Afghan Peace Process: Home Grown Solution Holds the Future

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Since October 2018, the US and Taliban negotiators held six rounds of direct peace talks in Qatar’s capital Doha. Any Peace process has some key aspects which are vital for its success. In the present context, the Afghan Peace process provided an opportunity to keep Taliban engaged on matters of shared concern for ending Afghanistan’s internal conflict that undermine stability. There are some positive signs of a breakthrough in the stalled peace process in creating opportunities for conflict containment. Led by U.S. special envoy for peace in Afghanistan Zalmay Khalilzad leading the US effort to facilitate dialogue and negotiate with Taliban was a matter of debate within Afghanistan’s political circles. Unfortunately, for the clarity any future peace agreement benefiting of all parties of the Afghan society excluded the association of the Afghan government seems to be the blank spot in resolving this puzzle from the six rounds of US, Taliban peace talks in Doha. Therefore the negotiating position of relevant actors on the most silent issues of Afghan peace process need to take more transparent approach to solve the ongoing crisis in Afghanistan.

Assessing the perspective of Afghanistan stability based on its own distinctive historical account and the external factors that either constitute or undermine the prospects of permanent peace should be meaningfully debated for the future stability of Afghanistan. There is a widespread perception among domestic and international foreign policy makers that the domestic political nature of the peace process is the fundamental piece in understanding Afghanistan’s internal insurrections that stems from variety of political, regional, ideological or inequality related reasons that needs cooperation between the conflicting parties. Obviously, the US has been among the driving forces behind the peace talks in Qatar. It is undeniable that the representation of President Muhammad Ashraf Ghani administration remains excluded outsider as the six rounds of direct peace talks unfolded in Doha between the US and Taliban negotiators. In response to the uncertainties over the US led peace talks the incumbent Afghan President Muhammad Ashraf Ghani running for a second term in a presidential elections said “Afghans do not accept an interim government not today, not tomorrow, not in a hundred years,” (New York Times, 2019). Hopefully having made the point, the Afghan government remain important actor in the ongoing peace process. Looking back at historical peace initiatives during the past there were several determined efforts by past and present governments of Afghanistan to resolve the matter through home-grown political solution of ending the Afghan insurrection. However some Peace efforts in the past were in jeopardy due to democratic and external interferences. Knowing more about the past mistakes the far-sighted wise statement by incumbent Afghan President Ghani’s statement we want peace quickly, we want it soon, but we want it with prudence,” and “Prudence is important so we do not repeat past mistakes.” (New York Times, January 2019). Therefore negotiators at the Doha Peace talks have to acknowledge to develop a peace deal involving several actors. There has been running debate since the absence of Afghanistan government in the peace process. Whether the presence of Afghan government in a US led peace talk with Taliban would better severe if they participated is an important argument taking place at regional level at the moment. Hence, it is important to recognize what Afghan government needs to preserve in stabilizing and in the interests of all parties. However
U.S. military is expected to reduce some of the 14,000 soldiers and the 8,000 troops from 38 North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and non-NATO countries in the coming years. On the other hand, frequent changes in policies concerning the Afghan peace process to end the eighteen-year war not only brings instability to the Afghanistan but also creates uncertain times for US-Afghanistan relations. Yet, in the light of analysis for the US, there are two key issues for negotiating with the Taliban. One is by ensuring that renewed 9/11-style attacks cannot originate from Afghan territory and secondly complete withdrawal of foreign troops from Afghanistan.

At the onset when Taliban refused to join the current system, they made it clear that they would not simply ‘join’ or be ‘integrated’ into the current system and lay down their arms, as this would be surrender for them, and they instead demand ‘reform’, including a new constitution drafted by “Afghan (religious) scholars and intellectuals. Noticeably the withdrawal of US-led foreign troops from Afghanistan is one of the Taliban’s key demands in peace negotiations. Details revealed during the Doha talks Sher Muhammad Abbas Stanikzai, head of the Doha office and a former Taliban deputy foreign minister making a statement in reference to US troop’s withdrawal from Afghanistan. Abbas Stanikzai said “We have told them that after ending your military intervention, we will welcome U.S. engineers, doctors and others if they want to come back for reconstruction of Afghanistan,” he said. “And they have promised to do so.” (Voice of America January 2019) January 30, 2019.

In this sense, the foreign policy positioning of United States (US), with Western alliance and other major stakeholders in the region particularly India, Pakistan, Iran and China having a multilateral agenda’s influencing Afghanistan’s future are areas of foreign policy concerned that need attention. Beyond this a broadening south Asian regional support led by institutional context driven by South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) can bring a regional solution to the Afghan crisis. It is important to recognize most salient consequences of the troubling realities that require socio-economic solutions. The reduction of the degree of dependence on external partners to bring about domestic solutions to internal problems is an essential factor. Thus these remedies plus home grown political solution with all parties of the Afghan society should be a possibility to test those factors that are able to change Afghanistan’s future while moving forward. This opinion piece gives the views of the authors, and not the position of the Afghanistan Government.

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