the G20. Even if political leaders have adopted all the right ideas, they still need a forum for turning those ideas into coordinated policies.

To my mind, there are two barriers standing in the G20's way. First, though it is representative, it is also far too large. As I have argued since 2001, what the world really needs is a more representative G7, comprising the US, Japan, the European Union, and the BRIC countries. This new grouping would reside within the G20 and represent three-quarters of global GDP. While Canada and a post-Brexit UK would lose some of their current influence, they would have no less of it than similarly situated countries such as Australia. At any rate, they need not worry: there is no reason to expect a diplomatic overhaul of this scale anytime soon.

The G20's second deficiency is that it (as well as the G7) lacks an objective framework through which to set goals and measure progress toward them. Since the group's initial success a decade ago, its agenda has been fluid, with each host country adding something new to the mix at every annual gathering. In the case of the Osaka summit, the Japanese government introduced the goal of universal health care.

No one doubts that universal health care is a worthy cause. But nor has the G20 actually done anything to help individual member states expand the provision of health care. Worse, the time spent paying lip service to this new objective could have been used to discuss outstanding issues such as antimicrobial resistance, which was added to the G20 agenda in 2016. The language about AMR in the latest communiqué was notably similar to that of previous summits, which suggests that little progress has been made.

Meanwhile, the market for new antibiotics is deteriorating rapidly. Without a concerted international response, drug-resistant superbugs could take ten million lives per year by 2050, resulting in a cumulative loss of around \$100 trillion in global output. What the world needs now is action, not empty words. *Jim O'Neill, a former chairman of Goldman Sachs Asset Management and a former UK Treasury Minister, is Chair of Chatham House.*



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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