

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



June 13, 2018

Who Wins and Loses From Eid Ceasefire Deal?

An unconditional cease-fire with the Taliban was announced by the Ashraf Ghan, the Afghan President, Thursday, July 7 last week and in a surprise move the Taliban announced a 3 day ceasefire during the Eidul Fitr, on Saturday, this week, but they excluded the international forces from the ceasefire.

What makes this announcement unique is that it is the first time the Afghan Taliban accepts a ceasefire initiated by the Afghan government, since 17 years ago when the Taliban regime was toppled by the international community and the United national Front in 2001.

The deal is unique in that it was announced before the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, an institution many analysts see it as a strategic cooperation platform among the regional countries including India and Pakistan. Many political analysts see the war in Afghanistan as a proxy war between various regional rivals, including India and Pakistan. This Edi ceasfire announcement came just on the same day, June 9, that the heads of state of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) gathered in Qingdao to mark the group's 18th anniversary. It was the fourth time that the annual summit was held in China, and the first outside of Shanghai (2001 and 2006) and Beijing (2012). Shanghai Cooperation Organization, after nearly two decades, now boasts eight full members, four observers, and six "dialogue partners;" a permanent secretariat in Beijing; and a security outpost in Tashkent. The SCO presents itself as a multilateral organization of equal and diverse sovereign members, making the Qingdao summit an important moment to reflect on the organization's trajectory, achievements, and enduring challenges.

President Ashraf Ghani on June 6 that, said: "China is a global pillar of international peace and stability and that Beijing must play more inclusive role in stabilizing Afghanistan and the region". He added that, "China today is a pillar of global stability. China has taken a huge role in making the stability of the global economy possible, and of course, with a series of initiatives, the most important of which is the One Belt One Road.". Based on this request and considering the ground realities in Afghanistan, President Xi proposed SCO-Afghanistan Contact Group in order to give a full play to the role of the SCO-Afghanistan Contact Group to facilitate peace and reconstruction in Afghanistan. In addition, the Taliban and other terrorist groups have recently become powerful in Afghanistan particularly in the northern parts of the country bordering with Tajikistan and some other neighboring countries. If these terrorist groups make their way to the neighboring countries of Afghanistan, they will pose serious threats to the SCO members. Based on this, all SCO members including China require expanding their cooperation with Afghanistan to address this issue strategically. In this context, the SCO-contact Group should initiate its cooperation between the member countries the soonest possible. Because, as the government of Afghanistan has always emphasized, terrorist groups are not only the enemies of Afghanistan, but they threaten all the countries, especially the neighboring countries of Afghanistan. As a result, no country will benefit from supporting the terrorist groups in the long run, even some countries gain short period benefits from supporting these terrorist groups. Therefore, as the SCO becomes stronger, its regional and international role increases as well. As a result, the SCO member states have an increasingly need for security, stability and regional prosperity. If the SCO member states want to play their regional and internal roles duly, ensuring security, stability and regional prosperity, they should first address those issues that affect them directly. This goal only can be ensured if the SCO member states recognize Afghanistan's security and stability as the first challenge to be addressed by the SCO. Doing so, they should put the neighboring countries of Afghanistan under pressure to end their supports to the terrorist groups including the Afghan Taliban terrorist group.

The surprise Eid Ceasfire by the Taliban group was shocking for many observers. As it is the first time the group accepts a ceasefire, analysts mentioned different reasons for such a surprise move by the group. However, some analysts hold that considering the coincidence of the announcement with SCO meeting and the strategic partnership between China and Pakistan from one side and the new role the regional and international community expects from China in general and from SCO in specific, the Taliban group may have accepted the ceasefire under pressure of Pakistan While Pakistan itself may have been pressured by China or SCO to initiate the ceasefire to signal a new approach to the prolong conflict in Afghanistan aligned with the Shanghai new regional and international role in addressing the regional and international conflicts.



Shanghai Cooperation Organization Qingdao Summit: Remain True to Original Aspiration and Sail off for A Brighter Future

By Zhang Zhixin

From June 9th to 10th, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) Summit was successfully held in Qingdao of China, which locates on the shore of the Yellow Sea. President Xi Jinping and leaders of SCO member states, observer states and leaders of relevant international organizations exchanged in-depth views on the development status quo and prospects of the SCO. The Summit depicted a new blueprint for SCO development and tapped new impetus into the global development.

At present, the SCO, with 8 member states, 4 observer states and 6 dialogue partners, stands as a comprehensive regional organization that covers the largest area and population in the world. Its members account for about 20% of world economy and 40% of world population. The summit was the first one since the SCO's accession of new members. It was the largest summit with the highest level attendance and most fruitful outcomes in history, and also an important summit with milestone significance.

The Qingdao Summit highlights the new vision and guidance, which is fully reflected in the following three keywords: The first one is "Shanghai Spirit". It features mutual trust, mutual benefit, equality, consultation, respect for diversified culture and pursuit of common development. The Spirit has already become the core value of SCO. During the Summit, President Xi proposed the new outlooks on development, security, cooperation, culture and global governance, added a new connotation of the era to the "Shanghai Spirit". The second one is "a community with a shared future for mankind". The Qingdao Declaration announced the vision of a community with a shared future for mankind, which will deepen the win-win cooperation among SCO member states, and promote the common development and prosperity of this region and beyond. The third one is "SCO Initiatives". The Qingdao Declaration emphasizes that the SCO will commit to the building of a more fair and balanced international order based on an equal, cooperative, indivisible, comprehensive and sustainable security. This is the political consensus reached by all the member states on the basis of every country's common needs, and these are initiatives and wisdom contributed to the improvement of global governance. The SCO summit achieved fruitful results. Leaders of SCO member states signed and witnessed 23 cooperative documents. The summit ratified The Action Plan for Implementing the Treaty on Long-Term Good-Neighborliness, Friendship and Cooperation of the SCO Member States for next five years, approved the Program of Cooperation for Combating Terrorism, Separatism, Extremism for next three years. Several practical cooperative documents in the area of trade facilitation, food security and customs cooperation and etc. have been signed. In particular, the Joint Statement on Promoting Trade Facilitation strongly advocates upholding multilateralism and opposing protectionism. The Belt and Road Initiative gained more and more support on the summit. All parties agreed to continue the fruitful cooperation in the fields of culture, education, science

and technology, health, tourism and etc. Senior representatives from Eurasia Economic Union, International Monetary Fund and the World Bank attended the summit, suggesting that SCO's influence is growing day by day.

The Qingdao Summit outlines the direction for SCO's future development. Member states should join hands, and continuously adhere to the following principles. First, continuously following the "Shanghai Spirit", firmly upholding the flag of peace, development and cooperation, prohibiting from forging a small circle of exclusiveness and jointly building the community with a shared future for mankind. Second, deepening the practical cooperation to ensure the cooperation of the three pillars in the fields of security, economy and social-culture to be pushed forward together, and bring more benefits for the region. Third, pushing forward the improvement of global governance, constantly improving and enriching the global governance system, and contributing the SCO wisdom and power to advance the international order towards a fairness and reasonableness.

The Qingdao summit strengthened bonds between the SCO and Afghanistan. The Qingdao Declaration pointed out that the SCO member states should support the Afghan government and people's efforts to maintain security, promote economic development, combat terrorism, extremism, and drug crimes. They believe that the peace, stability as well as the economic recovery in Afghanistan will promote the security and sustainable development of the region. The Summit emphasized that the political dialogue and the inclusive reconciliation process featuring "Afghan-owned, Afghan-led" is the only way to resolve the Afghan issue, asked all parties to strengthen cooperation under the central coordination of UN to achieve the stability and development of Afghanistan. The declaration affirmed the achievements of the "SCO-Afghanistan Contact Group" meeting as well as the positive contribution of the Tashkent International Conference, and supported all mediation, dialogue and cooperation mechanism on Afghanistan more actively carrying out their duties. During the bilateral meeting, President Xi Jinping appreciated President Ghani's peace initiative to Taliban earlier this year as well as the announcement of ceasefire in recent days, which once again showed China's firm position on supporting Afghan peace and reconciliation process, and supporting all parties resolve the Afghan issues through political dialogue.

The Qingdao Summit started a new journey for SCO's development, and left a brilliant mark in the evolution of the global landscape. The Chinese side would like to strengthen cooperation with all parties under the framework of SCO, sail for the future and fulfill our dreams together. We hope to promote the "Shanghai Spirit", push forward the international order towards more fair and reasonable direction, and make the sunshine of security and prosperity brighten the common homeland of mankind.

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Nourishing Cities with Nature

By Carlo Ratti

Ever since the ancient Greek poet Theocritus wrote his pastoral idylls romanticizing rural life, people have been pondering how to build cities that are in concert with their natural surroundings. But with rates of urbanization growing exponentially around the world, the need for greener cities has never been more urgent. Fortunately, innovation and technology can help strike this long-elusive balance.

Bridging the urban-rural divide has long been a focus of city planners. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, European cities experienced unprecedented growth as huge numbers of people moved from the countryside to newly booming metropolises. As these cities grew, they become overcrowded and polluted, which inspired a new generation of thinkers to search for solutions.

One of these visionaries was Britain's Ebenezer Howard, who in 1898 coined the term "garden city" - which he defined as residential communities built around a mix of open spaces, parks, factories, and farms. Soon, London was surrounded by leafy suburbs designed to keep high-quality housing and abundant green space in equilibrium. Howard's mantra was to bring the city to nature.

A few decades later, on the other side of the Atlantic, Frank Lloyd Wright conjured up Broadacre City, an imagined suburban development balancing the built environment with the wild. And back in Europe, Charles-Édouard Jeanneret, an architect and designer known as Le Corbusier, was sketching visions of utopian cities that seamlessly enveloped the natural world.

And yet, while each one of these ideas was revolutionary for its time, they failed because they relied heavily on the automobile and promoted urban sprawl. In fact, most early urbanization in the West was characterized by development patterns that crashed against nature, connected not by green spaces and parks, but rather by endless ribbons of impervious pavement. As planners recognized the shortcomings of twentieth-century remedies, they sought to reverse the equation: how can nature be returned to the city?

New York City's High Line, an aerial greenway built from a converted rail bed that opened in June 2009, was one of the first projects to capture this new ambition in urban planning. From

London's (now defunct) Garden Bridge to Seoul's Skygarden, projects are being designed to better incorporate nature into the urban fabric.

Singapore's Gardens by the Bay is among the more ambitious efforts. At the park's Supertree Grove, photovoltaic cells harvest energy from the sun, and rainwater is stored in the steel trees' "canopy" to feed vertical towers of foliage. Dehumidified air is even collected to help cool adjacent buildings.

Meanwhile, in Germany, a startup called Green City Solutions is building mobile moss-covered walls to clean polluted air and help lower urban temperatures. The company's CityTree concept - essentially a natural filtration system - is being tested from Mexico City to Milan.

We are even witnessing a boom in urban agriculture, as advances in hydroponic and aeroponic farming techniques make it easier to grow vegetables in confined spaces. While cities will never replace rural areas as the world's main source of nutrition, a higher percentage of food can be cultivated in urban areas. New ventures like Freight Farms in Boston and InFarm in Berlin are already harnessing these technologies to bring urban farming to more people.

As innovative solutions like these take root, urban planners are turning their attention to even bolder endeavors. One concept that my colleagues and I have explored is custom-designed urban ecosystems and climates. In Milan, we recently unveiled our Living Nature exhibit, a 500-square-meter (5,381-square-foot) pavilion that can recreate four seasons simultaneously under the same roof. The goal of the project was to spark conversation about sustainable design, and to illustrate the surprising ways that nature will be integrated into the cities and homes of the future.

More than a century ago, the French geographer Élisée Reclus astutely predicted that people would always need "the dual possibility of gaining access to the delights of the city ...and, at the same time, the freedom that is nourished by nature." Reclus's ideal was visionary, if premature. But today, thanks to new technologies and bold thinking, the urban-rural divide in city planning is slowly closing.

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