

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

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Seeking Common Ground and Addressing Common Challenges via CICA

The 5th summit of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA), hosted by Tajikistan, is significant for mitigating challenges across the region and building mutual trust and mutual understanding between member states.

A number of challenges loom large in the region. The issue of terrorism as well as political rivalries are highly perilous. Terrorism is a common threat to all nations across the globe, and Asian states are particularly vulnerable to threats posed by terrorist networks, including I-Qaeda, ISIS, and the Taliban. That is, a large number of people, women and children included, lose their lives as a result of terrorist attacks. Second, political rivalries across the region, notably in the Middle East, also jeopardize regional security and push the countries to confrontation. Rivalries, which are most likely to stem from self-interests, will be conducive to conflict leaving no room for mutual trust.

With this in mind, regional and global conferences are necessary to provide a platform for communication and dialogue among nations so that they could address the common challenges, combat common enemy, and build mutual trust.

Addressing the summit in Dushanbe, the capital of Tajikistan, Afghan CEO Abdullah Abdullah said that the security threats posed by the terrorist activities were still the main challenge for their countries and the region. Deteriorating security conditions pose a serious challenge to development and economic cooperation. He added that addressing the common challenges and threats required great collective efforts and more sincere cooperation. According to him the region needed to strengthen security and stability and to bring peace and prosperity to their people in a spirit of regionalism and togetherness.

It is self-explanatory that Afghanistan has been the main victim of terrorism in Asia and paid heavy sacrifices as a result of terrorist attacks. Meanwhile, Afghan soldiers made great sacrifices in combating terrorism. Being frustrated with the conflict, both Afghan nation and state expect the international community to support Afghanistan in combating terrorism as well as peace process. The Afghan government has been urging neighboring countries, regional stakeholders, and global powers to support Afghanistan's peace process.

Attending the second round of the non-governmental forum of CICA on June 28, 2017, in Beijing, I suggested two main solutions for mitigating the persistent militancy: First, it would be highly effective if the clergy of the state members form a religious committee to campaign against terrorism through oral and written preaches. That is, clerics, mainly from Islamic countries such as Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran, Iraq, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Malaysia, Indonesia, etc., issue fatwa (religious decree) so as to condemn terrorist acts and publish monthly magazines for enlightening the true spirit of Islam and supporting religious tolerance.

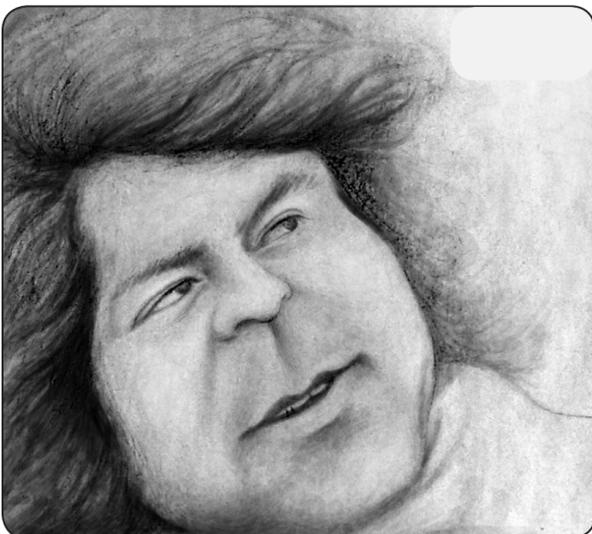
Indeed, mullahs and muftis in the mentioned countries carry much weight for Islamic societies and their fatwa and preach against extremism will reduce terrorism to a great extent.

Second, traditional mechanism for combating modern terrorism would not succeed to tackle the issue. The world should reinforce intelligence, exchange intelligence information, and engage actively in cyberspace to combat insurgency.

It should be noted that the objectives of CICA are to promote the spirit of co-existence, resolve disputes through communication rather than confrontation, enhance tolerance and regional cooperation, and stress the role of diplomatic approach for gaining peace and stability rather than persistent enforcement of power. Hence, the member states have to play active role in achieving the CICA objectives so as to mitigate regional threats and challenges and pave the ground for building a moderately prosperous society for mankind.

The CICA conference was conducted in Tajikistan just after the 19th summit of the Council of Heads of State of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) was hosted by Kyrgyzstan, in which President Ghani participated. The SCO summit also puts much weight for bringing nations closer, smoothing the path for common ground and regional cooperation, and tackling common challenges. Regional stability and combating terrorism were also discussed by SCO member states, observers, and dialogue partners. The participants urged regional and global cooperation and building mutual trust.

CICA members and all SCO stakeholders have to step up their cooperation for mitigating the regional and global challenges, mainly the three evil forces of terrorism, separatism, and extremism. They should not end up with only talks and speeches, but take more practical steps. The two summits should have a direct and tangible results for the region. If member states simply gather and deliver speeches without being actively engaged in reducing challenges, it will be disappointing. Thus, they have to draw a roadmap for tackling the challenges and each country should be tasked to achieve a certain point or goal each year and report it to the member states in their annual summits.



Pessimism and Optimism on the Eve of Seventh Round Talks Between US and Taliban

By: Mohammad Zahir Akbari

It is said that the seventh round talks between the US negotiators and the Taliban members in Doha, will take place in few next days hoping that this time the talks would produce sensible results. The US forces withdrawal from Afghanistan, counterterrorism assurances, ceasefire and direct talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban are the main key issues which have been discussed in the past six rounds of the talks between US and Taliban. According to local Analysts familiar with Doha talks and the peace process, the Taliban will be given "a number of privileges" in this round of the talks. "The Americans have decided to give the Taliban some privileges to take the negotiations out of the current situation," quoted from Wahid Muzhda, a Kabul-based political analyst.

However, there is also some pessimism as the peace talks have been faced with many deadlocks over the past seven months since Khalilzad started his efforts on behalf of the US government. Last time in May, Khalilzad said the talks are making "slow" but "steady" progress. Preparing for the seventh round talks, last week he arrived in Kabul and since then he has held consultations and talks with Afghan government leaders and members of the civil society, the youth and women. According to reports, another meeting on Afghan peace will be held in Norway after the US-Taliban talks in Doha. It is said also that the former spy chief and a vice presidential candidate Amrullah Saleh and head of President Ghani's office, Salam Rahimi, have been invited to the Norway meeting.

On the other side, Taliban has refused to attend the meeting due to the possible presence of the two key officials. Khalilzad said in a tweet on Friday that Norway has a long-standing history in helping Afghanistan and great expertise in facilitating negotiations. The US envoy said that intra-Afghan peace negotiations could benefit from Norway's support. The Taliban's willingness and refusals on attending meetings on peace has created doubts among critics and some lawmakers, who say the group does not seem "interested in peace". It is also said that Taliban are not the genuine negotiator for peace talks and they are always steered by outsiders.

In the second round of talks between the Taliban and Afghan political figures in Moscow, the Taliban negotiators insisted on the full withdrawal of US troops. Fawzia Kofi one of the Moscow meeting participants said that Taliban's dogmatic mentalities have not changed yet. Thus, the Taliban have not accepted democracy and they have not shown any green signal to an end in the war or to a ceasefire; once they divulged their intention with saying to abolish the Afghan national army but later retreated from position due to confrontation with public criticism inside Afghanistan.

Moreover, according to sources the Taliban will only focus ne-

gotiation over foreign troops' withdrawal from Afghanistan in return for their pledge not to welcome foreign extremists. Experts believe that the Taliban delegation will not negotiate over internal issues even if Khalilzad bring the issue of ceasefire and intra-Afghan dialogue up at the meeting.

Nevertheless, the US negotiator, Khalilzad, seems optimistic as recently said that in the upcoming meeting with Taliban he would "try to bring the first two parts of our peace framework to closure." Though he emphasized the success would require other parties to show flexibility. He also stressed that all talks would take place in accordance with the principle that "nothing is agreed until everything is agreed". According to most Afghan people and analysts without intra-Afghan dialogue, peace is not possible in Afghanistan. Afghan people are not willing to desist from the democratic achievement hardly attained in last 18 years.

Simultaneous to this, a US military commander noted this week that strongholds of the Islamic State group in eastern Afghan provinces "are very worrisome to us. While the Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid claimed that Taliban had cleared many Afghan areas of IS, and he accused American forces as well as their local partners of launching aerial strikes against Taliban positions in areas where the insurgents are battling IS militants. "If American generals really fear from Daesh, then why are they avoiding its elimination and creating hurdles against mujahedeen operations," quoted from Mujahid. Overall, there are several challenges in Afghanistan peace process. First, the Afghan government and some regional stakeholders have been marginalized in the talks between the Taliban and US representatives. If this one-to-one talks reach deadlock, there is no third party around the table to push for breaking. It is believed that engaging regional actors and the Kabul government would make the talks inclusive and productive.

Second, the Taliban are simply pushing for their demands without considering the demand of people and government of Afghanistan. Although the Taliban negotiators had been delisted from the blacklist, the US troop pullout had been agreed, and some of their prisoners released but the Taliban has accepted not a single demand of their interlocutors and have intensified their attacks in recent months.

Third, instead of siding with Washington in the talks, Russia continues a parallel negotiation to Doha talks through inviting the Taliban and US political and Jihadi leaders every once in a while. This would contribute to the Taliban's international recognition and boosts their morale for fighting. It implies that Moscow is showing Washington that it has leverage on the Taliban or close tie with their leadership simply to urge the US indirectly to withdraw its troops from Afghanistan.

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The World Is Running Out of Time

By: Bertrand Badré

In 2015, the international community launched a renewed effort to tackle collective global challenges under the auspices of the United Nations Sustainable Development Agenda and the Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP21). But after an initial flurry of interest, the progress that has been made toward achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and tackling climate change has tapered off. Around the world, many seem to have developed an allergy to increasingly stark warnings from the UN and other bodies about accelerating species extinctions, ecosystem collapse, and global warming. Now is not the time to debate whether progress toward global goals is a matter of the glass being half-full or half-empty. Soon, there will no longer even be a glass to worry about. Despite global news coverage of civic and political action to address our mounting crises, the underlying trends are extremely frightening. In recent months, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has marshaled overwhelming evidence to show that the effects of global warming in excess of 1.5°C above preindustrial levels will be devastating for billions of people around the world.

A recent report from the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services serves as yet another wake-up call. Human activities, the report concludes, have put an unprecedented one million species at risk of extinction. The oceans that supply food and livelihoods to more than four billion people are under threat. If we do not take immediate action to reverse these trends, the challenges of playing catch-up later will probably be insurmountable.

For decades, most of the major economies have relied on a form of capitalism that delivered considerable benefits. But we are now witnessing the implications of the Nobel laureate economist Milton Friedman's famous mantra: "the social responsibility of business is to increase its profits." A corporate-governance model based on maximizing shareholder value has long dominated our economic system, shaping our accounting frameworks, tax regimes, and business-school curricula.

But we have now reached a point where leading economic thinkers are questioning the fundamentals of the prevailing system. Paul Collier's *The Future of Capitalism*, Joseph E. Stiglitz's *People, Power, and Profits*, and Raghuram G. Rajan's *The Third Pillar* all offer comprehensive assessments of the problem. A capitalist system that is disconnected from

most people and unmoored from the territories in which it operates is no longer acceptable. Systems do not work in isolation. Eventually, reality asserts itself: global trade tensions reemerge, populist nationalists win power, and natural disasters grow in frequency and intensity.

Simply put, our approach to capitalism has exacerbated previously manageable social and environmental problems and sowed deep social divisions. The explosion in inequality and the laser focus on short-term results (that is, quarterly earnings) are just two symptoms of a broken system.

To maintain a well-functioning market economy that supports all stakeholders' interests requires us to shift our focus to the long term. In some ways, this is already happening. But we need to channel the positive efforts underway into a concerted campaign to push systemic reforms past the tipping point. Only then will we have achieved a feedback loop that rewards long-term, sustainable approaches to business. Most important, we must not succumb to complacency. Short-term tensions over trade and other issues will inevitably capture the attention of people and governments. But to permit the latest headlines to distract us from impending environmental and social catastrophes is to miss the forest for the trees.

Having said that, the impetus for driving positive change cannot be based on fear. The looming crises are both real and terrifying, but repeated warnings to that effect have diminishing returns. People have become immune to reality. Long-term change, then, must come from a readjustment of the market and our regulatory frameworks. Although consumers, investors, and other market participants should keep educating themselves and pushing for change, there also needs to be a thorough and rapid re-examination of the rules and norms governing capitalism today.

We need to impose real costs on market participants who do not change their behavior. That won't happen through speeches, commentaries, and annual reports. The market economy is a powerful force that needs direction, and regulators and market participants themselves are the ones holding the compass. It is time to get serious about establishing the direct financial incentives and penalties needed to drive systemic change. Only after those are in place can we begin to debate whether the glass is half-empty or half-full.

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