

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

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Public Worries about Outcome of Peace Talks

If political vacuum emerges in Afghanistan after the withdrawal of US forces, all democratic achievements will be at stake. The ongoing peace talks are highly significant for Afghanistan. The Taliban interlocutors, mainly the US delegates, have to urge for international guarantee for peace agreement, if it is ever signed.

The US Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation Zalmay Khalilzad has said in his book "The Envoy" that following the collapse of the communist regime in 1992 and disintegration of the Soviet Union, the Bush and Clinton administrations, instead of working to stabilize the situation, did not engage in Afghanistan's issue as it descended into civil war. He added, "We failed to form a broad-based transitional government, which could have empowered moderate forces and avoided Afghanistan's collapse into civil war". Khalilzad stated that "prolonged warfare and instability enabled the triumph of the Taliban, whose regime made Afghanistan a magnet for violent Islamists worldwide".

Now as Khalilzad is leading the US representatives in Doha talks, a number of Afghans, including political pundits, fear that if hasty withdrawal is agreed upon by the two negotiating sides, a void will emerge again, which will push Afghanistan to a new challenge. That is to say, it is feared that the Taliban are slowing negotiations to run down the clock, with President Trump already signaling he wants out of the war anyway.

The Taliban are pushing for a timeframe of US troop pullout in the ongoing peace talks in Qatar without showing tendency to negotiate ceasefire, which is in the agenda of their US interlocutors. Before sixth round of talks, the Taliban also declared seasonal spring offensive to intensify their attacks notwithstanding their presence at the table to discuss peace.

With this in mind, the stakeholders have to agree on the sequencing of the troop pullout, the ceasefire, the political settlement, and long-term assistance to Afghanistan to ensure that the withdrawal of foreign troops does not leave a vacuum in the country, as was the case after the 1988 Geneva Accords.

A degree of regional consensus over Afghanistan's final status security issues is required for the country's stabilization even after signing peace deal with the Taliban. These issues have to be considered: "What (minimal) redlines can all stakeholders endorse concerning the composition and structure of the Afghan government? What, if any, international military advisory or counterterrorist presence will international actors offer Afghanistan? What will be the size, mission, and composition of the security and defense forces that international actors will support? Who will finance, equip, and train those forces and fund service provision by the state? How will landlocked Afghanistan be integrated into the regional and global economy?"

Meanwhile, all local stakeholders - government officials, opposition leaders and tribal elders - have to reach a consensus among themselves on what they want from the peace settlement. Currently, they seem to be more focused on holding on to their seats after the upcoming presidential election than reaching a deal with the Taliban.

To this end, it is believed that, on the one hand, lack of regional and local consensus, and on the other hand, the Taliban's intensified attacks and their unwillingness to declare ceasefire are the main obstacles before reaching a peace deal.

Lack of agreed regional framework corresponding to the present Doha talks and the empty seats of Afghan official delegates around the table is really disappointing. The National Unity Government expects US negotiating team to persuade the Taliban, in the present negotiation, to hold direct talks with the Kabul government. In other words, it is widely believed that talks behind closed doors, without the presence of Kabul representatives, will not lead to peace.

Negotiating from the position of confidence, the Taliban still persist on their demands without signaling for ceasefire.

The Taliban's refusal to President Ghani's offer for ceasefire in Ramadan, Muslims' holy month, and the demands of Loya Jirga representatives for peace clearly shows the Taliban's lukewarm response to peace and stability in Afghanistan.

Overall, since peace talks have led to no palpable result despite being debated hotly, Afghans are not optimistic enough about the outcome of the talks but they are highly frustrated with the decade-long war. Meanwhile, Afghan people are also worried about the return of "Islamic Emirate" since the Taliban abide by no law.

Since Khalilzad is a veteran envoy and aware of Afghanistan's social, political, and cultural structures, it is hoped that he would consider all aspects of peace deal, if it is signed, so that the past mistake is not repeated and a political vacuum will not emerge.



The US peace Envoy on Afghanistan Meets with Indian Officials

By: Mohammad Zahir Akbari

The U.S. Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation Zalmay Khalilzad met with the Indian officials and other stakeholders on May 6-7 in New Delhi, the capital of India for consultations on the Afghan peace process, as quoted said the U.S. Embassy in India in a statement. The U.S. Embassy said that Khalilzad met with Minister of External Affairs Sushma Swaraj, National Security Advisor Ajit Doval, Foreign Secretary Vijay Gokhale, and India's Ambassador to Afghanistan Vinay Kumar, among others. According to the report, during his meetings, Khalilzad welcomed expressions of support for the Afghan peace process, which strengthens an emerging international consensus for peace efforts. "He also recognized the many important contributions India has made to Afghanistan's development," the U.S. Embassy said. "Khalilzad and his counterparts discussed the many important benefits that peace would bring, including preventing International terrorist use of Afghanistan as a platform for attacks; improved prospects for regional peace and security; and increased regional connectivity and trade," the statement noted. However, Khalilzad and the Indian officials solidified that Afghanistan's political future is for Afghans to decide through an inclusive and legitimate process, the statement added. "They also agreed that Afghan gains of the last 18 years must be preserved and built upon. Khalilzad will continue to consult with Indian counterparts as the peace process moves forward," the U.S. Embassy said.

The similar points tweeted by Zalmay Khalilzad on Tuesday that he appreciates India's expression of support for our efforts as it strengthens an emerging international consensus. "We agreed on important benefits peace will bring: addressing the threat of terrorist use of Afghanistan; increased regional connectivity and trade," he said. Khalilzad noted that by precluding the use of Afghan territory to attack any other nation, a peace agreement could strengthen ties by allowing the regional growth of trade and economies. "As the world's oldest and largest democracies, we agreed that the gains made in the last 18 years should be preserved. We also agreed that Afghanistan's political future is for Afghans to decide through an inclusive and legitimate process," Khalilzad tweeted.

The convergence on the preservation of the last 18 years achievements between the two major countries is of very important points which always emphasized all stakeholders including Afghan people. Recently, the Loy Peace Consultative Jirga Stressed on the protection of the attained values gained in the last two decades. The participant of Loy peace jirga unanimously stressed that no sustainable peace is possible without preserving the political and economic interests of the country. "We don't want such a peace that women's rights are not respected, freedoms of expression are not ensured, elections are not held," the participants said. The delegates of Jirga called on Taliban to stop violence, embrace peace, called to release prisoners as a sign of their goodwill but

unfortunately, they responded with guns, explosion and hundreds of casualties throughout the country.

The latest Taliban attack which carried out on Counterpart International organization is more meaningful response happened simultaneously with the meeting of Khalilzad to Indian officials. This attack left dozens of victims in the heart of Kabul capital city and The Taliban shortly claimed responsibility for the attack, saying the organization was created by the US Department of State. In a tweet, Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said Counterpart was involved in "harmful" activities in Afghanistan and was linked to USAID. Earlier, in response to US special envoy as had asked to stop the war and lay down their arms, they said to US stop repeating failed strategies while expecting different outcomes. Overall, the latest political events may raise doubts and question if the peace process faced trouble or stalemate? The sixth round of talks between U.S. and Taliban representatives kicked in Doha on the 1st of May but released no clear outcome. According to reports the U.S. delegation focus on a declaration of a ceasefire to pave the way to an end to the fighting. On the other hand, the Taliban group stress on firstly the withdrawal of U.S. forces from the country.

Thus, in Moscow, a significant group of prominent Afghan politicians met in February to start a dialogue with the Taliban negotiating team but efforts to continue this dialogue failed due to disagreement on the list of representatives. While the fact is that real negotiations - Afghan-owned and Afghan-led - have not started, nine months after the US initiated talks with the Taliban about the withdrawal of US forces. On the other hand, the fundamental issues which caused overall the troubles have not been touched yet. The Taliban repeatedly refused to recognize the current leadership in Kabul as a legitimate government while the real negotiations will face stalemate if they insist on their obstinacy.

The other related challenge for Afghanistan peace process lies in achieving cooperation between India and Pakistan instead of persisting confrontation. This would require that India and Pakistan overcome longstanding political and psychological barriers through direct engagement. At a minimum, they could discuss how best to stay out of each other's way in Afghanistan. More ambitiously, they could usefully engage in a discussion of the best channels - bilateral, trilateral, or regional - through which to address various governance challenges. This discussion could also identify modest ways in which India and Pakistan might align their efforts, if not collaborate in achieving common goals. The initiation of formal engagement could chart the way to improved and increasingly transparent relations and ultimately a more stable Afghanistan.

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The Time Has Come for a Global Carbon Emissions Tax

By: Mats Persson

The problem is staggering, even existential. Global emissions of greenhouse gases - especially carbon dioxide - are rapidly driving up global temperatures, transforming life as we know it. If those temperatures reach 2°C above pre-industrial levels, scientists warn, the results will be catastrophic. An international conference is called, under the auspices of the United Nations. Politicians declare that the world must curb CO2 emissions to avoid exceeding the 2°C threshold. And then nothing substantial happens.

The 2015 UN climate conference in Paris was supposed to be different. It produced a document, signed by 197 parties, containing general guidelines for climate policy and memorializing a global commitment finally to address the problem. As usual, however, emissions have continued to rise steadily, increasing the concentration of atmospheric CO2 at an alarming rate. Last year's climate conference in Katowice, Poland - which focused on making the Paris commitments more specific and binding - did nothing to change this.

The reason UN climate conferences keep failing is straightforward: their agendas - centered on voluntary, quantitative targets - are fundamentally flawed.

Agreeing to quantitative, universally applied emissions-reduction targets at a UN conference is easy. But countries automatically regard adherence to those targets as a sacrifice: in the effort to reduce emissions by x tons, we would lose y million jobs, and GDP will fall by \$z billion. Because there are no actual sanctions or punishment for non-compliance, when push comes to shove, governments can simply change their minds.

Even if a government does try to uphold its commitments, say, by imposing new regulations on high-emitting industries, it may not obtain the desired results. Businesses, too, want to avoid making any sacrifices, so they will seek any way to avoid regulations, including bribing government officials to look the other way.

Questions of fairness can further weaken incentives to fulfill UN climate commitments. Why should a poor developing country make the same reduction, whether in absolute or proportional terms, as a rich Western country? After all, on their path to high-income status, Western economies emitted with abandon.

Poor countries not only face constraints on development that their rich counterparts never did; it is also much harder for them to cover the costs of creating a low-carbon economy. Compensation is discussed, but countries consistently fail to agree on who should receive how much support, and who should pay. So the debate is pushed to the next conference. Meanwhile, the volume of atmospheric CO2 keeps increasing.

The voluntary quantitative restrictions that underpin the UN climate agenda amount to a weak foundation for a solution to the crisis. A better approach would begin with a uniform tax on CO2 emissions worldwide - say, \$100 per ton.

Virtually all economists agree that, from an economic perspective, such a tax would create a much firmer foundation for climate action, not least because it would generate immediate revenues for governments. A

global tax would also be politically more feasible than national measures - such as the French fuel tax that triggered widespread protests against President Emmanuel Macron - because consumers would not bear the full cost.

To be sure, prices for consumers would still rise, with the precise amount depending on the price sensitivity of supply and demand. If the supply of oil were completely inelastic (that is, if the world had a fixed number of wells from which oil could be pumped at no cost), the market price would fall by exactly the amount of the tax. In such a scenario, the full cost of the tax would be borne by the owners of the oil wells.

But supply is not completely inelastic. If the market price is high, new oil deposits (with higher extraction costs) will be developed; if it is low, some existing production will be closed down. The extent to which oil companies adjust to shifting demand will thus shape the effect of a global CO2 tax on consumer prices.

Because supply is not completely elastic, either, producers and consumers would share the burden of the CO2 tax, meaning that both would have an incentive to reduce their fossil-fuel production and use - and thus their emissions. If the billions of dollars in new tax revenue, at least partly funded by oil producers, were channeled toward broadly beneficial or otherwise popular investments, voters might be more than accepting of a CO2 tax.

A CO2 tax would also go a long way toward resolving the corruption problem raised by quantitative emissions restrictions, because governments would have less incentive to accept bribes from companies, especially if officials are held accountable for meeting revenue targets. Even governments that are skeptical about climate change might find the added revenues sufficiently appealing to support the tax. In this sense, a CO2 tax is "incentive compatible": all governments - corrupt or honest, dictatorial or democratic, climate skeptic or climate leader - have a motive to impose and enforce it (provided that all other countries do the same).

As for fairness, the issue would be resolved in an ad hoc way: all oil-consuming countries, rich or poor, would receive tax revenue that is partly covered by oil-producing countries, which include the richest (and, in some cases, most corrupt) economies in the world. This might not be the optimal way of redistributing wealth across countries, but it is a feasible one. And the inclusion of any element of redistribution could ease resistance to climate action among developing countries frustrated by the advantages enjoyed by their wealthier counterparts.

The next UN climate conference will take place in Santiago, Chile, in December. That gives the world eight months to prepare a new agenda focused on coordinating a worldwide CO2 tax. Oil-producing countries will vote against it, because it would be much harder to avoid implementing than current commitments. But if most of the international community stands behind the measure, a UN conference could, at long last, bring genuine progress toward reducing global emissions and curbing climate change.

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