

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



July 28, 2019

## Regional Supports Essential to 'Afghan-led' Talks

On his state visit to Washington, Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan said that he would meet with the Taliban and persuade them to hold direct talks with the Afghan government stating that there was no "military solution" to the conflict. Pakistan is a key stakeholder in Afghan peace process and can play essential role if it puts its weight behind the process.

Afghan peace issue has been discussed between Khan and the US President Donald Trump, who urged Islamabad to engage in talks in more active way.

Meanwhile, US Envoy Zalmay Khalilzad traveled to Afghanistan and held meeting with Afghan officials, including President Ashraf Ghani and CEO Abdullah, to brief the last round of Doha talks and discuss the prospect of upcoming talks, Khalilzad is preparing for.

Speaking to President Ghani by phone, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said that the US President's South Asia Strategy did not change regarding Afghanistan.

Washington seems highly serious about the peace talks to end the 18-year conflict. It has repaired its strained relations with Pakistan to win its support for peace talks and push the Taliban to hold direct talks with Afghanistan.

After meeting with Trump, Khan's statements indicate that his country would put its weight behind the peace process as he will personally meet with the Taliban leadership. Now both Kabul and Washington view Pakistan how it will play its role and how much it will fulfill its promise in this regard.

Holding their third consultation on the Afghan peace process in Beijing this month, Russia, China, and the United States welcomed Pakistan joining the consultation and believed that Pakistan could play an essential role in facilitating peace in the country. Issuing Four-Party joint statement, they encouraged "all parties to take steps to reduce violence leading to a comprehensive and permanent ceasefire that starts with intra-Afghan negotiations". They also reiterated "Afghan-led and Afghan-owned" peace talks and agreed that the talks should produce "a peace framework" as soon as possible. They also agreed to invite other important stakeholders to join on the basis of the trilateral consensus.

Equally important, ministers of BRICS countries reiterated their support for national and international efforts to achieve "Afghan-led and Afghan-owned" peace and reconciliation process this week, while discussing arrangements for the eleventh summit of the bloc, slated for November 13-14. They also voiced their concern over the deteriorating security situation in Afghanistan.

Despite the regional efforts made to facilitate intra-Afghan dialogue and push the Taliban to declare ceasefire, violence has increased tremendously leading to heavy casualties. Afghans lose their lives on daily basis in attacks carried out by warring sides. Although the Taliban said they would reduce violence against civilians to zero, they rather intensified their attacks against them. Recently, a large number of Afghan civilians lost their lives in roadside bombs and indiscriminate attacks carried out by the Taliban militants. It indicates that the recent intra-Afghan dialogue held in Doha, amid seventh round of US-Taliban talks, did not yield result.

The Taliban's recent unfulfilled promise of reducing violence compounded the public mistrust in the Taliban. They now fear that the Taliban will not exercise the peace agreement, if it is signed between the Taliban and their interlocutors. So there will be a strong sanction behind the peace agreement and the international community and the US and NATO officials have to observe the agreement to ensure its smooth implementation after being signed.

However, the recent regional supports to the peace process generate hope for Afghan nation. Since military deal reached stalemate, peace talks, with the support of regional stakeholders, are the only gleam of hope for Afghan ordinary people. With every round of talks, being held between the Taliban and US representatives, Afghans pay close attention to news and reports with optimism. They hope they would hear positive news, ceasefire, and progress in the talks.

But they are still not clear about the outcome of any talks since talks are being held behind closed doors. In the meantime, the optimism being expressed by officials and the Taliban interlocutors about strides made in the talks, as they said on several occasions, is ephemeral and has put no effect on the daily life of Afghans so far.

In the upcoming round of talks, regional states have to put pressure on the Taliban to declare ceasefire, or at least stop killing civilians and targeting public infrastructures, so that Afghans believe that the Taliban are genuine negotiators and do not intend to play a foul game. That is, the next round of talks should put a positive impact on the daily life of Afghan citizens.

## Inside story of US policy in Afghanistan after Soviet takeover

By: Rajkumar Singh

From the beginning of Soviet intervention in December 1979, the United States of America compounded the whole issue in Afghanistan. It used Islamic fundamentalism to counter Soviet communism. To fight Soviet-style atheism, US policy-makers did not hesitate to use religion for political ends—the Catholic Church in Central America and Islam in Afghanistan. In other words, Islam was employed to unite the Muslim world and spur the spirit of Jihad against the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan. The US-led military campaign in Afghanistan was fuelled by succeeding American administration. The Reagan Doctrine of arming anti-communist freedom fighter in places such as Afghanistan, Angola, Cambodia and Nicaragua sanctified the doctrine of low-intensity conflict. By funneling billions of dollars, worth of arms through conduit states and their agencies, Washington allowed the conduits to bring into play their own interests, biases and rivalries. The Soviet intervention in Afghanistan was followed by General Zia's agreement with the US in 1981 for a strategic relationship. As it was concluded in the background of Afghan crisis, it made Islamabad a major recipient of US economic and military assistance. After a gap of over a decade, the Pakistani military was able to support an ambitious modernisation programme involving the introduction of some of the latest weapon system into the forces and the acquisition of advanced military technology.

### Long-term effects on Pak-Afghan society

With the eruption of crisis in Afghanistan, thousands of refugees sought sanctuary in Pakistan from Soviet air raids. The Government of Pakistan had every reason to be worried about the Afghan refugees. They began to create troubles. The use of Pakistan as a base by several Afghan guerrilla organisations and the arrival of millions of Afghan refugees have helped aggravate internal strife. Western nations have funneled hundreds of millions of dollars worth of sophisticated weapons through Pakistan to the Afghan rebels, but the large quantities of the supplies have found their way into underground Pakistani arms markets. Elements in the Pakistani army police and the refugee administration are still operating scams to sell weapons and relief supplies for personal gains. In that covert US war against the Soviet Union and a series of Soviet-backed regimes in Afghanistan, the USA chose Afghan religious extremists as their allies. Hand picked by Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence agency from among Pakistan-based Afghan dissidents and refugees, trained by the Pakistani military and the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and given generous US military assistance, the Mujahideen (Holy Warriors) waged a Jihad against the government in Kabul and its Soviet allies. During this period, the CIA also recruited thousands of volunteers from states in the Middle East and North Africa—including Algeria, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen to join the Mujahideen. Motivated by religious zeal and the sight of fellow Muslims fighting against the mighty Red Army, these volunteers eagerly underwent military training and joined the Jihad.

The Islamic Jihad, like any other multinational is now a global entity. Thanks to these men, and to the heroism of the Mujahideen and the Afghan people and also to the Stingers, Western and Muslim money, the Red Army, the most powerful military force on Earth, was stopped and turned back. Followed by the death of General Zia in August 1988 in an air crash, the Soviet take over in Kabul formally ended in February 1989. The Afghans won the war but lost the peace. Jealously, tribalism and the lust for power very soon replaced by the holy war. It was a demoralising spectacle; humankind at its lowest ebb; politics as usual. At the other end, the Soviet withdrawal marked the end of an era.

### Position of post-withdrawal Afghanistan

In the post-Afghan period, though Pentagon helped during 1992-95, with the movement of thousands of Mujahideen and other Islamic elements from Central Asia, even some Turks, in Europe to fight alongside Bosnian Muslims against the Serbs, a large number of Afghan Mujahideens became irrelevant to the US. Once the Afghan Jihad was over, the Generals did not know what to do with the fighters being turned out by the madrassas. But the United States of America was largely responsible for blocking peaceful transition of power in post-Soviet phase in Afghanistan. Its weapons and other aid created a pro-US element that had come to haunt regional and international security. These elements were fattened by the ISI at the expense of US tax-payers. Further it was a White House ceremony attended by some bearded and turbaned Afghan guerrillas in the mid 1980s that Reagan proclaimed Mujahideen such as Osama bin Laden as the 'moral equivalent of the Founding Fathers' of the United States. When Soviet tanks started rolling out of Afghanistan, the Americans too pulled out without installing their nominee in Kabul. The chaos and bloodshed that followed only helped Pakistan to make Afghanistan its colony.

### Marked global effects of US policy

In the period of US-led war against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan and thereafter Islamabad knew it well that the United States interest in Pakistan stemmed less from a concern for the security of this area and more from its own global strategy. This interest would wax or wane with changes in Washington's perception of Moscow's designs in the region. Hence, should either the Russians withdraw from Afghanistan or the two super powers agree to a détente in Europe or there be a change of heart between Washington and New Delhi, the American interest in Pakistan would decline. In fact, Pakistan used its participation in the covert US operation not so much to rout the Soviet forces in Afghanistan as to strengthen its military position against India and to favour Afghan guerrilla groups based in Peshawar. Islamabad easily pushed its agenda because the United States had accepted its condition that the ISI control the weapons flow and select the arms recipients. Before Pakistan one option was to turn them into private militias and to use them to terrorise Pakistan's minorities. The other, more attractive alternative, was to export them to Kashmir to try and repeat the so-called Afghan Jihad.

On the other there was no doubt in the fact that the Islamic victory in Afghanistan ignited the new Intifada. Muslims across the world were elated, emboldened and made proud by the victory over Soviet Union in Afghanistan by Islamic faith and ardour, many Muslim reasoned, they could just as well liberate themselves from oppressive regimes, the Israeli occupation of Southern Lebanon, Indian misrule in Kashmir, Catholic oppression in the Philippines, or Russia's brutal repression of the Caucasus. Disgusted by the bloody mess in Afghanistan, many Mujahideen turned their attention outside Afghanistan. A year after the Soviets withdrew from Afghanistan, rebellion erupted in India-held Kashmir. As the Afghan war veterans took their war outside Afghanistan, the security of the United States, several Muslim states, the Philippines, China and Russia came under pressure. But many thought the greatest impact of the movement of these men was felt in South Asia. India particularly began to identify itself as bearing the burnt of the terrorist acts perpetrated by Islamic militants. Indeed Pakistan has been identified by many as "waging a war by proxy in India-held Kashmir through Islamic militants. Pakistan itself has been wracked terrorist acts brought about by religious extremism and the drug trade, both a fall-out of the Afghan war.

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## Boris's Brexit

By: Anatole Kaletsky

Now that Boris Johnson has achieved his lifetime ambition to become the United Kingdom's prime minister, the tragedy of Brexit is approaching its climax. While the rest of the European Union has viewed this with barely disguised horror, there is good news and bad news in Johnson's apotheosis. The bad news is that the "no-deal" withdrawal from the European Union that Johnson advocated to win the leadership of the Europhobic Conservative Party could cause a sudden stop in economic activity comparable to the disaster that followed the failure of Lehman Brothers in 2008. Although this business breakdown might initially affect only trade-related businesses in Britain, and produce some kind of UK-EU compromise within a few weeks or months, we learned in the 2008 financial crisis that even a brief interruption of normal commercial relations in one part of the economy can reverberate for many years.

The good news is that Johnson is a far cleverer and more adroit politician than his predecessor, Theresa May. And pessimism about Britain's prospects has become so widespread that any Brexit outcome other than a no-deal rupture would now be a positive surprise, causing an economic resurgence not just in Britain but across Europe. Yes, Britain is bound to suffer in the long run from any version of Brexit. But in any version of Brexit other than "no deal," the short-term damage would be offset by a rebound in business and consumer sentiment as the risks of total breakdown were suddenly replaced by the certainty of a lengthy transition period in which Britain's economic relations with Europe would remain almost unchanged.

In this scenario, policy changes on both sides of the Channel could outweigh even the structural damage of Brexit to Britain and its trading partners. The UK would benefit from a cyclical stimulus promised by Johnson in the form of higher public spending and tax cuts. The rest of Europe, especially Germany and France, would gain from the commercial opportunities from new EU policies likely to squeeze British competitors out of the single market in lucrative industries such as finance, media, pharmaceuticals, defense, and autos.

What, then, is the probability of an orderly outcome and long transition period, as opposed to a potentially catastrophic sudden rupture?

Political betting markets now put the odds of no deal at 33%, and some financial analysts rate it as high as 50%. This is no surprise, given that Johnson devoted most of his leadership campaign to normalizing the idea of no deal. There are, however, at least three reasons why a no-deal Brexit remains very unlikely, despite Johnson—or perhaps because of him.

First, parliamentary numbers are stacked higher than ever against a no-deal outcome. All opposition parties are more united against Johnson than they were against May, while his effective parliamentary majority has been reduced to only two or three MPs. So, in principle, it would take only two Tory defectors to vote down Johnson's government and trigger a general election. With 40 Tory MPs having voted this month to weaken Johnson's negotiating tactics, there are clearly enough potential dissidents to topple his government should that be necessary to avert "no deal". And if an election were triggered before Johnson could re-unite his party by delivering some version of Brexit, he would probably lose, becoming the shortest-serving prime minister in British history. Provoking a rebellion among opponents of a no-deal Brexit is therefore a much greater risk to Johnson than upsetting the Europhobes who sabotaged May.

Second, Johnson has a means of avoiding a rupture that was not available to May. If he could persuade EU leaders to offer some minor cosmetic changes to May's withdrawal agreement, Johnson could almost certainly get Parliament to pass his "new" deal. This is because the hard-line Euroskeptics determined to replace May with a "genuine" Brexiteer would now have no choice but to vote for Johnson's deal or risk an election in which they might lose Brexit altogether. Meanwhile, many pro-Europeans in both major parties who had previously hoped to prevent Brexit will now support almost any negotiated agreement, just to avoid the no-deal nightmare. The main threat therefore comes from the EU side. Will European leaders give Johnson enough cosmetic concessions to turn "May's pig of a deal" into "Boris brings home the bacon"? The answer is probably yes. EU leaders are almost as desperate as Johnson to end the Brexit saga—and Johnson really needs only one small concession: a change to the "Irish backstop" designed to guarantee an open border in Northern Ireland.

Because the border issue really matters only to Ireland, the EU will be guided by the Irish government's interests. And it is hard to see why the Irish government would prefer the certainty of immediate damage to Ireland's economic and security interests in a no-deal Brexit to a slight softening of the "Irish backstop" that would guarantee a long transition period in which nothing would change. As Pat Leahy, a prominent Irish Times commentator, recently noted: "Isn't the possibility of Border checks in a few years' time better than the certainty of checks on October 31st?" Better still from the Irish standpoint, during the transition period following an orderly Brexit, Britain would be eager to negotiate a permanent EU trade agreement, which would put Ireland in an even stronger position to insist on open-border conditions. This leads to a third reason for betting against a no-deal outcome: Johnson's own statements and political style. While Johnson has repeatedly promised to leave the EU in October "with or without a deal," he has also put the chance of no deal actually happening at "a million to one against," because he is confident of a successful EU negotiation.

Why has the world accepted Johnson's promise of "with or without a deal" as gospel truth, while dismissing his prediction of an agreed Brexit as irrelevant wishful thinking? Focusing on personal ambitions and downplaying promises, which has usually been the best way to predict Johnson's actions, suggests the opposite conclusion.

If Johnson goes for a no-deal Brexit, he risks disaster whatever happens: an economic meltdown if he manages to bypass parliamentary opposition and delivers the promised rupture, and a premature general election if Parliament blocks it. If, on the other hand, he genuinely tries to negotiate an orderly withdrawal agreement, Johnson could still deliver a symbolic Brexit by his October deadline, but also secure the transition period that Britain desperately needs.

The resulting rebound in business confidence would then allow a generous budget of tax cuts, public spending giveaways, and Keynesian fiscal stimulus, paving the way for a general election next spring that Johnson would be almost certain to win with a big majority. For a political libertine whose only consistent principle has been inconsistency, an orderly, negotiated Brexit would surely be the favored option, regardless of the reckless promises to Europhobes that put him in power.

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