

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



December 31, 2016

Lingering Peace Negotiation

The peace game has changed into an endless political competition that has never come to fruition but debated hotly once in a while. Afghan government put all its eggs in one basket to hold talks with the Taliban elements, mainly when Pakistan promised to nudge them to the negotiating table.

Afghan officials fluctuated between hope and chagrin for more than a decade and established the High Peace Council (HPC) to persuade the Taliban to stop violence and bloodshed.

Whenever Afghanistan stood a chance of holding talks, a whistleblower emerged mysteriously and sabotaged the plan. As a result, Pakistan, which is seen as key to the future of Afghanistan, brokered the first-ever direct talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban in July 2015. But the process was scuttled after the confirmation of the death of Taliban Supreme leader Mullah Omar.

It is believed that the negotiation of peace is getting more complicated in process of time. With the unmitigated insurgency and the Taliban's heavy offensives, the negotiation of peace is being debated again as Russia, China and Pakistan held its three round meeting, last week, on "deteriorating situation in Afghanistan", particularly as reports say that loyalists to the self-styled Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) has increased.

The previous two rounds of the tripartite meetings were not publicly disclosed. The third meeting was announced by the participating states in an indication of their growing confidence in their cooperation driven by the fear of ISIL gaining a foothold in Afghanistan. The announcement of the talks, however, annoyed Kabul, which questioned the effectiveness of a process on Afghanistan without its representation. In other words, the meeting had provoked a storm of protest from Afghan leaders, who saw it as "meddling in Afghanistan's internal affairs", "illegitimate" and "dubious".

Speaker of the lower house of Afghan parliament Abdul Rauf Ibrahim had asked the government to seek a clarification from Moscow about the meeting.

Meanwhile, Russia is also supporting Iran's entry into the relatively new process. Tehran has been Moscow's ally in the fight against ISIL in Syria. In a separate troika formed two weeks back, Russia, Iran and Turkey reaffirmed "their determination to jointly fight the IS".

In addition, Russia, China and Pakistan agreed to expand their tripartite consultations on Afghan conflict and include other countries, including Afghanistan, after Kabul objected to its absence from the regional discussions.

The tripartite meeting on Tuesday, December 27, 2016, expressed concerns over the increased activity of ISIL in Afghanistan. Russians believe that protracted conflict in the country has left ungoverned spaces, which are being taken up by the ISIL fighters returning from Iraq and Syria, where the militant group is on the retreat.

The three countries reiterated their support for reconciliation process in Afghanistan. "The participants agreed to continue their efforts towards further facilitating the Afghan-led, Afghan-owned peace and reconciliation process in Afghanistan according to the known principles of reintegration of the armed opposition into peaceful life," the joint statement said. "The Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China as the UN Security Council permanent members confirmed their flexible approach to delisting Afghan individuals from the UN sanctions lists as their contribution to the efforts aimed at launching peaceful dialogue between Kabul and the Taliban," the statement further noted.

The position on delisting looked to be a snub for Afghanistan that had last month asked the United Nations to add Taliban's new leader, Maulvi Haibatullah, to its sanctions list. It is further believed that the absence of main negotiators, Afghanistan and the Taliban, in the trilateral talks will never lead to political stability rather it widens the gap among the countries in general and compounds the mistrust between Kabul and Islamabad in particular.

The first point that will lead to tension is delisting the Taliban's dangerous figures from the UN's list whereas Kabul asks the opposite with the repeated refusal of the Taliban to hold talks and their heavy offensives that led to great casualties within the last two years. So, one will conclude that there is no bona fide intension for peace and it has rather changed into a political competition or deceptive game.

Considering the current mistrust, it is believed that the stalemate of peace talks will not be broken in 2017 either and the insurgency will continue unabated. Although Afghan officials ask warring factions to join peace process, there is no positive answer except for the Hezb-e-Islami Afghanistan (HIA) led by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, which signed a peace agreement. It is hoped that the countries will bury the hatchet and decide a collective strategy to end violence and bloodshed not only in Afghanistan but around the globe.

Reaching Peace Agreement

By Asif Ghaznawi

Peace process in Afghanistan officially began in 2010 when government of president Karzai founded Peace High Council led by late Burhanuddin Rababi. Almost six years passed since then and officials in the council say 'about 20 thousand militants belonging to different groups of Taliban so far joined peace process.' Peace council with a wide structure; comprising a chief, his many deputies and several advisors, many committees of the council, offices in provinces and other sections, has spent perhaps tens of millions of dollars but the council has been under criticism by ordinary people, politicians and civil society; because despite efforts by the council, Insurgency still continues in the country and people's dream for peace has not been materialized.

Fighting in Afghanistan has been indeed complex and people do not know well about the roots and reasons. Even our political analysts have not reached a conclusion on factors that caused and continued the war. In the meantime Peace high council recently announced to have prepared a new strategy for peace process. Peace process and its program until now have not been so transparent; as it did not have tangible achievements too. 'According to new peace strategy specific and clear mechanisms designed and wide changes will be brought in the organization of peace council.'

President's office without giving details has said this. New strategy means that previous plans and programs have failed and may be the peace council did not have any strategy and plan. Peace council even accused of wasting time and resources and having no serious plan and authority to talk with militant.

Afghanistan, after the fall of Taliban regime in 2001, began a new era of its history and a democratic government came into being. For the first time over past three decades, Afghans elected a democratic government. Thousands of public buildings and installations have been constructed. More than six million students are busy getting education and thousands of schools and universities have been built. Our constitution recognized equal rights for men and women, civil and political rights of people are reserved. According to the constitution government is committed to do social justice and practice democracy, it follows United Nations' charter, the universal declaration of human rights and ensure right of freedom and respect human dignity. (Constitution; articles 6, 7, 24, 35) These and many other achievements and developments we have had during the past 15 years and that's why people of Afghanistan support the government despite problems and inefficiencies. Most importantly, 'national sovereignty' in the constitution belongs to people and they practice it through their representatives as president, members of parliament and other councils. But Taliban and other militant groups so far opposed all these values, they do not accept the political system of the country and their model of government is Emirate or Khelafat.

What the people of Afghanistan expect from government is not to compromise on democracy, civil and political rights of people,

human rights and women's rights. People participating in several elections, endorsed democracy and showed their opposition to Taliban and other like minded groups. According to Taliban's political theory democracy is non-Islamic and an 'Emir' should be at the helm of power; as they did in past during their rule (2001-1996) in the country.

Taliban opposes military and political agreements with other countries and their military presence in Afghanistan; it is while Afghanistan needs extremely military and financial help of international community; especially western countries. Our military strength and economic power totally depend on cooperation of our international allies. Taliban oppose all these and instead let members of terrorist groups make hideouts for themselves in the soil of Afghanistan. People of Afghanistan have been suffering because of groups like Taliban, Al Qaeda and Daesh. Afghan government can not fight these terrorists without military and financial help of its international allies.

Previous, Afghan government led by president Karzai, released thousands of militants from prisons. It was may be to take peace process ahead and reach peace agreement but people now do not want it be repeated, they support peace efforts; but not on cost of their democracy, freedom and recent achievements. Afghans across the country supported government and military operations against terrorist militants. Military operations by Afghan forces in this year were successful; fighters suffered heavy casualties and could not capture any province as they had planned before.

Though conflicts and disputes are finally ended via negotiations; but military means always proved to be decisive and crucial to pave the way for talks. Armed opposition groups have chosen military ways to achieve their political goals; for Afghan government military means and a strong military encounter can be the best way to force insurgents for talks. Government of Afghanistan with a powerful military only can crash current militancy and insurgency in the country. In the past six year government has given enough time and concession to militant opposition to encourage them to start peace talks; but they misunderstood and misused it and instead increased their militancy and terrorist attacks. They rejected talks with government and stressed on their previous conditions. Taliban repeatedly announced to accept nothing but change of political system, complete withdrawal of foreign forces and enforcement of 'Sharia' their rigid and untrue interpretation of Islam. Nonetheless talks with Taliban will give result at a time when government tighten and strengthen military operation against them, suppress them harshly and leave them no safe and secure place. In new strategy of peace council highest priority should be given to power and military pressure on insurgents; they know language of force better than reconciliatory and peaceful methods. Dialogue and diplomacy is finally the solution; but indeed a strong military pressure can bring the insurgents to negotiating table.

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The Next Migrant Wave

By Stephen Groff

Imagine that you are a farmer. Your crops are withering as weather patterns become more volatile, your well water is too salty to drink, and rice is too expensive to buy at the market. So, you leave home in search of a better life.

Millions of people in vulnerable communities around the world do not have to imagine such a scenario. They are living it now, as an increasingly unpredictable climate takes its toll; and their numbers are likely to soar as the effects of climate change intensify.

But the world is even less prepared for these future climate migrants than Europe is for the current wave of people fleeing from the Middle East and North Africa. Most climate migrants will relocate within their own borders, but others will have no choice but to seek refuge abroad. If sea levels rise by more than one meter, entire populations of Pacific-atoll and reef-island countries might have to relocate.

If it is well planned and managed, migration can help people adapt to such threats. But if it is not, it can lead to humanitarian crises. Overall, today's policies are inadequate. Source and destination countries urgently need to make it easier and safer for people to move, or to remain where they are if they cannot afford or choose not to leave. Climate change will be one of many factors fueling future migration waves. Although it will become increasingly difficult to distinguish between people fleeing from environmental factors and those who have left for other reasons, we know that climate will play a larger role in migration, as slow-onset threats such as erosion and acute hazards such as cyclones threaten more people's livelihoods.

Most of the people at risk live in Asia, which is uniquely exposed to the effects of climate change. Nine of the ten countries with the most people living in low-lying areas (who are therefore threatened by flooding, storm surges, salinity, and erosion) are in Asia, owing to mass migration to megacities in recent decades.

A recent study forecasts that Asia's low-elevation population could double by 2060, to 983 million, from its level in 2000, thus accounting for 70% of the world's total. Elsewhere in the region, water stress from reduced rainfall, salinity, glacial retreat, and desertification will hit water stocks, threaten livelihoods, and drive up food and water prices.

These drastic scenarios might not materialize if the world succeeds in mitigating climate change. But no country should be complacent. Asian countries, especially, should prepare for worst-case scenarios, and implement far-sighted national policies, such as Kiribati's "migration with dignity" program, which provides education and vocational training to citizens of the low-lying Pacific island state to improve their chances of finding decent work abroad. Preparations for any future

scenario in Asia will require more complete data to judge the potential impact and timing of climate-related events, and to assess their effect on migration patterns. Country-specific data would allow individual governments to hone their policies. This includes more thorough national censuses, which too often disregard marginalized communities like slum-dwellers. Censuses should be conducted inclusively, fed into national databases to monitor progress and identify vulnerable populations, and shared across the region.

Governments should educate their citizens about the effects of climate change, in order to prepare those who want to stay or cannot afford to leave. Migrant source countries should have national disaster risk assessments (so that they can plan for potential losses), comprehensive hazard maps, and disaster early-warning systems to reassure their citizens. And new houses, roads, bridges, and other infrastructure, such as water systems, should be built to withstand extreme weather.

At the same time, governments should provide access to portable benefits for those people who do leave, so that they can support themselves abroad. And destination countries should consider providing emergency employment for displaced workers, using Australia and New Zealand's seasonal worker programs as a model. Destination countries could also establish urban work and training centers for incoming migrants, many of whom will lack the skills required to land city jobs; and they should recognize the qualifications of those who do have expertise, and help them to find work.

It will be essential for destination countries to invest in sustainable infrastructure and basic services for new arrivals. Some cities are hesitant to provide services, because they fear it will attract new migrants. But this attitude only forces migrants into slums, which creates even bigger problems. A better approach is to steer migrants from vulnerable rural areas to nearby medium-size cities equipped with the necessary services to absorb them; this, in turn, will prevent megacities from growing unsustainably.

A comprehensive approach along these lines would help to make migration part of the solution to climate change, not just another of its harmful effects. Many countries will need funding to implement such plans, and, encouragingly, the 2015 Paris climate agreement established a taskforce to address climate-related displacement. One of its main goals should be to ensure that funding mechanisms for climate-change adaptation encompass migration issues.

For now, we need a more energetic global discussion on this pressing issue. Whether climate-induced migration brings relief or chaos will depend on the policies and investments we agree to today. We should act now to give vulnerable communities a say in their future. (Courtesy Project Syndicate)

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Air Pollution



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