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## **An Afghan Proposal for an Enduring Peace in Afghanistan**

### **Historical Perspective, a lesson learned from the past**

It is the third attempt to end the decades-old conflict in Afghanistan. The Geneva Peace Accord, in the 1988, did not achieve peace for Afghanistan, because Afghans were not part of it. The disintegration of the USSR and a sense of “victory” in the West left Afghanistan in a lurch to fend for herself. No one walked the terms of the Geneva Accord and Afghan Jihadi parties fought for power and consigned the country to civil war on ethnic lines. To the world the civil war after the withdrawal of the 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 country and their aspirations for peace must be reflected in the peace process and the later processes.

The Bonn Agreement in 2001 was in no way a durable solution to a protracted conflict. It was rather a quick political arrangement imposed by an external actor that led to the handover of the power and the state affairs to one party to the conflict in utter disregard to the diversity and principles of inclusion. The majority of the Afghans were again excluded. The exclusion of the Taliban was an intentional decision that ensued a forced war. The agreement was again a zero-sum game which turned many warlords into billionaires who continued to profit from war economy.

### **Regional and International Aspect**

The US hegemony is facing tough competition from regional actors and its dominance has created regional reactionaries. Today the international structure is in flux and major actors are busy arranging poles to position themselves. Russian and Chinese alliance seems cordial in pursuit of both geostrategic objectives regionally and globally. Iran is acquiring power, in the Persian Gulf, to be one of the main anchors. Pakistan is fast expanding its nuclear assets to keep the balance of power with its arch-rival India.

### **Current Situation**

The conflict in Afghanistan is at its worst form today where civilians trapped in conflict are killed in utter violations of all international laws of war. In the shadow of the current conflict, the parties are sowing seeds of new conflict at the grassroots level. The Afghan government, NATO and Taliban have been using local civilians as intelligence sources and shield that have led to the killing of innocent people in villages and communities. This has broken communities from within and has caused suspicion among the local population against each other. There is a trust deficit among the people of Afghanistan. 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 Government, NATO or Taliban.

The talks between the US and the Taliban are a political breakthrough. However, the peace process that is underway, has not only excluded the current government but also the wishes of the citizenry, as a result it does not seem to be able to bring durable peace to the country.

without adequate consultation with the people. Afghans want to be directly consulted with rather than the ethnic leaders taking the role to represent them.

President Ghani's proposal for peace has some practical elements. However, it needs wider consultation and inclusion of impartial groups that have been present in the country contributing to the state-building. The peace process is handled by individuals who are accused of not having the required qualifications and integrity for managing the peace process. The delegation that represented the Afghans in round seven of peace discussion in Doha was made of the elite of which some were war profiteers and western wiz-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.

Looking at the ongoing peace process, it has been very much exclusive between the US and the Taliban excluding Afghan Government and the public. It is imperative to mention that Afghans must be genuinely represented in the peace process. The peacemaking must bring in the real issues that the country and the nation face, rather than looking for quick fixes.

### **The Purpose**

The Afghan peace process has entered into a critical stage. Since its commencement, it heavily relied on the opinion of the elite on all sides, the US and the Taliban. It, however, requires people's opinion from the grassroots. The purpose of this document is to outline a proposal to address issues of concern for the people of Afghanistan who have been neglected throughout the process entirely and till this moment. It presents a unique solution on how peace can actually prevail and proposes approaches and mechanisms that can result in a lasting peace in Afghanistan and the wider region. This paper conveys the stance of Afghan Samoon Society about the ongoing peace process.

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 a genuine desire for durable peace for all Afghans, the region and the world. Afghans want peace and they must lead the 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 post-peace order that they want, define the elements that will help achieve a sustainable peace, identify and seek the 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, the Afghan government and the Taliban. Therefore, 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. The peace process must be inclusive to reach a broad-based agreement owned by Afghans and have the assurance of guarantors to monitor peace, flag deviation and return the parties to adhere to their commitments for peace implementation. Warlords, with a history of violence, by no means can represent the will of the Afghan masses alone, thus alternatives must be explored. It is important to mention that neither the Afghan government nor the Taliban has the right to declare amnesty. It is the innocent people who have been the victims of this prolonged war who retain the right to forgive.

### **The Proposal**

a complex case for building peace and therefore reviewing the Geneva Accord and Bonn Agreement to understand their flaws is important. Transitioning from conflict into a durable peace requires “give and take.” Afghanistan is a country that does not require importing models for conflict resolution because Islam and the Afghan culture have strong principles for both conflict resolution and peace. Applying Islamic and traditional principles to resolve conflict will be easy, cost-effective, and quick with a strong local buy-in. We therefore propose that the following to be taken into consideration as essential issues during the peace talks at all stages.

### **The Non-Negotiable Elements for Peace:**

1. People’s Aspirations: The views and aspirations of the people of Afghanistan must be reflected throughout the pre and post peace processes.
2. Unitary State: No groups should be allocated land to rule within the country. All parties must work on a national agenda and principles based on the mandate from people. The peace process must promote unity among the people of Afghanistan.
3. Transitional Justice: as key to durable peace, the need for transitional justice must be addressed by all parties to conflict and victim’s grievances and issues of past crimes must be discussed.
4. Afghan-led Process: the peace process must be led by Afghans and backed by the regional and international actors unequivocally and honestly to achieve the long lasting peace objective.
5. Preservation of Democracy: constitutional democracy must be maintained to guide the country and ensure women’s rights, freedom of expression, free press, and the rights of religious minorities.
6. Sovereignty: Afghanistan’s sovereignty in terms of territorial integrity, foreign policy, internal affairs, and economy, must remain in its entirety.

### **The Necessary Conditions for Peace:**

1. National Consensus (Ejma-e-Mili) must be formed as part of the peace dialogue. Afghanistan is a diverse country and its social fabric must be retained;
2. All parties to the conflict must refrain from war-mongering;
3. All parties must agree and commit to a unified political solution to the conflict in Afghanistan;
4. A national narrative for peace that represents Afghan nation’s aspirations should remain supreme; A comprehensive agenda for conflict transformation and peacebuilding should be put in place.
5. Regional Consensus on the peace in Afghanistan is a must. Inclusion, support, and agreement by regional and international stakeholders on the Afghan peace is crucial;
6. Countries in the region must openly declare and prove non-interference in the internal affairs of Afghanistan and support the Afghan peace process;
7. UN/OIC, or any other international responsible body must immediately step-in in the peace process and play independent and neutral role as facilitators and guarantors;
8. All parties to the conflict must declare that they value living in peace with each other and the neighbors and do not pose any threat to the national, regional and international security;
9. All parties to the conflict must agree and implement an immediate and comprehensive ceasefire and commit to mechanisms for peace talks; soften the ground for continued dialogue and social engagement;
10. All parties to the conflict to release prisoners of war through a well planned mechanism and agreement;
11. During the dialogue for peace, humanitarian assistance must be allowed to reach the people in need in the areas of conflict;

must provide all means of support on the peace process including the space for dialogue, resources, and security to those who will take part in the peace process.

### **About Afghan Samoon Society:**

Afghanistan is going through an important phase of its history where migration from conflict to stability is being pursued. The country is in process of establishing and strengthening its political bases rooted in democratic principles and practices. However, as the country is yet to achieve political maturity and stability there have been voids being observed in the political processes and practices such as lack of party based politics. Also, a genuine opposition has failed to rise over the course of last one decade as people have been sitting in the government while playing dummy role of opposition. On the other hand, civil society has also failed to play the role of an independent source of oversight, advocacy and lobbying body over political institutions.

Considering the fact that Afghanistan has been in the process of political transition, existence of gaps in political practices, like any other post conflict setting, is typical and expected. However, existence of such loopholes and gaps on longer term bases can challenge political bases of the country. Hence, there is need for continued and facilitated effort towards filling the gaps, promotion of relevant political activities for support of democracy and political development of Afghanistan.

The need for political mobilisation, identification of gaps in political processes, filling the void created by non-existence of a genuine and pronounced political opposition warrants a collective effort initiated and carried by common Afghans, technocrats, political personalities, and civil activists. Therefore, a group of Afghans with diverse personal, professional and academic backgrounds have come together to form a civil society organisation, Samoon Group, in order to play an active role in political sphere of Afghanistan.

Samoon is a Pashto word meaning Reforms. The group is formed to play an active role in mobilization of masses, particularly youth; take action on legislative, policy and issues related to the national interest of the country. Also, the group is geared to eliminate political monopoly from the Afghan political setting and play a role in circumventing hijacking of Afghan politics by individuals and groups formed based on common personal interest.