

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

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## Growing Concern over US-Taliban Peace Deal

US officials sat for more than one year across the table to negotiate peace with the Taliban outfit and finalized a draft peace deal which is not acceptable to the Kabul government. The agreement does not put an end to the 18-year conflict in Afghanistan and all the controversial issues between the Taliban and their US interlocutors have set to be resolved in intra-Afghan dialogue.

After US Special Envoy Zalmay Khalilzad briefed Afghan leaders, including President Muhammad Ashraf Ghani, in Kabul, Ghani's running mate Amrullah Saleh said the Kabul government would not sign what he described it a "shameful and disgraceful agreement" and that Afghans were ready for further sacrifices. Reports say that the draft recognizes Taliban's preferred title the "Islamic Emirates" though the US calls the group Taliban.

Now as Khalilzad is seeking to build a consensus with the Kabul government before the deal is signed, Afghan officials are concerned about the accord, drafted behind closed doors, and deem some of the issues debatable. Although political pundits believe that "Islamic Emirates" is a title for the Taliban not Afghanistan, the Taliban's pressure on their US interlocutors bore the desired fruit for their leadership. On the other hand, the US side could not persuade the Taliban to declare a ceasefire, which was presumed as the main goal of the talks.

Time magazine's Kimberly Dozier has now released that the US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has refused to sign off on the agreement because, according to Dozier's report, "It doesn't guarantee the continued presence of US counterterrorism forces to battle al-Qaeda, the survival of the pro-US government in Kabul, or even an end to the fighting in Afghanistan."

Michael Rubin said in his commentary titled "The Afghanistan agreement is even worse than first reported" that as Khalilzad had been telling people the Taliban had promised not to allow al-Qaeda to use Afghan territory as a launch pad for their attacks on the United States, those privy to the deal say the Taliban have made no explicit promise to cut ties with al-Qaeda.

The US-Taliban negotiations were the only gleam of hope for Afghan ordinary people for end of conflict. However, the draft agreement is disappointing for not ending the conflict. Although Khalilzad said in a tweet that the agreement "will reduce violence and open the door for Afghans to sit together to negotiate an honorable and sustainable peace" and a sovereign Afghanistan that does not pose threat to the US and its allies, Afghans do not trust the Taliban, the group which promised Afghan representatives in an unofficial dialogue to reduce violence but rather intensified their militancy against both Afghan combatants and non-combatants. Thus, after holding nine rounds of talks, the only outcome for the Afghan government is that Khalilzad and his team could only persuade the Taliban to negotiate with the Ghani administration. It is believed that any other country such as Russia and China could also broker peace talks between the Taliban and the Kabul government.

The backdoor talks left Afghan people in the dark about both the process and the details of those dealings. After the news released that signing peace agreement was imminent between the Taliban and US representatives, Afghans, on tenterhooks as to what decisions had been made about their future, had little choice but to refresh Twitter. In short, the exclusionary nature of the talks has fill the air with fear and disappointment for Afghan people. Women are highly concerned about their fate and fear if the Islamic Emirates will return with their old ideology.

Worst of all, militancy has been escalated and the Taliban still carry out indiscriminate attacks. Almost 4,000 non-combatants have lost their lives in the country in the first half of this year, with a 27 percent increase in war-related civilian deaths in the second quarter.

Hours after Khalilzad brief Afghan officials on the agreement, the Taliban militants carried out a deadly suicide attack in a high-security zone that is home to several international organizations in Kabul, killing more than a dozen people.

The Taliban show no sincerity for peace since they have intensified their attacks and threatened to mar the process of presidential elections.

If the peace agreement is to open the door to a real reconciliation between the Taliban the Kabul government, then the Kabul government must be legitimate, and nothing proves legitimacy like democratic victory.

With the growing concerns about the US-Taliban peace agreement, the two sides have to revise their deal without any hurry so that it could be acceptable to both Afghan and US officials.

## Why People Are Worried About the Peace Deal with Taliban

By: Mohammad Zahir Akbari

After the ninth round of peace talks between US-Taliban has ended, the US Special Representative for Peace, Zalmay Khalilzad, came to Kabul to brief the Afghan president and political leaders on details of the Doha peace talks. Based on official reports, he discussed the main framework of the draft agreement with President Ashraf Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah. "The draft framework agreement was shown to President Ghani but farther discussions will continue with him, tweeted by Waheed Omer, a president senior advisor." He also showed up in Afghan Medias and responded to some of the questions asked by journalists and other Afghan people.

In general, it seems that Washington is decisive to peace deal with Taliban due to several reasons such as losing the lives of more than 2,300 American, imposing nearly one trillion dollars and also making a credit for Trump election campaign. Based on the draft agreement, it is said that the US will withdraw 5,000 troops from five bases in Afghanistan within 135 days if conditions in the agreement are truly implemented by the Taliban.

"Yes, we have reached an agreement in principle," Mr. Khalilzad said during an interview with Lotfullah Najafzada, a TOLONews journalist. "Of course, it is not final until the US president [Donald Trump] agrees on it. So, at the moment, we are at that stage." The US envoy said that as part of the agreement, at the first stage, the provinces of Kabul and Parwan - where the Bagram Airfield is located - will see a reduction in violence.

However, the details of Khalilzad's talks with government officials and political leaders have not been released to the media. Therefore, many of the people are seriously following the news with great concerns about the outcome of the agreement fearing from return to black Taliban-era. In fact, the increasing concern of people originates from two main issues: unclear process of peace talks and the bitter memory of people from Taliban era. Many people think that the Taliban is not a credible group to count on its sayings and commitments. In the previous round, the Taliban had called themselves as "White Pigeons of Peace" but later when dominate on cities and country used various types of atrocity which not was imaginable to any human.

Taliban has left such a bitter memory that will never be forgotten in the history. People remember the cruel deeds of Taliban when they dominated in Kabul and other large cities in nineties. As pointed out, Taliban introduced themselves as white pigeons of peace but soon after changed to such warlords that no value or criteria was important for them. The burnt land policy, forced mass migration and systematic ethnic and religious massacres are some parts of the group's crimes which, somewhat, continues yet. In addition, the Taliban are not an independent group to do

whatever they want, but they are inspired by the policies of the countries in the region and follow their goals and desires. According to most Afghan people, no changes have occurred in mentality and behavior of the Taliban while some of its branches have become more extremists.

However, Mr. Khalilzad said the return of Islamic emirate is not acceptable by force and this point has been included in the draft agreement. While the possible return of an Islamic emirate as part of a peace deal between the US and the Taliban has been a much-debated topic which increased a lot of concerns about the loss of achievements the country has made in the last eighteen years. Many people ask why we have fought and undertook heavy human and non-human expenses within eighteen years if the outcomes of peace deal undermine the past achievements.

Anyway, the key point is that after eighteen years the US and the Taliban have come to realize that they cannot win each other through war or with less expense. Therefore, they have defined the solution to ending the US-Taliban war but according to many Afghan analysts it is not going to end the war in Afghanistan. The US war with the Taliban is one issue, but the Afghan government's war with the Taliban is another matter which differs in nature and in its consequences.

It is in the Taliban's interest to end the war with the United States. If the war ends with the withdrawal of foreign troops from Afghanistan, it is a great privilege for the Taliban and they will never miss this opportunity, but when it comes to the Afghan people, the Taliban's views will be different. The Taliban and their supporters will never want an end to war in Afghanistan. The Taliban believe that with the departure of foreign forces, the government and security forces will not be able to confront the group. The Taliban, on the other hand, understand that the political disintegration and personal interests of some political leaders make it impossible to form a large national consensus in the wake of the war with the Taliban.

For these two reasons, the Taliban consider Afghanistan's political system vulnerable and fragile and believe that the current system will shortly collapse with military and political pressure if it does not have strong support from foreign countries. The fall of the Taliban regime means the rule of the emirate. As a result, this scenario has heightened the Taliban's enthusiasm for signing an agreement with the United States. On the other hand, it raised concerns among Afghan people as the agreement may sacrifice the national achievements and prepare the ground for a despotic government.

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## Britain's Brexit Breakdown

By: Philippe Legrain

British democracy was once widely seen as a model for others to follow. But it has now sunk into its deepest crisis in living memory. At stake is not only whether the United Kingdom crashes out of the European Union without an exit deal, but also how far a country once famed for stability and moderation descends into political civil war.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson, seems determined to take the UK out of the EU on October 31 at any cost. The chances of a chaotic no-deal Brexit increased dramatically on August 28, when Johnson moved to suspend the UK Parliament for five weeks between mid-September and October 14. It will now be much harder - but not impossible - for his parliamentary opponents to thwart him.

Johnson claims that he wants a deal, but that the threat of leaving without one is needed to force the EU to compromise. In his view, curtailing Parliament's ability to block a no-deal Brexit was necessary to make the threat credible.

It is not inconceivable that EU leaders, who meet as the European Council on October 17-18, might agree on a revised deal that British MPs would then rubberstamp, for fear of the alternative. But Johnson's demands are extreme. In particular, he wants to scrap, not just modify, the "backstop" designed to keep the Irish border open - and to preserve the fragile peace in Northern Ireland - after Brexit. That suggests his real aim is to blame EU intransigence for the failure of negotiations and to provoke his parliamentary opponents into forcing a general election, for which he is already preparing with a blizzard of spending promises and catchy policy announcements.

In the election campaign, Johnson would accuse Parliament of thwarting "the will of the people," meaning the narrow 2016 vote to leave the EU. This tactic might erode support for Nigel Farage's Brexit Party and rally most Leave voters under Johnson's Conservative banner. With Remainers divided, Johnson might win the sizable parliamentary majority that eluded his predecessor, Theresa May, in the 2017 general election. But for now, there is no democratic mandate for a no-deal Brexit. The 2016 referendum did not specify how the UK would leave; the Leave campaign simply promised that doing so would be easy, painless, and by agreement. A no-deal Brexit would be none of those things.

The government's own planning envisages ports seizing up and businesses going bust as tariffs on UK exports to the EU go up overnight. Food, medicines, and fuel could run short. Civil unrest would be likely. And a painful recession would doubtless ensue.

Worse, such an outcome would cut the UK adrift from its European neighbors. A post-Brexit trade deal with the EU, with which the UK does nearly half its trade, would be postponed indefinitely; even starting talks would require Britain to swallow the terms of the rejected withdrawal agreement. Bad blood would also jeopardize security and foreign-policy cooperation. No wonder US President Donald Trump, who hates the EU because it enables Europeans to stand up to him together, is cheering Johnson on.

A no-deal Brexit also would be painful for the EU, and especially Ireland. The fragile eurozone economy, which already is grappling with China's slowdown and the uncertainty created by Trump's trade wars,

could plunge into recession. And given the limited scope for European monetary or fiscal stimulus, the damage could be more severe than expected.

How, then, might a no-deal Brexit still be stopped?

Rebel MPs' preferred option had been to pass legislation instructing Johnson to seek a further extension to the UK's exit deadline. They might still do so next week, or even just after the October European Council meeting. But the timing is very tight, and government delaying tactics could stymie the rebels. Moreover, Johnson might ignore such an instruction; the EU could reject an extension request; or, more plausibly, it might impose conditions on the extension that Johnson would reject.

The rebels' second choice - a no-confidence vote - now seems likely next week. With his allies from Northern Ireland's Democratic Unionist Party, Johnson has a parliamentary majority of just one. And because his suspension of Parliament has outraged rebel Conservatives who had previously balked at bringing down their own government, a no-confidence vote now stands a greater chance of success.

But bringing down the government would not be sufficient to stop a no-deal Brexit. The motley crew of rebels also would need to support the formation of a caretaker government that would seek a Brexit extension, call a general election, and perhaps also legislate for a second referendum. Moreover, Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn, a hard-line socialist and closet Brexiteer, insists on leading such a government. That would require Conservative rebels, opposition Liberal Democrats, and also MPs who quit Labour in protest over Corbyn's leadership to rally behind him - a tall order.

Alternatively, if Corbyn failed to muster a majority, he could give Labour's backing to a caretaker government led by someone less controversial - but that is also unlikely. If an alternative government could not be formed within two weeks of a successful no-confidence vote, rebels would need to hope that Johnson called - and lost - an election before October 31. Johnson might calculate that it would be easier for him to win an election before no-deal chaos materializes; for now, at least, he says he won't trigger a pre-Brexit poll.

That leaves the nuclear option of Parliament voting to revoke unilaterally Britain's notification of its intention to leave the EU under Article 50 of the Treaty on European Union. This is the only surefire way to thwart a no-deal Brexit. But it would be an incendiary move. Many Leavers would see it as an anti-democratic coup. And because it would reverse the 2016 referendum result, such a step would necessitate a new plebiscite pitching Remain against No Deal.

With luck, Johnson's scorched-earth tactics will spur his disparate opponents into overcoming their differences to stop a no-deal Brexit. But whatever happens, the pragmatic center is being squeezed out of British politics. Both hardline Brexiteers and diehard Remainers have rejected the only available exit deal. As each side ups the ante, Brexit is now an all-or-nothing fight to the death among absolutists.

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