

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



November 19, 2018

Murky Prospects of Peace Process

With Afghan people tired of the ongoing instability and insecurity, the prospects of peace process, unfortunately, do not appear to be bright, as well. In fact, different rounds of talks with Taliban by different authorities, the differences of Afghan government with the regional countries and the inability of Afghan government to control the security situation have made the situation seem very murky. It is the reason that insecurity does not seem to decrease even in the ongoing cold weather, when every year it used to get relatively calmer.

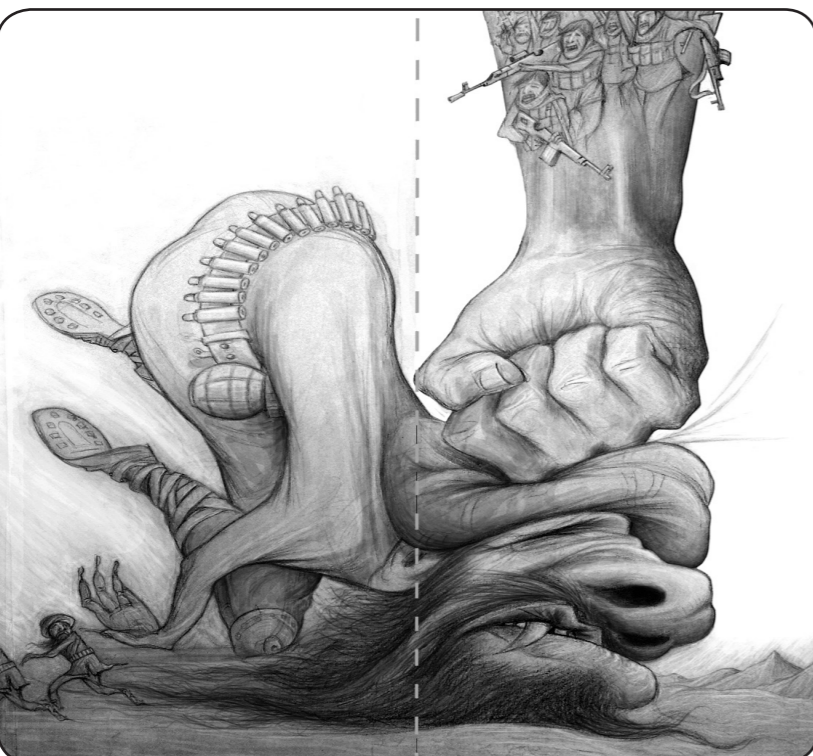
What is the reason that the peace process with Taliban does not get on track, and there are doubts and questions about it in every circle? The fact is that the Afghan government, itself, is not really sure how to deal with the situation. It lacks any comprehensive strategy in this regard, and keeps on calling Taliban for talks. Without having a comprehensive and practicable strategy, and thinking that there would be any headways in peace process with Taliban is a fool's errand. The unpreparedness of the government under the leadership of President Ashraf Ghani has further emboldened Taliban. Therefore, they have started believing that they can have a lion's share in any sort of deal that may be reached with them.

As far as, war is concerned, Taliban seem to be gaining grounds. Currently, Afghan government has control of only 55 percent of all the districts of the country, which is slightly more than the half. On the other hand, they can also threaten the districts that are under the control of the government whenever they want, which they have proved recently. Even, the incidents in capital Kabul show that they can launch lethal attacks in almost all parts of the country whenever they want. Taliban, and even their enemies, have now started believing that they are not losing the war in Afghanistan, and that can be very dangerous for the prospects of peace.

Gen. Joseph Dunford, US chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said on Saturday, Nov 17, that the Taliban "are not losing" in Afghanistan, and much more needs to be done to bring peace to the war-torn country. During a discussion at a security forum in Halifax, Nova Scotia, he commented, "They are not losing right now, I think that is fair to say... We used the term stalemate a year ago and, relatively speaking, it has not changed much." However, he also gave the indication that Taliban also believe that they cannot win the war through violence alone and they have to come to negotiation table. Therefore, he said in his statement, "Without going into detail here, we do believe the Taliban know that at some point they do have to reconcile... The key to success is to combine all that pressure to incentivize the Taliban." Nevertheless, the opportunity to pressurize Taliban seems to be getting out of the hands of Afghan government. Taliban seem to have realized this as well; therefore, they have always emphasized to have direct talks with the United States. Different rounds of talks between the Taliban and US representatives in Qatar point at the idea that US also seems to have realized the need to have direct negotiation with Taliban. An Associated Press report highlighted on Sunday, Nov 18, that high-ranking members of the Taliban have held three days of talks in Qatar with the US peace envoy for Afghanistan, Zalmay Khalilzad. The report said that the former Taliban governor of Herat Province, Khairullah Khairkhwa, and former Taliban military chief, Mohammed Fazl, attended the talks with Khalilzad in Qatar where the Afghan militant group has a political office. Khairkhwa and Fazl were among five senior Taliban members released from the US military detention facility at Guantanamo Bay. All five former Guantanamo Bay detainees are now based in Qatar and are thought to have enough influence with Taliban fighters in Afghanistan to broker a peace deal.

Zalmay Khalilzad seems to have quickened the process as US appears to be pushing for some sort of agreement with Taliban before the presidential elections in Afghanistan next year. Recently, he also met with Ashraf Ghani, probably with the message that he will be involved in the process later; however, it is not sure whether Taliban are ready to have talks with Afghan government representatives directly. Taliban consider Afghan government as a puppet government and have always emphasized that they either talk directly with US or talk with Afghan government representatives after the 'foreign forces' leave Afghanistan.

Though currently there seems to be an urgency in reaching to a peace deal, the method to approach the process seems to have lost its shape. Urgency alone will not solve the issue; there has to be a comprehensive strategy to approach the matter. Identifying the conditions of the peace process, involving all the national stakeholder and regional countries, and above all defining the future shape of the political and constitutional setup in the country are pivotal before jumping around the negotiation table; otherwise, the dreams of peace in Afghanistan will only remain a dream.



The Consequences of Taliban Attacks on Hazara Region

By: Mohammad Zahir Akbari

Following the coordinated attacks of Taliban on Hazara regions, especially Jaghori inflicted severe damages on the lives of already deprived people. According to local sources, nearly 3000 families has been displaced, many houses were burnt or destroyed, telephone networks and other public services such as schools, universities, businesses and so on have all stopped. As a result, thousands of men, women, and children became homeless and are extremely at risk of freezing weather and hunger in Ghazni, Bamyan and other neighboring provinces. The exact number of casualties is not accurate but the basic figure as given by local sources show that 42 people were killed, 5 people are missing, and 48 people have been wounded while over than 30 killed and injured from the security forces.

The attacks on Jaghori and Malistan comes after tragic battle between Taliban fighters and Hazara local police in the central province of Uruzgan Khas that reportedly killed one hundred people and around 500 families displaced to neighboring districts. Due to late action by security forces and vastness of tragedy it caused a lot doubts and mistrust that eventually, a large number of people walked out to raise their voice through peaceful demonstration from Kabul, Bamyan, and Mazare Sharif. The street protest in Kabul ended with ISI attack that left 6 killed, and 20 wounded.

Thus, the hatreds spread throughout the country and even penetrated to the academic environments; a number of Kabul university students started clashes with each other over similar ethnic issues on Thursday, in which several of them were killed and injured. Arresting around 35 students, the government promised to punish those involved in the university tensions, with the minister of higher education saying that no individual or group was allowed to expand political and group plots in the academic campuses. As a result, The Kabul University was closed until an unknown date due to tensions among students, ministry of higher education said Friday.

The widespread violence also instigated the parliament to summon the security officials for briefing about the increasing violence. Facing the harsh criticism, the defense minister burst out to confess the limitedness of the gov-

ernment capacities and asking for cooperation of PMs. In recent years, such attacks are increasingly repeated on Hazara community. Taliban and IS have been accused of committing human rights violations against certain group of people. In the capital, Kabul, Hazaras have suffered repeated violence. Hundreds have died in the attacks, which have targeted Hazara protests, Shi'ite mosques, and shrines. IS has invariably claimed such attacks to create sectarian division in the country.

However, The Taliban denied targeting "any specific race, ethnicity or sect," in a statement posted on their website. The attacks were against the "Kabul regime and American hireling positions in Jaghori", spokesman Zabiullah Mujahid said. He stressed our fight is not against any religion or any race and Hazara our compatriot they should not leave their homes. He said, they would firmly deal those who frightened to leave their homes. This is said after, many expressed concerns and displacement about the apparent deliberate targeting of Hazaras.

The government is also responsible to a large number of displaced men, women, and children who are in need of urgent assistance; Arrivals to Ghazni city, where Taliban fighters are clashing with government forces on the outskirts of town, say the government has failed to provide them with basic necessities. "We have gone from one grave to another," says Abdullah, a resident of Jaghori who fled to Ghazni city on November 13 with his family of nine. "We don't have any food or blankets. Two of my children are sick from the cold, and there's no medicine." "We left in the middle of the night in a crowded truck," adds Abdullah, who only goes by one name. "People left the city by any ways they could. Most families are living in schools, mosques, and hostels in the city, while others are staying with relatives. Many of the new arrivals say the response has been slow. "I came here with my wife and children," says Mohammad Ali, whose family found shelter in a mosque in Ghazni city on November 11 after leaving their home in Sang-e Masha, the main town in Jaghori district. "There's no food. People are getting sick."

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How Can Countries Reduce Poverty Faster?

By: M Niaz Asadullah and Antonio Savoia

Can the world end poverty by 2030, the target set by the United Nations Agenda for Sustainable Development? The UN General Assembly recently reaffirmed this deadline but conceded that meeting it will require "accelerating global actions" to tackle poverty's causes. As the international community explores new solutions, lessons from the past could be instructive.

Poverty reduction has been central to development policy for decades. During the 15 years of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the predecessor to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the percentage of people living in poverty - defined as less than \$1.90 a day - declined significantly, from nearly 27% in 2000, when the MDGs began, to about 9% in 2017.

At first glance, the rate of poverty reduction in the first few years of the SDGs has also been impressive. Between January 2016 and June 2018, an estimated 83 million people were lifted out of extreme poverty. And yet, to remain on track to meet the 2030 target date, about 120 million people should have escaped poverty during that period. Despite the welcome gains, the pace of progress has been less than satisfactory.

In a recent paper co-authored for the journal World Development, we examined what factors drive successful poverty reduction. Using poverty statistics from developing countries during the MDGs era, we assessed whether countries with higher levels of income poverty - that is, more people living on less money - experienced faster reductions in their poverty rates than economies with lower income-poverty levels. Using limits of \$1.25 and \$2 per person per day, we found that poverty tended to decrease faster in countries that started out poorer.

But these findings, while positive, tell only part of the story. In many countries, the end of poverty remains a distant goal. For example, at the current pace of poverty reduction, we estimate that Mali, where 86% of the population lived on less than \$1.25 a day in 1990, will require another 31 years to eradicate extreme poverty altogether. But even in Ecuador, where only 7% of the population lived on less than \$1.25 a day in 1990, eliminating poverty will take at least another decade.

The differing experiences of countries in Africa and Asia illustrate that while adoption of the MDG agenda did accelerate poverty reduction, the degree of progress has varied widely. In the early 1990s, poverty levels in Nigeria, Lesotho, Madagascar, and Zambia were similar

to those in China, Vietnam, and Indonesia. But by the time the MDGs ended in 2015, the Asian countries had reduced levels of poverty dramatically; the African countries had not.

This divergence continues. Today, extreme poverty is mostly contained to Africa; according to the World Bank's 2018 Poverty and Shared Prosperity report, 27 of the world's 28 poorest countries are on the continent, and each has a poverty rate above 30%. In fact, at current rates of poverty reduction, more than 300 million people in Sub-Saharan Africa will still be poor in 2030.

Many factors have contributed to the shifting geography of poverty. In Africa, weak economic performance - fueled by conflict, ineffective policies, ethnic fragmentation, and external shocks - has made it more difficult for countries to fund poverty-alleviation programs. But the most important factor may be state capacity. After all, weak state institutions cannot effectively deliver public goods and services.

Of course, this leads to another question: what factors determine a state's capacity? In general, states work better when ruling elites are bound by limits on their power. But administrative experience also plays a role. China, with a slightly longer period of modern statehood than most of its younger African counterparts, may simply have developed a greater ability to administer its territory.

And yet, whatever the reason for the variation, there is no doubt that state capacity is one of the key ingredients for successful poverty reduction. We found that during the MDGs, high-poverty countries with strong state institutions were able to reduce poverty twice as fast as countries with feeble capacity, and were more likely to achieve the MDGs' target of halving poverty by 2015.

Poverty eradication remains a top priority for the 193 governments that have adopted the SDGs. But as the international community learned from the MDGs, goals do not guarantee progress. To ensure that the 725 million people who remained in poverty at the end of MDGs period can escape requires investing in programs that aim at building effective states. Otherwise, an end date for poverty will remain elusive.

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