

We, the people of Afghanistan want peace

Historical Perspective-- learning from the past

It is the third attempt to end the decades old conflict in Afghanistan. The Geneva Peace Accord did not achieve peace for Afghanistan because Afghans were not part of it. The disintegration of USSR and a sense of victory in West left Afghanistan in lurch to fend for herself. No one walked the terms of the Geneva Accord and Afghan Jehadi parties fought for power and consigned the country to civil war on ethnic lines. To the world the civil war after the withdrawal of Red Army from Afghanistan was peripheral. The situation turned out to be a zero sum game for the major actors and they walked away with a strong sense of "ultimate victory". Peace in Afghanistan cannot be considered peripheral and people of this the country and their aspirations for peace must be reflected in the peace process and peace making.

The Bonn Agreement in 2001 was in no way a peace deal, it was rather a quick political arrangement imposed by an external actor that led to the handover of the government and the state to one group of people in utter disregard to the diversity and sensitivity of the society. Majority of the Afghans were again excluded. Exclusion of Taliban was a conscious decision and the war that ensued was forced. The agreement was again a zero sum game and it turned many warlords into billionaires who continued to profit from war and did not imagine peace to serve their greed.

Regional/ international aspect

The US hegemony is facing tough competition from regional actors and its dominance has been disastrous for the world. Today the international structure is in a flux and major actors are busy arranging poles to position themselves. Russian and Chinese alliance seems cordial in pursuit of both geo-strategic objectives regionally and globally. Iran is acquiring power to be one of the main anchors in collaboration with regional powers in the Persian Gulf, Pakistan is fast expanding its nuclear assets to keep balance of power with its arch rival India. Both US and Pakistan realize that some kind of an agreement in Afghanistan will save them men, money and machines to remain relevant in the emerging multi-polar structure globally.

Current Situation -- challenges-



The conflict in Afghanistan is at its worst form today where civilians trapped in conflict zones are bombed and killed in utter violations of all international laws of war. The offensive against Taliban in the past one year has had massive toll on civilians across the country especially the rural areas where youth is a source of competition between the government and Taliban. In the shadow of the current conflict, the parties are sowing seeds of new conflict because the government, NATO and Taliban have been using local civilians as intelligence sources that led to killing of innocent people in villages and communities which has broken communities from within and led to suspicion among local population against each other. There is a trust deficit among the people of the country. The country is facing three layers of conflict: one at the national level with the Taliban and other armed opposition groups, second at regional level among major tribes and clans and a third one is at village level that has happened due to either cooperation with the Taliban, NATO or with the government.

The current talks between the US and the Taliban is a political breakthrough. However, the peace process that is underway, has not only excluded the current government but the wishes of general population and it will not bring durable peace to the country. The US through this peace process seeks limited presence in their bases in Afghanistan.. One political leader of the National Unity Government is doing exactly as instructed by some embassies in Kabul. Other political parties are backing the US' peace plan too without any consultation with people. People want independent agency rather than ethnic entrepreneurs appropriating themselves the role to represent people.

President Ghani's proposal for peace has some practical elements but it needs wider consultation and inclusion of impartial groups that have been present in the country and working to build the state. The peace process is handled by unqualified corrupt men in the government and it looks like a family affair rather than a national quest. The delegation that represented the Afghans in round seven of peace discussion at Doha was made of elite of which some are war profiteers and western wazir-kids who only work to protect their ill-gotten wealth, political position and in no way represented the Afghan masses, especially the victims of the current war. We are witness to another recipe which will cave-in the current trillion dollars set-up within weeks of NATO's and US withdrawal. It is imperative to mention that Afghans must be genuinely represented in the peace process, peacemaking and peace implementation to bring in the real issues facing the country and the nation, rather than allow those who have benefitted from the conflict and will easily table the wishes of external actors.

This paper conveys the stand of the group about the peace process

Purpose

The Afghan peace process has entered into a critical stage. Since its commencement, in June 2018, it heavily relied on the opinion of the elites-- on all sides, the US, Taliban and the Afghan Government. It, however, requires an Afghan opinion that can represent



that of the grassroots-- the Afghan people. The purpose of this paper is to address this end. It presents a unique solution to how peacemaking can actually happen-- mechanisms, approaches, and action plans, and that can result into a lasting peace in Afghanistan and the wider region.

The regional changes have global implications and peacemaking in Afghanistan must not be pursued in the guise of tactical compulsion by international actors present in Kabul to achieve geostrategic goals. It should rather be based on genuine desire for durable peace for all Afghans, the region and the world. Afghans want peace and they must lead the peace process because it is for their country and its people. Afghans must gather all those who are the representative of the people and who genuinely want peace, they must have a picture of the order that they want, define the elements that will help achieve a sustainable peace, identify and seek commitment of the guarantors and implement it under the aegis of the agreement among Afghans.

The current peace process is mired by distrust between the US and the Afghan government as well as mistrust among the US, Afghan government and the Taliban. Working on restoring and establishing TRUST is key to convey the intent for peace. Mapping the main internal actors, regional actors and global stakeholders is important. Peace process must be all inclusive to reach to a broad based agreement owned by Afghans and have the assurance of the guarantors to monitor peace, flag deviation and return the parties to adhere to their commitment and peace implementation. Warlords by no means can represent the Afghan masses and their presence in the peace process will legitimize their wrong acts over the past 19 years and make the national will subservient to their violent fantasies. It is important to mention that neither the government nor the Taliban have the right to declare amnesty. It is the innocent people who been the victims of this prolonged war and retain the right to forgive.

New proposal

Protracted internal conflicts are often complex, more so in multi-ethnic societies. Afghanistan is a complex case for building peace and therefor revisiting the Geneva Accord and Bonn Agreement to understand their flaws is important. Transitioning from conflict into durable peace requires give and take. Afghanistan is a country that does not require importing models for conflict resolution because Islam has strong principles for both conflict resolution and peace found on justice. Applying Islamic principles to resolve conflict will be easy, cost effective, quick with strong local buy-in.

The non-negotiable elements for peace

1. The views and aspiration of the real people of Afghanistan must be reflected throughout the process, peace agenda and peace implementation
2. Independence of the country in terms of economy, foreign policy, territorial integrity and internal affairs



3. Unitary state: there must be no allocation of land within the country to groups to rule. All parties must work on national agenda and rule based on mandate from people. The peace process must promote unity among people of the country.
4. Transitional Justice is key to peace and this must be discussed by the victims rather than war profiteers whose intentions are suspect.
5. A constitutional democracy to guide the country
6. The peace process must be led by Afghans and backed by the regional and international actors unequivocally and honestly to achieve peace.

To this end, It is essential to map all actors to the conflict, such as facilitators, mediators, spoilers, war profiteer and peace-niks, help with the capacity of the actors to be able to imagine a post peace order, “durable peace” and negotiate it for a just society for all. Spoilers must be excluded.

These stakeholders must identify the core issues for discussion that need to be brought to the table during the peace talk. The ruling elite should not alone identify the actors but allow political parties, civil society and other representatives of people to engage in the process. Mullahs and clergy who deem this war as unjust must be identified and made part of the process.

The issues deemed essential for establishing confidence for peace among actors are:

- Real representatives of people must form a National Ejma and be part of the peace dialogue. We recognize that Afghanistan is a diverse country and it must retain that social fabric.
- All parties to the conflict MUST refrain from war-mongering.
- All parties must agree and commit to find a political solution to the conflict in Afghanistan;
- There must be a national narrative for peace than individuals elevated above the people.
- The regional countries’ inclusion, support and agreement to peace is critical for peace in Afghanistan;
- UNAMA/OIC must immediately step in and play an independent, neutral role as a facilitator;
- All parties must declare that they want to live in peace with all neighbors;
- Parties to the conflict must agree and implement an immediate ceasefire;
- Release of prisoner of war through an agreement;
- Work on a framework and venues for peace talks;
- During the dialogue for peace, humanitarian assistance must be allowed to reach to the people in need. ;
- The government and the guarantors must provide the space for dialogue on peace, resources and security to those who will take part in peace process;

- The parties to peace process must agree on mechanisms for peace talk and to soften ground for continued dialogue;
- Regional countries must openly declare non-interference in the internal affairs of Afghanistan and support the peace process among Afghans.