

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

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Regional Stakeholders Signal their Support to Afghan Peace Process

Afghan people call on the Taliban to hold direct talks with the Kabul administration and Afghan officials hold out hope that the talks will be restarted. US Special Envoy Zalmay Khalilzad, who led nearly a year of talks with the Taliban on a peace settlement, has briefed members of the United States House Foreign Affairs Committee and shared with Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan "how far his negotiations with the Taliban had gone, the nature of the talks and what expectations he holds in the future".

In an open hearing, US acting Assistant Secretary of State Alice Wells told the House panel the US-Taliban talks had "broken new ground in this last round of negotiations that took place," and also hinted the Trump administration has not ruled out a return to the bargaining table. She is cited as saying, "We would like to see the Taliban take actions that would allow us to return to negotiations."

After the cancellation of US-Taliban talks, Taliban delegations traveled to Russia and Iran to signal that they seek a revival of peace talks with Washington. Taliban spokesman Suhail Shaheen vowed to continue peace talks with the US, provided that the US "shows commitment to what they have agreed".

Expressing disappointment with the breakdown of US-Taliban negotiations, Russia's Special Envoy to Afghanistan, Zamir Kabulov, described Trump's cancellation of US talks with the Taliban as a "negative signal" but said that statements from Taliban representatives and US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo raised hopes for future dialogue.

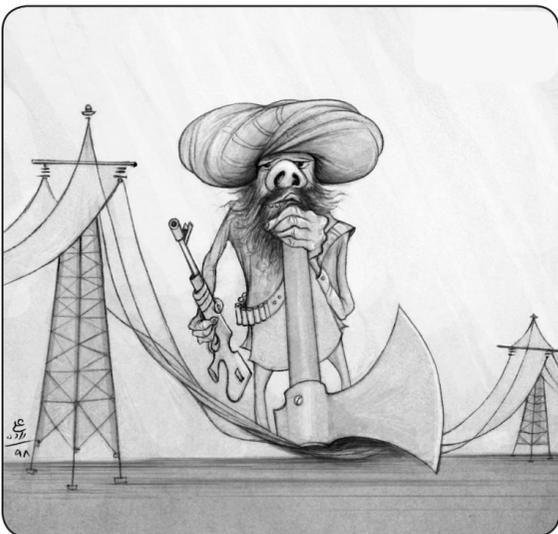
Over the past year, Russia has participated in trilateral summits with the US and China on ending the conflict in Afghanistan, allowing Moscow to exert influence over discussions on a withdrawal of US troops. As the United States was on the threshold of signing a peace deal with the Taliban, Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said Russia was ready to be a "guarantor" of any future Afghan peace settlement. Although the Afghan government disapproves of Russia hosting the Taliban, Moscow has insisted that its involvement in peace talks is motivated by national security concerns, rather than aspirations for diplomatic influence and claims that it does not have any particular interest in "filling the vacuum in Afghanistan". But Russia has to consult with the Afghan government and support intra-Afghan dialogue or else it seems that Moscow is interfering in Afghanistan's internal affairs. In the wake of the destructive role of the Soviet Union in 1980s, Afghan people view Russia with mistrust and believe that it simply seeks to continue its political rivalries with the United States through hosting Taliban delegations, which will only add to the Taliban's credibility and international recognition. Hence, Russia should not give much credit to a terrorist group which is widely involved in killing Afghan soldiers and civilians. To prove its sincerity, Russia should use its leverage on the Taliban to stop violence and hold direct talks with the Afghan government.

Chinese officials have expressed their willingness to work with global powers to support Afghan peace process. China-Afghan relations are based on mutual trust and mutual respect. Both the Afghan government and Afghan nation are optimistic about the role of China in the peace process.

Meanwhile, Chinese officials seek to cement ties between Kabul and Islamabad, which will contribute to the peace process. Afghans hope that China and Pakistan will be able to broker the intra-Afghan dialogue and pressure the Taliban to reduce violence. As the relations between Islamabad and Washington has been thawed, Afghans hope that Pakistan will play more active role in the peace process. Although Pakistani officials promised to engage more in the process, they yet to take more practical steps and broker talks between the Taliban and the Afghan government.

Iran's role is also viewed with distrust in Afghanistan. Since relations between Tehran and Washington has hit rock bottom, Iran is going to mitigate Washington's pressure through signaling leverage on the Taliban. Perhaps, Iran is also angry about being marginalized in the peace talks despite being Afghanistan's immediate neighbor.

The Afghan government welcomes any neighbors to play constructive role in the peace process and calls on the Taliban to reduce violence and hold direct negotiations. Afghanistan's neighboring countries and regional and global stakeholders have to prove their sincerity through pushing the Taliban to sit around the negotiating table with the Afghan government and pressuring them to reduce violence.



Presidential Election is a Golden Opportunity to Strengthen Democracy in Afghanistan

By: Mohammad Zahir Akbari

In recent weeks, the election campaigns have been decentralized from Kabul to remote provinces and main districts of Afghanistan. The Presidential candidates have increased their trips to remote provinces so as to explain their programs to the people. On the other hand, people warmly participate in election campaign gatherings to hear the programs of the presidential candidates. Few days ago Mr. Sarwar Danesh went to Jaghori and warmly welcomed with bunches of flowers and large gathering of people including men, women, intellectuals and other elders of Jaghori people. Thus, he traveled to Daikundi and other provinces facing with unprecedented warm welcome of huge number of people.

In general, election has become as a hot topic among the citizens; everywhere has beatified with posters, slogans and pictures of presidential candidate members. Every citizen including students, teachers, drivers, shop keepers and other social gatherings are talking about their favorite candidates. Social media network users, especially face-book users have become more active; they post hundreds of pictures, notes, slogans and comments against or in interests of their favorite candidates. These all show the interests and readiness of Afghan people for participation in the upcoming presidential election.

Given the positive reaction to cancellation of faulty peace process by Donald Trump and warm welcome to presidential candidates, especially from the current president and his team, people will say no to extremist groups by warm participation in the upcoming election. Also, given the social diversity of the country and bitter experience from the past, people have gotten the right path which is election and overall promotion of democracy in the country. Therefore, Afghan people seem very determined to participate in the upcoming election at any cost but not repeat the unfortunate circumstances of the past.

In fact, people of Afghanistan realized that election is the most important national programs which determine the future of nation. The alternatives to election are only war, sovereignty of ethnic and family-oriented system and overall social and political disorder. As aforementioned, the people of Afghanistan have experienced all these situations in past and have endured their bloody and harmful consequences. Therefore, in spite of security threats and repeated warnings of Taliban, people welcome the election and will have widespread participation on the Election Day.

According to some political experts, a transparent election is the most important way to fight against Taliban and increase legitimacy of the government. Holding election and widespread participating in election is a big no to Emirate and extremist system in the country. Estimated, around 7 million people will participate in the election, it means that absolute majority of Afghan people do not want Emirate. If this happens, no power will be able to impose its barbaric system on majority of people while they have international allies also beside them. In this case, Taliban will have no way,

except meaningful talks to the republican people of Afghanistan. Thus, Taliban will come to confess that peace talks will not be enough with the US. They will understand that a sustainable peace is possible through meaningful negotiation with opposition of emirate and proponent of republicanism in the country. So, election is the greatest capital of Afghan people provided that not spoiled with poor management and security threats imposed by terrorists. Otherwise, a poor election may reopen the way to Emirate and other extremist groups in the country. Consequently, all people of Afghanistan men and women, officials and non-officials should try to succeed the upcoming election.

Overall the widespread participation in the upcoming election has many benefits summarized as follow: firstly, it will not only legitimize the election and next Afghan government, but also delegitimize its alternative options in the public opinion on condition that succeed to hold a sound election in the country. In recent years, different alternations have been raised such as interim government, Emirate and so on because the Independent Election Commissions (IEC), as responsible entities, was not successful in institutionalization of election and smooth transition of power in the country.

Secondly, the widespread and successful election will show the hatred of people from terrorism and return of Emirate in the country. Unfortunately, until recent days a number of politicians wanted to cancel the presidential election and change the type of political system through establishment of interim government. These issues have raised serious concerns and hopelessness in the public opinion regarding past 18 years achievements, but people never retreated from their positions. Now that everything has returned on its right path, we must not spoil this national and historic opportunity of the country. From one hand, we should widely participate in the election and on the other hand, we must not repeat the experience of last elections.

Thirdly, widespread election participation will strengthen and institutionalize the democratic process in the country. As a result, people will get confident to use its votes as democratic means of choosing their political leaders. Though Afghan people have experienced several elections with going to the ballot box but, democratic believes have not institutionalized, especially in remote parts of the country. In remote parts of the country, majority of people live with their old and traditional values. In addition, the election process faced many ups and downs due to poor management of IEC in recent years. So, everyone including Election Commissions officials, election bodies, security official, electoral candidates, media and others should try to keep the electoral environment hot and stop any movements which discourage the people from participation in the election process.

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Reconciliation Must Drive Development

By: Rémy Rioux

In a profoundly volatile world riddled with fractures, the temptation to embrace a seemingly reassuring path of withdrawal or isolation may be strong. In fact, avoidance of potential hazards seems only natural. For lack of a better alternative, we may be instinctively inclined to look inward in order to circumvent or at least mitigate the risks of a world that feels like end times, in which children are telling us the truth.

Many of us have already decided to follow that route. And yet the fires which recently ravaged the Amazon rainforest are a stark - and tragic - reminder that this line of reasoning, albeit understandable, is misleading. In fact, we should be moving in the opposite direction. We live in a world in common, which means that we are all vulnerable to threats - be they environmental, social, or political - that know no borders. Because direct or collateral effects can be felt everywhere, we should be nurturing a desire for reconciliation, not isolation.

These opposing views on the many challenges of an interdependent world - climate change, loss of biodiversity, deadly pandemics, social fragmentation, insecurity, trafficking of all kinds, and uncontrolled migration - underpin divergent strategies. On one hand, proponents of openness and stronger coordinated action seek collaboration with other countries in a spirit of international solidarity. On the other hand, advocates of distinct national trajectories endorse agendas designed to spread a subtle theory of withdrawal, including at the very center of the fundamentally generous field of development policy.

And the overall trend is unequivocal: an increasing number of leaders, from Russia to Brazil and the US, are unabashedly embracing nationalistic agendas and opposing efforts to promote joint global governance. Consider, for example, the "Journey to Self-Reliance" concept promoted by the United States Agency for International Development. The phrase conveys the positive impression of encouraging countries that receive international assistance to take ownership of their development challenges through enhanced autonomy, as opposed to being dependent on aid. And USAID deserves credit for breaking with the unrealistic idealism that pervades global development efforts.

Nonetheless, the agency's self-reliance approach - along with the US government's aggressive trade policy - essentially accepts and potentially exacerbates existing global fractures. In

particular, it promotes inward-looking perspectives, rejects the idea that a collective response to development challenges might be possible (let alone more effective), and justifies aid in the name of US national security rather than international solidarity.

Such an approach cannot be the basis for our development efforts. Development policy should be open and collaborative. It should not be diverted from its raison d'être and stealthily promote isolationism. But that is the risk facing development policy if it fails to reinvent itself and thus remains a noble yet insufficient instrument of global cohesion. If an increasingly divided world is to meet the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals by 2030, development policy needs renewed ambition. Otherwise, it will end up helping to make the case for the self-reliance approach.

We therefore need a guiding concept to define a new basis for collective action. I believe that the idea and method of reconciliation can help. "Reconciliation" is perhaps a simpler and more dynamic way of expressing the collective global objectives reflected in the SDGs. It would amount to a new *modus operandi* that would help us transcend the simplistic binary division between local and global.

A reconciliation policy would fully mobilize the resources and stakeholders of all countries - including civil-society organizations, multinational companies, major cities, and development banks - and direct them toward concrete cooperation and reciprocal international aid. This would bring about what I call a "polypolar" world.

To implement this policy successfully, we need to revitalize the traditional aid-centered paradigm and promote the concept of "sustainable development investment" (SDI) to guide as much global investment as possible toward fulfilling the SDGs. SDI would not substitute for official development assistance, but would complement it as a form of investment that ultimately aims to provide public goods, rather than generate short-term financial returns.

To meet these challenges and achieve the SDGs, we must not succumb to the siren song of self-reliance. Instead, let's embark on a journey of reconciliation. Let's choose hope.

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