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NEGOTIATING WITH THE TALIBAN: HOW WILL IT AFFECT THE FUTURE OF AFGHANISTAN?



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Abstract

In response to the 9/11 terrorist attack in New York, the U.S. army launched an operation on October 7, 2001. Despite the total removal of the Taliban in 2001, now Afghanistan is more insecure than ever. According to the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR), Taliban controlling the 43 percent of Afghanistan's districts and threaten 70% of Afghanistan. After President Donald Trump's will to end the longest war in American history, special representative Zalmay Khalilzad began to shuttle between the countries that might have an impact on the Afghan issue. Since September 2018, Khalilzad has held five rounds of talks with the Taliban.

The most important issues of these negotiations are: The United States wants to ensure that Afghanistan will not be a shelter for terrorist organizations, cutting off ties with organizations such as al-Qaeda, Taliban talks with the Afghan government and a ceasefire. On the other side, the only condition of the Taliban is that the clear timetable of foreign forces complete withdrawal from Afghanistan. Also, Afghan president Gani stressed that they would void the outcome of the negotiations that excluded the elected government. The American side gives the message that the process continues with Gani's knowledge and support.

After the U.S. withdraw, the predictions that the Taliban can return to Kabul are pushing Washington to pursue peace talks and to accept the Taliban as a political reality is a defeat in any case for the United States. On the other side, Afghans are concerned that negotiation with the Taliban could destroy the 18-year gains in democratic and human rights fields.

Within this pessimistic atmosphere, is it possible to negotiate with fragmented, factionalized and undisciplined groups of Taliban to be successful? Is the U.S.-Taliban agreement sufficient for peace? How will it affect the future of Afghanistan? and is it the beginning of dark times for women and minorities in Afghanistan? This article tries to answer the above questions.

Keywords: Afghanistan, Afghan government, human rights, peace talks, Taliban, U.S.

Introduction

For decades, identifying the most appropriate political order for Afghanistan remains a challenge. Historically, the political agreement and talks in Afghanistan have not resulted at the end of violence and conflict and instead has changed the forms of conflict. This is because there has not paid attention to all aspects of violence and

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conflict transformation ways. Instead, the goal was to reach a short-term political agreement between the parties of the conflict (Sadr, 2018: 10-11).

With the fall of the 2001 Taliban, there was great hope for peace among Afghans. In this newly initiated democratic process elections are held and the people have participated widely. This stability continued until 2007, but after this year, the Taliban began to grow stronger and parallel to this, security began to deteriorate. In this way, he became stronger and more armed and became a threat.

According to the Bonn Agreement in 2001, it created a new political order and introduced new political institutions in Afghanistan. However, the new political institutions did not meet the socio-political design of the country. The highly centralized political system was not able to adapt to the cultural and moral diversity of Afghan society. In addition, this centralized system has increased barriers to bureaucracy and, as a result, reduced the speed of services and led to an increase in the level of corruption and unwillingness (Shahrani 2001; Shahrani 2003; Cameron 2001).

Seven years have now passed since the fall of the Taliban regime and now many towns and villages are under the threat, and their presence now adjoins the gates of Kabul. Despite the upcoming arrival of 20,000 to 30,000 additional US troops, the Taliban insurgency in Afghanistan seems a clear proof of the impossibility of winning a military victory in Afghanistan. Thus, the Afghan government as well as the international actors, consider that to prevent the country from falling into chaos after the departure of the Western military forces, the diplomatic channel must be considered as an option that could provide security and peace.

Afghanistan Conference held in London in January 2010, Afghan President Hamid Karzai presented a plan for reconciliation and to negotiate with the Taliban. The international community welcomed this initiative. In July 2010, in Kabul, an international conference was held in which countries with prominent troops in Afghanistan pledged to finance this plan for reconciliation. And in October, a High Peace Council was created, consisting of seventy people whose goal was to negotiate with the Taliban. However, this process further strengthened the Taliban and increased the attack and expanded the area of control.

This is the 6th Negotiation since the negotiations with the Taliban began in 2010. But these negotiations have so far failed; there is no indication that it will succeed in the future. For reason that the Taliban does not have a single address, even if one group is ready to negotiate and give results, the other groups will not accept it. Second, President Trump and Ashraf Ghani, President of Afghanistan, are trying to open a dialogue with the Taliban. President Trump tries to retreat the US troops from Afghanistan as soon as possible. Similarly, President Ashraf Ghani is to enter successfully in the upcoming election and be elected for another term in the election.

From this perspective, this research has been conducted to prevent the repetition of past mistakes, with a special focus on the Afghan peace process.

Considering these events, how realistic are the negotiations? Will it succeed? What will be the future impact of the negotiations? An attempt that tried to find answers to these questions. In this context, the study consists of three parts: the historical process of the negotiation, the negotiation parties and its impact on the future of the country.

The Historical Stages of the Peace Process

In the post-Bonn era, after the Taliban's second riot in early 2007, a series of peace processes have taken place between the Taliban and the Afghan government and the United States. Since then, numerous efforts have been made by domestic and international actors. Many of these initiatives and programs were in contradiction with each other and ultimately did not result in a tangible result of a change in conflict and lasting peace. At the conceptual level, there has been a multitude of views regarding the prospects of the peace process in Afghanistan. For example, Ahmed Rashid, argues that peace in Afghanistan is maintaining through local confidence-building measures and fragmentary talks with the distinct factions of the Taliban. Other analysts such as Harun Mir, suggest that, holding a second international conference 2001 Bonn Conference as a way to negotiate with the Taliban (Mir, 2018).

The Afghan government started a Peace and Reconciliation Program in June 2010 to create a peace-led Afghan-led peace process. The program included the Secretariat of the Peace and Reconciliation Program and the Peace and Reintegration Committees. The Secretariat was composed of the Ministries of Interior, Defense, Rural Development, the Independent Local Authorities and ISAF and led by Mohammad Massoum Stanekzai. At the macro level, the program organized at a political and provincial level, obliged to call, mediate disputes, and resolve complaints (Sadr, 2018: 16).

The High Peace Council, which consists of 69 members (9 women), was established in 2010 to implement a peace plan and reintegration, which emphasized the increase in the number of Talks to negotiate with the Taliban. The existence of the High Peace Council in 34 provinces of the country has not been comforted by the workings and achievements of the High Peace Council. In addition, the lack of transparency in the peace process and the fact that the role of women at the decision-making levels of this process is one of the concerns among the people (Open Society Foundations, 2016).

In 2009, several rounds of talks between Kai Eide, the UN Special Representative in Afghanistan and senior Taliban leaders, including Abdul Latif Mansour (secretary of the Supreme Leader Council) were held. The talks were cut off when Pakistan's intelligence services arrested Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar (the deputy of Mullah Omar) and Latif Mansour in Karachi in December 2009 (Wormer 2012). Subsequently, in 2011, an informal dialogue was held between two representatives of the Afghan government, the High Peace Council and the high-ranking officials of the Taliban in Dubai. The Afghan government agreed to recognize the Taliban as a legitimate movement and called on the United Nations Security Council to do the same. After the end of the calls after the assassination of Professor Burhanuddin Rabbani, head of the Supreme Peace Council, two rounds of talks (Dubai in Dushanbe in 2012 and Doha in May 2013) were held between the Afghan government, the Taliban's political commission and the United States with the Norwegian government. The Taliban agreed to negotiate along with an international third-party mediator and also repeated their request to be recognized as one of the parties to the conflict (Safi and Ruttig, 2018).

At the same time, Germany began mediation between the Taliban, the United States and the Afghan government. One round of talks between BND Germany and Tayeb Agha (formerly Mullah Omar's secretary) was held in Doha at the end of 2009. The next round of talks in Munich in 2011 between Tiban Agha, German delegates and US

diplomats and intelligence officials held the agreement to establish a communications office for the Taliban in Qatar in June 2013 (Womer 2012).

The Afghan government has ceased its efforts and spent hundreds of thousands of dollars on the Peace Consultative Jirga and the Peace Council for a year, and finally decided not to negotiate with the Taliban and it would be better to negotiate with the ISI or the ISI rather than the Taliban. This decision was taken away when Burhanuddin Rabbani, the president, died in an explosion.

Dr. Spanta, the Afghan foreign minister claimed that Pakistani ISI using the Taliban as a foreign policy instrument and added that the solution of the existing problems should be sought in Pakistan. Therefore, the real authority for peace talks is not the Taliban, but Pakistan (8subh newspaper, 2011).

With the shift of government in 2014, the negotiation began once again. In April 2015, with the mediation of Pakistan, Massoum Stankezy, Afghan defense minister with three Taliban members: Abdul Jalil (the former deputy of foreign ministry), Mohammad Hassan Rahmani (former governor of Kandahar, and current member of the Supreme Council of Taliban) and Abdul Razaq met in Urumqi. Subsequently, on July 2015, a new era of Pakistani-led talks was held between Taliban representatives and Afghan government representatives in Murray, Pakistan. This round of talks has been widely considered as the first round of talks between the Taliban and Afghanistan at the highest level. The Taliban delegation comprised Abdul Latif Mansour, Mohammed Abbas Akhound and Ibrahim Omari and an eight delegate from both sides of the coalition of the National Unity Government Afghanistan (Osman, 2015).

The increase in suicide attacks during 2015 and early 2016 changed the policy of the Afghan government towards a complete crackdown on terrorism and cut off negotiation with them for a short time (Sadr, 2018: 20).

In 2017 Donald Trump president of the United States announced the new strategy, including conditional military presence in Afghanistan, increased pressure on Pakistan and strategic partnership with India. He said that, after an effective military effort, it might be possible to have a political deal involving the Taliban elements in Afghanistan. In response to this strategy, the Taliban wrote a letter to the American government, in which they proposed a negotiation with the United States (Ibid, 21). At the same time, the Taliban rejected the peace proposal of the Afghan government.

The United States, frustrated by the long war in Afghanistan and opens up options to resolve the conflict by negotiating with the Taliban. In less than a year after the United States announced South Asia's strategy, the Trump government has changed its policy towards the Taliban by adopting a policy of direct talks with the Taliban in 2018 (Mashal and Schmitt, 2018). These negotiations are still ongoing. But, So far, it's not yielded any tangible and positive results.

Parties to the Negotiation of Conflict and Peace in Afghanistan

Parties to the peace negotiation with the Taliban is as follows:

Taliban

The issue of the emergence of the Taliban is one of the most complicated current issues in Afghanistan. About the spread of the Taliban and its influence in Afghanistan, it can be said that in the fall of 1994, the Spin Buldak border town in the Kandahar and

Pakistani borderline broke out in a massive clash involving less than 300 people. The group, which introduced themselves as students of religious schools, became known overtime to the Taliban. They were first claiming to provide security to the country for the transit of merchandise, but it was not long before they launched their military-political plans. First, they removed the control of Kandahar from the hands of the mujahideen. By fixing their position in this place, they took control of the southern provinces and then the southwestern area at a short time, and after the capture of Kabul, the eastern provinces followed by the capture of Mazar Sharif and Bamiyan took control of all of Afghanistan (Arjmand, 2009: 44). Today almost 40 percent of Afganistan is under control of the Taliban.

Afghan Government

Since 2007, the Afghan government has been taken several peace talks with the Taliban. But all negotiations were unsuccessful. The earlier negotiations which started in 2018, the Taliban rejected direct peace talks with the Afghan government, but the U.S. A close adviser to President Ashraf Ghani said the government would continue its efforts to establish a direct diplomatic link with the Taliban. "The talks should be in Afghanistan," said the adviser, who did not want to be named. "It is important that the Taliban acknowledge this." Taliban, Instead of negotiating with the Afghan government, which from the perspective of the Taliban are only puppets of the West, the radical Islamists are now sitting around the table with the world powers. Representatives from the U.S., from Russia and now at the meeting in the United Emirates are also representatives from Saudi Arabia and Pakistan.

According to NATO data, the government of Ghani only controls 55.5 percent of the 407 Afghan districts. The Taliban say they controlled 70 percent of the country.

International Community

Support of the international community of peace talks is vital; especially, with the USA and regional powers. In the past weeks, it became more specific that, the Taliban wanted to negotiate, but only with the U.S. Because the government in Kabul was not legitimate. However, Secretary of Defense Mattis still sees positive signs: "We have already signaled the willingness of the Taliban to negotiate before the Kabul conference, and we want the Afghans to do it ourselves, while we are open for further steps."

The U.S. Special Envoy for Afghanistan said: "They would like to solve the remaining problems by peaceful means, with political negotiations". He believes that there is now an opportunity for reconciliation and peace.

Afghanistan is a mountainous and difficult region, so first Britain, then Russia lost the war here, and this issue makes America uneasy. America cannot afford a second serious defeat after Vietnam. Thus, it seeks to provide a fragile peace and to leave this country as soon as possible. Apparently, even at the expense of the loss of 17 years of democratic gains.

There are currently about 22,000 foreign troops from 39 countries, including 14,000 Americans in Afghanistan. U.S. President Donald Trump is considering withdrawing half of US troops from Afghanistan in the first place (ABD ile Taliban anlaştı, 2019).

Current Negotiation with the Taliban and Future Concerns

Since October 2018, US authorities and representatives of the Taliban have held seven rounds of talks aimed to ensure a safe exit for the United States in exchange for the insurgents guaranteeing that the Afghan territory will not be used by foreign militants and will not become a security threat to the rest of the world (Azami, 2019).

Zalmai Khalilzad, the US State Department's Special Representative for the Afghan Peace Process, said on the 27th January 2019 that U.S. and Taliban representatives agreed on a comprehensive peace framework. Mr. Khalilzad says the draft agreement includes a "plan to withdraw U.S. troops, set a ceasefire and reject international terrorist groups in Afghanistan" (Khalilzad: We reached..., 2019).

On the other hand, Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said some progress was made during Sunday's talks, but no agreement was reached on the ceasefire with the U.S. and peace talks with the Afghan government. "It is impossible to make progress on other issues until there is agreement on the withdrawal of foreign troops from Afghanistan," he said (Aktan, 2019).

During a visit to Afghanistan at the end of June, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said that the Trump government aspires to have a "peace agreement before September 1".

However, the Taliban continue to negotiate and fight at the same time. In this environment, will the negotiation be successful? We will discuss this issue in the following.

According to the data of the United Nations, 6 to 11 thousand civilians have lost their lives every year since 2009 in the conflict in Afghanistan. Afghan President Ashraf Ghani said more than 45,000 security officials have been killed in the clashes since taking office in 2014 (ABD ile Taliban anlaşığı, 2019). So, it is necessary to negotiate or fight with the Taliban. If we negotiate, how will we guarantee, it will be successful? to what extent can the international community and the UN guarantee that negotiations will not lead to disaster? If we go a little past, Mr. Ghani added that as leader of Afghanistan, "I am aware of the current role of the region and the world, and I also know that what threats and possible threats are exist after the peace accords." He added that for this reason, he insisted on "peace with deception" that he would not repeat the experience of Dr. Najibullah, the last president of the Soviet-backed government in Afghanistan. He said that "we all know how deceived he was (the Najibullah), and the United Nations gave him the guarantee of peace, but unfortunately it was a disaster." With the collapse of Najibullah's government in Afghanistan in 1992, the country entered a bloody stage of civil war, and Kabul was divided between several groups of Mujahideen and a large part of the city was destroyed (Khalilzad: We reached..., 2019).

Principally, the U.S. itself is aware that the peace talks only with the United States will not yield lasting results. Therefore, after his last meeting with the Taliban authorities, Khalilzad said, "I have encouraged the Taliban to speak directly with the Afghan authorities. Now the Afghan authorities should not miss such a great opportunity, leaving aside the problems between them." Khalilzad expressed that the security and stability in Afghanistan is a source of concern for the United States and emphasized that they are working together with the Afghans for the cease-fire in the country. Khalilzad,

Taliban representatives in the last meeting in Qatar, the withdrawal of the United States from Afghanistan, the cease-fire and the destruction of other terrorist organizations in the country (Anadolu Ajansı, 2019). However, after the U.S. withdraws from Afghanistan, the Taliban still has to deal with the Afghan government. Therefore, it would now be useful to acknowledge its effective involvement.

A successful peace process requires “that the protagonists are willing to negotiate in good faith, and that the negotiators are committed to a sustained process” (Darby and Ginty, 2008).

The Taliban's official position is to refuse any process of dialogue unless there is a complete withdrawal of foreign troops. Moreover, the Taliban want the full implementation of Islamic law and the absence of interference in Afghan affairs. President Karzai emphasizes that reconciliation means renouncing violence and recognizing the Afghan Constitution. From then on, the idea of national reconciliation appears ossified by this incompatibility of conditions between Kabul and the Taliban. In fact, the terms of their respective conditions are antagonistic and ultimately result in a negation of their mutual existence.

But there is public concern about results of peace talks with the Taliban. One of these concern is women's rights. The biggest problem with women's rights is the low participation in the negotiations. It also makes them anxious about the future. This applies to minorities, especially sectarian minorities. "We are not going to accept a reintegration plan that will not be based on justice and respect for human rights, including those of women," concluded the participants in the Dubai peace talks. The Geneva Declaration also emphasizes the role of women in the peace process and respect for international law. What complicates a little more massive support of the Taliban initiative of Kabul.

Conclusion

The fight against terrorists should be a priority. However, there is no political will in this regard. The fight against terrorists must be carried out very carefully. Otherwise, terrorists see this process as a gap and opportunity, and it will come forward by further strengthening its own. It is necessary to have a strategy; in the absence of a comprehensive strategy, each leader or attempt to negotiate in his own mind. Because of that, the Taliban gained strength especially with the start of the peace negotiations in 2010 and the government weakened gradually.

Until now, no conclusions have been reached about peace. Taliban attacks and government and foreign forces continue to their operations. Therefore, first of all, cease-fire should be declared. In this environment, only peace is discussed and a conclusion is reached. If terrorists do not ready to leave arms and be ready for peace, the government must do its most fundamental duty of maintaining security. And in case of defense, the government must go into attack. Moreover, the exclusion of the Afghan government from the peace process will harm the legitimacy of peace. In addition, the Taliban did not meet the requirements. These are the biggest obstacles to negotiation and cause distrust between the parties.

There are different groups of terrorists in Afghanistan. Some militants will join other groups such as Isis instead of laying down their arms. Therefore, the reasons for joining terrorism should be investigated and permanent solutions should be produced. For

example, reducing unemployment, providing quality of education, overseeing radical religious centers.

In our opinion, negotiating with terrorists will give them political identity. This also means that we ignore their murders and to disrespect the victims of terrorism. Moreover, negotiation with the Taliban will pose serious threats to Afghanistan's 17-year democratic achievements.

Peace negotiations have been unsuccessful in many countries and have caused terrorists to grow stronger. If it fails in Afghanistan also, the reasons would be as follows:

- Weak government and corruption,
- foreign countries interventions,
- Unbalanced distribution of power in a multicultural country like Afghanistan,
- partly public support of the Taliban,
- unwillingness of negotiating parties.

Identifying solutions for the peace process to succeed is as follows:

- Negotiations parties must be clear,
- Negotiations must have a plan and frame time,
- Parties must have goodwill and trust each other,
- Role of the Afghan government and the international community must be clear,
- Maintaining the rule of law.

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