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## Ownership of the Peace talks

As direct talks between the United States and the Taliban are in the process, ensuring national ownership has gained a central role in the country and international circles. National ownership of the talks can further open the door for peace in Afghanistan. The success of peace talks depend on aligning such efforts with those led by the Afghan people and government. Such alignment helps us to ensure the Afghan leadership and ownership of the process and thereby achieve a sustainable political settlement with the Taliban. To ensure such ownership, the peace talks shall be open and transparent to encourage the involvement and ownership of all Afghan stakeholders. The US and international community, and regional stakeholders shall stress the imperative need for the Taliban to directly talk with the Government and the emphasis on the centrality of Afghan people and government in the peace process as an essential element and inclusive part of the process.

### Required Factors for Peace Talks Success

As past experience and peace studies show, there are several factors that are vital for a successful peace talk; including to be perceived as legitimate and credible, particularly in the eyes of the local population; ensure national and local ownership of the peace process; genuine commitment to a political process by the parties in working towards peace; clear, credible and achievable mandates, with matching personnel, logistic and financial resources; unity of purpose within the Security Council, with active support to UN operations in the field; host country commitment to unhindered UN operations and freedom of movement; supportive engagement by neighboring countries and regional actors; the utmost sensitivity towards the local population and upholding the highest standards of professionalism.

### Local Guarantee of Peace

A sustainable peace requires the Afghan government to develop specific programs to address the needs for Peace and Democratization process in the country. Afghan government shall take all the necessary measures to build social cohesion to strengthen the ability of grassroots communities to connect and provide input into evolving governance structures. Such programs shall focus on state reconstruction, aiming to increase public trust and strengthen democratic institutions. Such programs play a major role in building bridges between local communities and their leaders at all levels.

### Role of the International Community

The international community has an extremely important role to play in this respect. Not only it is imperative for donor countries to voice their continued financial support for both the country's development and military assistance to the Afghan armed forces, but all countries with an interest in a peaceful and stable Afghanistan need to demonstrate their unwavering, yet critical, support for a negotiated peace process. No one denies that Success of Afghanistan Peace Process Will Depend on International Support for Local Efforts. International community shall seek to reinforce the capacity of Afghan society, both the government and citizens, to strengthen and ingrain democratic culture and practices that underpin state-building, and promote sustaining cohesion between Afghan at the national and local levels. This will be achieved by supporting effective and legitimate governance, promoting citizen ownership of democracy and peacebuilding, and enhancing the contribution of women and youth to peace and democracy.

Afghan peace talks have entered to a critical phase. While direct talks between the United States and the Taliban have further opened the door for peace in Afghanistan, the success of these talks depend how much the Afghan people and government will be involved in the process and have the ownership of the talks. International support during and after the peace process, must be contingent upon the continuity of the State, its institutions and the constitutional framework. International community and regional countries play a critical role both during the talks and post conflict to oversee the implementation of the peace deal and guarantee that the warring parties to implement their commitments that will be made in a possible agreement.

## Public Optimism for Peaceful life in the New Year

By: Hujjatullah Zia

Notwithstanding the growing hope for peace and stability, Afghans have suffered severely within the past years as the Taliban guerilla fighters intensified their attacks following the drawdown of U.S.-led NATO troops from the country.

Afghans celebrated democracy through casting their votes in presidential and parliamentary elections hoping to be able to exercise their rights and freedoms in a democratic and violence-free society.

Meanwhile, Afghan government offered olive branch to the Taliban on multiple occasions in a bid to put an end to the protracted war, but the Taliban turned it down. The continuation of war led to public frustration and disappointment as civilians bore the brunt of violence and bloodshed.

Since the Taliban's leadership realized the fact that their hit-and-run policy would only lead to horrible consequences and increase the number of Afghans' casualties, it signaled holding talks with the U.S. officials. In the meantime, the Taliban have intensified their attacks against Kabul government refusing to accept its representatives at the negotiating table.

However, as the recent talks between the Taliban and U.S. representatives as well as talks between the Taliban and Afghan political and Jihadi leaders have been debated hotly, a sense of hope has resurfaced in the public air. Remaining optimistic about the talks, Afghans hope that the peace talks will yield a positive outcome soon and they will be able to live in a civil society void of war and violence.

In the new solar year, hope surges up in the air with the ongoing make-or-break peace talks. In other words, Afghans hope that the negotiations will bear the desired result and presidential election will be held, too. Reaching a peace agreement with the Taliban before presidential election is supported by Afghan people. Since Afghans are highly frustrated with the war, striking a peace deal at the cost of establishment of an interim government is believed to be acceptable to them. In some provinces, Afghans gathered to raise their voice in support of peace. Similarly, a number of individuals moved in peace caravan to call on the Taliban and government to sit for negotiations.

It should be noted that peace deal is acceptable to Afghans to the extent that the past achievements should not be compromised at the table. In the meantime, the Taliban should return with open mindset so that they could not target the public

rights and freedoms, especially those of women.

Although Afghans expect the government to step up peace talks and conduct presidential election in the new solar year, the challenges and obstacles continue unabated. For example, President Ghani's political opponents and Jihadi leaders have adopted different approach to peace talks. They will participate in Qatari meeting slated on April 14, which is follow-up to Moscow meeting, but Ghani's administration is unlikely to send his delegation. With this in mind, the Taliban capitalize on the split and seek to bargain for higher price at the table. They would persist on the establishment of interim government, which is strongly resisted by Ghani's administration but accepted by his political opponents. Even CEO Abdullah said that if establishment of interim government ensures peace and stability in Afghanistan, it will be acceptable to him. Meanwhile, Mohammad Hanef Atmar, Afghan former NSA and current presidential candidate, said the term of the current government would end on 22 May and demanded formation of interim government.

It came as Hawa Alam Nuristani, the Chairperson of the Independent Election Commission of Afghanistan said earlier that the presidential elections would be conducted on 28 July.

Leaving bloody years behind, Afghans hope that lack of political consensus between officials will come to an end and national consensus will be created in the upcoming Consultative Loya Jirga. The strong determination of U.S. and Taliban's representatives for talks have created more room for optimism.

The ball is still in the Taliban's court whether to continue their bloodshed or stop killing Afghan civilians and soldiers. But it goes without saying that they will neither benefit in their war-war policy nor win the war. Thus, they had better declare a ceasefire and resolve the issue through negotiations.

Afghan officials are recommended to put their differences aside and adopt a single approach towards peace talks. It should be noted that the heavy casualties sustained by Afghan combatants and non-combatants since the establishment of National Unity Government are highly shocking and would mount the level of public dissatisfaction across the country. Pushing for ceasefire is the main responsibility of Afghan government. It is hoped that Afghans will no more fall the victims of terrorism and will live a peaceful life in the new solar year.

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## Europe Needs a Global Strategy

By: Joschka Fischer

Donald Trump's election as president of the United States may have hastened the end of the "American Century" and of the US-led postwar international order. True, the world's political and economic center of gravity had been shifting toward East Asia well before 2016, and the idea of China rising to global power in the coming "Pacific Century" is not new, either. But Trump's actions, together with those of his Chinese counterpart, Xi Jinping, have brought the increasingly sharp superpower rivalry to center stage. Unfortunately, Europe has yet to produce a coherent response.

The current US-China trade dispute has the potential to trigger a global recession. But even this conflict is only part of a far larger power struggle, including in the technology sector, to determine whether the new rising star (China) or the incumbent (America) plays the leading global role.

For most of the period since China began its modernization drive under Deng Xiaoping in the late 1970s, its policy was not to challenge the existing geopolitical and strategic order, and to avoid a confrontation with the US at all costs. But Xi's speech at the Communist Party of China's 19th National Congress in October 2017, and the several current Chinese initiatives aimed at challenging US dominance, indicate that China will no longer hide its strength and bide its time, as Deng enjoined.

China's new assertiveness is evident in its military fortification of reefs and small islands in the South China Sea, as well as in the "Made in China 2025" strategy, which aims to make the country the world leader in the key industries of the future within a decade. And with its massive "Belt and Road Initiative" (BRI), China wants to use investments in trade and transport infrastructure to establish its geopolitical and commercial dominance in Eurasia, Europe, the Middle East, and Africa.

Faced with this increasingly obvious challenge to its leadership, the US has also changed its strategy and adopted a more confrontational stance toward China. Although Trump is leading this shift, American anger, fear, and frustration about China extend far beyond the White House and the Republican Party, and deep into Democratic Party ranks.

For starters, the US is taking a harder line on trade. In the past, the American market was generally open to Chinese exports - without such access, China's rapid economic growth would never have been possible. But the Trump administration wants to end this openness and turn the countries' bilat-

eral trade from a tool into a weapon. The US is also toughening its stance toward the BRI, and has criticized Italy's recent decision to endorse the initiative.

Technology is another big American concern. The US and China are engaged in a bitter contest in the field of artificial intelligence and continue to clash over Chinese telecoms firm Huawei, one of the country's leading global companies.

Senior Huawei executive Meng Wanzhou, the daughter of the company's founder, is currently awaiting extradition to the US after being arrested in Canada last December for allegedly violating US embargo rules concerning Iran. At the same time, the Trump administration is putting heavy pressure on its European allies to exclude Huawei from their telecoms markets because of espionage concerns (although the US has yet to produce evidence of this publicly).

The arrival of this new twenty-first-century global order does not bode well for Europe, as these internal trade and technology skirmishes make clear. But, as per usual when confronted with a major global challenge, Europe is largely navel-gazing and preoccupied with internal problems, including Brexit.

But Europeans cannot afford to remain aloof. Europe will be one of the first casualties if the current dispute between China and the US turns into a full-blown trade conflict. Should that happen, the two superpowers will demand that Europe take sides - precisely the kind of choice it does not want to make, because the US and China are its two main export markets. Similarly, Europe would most likely face Chinese retaliation if it decided to shut Huawei out of its national markets.

Europe must forge its own strategic view about the new global order. And it will have to put enough weight on the geopolitical scales to continue to trade with both the US and China on its own terms.

This will require Europe to develop an industrial policy based on European interests and values.

In addition, Europe's leaders must recognize that China is rapidly building an alternative political system in which a single party digitally controls the masses. Whatever one's view of Trump, this will not happen in the US.

The global geopolitical balance is changing quickly, and Europe must adapt. Instead of looking inward, European leaders need a credible strategy toward the two superpowers - and China in particular.

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