

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



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Trust Building Between Af-Pak is a Must for Peace

Considering that the peace talks has reached a critical phase, engagement with more Afghans across the country on how to achieve a negotiated political settlement that brings a durable peace looks inevitable. All stakeholders hold that such consultations are of utmost importance to reach a sustainable peace in the country.

Role of Pakistan in Bringing Taliban to the Negotiation Table

Pakistan is one of the Main stakeholders of the Peace talks. As a result, focusing on improving the relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan as part of building further international consensus for peace is one of the key objectives of Kahalilzad in the Peace talks. It is self-explanatory that the peace in Afghanistan will provide opportunities for regional connectivity and development that both countries will benefit from them. However, improvement in Pak-Afghan relations has often been hampered by mistrust and reciprocal accusations by both sides. Anyhow, both sides are hopeful that years of mistrust can be replaced by mutual trust and cooperation toward peace. Although, Pakistan has offered support to US efforts to broker an end to America's longest-ever war and is also willing to play a role in persuading Taliban to meet Afghan officials, but Afghanistan has been skeptical about the Pakistan's sincerity in the Peace talks and encouraging Taliban for direct negotiations with Kabul.

Urgent Need to Develop a Trust Building Mechanism

President Ghani's visit from Islamabad on June 27 for talks on improving Pak-Afghan relations that are often hampered by mistrust and reciprocal accusations is a golden opportunity for both sides to develop a joint trust building mechanism to overcome the historical mistrust between the two nations for the good of them. President Ghani and Prime Minister Imran Khan can change this visit to be positive to become a base to replace the years of mistrust by mutual trust and cooperation toward peace. If they reach to such an agreement, as peace talks have entered to a new stage and Afghans must be engaged more than ever, it will enable the Afghan government for an intra-Afghan dialogue to achieve a negotiated political settlement that brings a durable peace in Afghanistan.

Afghan peace talks continue to progress and preparations are under way for intra-Afghan negotiations as now as an essential part of this process. Mr. Khalilzad has already met members of the National Unity Government, political leaders, civil society, and women to discuss progress in US efforts to facilitate an inclusive peace process. There is no doubt that Pakistan plays a vital role in the talks. As a result, President Ghani's visit from Islamabad can be a crucial moment for the talks if both sides can overcome the longstanding mistrust between the two countries. Trust building between the two countries is difficult, but achievable and can ensure a negotiated political settlement that brings a durable peace not only in Afghanistan but in the region.

Regional Cooperation to be Stepped up in SCO Summit

By: Hujjatullah Zia

Afghan President Muhammad Ashraf Ghani traveled to the Kyrgyz capital of Bishkek to attend the 19th meeting of the Council of Heads of State of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). The meeting will carry increasing significance for Afghanistan, which is an observer state of the SCO.

Last year, China hosted the SCO meeting with the participation of heads of states, including President Ghani from Afghan side. The SCO signed a protocol with the Afghan government during the SCO Heads of State summit in Qingdao, China, to establish the Afghanistan Contact Group, a consultative mechanism for developing proposals and recommendations to support the country for establishing a peaceful and prosperous Afghanistan.

Heads of states meet in Bishkek at the time of immense challenges to regional stability. The three evil forces of terrorism, separatism, and extremism as well as political confrontation loom large across the region. Militant groups carry out indiscriminate attacks in regional countries, mainly Afghanistan. Meanwhile, the self-styled Islamic State group still remains a serious threat to the region. The Easter Sunday deadly bombings in Sri Lanka, which is a dialogue partner to the SCO, on April 21 suggests that terrorist groups seek to extend their reach across the region and target people on the basis of their faith, race, and color.

Meanwhile, poverty remains a formidable challenge in many countries in the region. Worst of all, poverty and hunger have been compounded as a result of regional conflict. For instance, a large number of civilians, including women and children, suffer severely in the wake of famine and hunger in Syria and Yemen.

The SCO participants will discuss regional security and poverty issues in the summit and reaffirm their commitment to promoting cooperation to address the ongoing challenges.

To mitigate insurgency as well as poverty, the SCO stakeholders have to promote mutual cooperation and trade and investment. That is, the SCO members, observers and dialogue partners have to reinforce their economic cooperation and join forces to combat terrorism.

The SCO summit provides a multilateral platform not only for commercial exchanges but also cultural interaction and people-to-people contacts. Regional stakeholders have to reinforce cultural exchanges so as to promote mutual understanding and mutual trust. It should be noted that violation of human rights and humanitarian

law is one of the serious issues across the region. The rights, liberties, and dignity of individuals are widely trampled upon in one way or another. People are killed simply on the grounds of their race, color, or gender. Meanwhile, Yemeni men, women, and children bear the brunt of violence and bloodshed as a result of the attacks carried out by Saudi-led coalition forces.

With this in mind, the SCO members, observers, and dialogue partners have to step up their struggles for protecting the rights and liberties of all individuals across the region and put pressure on warring sides to resolve their issues through communication rather than confrontation. Hence, all regional and global stakeholders need to pave the ground for smooth exercise of human rights and humanitarian law.

The SCO stakeholders are supposed to establish mutual trust, friendly relations, and good neighborliness and promote the culture of dialogue and interaction so that they could mitigate regional problems and challenges. In other words, they have to promote the "Shanghai Spirit" – i.e. mutual trust, mutual benefit, equality, consultation, respect for cultural diversity, and pursuit of common development.

Adhering to the international principles, stated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the United Nations Charter, SCO stakeholder have to respect the cultural values and social norms of all nations and step up their struggles for trust-building.

The issue of Afghanistan is highly serious as militant groups, notably the Taliban, have intensified their terrorist activities. Afghan soldiers and civilians have sustained heavy casualties in the last 18 years of conflict. Having said that, peace and prosperity still remain elusive in Afghanistan. Thus, regional stakeholders and SCO members have to support Afghanistan in its campaign against terrorism. They have to reinforce their military support to Afghanistan, with regard to international principles, to eliminate terrorism. Meanwhile, the SCO members are expected to put pressure on the Taliban to hold direct talks with the Afghan government and declare ceasefire.

It is believed that promoting Afghanistan from SCO's observer to member state will mitigate some of the challenges in Afghanistan and the SCO members need to take this issue into account. Perhaps, this year's summit will further contribute to the mitigation of regional challenges and President Ghani's trip will be more fruitful.

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

Where is the Key to Peace: Kabul or Islamabad?

By: Mohammad Zahir Akbari

Recently the Pakistani Foreign Minister, Shah Mehmood Qureshi, said that Pakistan is ready to help Afghanistan in post-settlement reconstruction and development. He assured that Pakistan would remain committed to durable peace and stability in Afghanistan, terming it a pre-requisite for development and prosperity of the region. He also promised to reopen its airspace for Afghanistan-India flights in next few days. According to Afghanistan Civil Aviation Authority, Pakistan will reopen its airspace for flights on June 14. It is hoped that this cooperation leads to deeper cooperation and bilaterally find the lost key of peace in Afghanistan.

Thus, both countries have showed some flexibility and started some newly political communication; The meeting of the president Ghani with Imran Khan in the margin of the Islamic countries' summit in Saudi Arabia, the trip of the national security adviser to Pakistan, the Sind evaluation meeting of the two countries and the recent Action Plan for Peace and Solidarity in Islamabad and finally the impending travel of the President to Pakistan are some example for this improvement which also caused some optimism. This skeptic improvement comes after several years of tension between the two countries with imploring Taliban to stop destructive war in the country. Undoubtedly, the issue of ending war and reaching peace in Afghanistan has been one of the main agenda that pursued by the government. As being one of the top priorities, it devoured a lot of fiscal and non-fiscal facilities from the already suffering people Afghanistan. With attempting to start peace negotiation with Taliban, many of the political and economic opportunities have been wasted while no positive outcome has produced yet. The very recent examples for this failure were the Qatar and Moscow meetings that the delegations of Afghanistan have not received anything other than humiliation and disgrace. Reversely, it created opportunities for Taliban to promote their political position and prestige in international arena.

Although everybody knows that war and peace in Afghanistan are managed from the outside, yet we are expecting peace and meaningful talks from the Taliban which seems paradoxical and more like a puzzle. If we believe that the Taliban is a group created by foreign countries, if we believe that the formation of Taliban group is a political project for political purposes, if we know that the Taliban are not independent in their policies and attitudes, then why do we waste a lot of resources in attempting talks with Taliban? Why the Taliban is always awarded one-sided advantage or awards while running a proxy war in the country.

Today's question "Where is the key to peace?" has become a kind of metaphor that Afghan citizens use it in different ways. The Former President of Afghanistan, Hamid Karzai, had said that the key to peace in Afghanistan is in the hand of US and Pakistan. A num-

ber of other politicians believe that this key is only in Islamabad and Rawalpindi of Pakistan but Once Khalilzad had said that the key to peace is in Kabul. In recent years, some of analysts refer it to the capital of some Arab countries or Moscow. Our current problem is that we have lost the key to peace and we do not know where to look for it. So, if we find the right address of key to peace, we would be able to solve the unresolved puzzle which is emanating from same point.

This unresolved puzzle has also affected our diplomacy with foreign countries. If today our foreign policy does not have enough rationality and stability, this originates from unstable and shaky political bases. We do not know where the key of peace is; sometimes we are seeking in America, sometimes we give our hearts to the Arab countries, and sometimes we give concession to Pakistan, and sometimes beg from Russia. In fact, the ship of our peace effort is drifting over an ocean without knowing the real destination.

Unfortunately, due to unsustainable and irrational political policies, the situation in Afghanistan has become so complicated and intertwined with multiple issues that we can hardly identify a single country as a factor in creating, intensifying and continuing the war in Afghanistan. For example, the role that the United States and Pakistan have had over the past years in Afghanistan, do not have now. The emergence of other countries in the field of competition and the extent of their role and influence in the intensification and continuation of war and peace has changed the judgments and perceptions of the past.

As a result, the US government though seems more flexible and may have retreated from some of its positions had in the past but cannot convince Taliban to end war in Afghanistan. The Taliban has not accepted even a single day of ceasefire while requested by the whole nation and neither agreed to sit in peace table with legitimate government of Afghanistan. Today, the Taliban group is not dependent to a single country; rather, it has established its relations with various countries and receives financial assistance and weapons from many countries.

In the past, Pakistan was blamed as a father of Taliban but today, due to addition of multiple supporters to Taliban, Pakistan may not have the previous influence over the Taliban group. However, the role of Pakistan in establishing peace in Afghanistan is undeniable provided that Pakistan desists from its dual policies and honestly pursues its interests in Afghanistan's peace and development. Thus, Afghanistan should also manage its relation with Pakistan on the basis of international norms and standard, and sensibly respond to Pakistan's legitimate concerns and demand. This seems to be the real point that the two countries can cooperate on peace issue in Afghanistan.

Mohammad Zahir Akbari is the permanent writer of the Daily Outlook Afghanistan. He can be reached at mohammadzahirakbari@gmail.com




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



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