

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

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Has Peace Process Failed?

Despite the increasing optimism about the outcome of US-Taliban peace talks, which was raised by US Special Envoy Zalmay Khalilzad, the process ended with a message tweeted by US President Donald Trump, but little is known about the sudden about-turn in the process.

Khalilzad held nine rounds of talks with the Taliban leadership behind closed doors and aired his optimism on several occasions after each ending as he described the talks "the most productive session" and "substantial progress". He also insisted on the crucial role of regional and global stakeholders and appreciated their support to the Afghan peace process. Khalilzad said that "peace" and "ceasefire" was part of the agenda for the White House even if not for the Taliban leadership.

In May, Khalilzad said in a tweet that "peace require that we find common ground on four inter-connected issues: troop withdrawal, counter-terrorism assurances, intra-Afghan dialogue and negotiations, and reduction in violence leading to comprehensive ceasefire". Meanwhile, to support peace process, Washington and Islamabad cemented their ties and US President urged Islamabad to put its weight behind the talks. On the other hand, Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan promised on his trip to Washington that he would hold talks with the Taliban.

Despite all the issues, including Khalilzad's persistence on comprehensive ceasefire and his optimistic views, he ended the talks with a draft agreement, which was acceptable neither to Kabul nor to Washington. Bargaining hard at the table, the Taliban leadership turned down Khalilzad's demand for ceasefire. The draft agreement was reportedly calling the Taliban "Islamic Emirate" and the Taliban would not declare ceasefire. Worst, the Taliban intensified their attacks against the Afghan government and nation.

I raised my doubt and mistrust about the Taliban in many commentaries and reiterated that the Taliban had been a foul player and they would never practice genuine intention in that regard. With this in mind, I mentioned that if the Taliban did not observe the rule of the talks, they had to face the consequences similar to Sri Lanka's Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam, which was a stronger terrorist group than the Taliban are, but was dismantled by military forces.

Although the United States may have legitimate concerns about the Taliban's intensified attacks in Afghanistan, it is possible that increased diplomatic pressure on the Taliban could have resulted in lesser carnage and persuaded the militants to engage with the Ghani administration.

With Washington's sudden turn-about, Afghans are in limbo. They have no idea if Washington resumes the talks or will resort to military forces. Washington should clarify its stance on the peace process.

In response to Trump's tweet, the Taliban leadership said that Trump's statements had damaged his credibility and warned of more American deaths.

However, it is evident that the Taliban played a foul game through intensifying their militancy amid the peace talks, which will justify Trump's decision. If the Taliban was genuine in the talks, they had to declare ceasefire. That is, the US-Taliban draft agreement had to lead to ceasefire and Khalilzad should not have succumbed to Taliban's demands. In a series of tweets, Trump hit out at the Taliban, asking "what kind of people would kill so many in order to seemingly strengthen their bargaining position?"

If Washington is going to resume the talks, it has to include Afghan representatives in the process. Forming an inclusive team, US and Afghan representatives included, is likely to be more productive. There should be a single deal between the Taliban, Afghanistan, and the US and agreed upon unanimously. The concern of Afghan people should be also considered in the talks, if resumed.

Meanwhile, regional and global stakeholders have to play an active role in this regard. They have to break their silence and use their leverage so that the negotiating sides reach a unanimously agreed pact. The Taliban have to reduce violence if they are genuine in negotiations. Intensifying attacks amid talks reflects the Taliban's insincere intention. They seek concessions through bargaining over higher price.

It is clear that the Taliban are also exhausted from the conflict and are aware that they will not win through war. If they miss the chance for talks, they will face harsh consequences and regret their rigid stance. It has been urged that negotiations are crucial for finding a solution. Talks will only bear the desired result if regional stakeholders play their role constructively and push the Taliban to stop violence to show their genuine intention in the talks. The talks are a win-win situation if the demands of all negotiating sides are observed and the Taliban should not seek to impose only their own demands.

Welcome to Victories and Opportunities after Stoppage of Peace Process

By: Mohammad Zahir Akbari

Following the intensification of Taliban attacks on Takhar, Kunduz, Baghlan, Farah and Kabul provinces, the national defense forces also increased operations against the Taliban in different parts of the country. In last few weeks, in addition to victories in the above-mentioned provinces, several districts that had been under control of Taliban for years now taken over by security forces. Thus, several important Taliban figures ranging from so-called governors to combatant commanders and technical personnel specialized in making suicide bombs and planning terrorist attacks have been killed. According to statistics provided last week, nearly a thousand Taliban troops were killed in various parts of the country.

Furthermore, one of the most dangerous Daesh hideout destroyed in the north of Kabul in a six-hours-long operation by a Special Unit of the National Directorate of Security Unit on Thursday evening. Seemingly, the information about the center was taken from a dangerous three-member of the group who were arrested last week. According to local reports, two Daesh members, who were hiding in a residential house in Sar-e-Kotal area in Kabul's Police District 17, PD17, were killed and a large number of weapons were also seized during the operation adding that one of them was a Pakistani national. The residential house, which was rented by the two Daesh members, used for planning terrorist attacks in Kabul and also made suicide vests. Therefore, we need to raise awareness among people to cooperate with the security forces in recognition of suspects when they see residing in their areas.

According to political experts, two major phenomena have exacerbated insecurity situation and also recent repressive attacks on the Taliban: election and peace talks. Holding elections is considered as an indispensable principle for the Afghan government but its failure is considered very critical to the armed opposition groups and important for their political credibility in political bargaining. Therefore, they have unprecedentedly increased their attacks across the country, especially on the capital city of Kabul. The Taliban did not want to accept intra-Afghan talks with the Afghan government because they were trying to cancel the elections and create a provisional government. If the Taliban could succeed to implement their plan, then, they could easily reach their wishes through their influence they gained and had among some politicians and ethnic groups.

Unfortunately, some of our political leaders were so fascinated by the leadership and vice-president position of the Provisional Government that they acted as spokesmen for the Taliban. They tried to defend and justify from their positions at the national level saying that there is huge difference between current Taliban and Taliban of twenty years ago. The current Taliban respect the modern values and became more flexible against international norms and

standards while the group has repeatedly shown both in theory and also in practice that they pay no values and attention to human rights, equality and freedom. They have repeatedly articulated their non-compliance with international conventions.

During the peace process with the US delegation, the Taliban became proud and felt triumphant as nearing to their Islamic Emirate dream after signing an agreement with the United States. They had affected the political atmosphere in a way that marginalized the government and their lobby groups and circles did not feel shy to justify their acts and return anyway. In fact, it was the Taliban group who chose when or who could participate in the negotiations and who could not participate. The Taliban had repeatedly rejected talks with the Afghan government and government representatives, but allowed the individuals to participate in intra-Afghan negotiations. The situation, as 2014, made the Taliban hopeful to reach their goal through intensification of war and military pressure. They wanted to cancel the election and establish a provisional government.

Fortunately, these dreams were not materialized to the benefit of Taliban and some politicians within the system. Trump stopped the Qatar peace talks with a short tweet and also refused to meet with Taliban leaders in the United States. The stoppage of talks not only damaged the peace process which was in interest of Taliban but also changed the situation on the military fronts in Afghanistan. The United States increased contribution with Afghan government in fighting against the group and became more involved in suppressing and bombing on Taliban gathering centers. As a result, not only dozens of Taliban leaders and commanders were killed but also paved the way for Afghan security forces to free many of districts in different provinces across the country. This can trend can also contribute to more inclusive and transparent election in the country provided that the government officials and political leaders do not miss the opportunity.

Given the victories achieved in last two weeks, it is understood if the international force had maintained the motives to fight against Taliban and jointly worked to strengthen the security forces and worked closely with them, today many of our military and security problems were resolved and the Afghan people would not have to go back to the point they had been through with bitter experience two decades ago. Although it is too late to say this, the current situation still provides a new opportunity for people, governments, political parties and political groups to defend democratic values with a full political consensus and say no to the Emirate and other extremist groups. Therefore, we should support the elections as a national process and strive for its transparency, security and credibility.

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The Amazon and You

By: Richard N. Haass

Nearly everyone has seen the dramatic images of the Amazon ablaze. Tens of thousands of fires - intentionally started or caused by logging, farming, mining, and other human activities - have broken out over the past year alone.

This matters a great deal, because forests absorb gases that increase global warming if released into the atmosphere. Reduction of the Amazon rainforest by fire adds to the problem of climate change in two ways: the fires themselves release gases and particles that accelerate the earth's warming, and the elimination of the trees by definition means they cannot absorb carbon dioxide.

The issue gripped last month's G7 meeting in France. The leaders of many of the world's wealthiest countries pledged just over \$22 million to help Brazil, home to the bulk of the Amazon rainforest and nearly half of the world's tropical forests, combat the fires. Brazil angrily rejected the offer.

Brazil's populist president, Jair Bolsonaro, stated that his country would not allow the G7 countries to treat it as if it were a colony. "Our sovereignty is nonnegotiable," the government spokesman declared. In the end, Brazil did accept some \$12 million in assistance from the United Kingdom, but it did not reach a compromise with the G7 or with France, which hosted the meeting.

What is going on in Brazil highlights a fundamental tension in the world. Brazil's government holds to the view that what happens inside the country's borders falls within its purview alone. This is the traditional notion of sovereignty, one largely shared by most of the world's governments, including the United States, China, Russia, India, and others.

But it is an increasingly inadequate, if not obsolete, notion in today's globalized world, where just about anyone and anything can reach almost anywhere. As a result, what happens within a country can no longer automatically and unconditionally be considered its concern alone.

Consider terrorism. In the late 1990s, the Taliban government then controlling Afghanistan allowed al-Qaeda to operate freely from Afghan territory. Al-Qaeda did just that, mounting an operation that led to the deaths of nearly 3,000 innocent men, women, and children in the US on September 11, 2001.

The US, then led by President George W. Bush and backed by much of the world, delivered an ultimatum to the Taliban government: hand over al-Qaeda's leaders and deny it future use of Afghanistan to promote terrorism or face removal from power.

Put differently, the government was told that the benefits and protections of sovereignty obliged it not to provide sanctuary and support to terrorists. The Taliban refused to accept this demand; within weeks, a US-led international coalition forcibly removed the group from power.

The lesson for Brazil is clear: what its government chooses to do and not to do vis-à-vis the rainforest has consequences for the entire world. If the issue were "merely" one of local environmental degradation and pollution, it would be solely a Brazilian matter, as bad as that might be. But as soon as the effects of deforestation spill across borders, what happens in Brazil becomes a legitimate concern of others. Pollution is mostly about local results of local activities; climate change is about the global results of local activities.

And we know that the results of climate change are costly: more frequent and severe storms, floods, droughts, and other extreme weather. More people are being internally displaced and turned into refugees as a consequence. Significant swaths of the globe may soon be uninhabitable. Climate change, like terrorism, has become everyone's business. Brazil should be viewed as the Amazon's custodian, not its owner.

So what is to be done? One approach is to create incentives for countries like Brazil to act more responsibly. This was behind the G7's offer to help Brazil, and it underpins long-standing EU aid programs designed to curb forest destruction and promote planting new ones.

But it is clear that Brazil's government is not responding the way it should. Removal of legal barriers to deforestation has added to the problem, as has a dearth of government resources to enforce the law and stop those who are illegally clearing trees and starting fires.

Again, sovereignty entails obligations as well as rights. And where compliance cannot be induced, pressure must be applied. The time has come to consider penalties against a government such as Brazil's if it refuses to meet its obligations to the world. Penalties could include tourism boycotts, sanctions, and tariffs. Obviously, positive incentives to encourage and enable desired actions would be preferable. But there must be sticks where carrots are not enough.

Many governments take this approach to deterring or responding to genocide, terrorism, and weapons proliferation. Brazil's behavior has raised the question of whether those who fan climate change ought to be treated similarly.

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