

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

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Public Concern over Prolonged Peace Talks Continues

Concern about the outcome of peace talks between the US and Taliban representatives continues. Although one doubts if the two sides reach an agreement, the consequence of the peace accord is unpredictable.

It is most likely that the US troop pullout will ensue the peace agreement, if signed between the Washington and Taliban negotiating teams, but Afghans and international political pundits still view the Taliban with deep mistrust. The intensification of the Taliban's offensive and their refusal to hold direct talks with the Kabul government compound the public concern and distrust. Gates, who served under George W. Bush and Barack Obama from 2006 to 2011, said that the reason behind the Taliban's refusal to negotiate with the Afghan government is to take over Afghanistan. He confirmed that the Afghan war might also end like the Vietnam war - which ended with the US pullout and subsequent communist takeover of the country - if the US troops were to withdraw. Afghans hoped that convening Loya Jirga, Grand Assembly, would contribute to the peace process as their representatives called on the Taliban to stop war and violence and hold direct talks with the Afghan government. However, the Taliban turned a deaf ear to the public voice calling it "obstacle for ending occupation" and was "sabotaging the authentic peace process". Thus, Afghans felt more disappointed and lost their relative trust in the Taliban, who have repeatedly turned down the public demand for peace and dialogue. Meanwhile, President Ghani's repeated calls for peace have been drowned out by the sound of incessant fighting across the country.

Afghans fear that the Taliban will hold and carry their fundamental ideology back to Afghanistan in case of signing a peace agreement with their US interlocutors.

In a commentary titled "The Global War on Terrorism Has Failed. Here's How to Win", Brahma Chellaney, professor of strategic studies at the Center for Policy Research in New Delhi, said, "The U.S.-led global war on terrorism has failed—and that is because it has focused on eliminating terrorists and their networks, not on defeating the jihadi ideology that inspires suicide attacks".

With the strong existence of the "jihadi ideology" across the region, the public concern is justifiable. Notwithstanding the ongoing talks between the Taliban and the United States, the Taliban leadership has not taken a single step towards peace. Therefore, the gap between the Taliban and Afghans has grown wider.

The escalated militancy on the one hand, and the prolonged peace talks, which led to nowhere, on the other hand suggest the Taliban's lukewarm response to peace and stability. The question is that do the Taliban really want to take the control of Afghanistan? The Taliban are not able to take over Afghanistan, but they may lead the country to further destruction. All parties, including the Taliban, agree on military stalemate. Hence, the Taliban cannot, either, win the war. Regarding peace accord, the Afghan government and nation will not accept the Taliban's preconditions for peace unless they are reasonable and lead to sustainable peace and prosperity in the country without harming almost two decades of democratic achievements.

The main concern is that the US troop pullout may create a political vacuum in the country, which will be capitalized on by militant groups, the Taliban included.

There are two main issues in the talks. For the one, Washington is seeking an honorable withdrawal. Second, the Taliban are seeking not to put the legitimacy of their "jihad" under question through signing an ambiguous peace agreement.

After all, it is believed that since the Taliban are a militant group rather than a political party, they are not familiar with diplomatic mechanism. The Taliban have been operating as a militant group without any legal restrictions. They are largely involved in violation of human rights and humanitarian law. Placing restriction on their activities through peace pact may seem hard to them. For example, currently the Taliban are collecting taxes illegally from different sources such as truck drivers and narcotic drug in areas under their control. Signing peace agreement will put an end to years of their illegal activities, illegal self-interests, and disarmament of their rank-and-file. In short, since the Taliban leaders are enjoying their luxury life and comfort zones outside the country, far from the pain of war victims and suffering of their militant fighters, they may not be concerned enough whether or not a peace agreement is signed. All the Taliban members, including their leaders and fighters, are recommended to sign a peace agreement so as to live a violence-free life. They should understand that war is in the interests of no parties.

**Progress or Retrogress against Taliban?**By: **Mohammad Zahir Akbari**

Unfortunately, there is no accurate information how much territory of Afghanistan is under control of Taliban, but comparing to the first decade of new Afghanistan Taliban have gradually expanded their influence in the country; the reality which concerns both Afghans and international allies. The US senior intelligence officials have repeatedly warned that the country remains fragile and could once again become a terrorist haven. Thus, a number of local experts, believe that neither peace and nor war strategy has produced significant achievement against terrorism, especially against Taliban. Because Taliban is not an independent group and they have been created for war, fiscally supported for war and overall they are steered by foreign countries. The last two decade experiences have showed that the Taliban have never responded positively to the peace called by government, political parties and other local peace movements.

It seems that Taliban may not joint peace process unless directly initiate deep talks with their steering suppers or win the war through seriously aggressive fighting. Otherwise, Taliban will keep destroying and expanding their domination throughout the country without paying any respect to national and international rule and values. Recently, the UN officials expressed their concerns that Taliban do not respect humanitarian rule and values. "I am gravely concerned about these serious allegations of ill-treatment, torture and unlawful killing of civilians and security personnel, as well as the deplorable conditions of detention," as quoted said Tadamichi Yamamoto, the head of UNAMA.

However, the government officials inform of good progress against Taliban aggression, especially in last few months. The Acting Defense Minister Assadullah Khalid says that the Taliban' spring offensive or so called Al-Fath has been failed, adding the group has not been able to make any progress in the battlefield so far. Khalid talking in a ceremony to introduce Mohammad Fareed Ahmadi as new commander for the Special Forces Corps emphasized that the National Security Forces have suppressed the Taliban and thwarted their subversive attacks. "Taliban and their supporters have made full efforts against the government but faced the iron will of the national security forces and miserably defeated", the defense minister said.

Pointing to foreign rebels operating in Afghanistan, he said, "I warn foreign terrorists to leave Afghanistan or this country would turn to their graveyard. When I come here, I feel proud and energetic," "Fareed would take care of soldiers in training and protection, the enemy tried to start a new offensive against the Afghan forces but it failed to do anything. This credit goes to you, the Afghan Forces. We're not alone, we have God and people on our side as well as international community's support," he said.

The acting defense minister said the bravery and sacrifices of the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces have stopped the en-

emy and their foreign supporters from changing anything in Afghanistan so far this year. "This year, the enemies along with their foreign supporters were not able to change anything in Afghanistan. This all shows your heroism and sacrifices," said Khalid. Khalid praised the Afghan commandos for their achievements and said the government fully supports the forces because they play a crucial role in foiling the Taliban's plans and activities.

Meanwhile, the new commander of the Afghan Special Operations Forces Mohammad Fareed Ahmadi, warned the Taliban to stop fighting against Afghans and Afghan security forces, otherwise, they will be eradicated. Ahmadi said the Afghan commandos, who conduct the special operations, will change the direction of war to peace and stability. "Together we will change the trend of war to peace in support of Afghan people," he said. "I'm warning the Taliban fighters not to kill themselves without any reason. Have mercy on your families." Ahmadi called on the Taliban fighters to stop listening to their leaders because they continue the fight under the order of foreign countries. "Do not listen to your Taliban leaders who sit under the flags of other countries," he said. "I warn foreign terrorists. Leave Afghanistan or this will be your graveyard." reported by multiple sources.

According to the interior ministry, over 1,100 Taliban have been killed or wounded by the Afghan National Security and Defense Forces within 20 days across the country. After announcing their Spring Offensive, the Taliban insurgents carried out couples of terrorist attacks in the country on the government and none government offices. Recently the rebels attacked one of the aid organizations (Counterpart) in capital Kabul, killing nine and wounding tens of civilians. This comes as the US Special Envoy for Afghanistan reconciliation Zalmay Khalilzad winded up his sixth round of talks with the Taliban negotiation members on about a month ago in Doha. Khalilzad recently tweeted that a peace process to bring political settlement in Afghanistan is the priority of the US.

Anyway, the political rationality requires evaluation of the past and wisely planning for the future. Whenever, the Afghan military changed their position from defensive to relatively aggressive, the terrorist groups have been extremely suppressed and lost the battlefield. Therefore, everyone agrees that defensive strategy does not work in Afghanistan. Likewise, we may not have international supports forever. The recent US strategy with the Taliban reflect their insistence on reducing money spent and lives lost in Afghanistan before next year's election. President Trump has repeatedly said that America's presence in Afghanistan was "ridiculous" and should be brought to an end. Based on these, we need to hurry so as to put an end to the long war through modifying our war and peace strategy.

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China-EU Relationship in New PeriodBy: **You Nan**

Over the past half century, there has been a sound basis for development between China and Europe, with mutual political trust, economic complementarity, and cultural exchanges. It can be said that both China and Europe are at a critical historical stage of development, it is more urgent than ever for both sides to enhance strategic mutual trust, deepen pragmatic cooperation and enhance role-playing in global governance.

Looking back on the historical development of China-EU relations in the past from 1975 till now, we can say that it has experienced several stages. Up to now, there are not so many policy documents issued by China and Europe for each other. There are seven documents issued by Europe to China and three documents issued by China to Europe. There are many factors of change in China-EU relations, such as the strength contrast between the two sides, policy changes and changes in the country's internal and external strategic environment. China and Europe's understanding of each other is also constantly adjusting and changing. China-EU relations have increasingly shown the characteristic of stability.

After China put forward the "Belt and Road Initiative", the European side also announced the "Eurasian Interconnection Strategy" document. Both sides attached importance to promoting interoperability. They agreed to promote the "BRI" and the EU initiative, and vigorously carry out the third party cooperation. While realizing the "hard link" of infrastructure, we should strengthen the "soft link" of systems, rules and standards. But there are still frictions and conflicts, mainly in the following aspects: First, there is insufficient political mutual trust and differences in ideas. China and Europe are opposed in political system and ideology, they have disputes over Tibet, Xinjiang, human rights, arms sales and Taiwan. They have also increased their criticism of freedom of religious belief. In addition, European countries also engage in "balanced diplomacy" in the East China Sea and South China Sea issues. Some Western European powers believe that the "16 + 1" cooperation framework is China's "divide and rule" over Europe, and that it will weaken the EU's external leadership. On March 12th, 2019, the European Commission and the EU High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy drafted a 16 page EU-China Strategic Prospects document. This report shows the EU's fear of so-called "Chinese competition". Second, the economy is wary of constantly suppressing China. China-EU economic and trade relations are asymmetrical. The main problem is the trade defi-

cit between China and Europe. Up to now, the principles and mechanisms for properly resolving trade disputes between China and Europe have not been reached.

China's and Europe's national conditions, regional and global changes require both sides to look at each other with a new strategic perspective. In the future, China-EU relations should be strengthened mainly in the following areas. First, deepen strategic mutual trust and do a good job of political leadership. We will continue to maintain high-level bilateral exchanges, hold annual Leaders' meetings. In view of the major global issues, the two sides should comprehensively implement the Strategic Plan for China-EU Cooperation 2020. We will better complete the in-depth docking between China's 13th Five-Year Plan and the European 2020 Strategy, and strive to achieve the effective integration of the two sides' medium-and long-term development strategies. Second, we should focus on the new changes in the strategic environment of China and Europe. It involves not only the relations between the EU and Russia, but also between Europe and the United States. Tensions between Europe and the United States and changes in EU-Russia relations will greatly increase opportunities for EU and China in various aspects, such as global climate governance, safeguarding the multilateral trading system and maintaining the role of the United Nations. China and the EU should abandon zero-sum thinking, eliminate the impact of adverse factors. Third, we should serve China-EU pragmatic cooperation in various fields and promote interconnection between the two sides. The OECD, G20 and China's "BRI" have brought new perspectives of cooperation for the development. Recently, the Italy and the Chinese government also mentioned the strengthening of the "BRI" and the docking of Italy's "northern port construction" and "investment Italy plan".

China-EU relations are in the new period of historical development, and both sides should cherish the opportunities for cooperation. The common interests and willingness of China-EU cooperation are increasing. China also hopes that more European countries will recognize the great potential of the "BRI" in promoting China EU interconnection and cooperation, conform to the trend of the times, seize the opportunities of common development, and contribute to building the community of human destiny.

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