

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

Daily
Outlook
AFGHANISTAN
The Leading Independent Newspaper

October 21, 2019

Wrong Conflict Settlement the Main Cause of the Peace Talks Failure

Several decades of conflicts in Afghanistan have brought economy its economy to the brink of collapse, creating humanitarian casualties and concerns. For decades, Afghanistan has been crippled by conflicts and civil strife in which violence and increased killings has prevalent.

While violent conflicts have declined relatively in the south, insurgencies in the north has increased, alarming re-surfacing of conflicts in the northern parts of the country. These conflicts are often linked to several factors including poverty, human rights violations, bad governance and corruption, ethnic and religious marginalization. Although many actors including the US, international community, Afghan government and civil society have been making efforts, conflicts continue to persist in Afghanistan and their resolution is usually protracted.

The United States is pushing for a durable peace in Afghanistan. Based on this policy the US Special Envoy Zalmay Khalilzad has taken concrete measures to reach to a comprehensive peace deal with the Afghan Taliban. After nine round of talks between the US and Taliban delegation, these talks failed due to a brutal attack of Taliban on a civilian target that killed several Afghans and one Great American soldier in Kabul. Zalmay Khalilzad has restarted the new round of the Afghan peace talks after an unpredictable stopped by President Trump. Despite these efforts which have achieved some appreciable success, the cradle of peace and stability in the country remains fragile and the possibility of a resurgence of Al-Qaeda and ISIS is high.

Afghan peace processes have been initiated and failed for several decades. For instance, Dr. Najib, the late Afghan president, started a national reconciliation program in 1970s but it failed. Then Afghanistan Peace and Reconciliation program started during the time of president Karzai and it had no specific results. After that President Ghani pushed for peace talks with the Taliban and it had not tangible outcomes too. And now, the US has started direct talks with the Afghan Taliban. These few examples raise the questions on the capacity and mechanisms used to resolve conflicts in Afghanistan. Consequently, failure to identify and thoroughly address the fundamental conflicts would likely cause Afghanistan to continue experiencing and suffering the brunt of these violent conflicts.

Identifying the roots of conflicts in Afghanistan is start of the real peace process in the country. The roots of conflicts in Afghanistan are much deeper and complex, and are embedded in the interplay of historical factors, socio-economic crisis, legacies of authoritarian and the politics of exclusion, international forces and regional struggles and interferences.

As the aforementioned constitute the broader causal factors, embedded within and related to them are bad governance and corruption, human rights violations, poverty, ethnic marginalization and narcotics proliferation, which continue to serve as triggers and drivers of violent conflicts in Afghanistan.

A credible settlement in Afghanistan requires to identify the root causes of conflicts in Afghanistan. At the same time, a viable solution needs Afghan men and women from all sectors of society, the government, private enterprise, tribal leaders and activists should be included in the process to work towards a consensus on peace to ensure that concerns of all parties are considered in the peace process. A peace deal based on the inclusion and consensus of all Afghans may be time consuming but would be a sustainable deal that can benefit Afghanistan, the region and beyond.

Targeting Civilians Outrageous and War Crime

By: Hujjatullah Zia

Civilian casualties continue unabated as the Taliban fighters and Islamic State group continue their hit-and-run strategy. Militant fighters seek to put pressure on the Kabul government through killing civilians, which outrages the public conscience.

Within the last 18 years of conflict, the Taliban have been widely engaged in killing non-combatants, including women and children. Their terrorist activities put the public rights and freedoms at stake. A large number of Afghan civilians have been killed and amputated as a result of the Taliban's indiscriminate attacks and suicide bombings.

With the emergence of the IS group, civilian casualties increased. The IS fighters emerged with more radical ideology and practices so as to generate further fear and disappointment in public air. In addition to targeting Shiite ethnic minority group, the IS fighters also carried out indiscriminate attacks killing scores of individuals, regardless of their ethnicity. The Friday blasts at a mosque in Nangarhar province, which killed and wounded dozens of people while offering prayer, is likely to be carried out by IS fighters but there is also a possibility for the Taliban's involvement. However, some believe that the Taliban were behind the attack - despite the Taliban's refusal - arguing that they hardly claim responsibility for attacks which lead to heavy civilian casualties so that the public anger is not triggered against them. The Afghan government has also blamed the Taliban for the attack.

Both the Taliban and IS fighters are actively operating in parts of Nangarhar, which shares a border with Pakistan in the east.

Afghans have constantly called on the Taliban leadership to stop violence against civilians and talk with the Kabul government so as to find a negotiated settlement. Meanwhile, Afghan representatives also urged the Taliban in Loya Jirga, held before presidential election, to reduce violence and negotiate with Ghani administration. Nonetheless, the Taliban turned a deaf ear to the public demand and continued their hit-and-run strategy.

Afghans hoped that peace talks between the US and Taliban leadership would put an end to the 18-year-old conflict in the country and broker talks between the Taliban and Kabul. However, it was called off by US President Donald Trump for unclear reason. The draft agreement which came close to be signed by the Taliban and

US officials last month would not result in ceasefire.

It is self-explanatory that the Taliban fighters have never observed the humanitarian law. They killed thousands of people within the last 18 years, to not mention those who were killed during the Taliban regime (1996 - 2001). Afghan civilians bore the brunt of terrorist activities carried out by the Taliban fighters. A report released by the UN said that 1,174 people had been killed and 3,139 wounded in Afghanistan's conflict between July and September.

Despite continuing peace talks with their US interlocutors, the Taliban leadership declared their spring offensive and intensified their attacks against Afghan soldiers and civilians. The Taliban targeted civilians to put pressure on the Kabul government. Moreover, the Taliban fighters chose to fight from residential houses to put the blame of civilian casualties on the government and trigger public anger against Afghan soldiers.

It is important to note that the Taliban are unlikely to gain concessions or put pressure on the government through targeting civilians. Moreover, targeting holy places such as mosques as well as worshippers amount to war crime. The Taliban fighters, even prior to the emergence of the IS group, carried out such attacks earlier. In other words, the Taliban have not only targeted worshippers but also clerics. Since the Taliban are unable to justify their attacks on holy places and worshippers, they tend to deny the responsibility. The Taliban outfit has both ideologue and mercenary fighters. Suppose their ideologues consider the sacred and the profane, their mercenary fighters will not care such issues.

The Friday blasts drew strong national and international condemnations. Condemning the attack, the European Union said that it aimed to undermine hopes for peace and reconciliation in Afghanistan. Indeed, it will be interpreted as the Taliban's lukewarm response to peace talks and generate disappointment. It will also further the public mistrust in the Taliban.

The Taliban should either come to the table with genuine intention or face the consequences. It seems a trick that they, on the one hand, signal for peace talks, but on the other hand, intensify their attacks against combatants and non-combatants.

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Growing fundamentalism is a reaction to the Western views

By: Rajkumar Singh

As a result of the renaissance in Europe, with the age of reason, the invention of gun powder, the geographical explorations, the industrial revolution and the colonial expansion of the European powers, Islamic glory became a thing of the past. The mainstream of the intellectual and creative section of the society fell into the grip of traditionalists who valued piety more than progress. Islamic decline became more apparent from the eighteenth century, when the French Revolution gave new concepts of democracy and nationalism to Europe and the Muslims were left far behind in every sector of human life. With them declined a civilisation which had consistently flourished in the major areas of three continents, Asia, Europe and Africa. Even their political authority was seriously challenged by the British in India, the Dutch in Indonesia, the French in Western Africa and the Russian in Central Asia. The question before Islam was not how to find few channels for its expansion, not even to retain the superiority they had enjoyed, but to survive and escape total annihilation and humiliation.

Search for self-identity

In the circumstances fundamentalist revival sought to strip modern, innovative and foreign influence from the Islamic faith. Earlier when Muslims were unable to meet the challenge posed by Western countries, the situation created fundamental doubts among the educated Muslims in Islamic values and ideas, and they were inclined more and more towards an appreciation of Western culture and outlook. The matter became much worse when not only the Westerners but also the Western educated Muslims began to think the same way. Hence, Islam came under fire both from within and without. But this does not mean that the Muslims did not resist the European onslaught. They fought every battle in India, including the one in 1857. Apart from this several movements were started to revise the tenets of Islam, each in their own way.

The quest for such an identity can be identified with the efforts of Syed Ahmed Khan and Amir Ali, for calling upon Muslims to strengthen the bonds of community. These efforts were akin to that of Shah Waliullah who urged the glorification of Islam in the wake of the disintegration of the empire under Aurangzeb. Shah Waliullah (1703-62) who was celebrated in history as a Muslim reformer or a hardliner was of the view that the essence of the scriptures i.e. Quran, Sunnah and Hadith could not be diluted and the purpose of Islam must remain synchronous with the Prophet's vision. Two generations later, Waliullah's followers founded the Deoband seminary of theology. The seminary was not just a Madrassah for religious teachings. Its instructions were inspired by one larger purpose of avenging the 1857 defeat by the British of the Muslim Empire. The Indian Muslims under the impact of the Wahabi movement preached the slogan 'Back to the Koran and sought to restore Jihad (holy war) for an Islamic ideal state. There had been the movements of the Mujahideen, dedicated to the establishment of an ideal Muslim state in the North-West Frontier. Thus, Islam became politically useful after the revolt of 1857 as aptly re-

marked by Abbas Rashid that the elite managed to foster a degree of general Muslim identification with issues like lack of education, discrimination in employment, inadequate political representation etc. He maintained that while their use of Islam may have been subjectively opportunistic, it was nevertheless effective given the context. Later on, of course, the British policy of divide and rule widened the cleavages of Hindu-Muslim differences, encouraged the Muslim Leaguers and used them to counter the Congress to strengthen their rule.

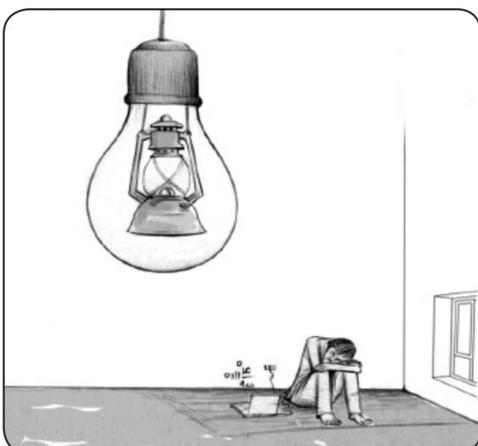
Development of Orthodox leadership

Meanwhile, the Muslim community, in contrast to the Westernised elite, the orthodox religious leaders or traditionalists who struggled to attain a position of leadership, regarded the credentials of the former to lead the Muslim Ulama with contempt. They considered the Muslim League a bunch of loyalist toadies and accused them of cooperating with the Satans of Europe against the Islamist Caliphate and Pan-Islamism. However, the foremost of the causes that ultimately led the Muslims to take to the gun was the betrayal by the imperialist powers of the West of the Arabs after the first World War (1914-18). As a result of this French domination was established over Syria and Lebanon while Palestine was excluded from all obligations to the Arabs. In contrast to Palestine, the Jewish immigrants from the Eastern European countries and Russia were out of harmony with the local environment but went on turning it into their homeland on European pattern and at the cost of Arabs. Further the creation of Israel and its recognition by the United Nations Organisation (UNO) shook the confidence of the Islamic world in this international organisation.

Current status

In post-World War II phase radical Islam's opposition to the West in general and the USA in particular continued unabated. No doubt the West has given the world science and technology and also introduced the concept of democracy and human rights. But it has also rubbished India, China and the Muslim world. They have imposed on these civilisations. Missionaries have been sent with foreign funds to subvert the religion and culture of those people. Muslims resent it more because they have recent memories of their power. Many Muslim countries were occupied. Even after independence their government were either toppled or turned into puppets. Their oil wealth still goes to enrich the West. Their oil revenues are diverted to arms purchases. Neighbouring countries are encouraged and armed to fight each other. The recent militant image of Islam has come basically from the use of religion to generate political consciousness in the Middle East where external involvement, on account of oil and Israel, has not permitted democracy to take root. The fear of confrontationist Islam became a burning issue in the West with the rise to power of militant Islam in Iran and the resilience it has displayed in several countries including Egypt, Algeria, Sudan, Pakistan, Libya, Lebanon and Afghanistan.

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