

“An exit strategy is not a political strategy and that is precisely what is lacking to ensure the future stability of Afghanistan and the volatile region that surrounds it.”*

Reconciliation with the Taliban: Challenges and Prospects

Taliban’la Uzlaş1: Zorluklar ve Beklentiler

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to discuss the challenges and prospects of reconciling with the Taliban within the context of the Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Program by posing the following questions: What was the main problem of the US that urged it to seek negotiations with the insurgents? What were the expectations behind that move? In which ways the last attempt to reconcile with the Taliban is different from the previous initiations. Why past efforts to disarm the insurgents and initiate political dialogue were unable to achieve the results that were sought? What are the conditions for a reconciliation process to

* Ahmed Rashid, “Security vs. Reconciliation: The Afghan Conundrum”, Briefing for the Munich Security Conference, an annual gathering of foreign ministers, heads of state, and other security experts, that took place February 3-5, 2012, <http://www.nybooks.com/blogs/nyrblog/2012/feb/13/afghan-conundrum-taliban-talks/> (Access date: 07.03.2013).

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develop? The article explores the major challenges of the US strategy. It argues that what Afghanistan needs is a comprehensive peace building process that rather than a political settlement in the narrow sense.

Key Words: *Taliban, counter insurgency, the Afghan Peace and Reconciliation Program, withdrawal of the US troops, peace building.*

Öz

Bu makale, Afganistan Barış ve Yeniden Bütünleşme Programı bağlamında Taliban'la gerçekleştirilen görüşmelerin zorluklarını ve geleceğe yönelik beklentilerini tartışmayı amaçlamaktadır ve bu amaç doğrultusunda şu soruları ortaya koymaktadır: ABD'yi isyancılarla müzakereye gitmeye iten ana sorun neydi? Bu hareketin ardındaki beklentiler nelerdi? Taliban'la bu son uzlaşma çabası hangi yönlerden önceki uzlaşma girişimlerine göre farklılık göstermektedir? İsyancıları silahsızlandırmaya ve siyasi diyalog başlatmaya yönelik daha önce adımları atılan çabalar neden istenilen sonuçları doğuramamıştır? Bir uzlaşma sürecinin gelişmesi için koşullar nelerdir? Bu makale, ABD stratejisinin önündeki büyük zorlukları incelemekte ve Afganistan'ın ihtiyaç duyduğu unsurun dar anlamdaki siyasi bir yapılandırılmadan ziyade kapsamlı bir barışı inşa süreci olduğunu öne sürmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Taliban, İsyana Karşı Koyma, Afganistan Barış ve Uzlaşma Programı, ABD Askerlerinin Çekilmesi, Barış İnşası.*

Introduction

In December 2009, President Barack Obama has set a target date of July 2011 to bring withdrawing US troops from Afghanistan and handing over responsibility for security to the Afghan forces. The fighting fatigue and the cost of the war were the most important drivers of this decision. The US war in Afghanistan is now the longest in the

US history. The war claimed the lives of more than 2.000 NATO troops, including at least 1.228 Americans¹ and it is costing the US taxpayers nearly \$100 billion per year, roughly seven times more than Afghanistan's annual gross national product (GNP) of \$14 billion.²

The fundamental question for the US is how to withdraw its military forces and achieve some sort of "peace with honour" in Afghanistan, without having reached its core political objectives. For this reason, many think that negotiations with the Taliban and other insurgent groups are necessary. Several insurgencies actually end with a political settlement and not a military solution. However seeking negotiations with the insurgents in such circumstances is also problematic since it would give the idea that the coalition accepts the inevitability of defeat and evoke either more outrageous Taliban conditions or simply a dismissal of coalition entreaties because victory is already at hand.³ The US needed a withdrawal that was not a defeat and decided to increase the cost of war for the Taliban through a sharp rise of NATO air strikes against insurgents. The surge of more than 30.000 US forces was ordered by President Barack Obama in order to shake the Taliban enough to coax them into negotiations. The American pilots dropped 2.100 bombs on Taliban positions between June and September 2010, a near-50 percent increase on the same period in 2009.⁴ In the fall of 2010, a diplomatic initiative as a parallel path that aimed at persuading the Taliban -or large parts of the movement- to make peace with the Afghan government emerged.⁵

¹ Casualties.org, "Operation Enduring Freedom: Coalition Military Fatalities by Year," <http://icasualties.org/oef/> (Access date: 07.03.2013).

² CIA, *The World Fact Book*, <http://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/af.html> and Congressional Research Service July 16, 2010, <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/RL33110.pdf> (Access date: 07.03.2013).

³ Ashley J. Tellis, Reconciling With The Taliban? Toward an Alternative Grand Strategy in Afghanistan, *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 2009.

⁴ Dexter Filkins, "U.S. Uses Attacks to Nudge Taliban Toward a Deal", *The New York Times*, October 14, 2010.

⁵ *Ibid.*

Previous Efforts to Disarm and Reintegrate the Taliban

At the January 28, 2010 Afghanistan Conference in London, the Afghan government pledged to develop an official program to engage elements of the insurgency in negotiations, reconciliation, and reintegration. The Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Programme (APRP) signed by the Afghan President Hamid Karzai in June 2010 was the latest in a series of efforts since 2001 to disarm insurgents and reintegrate them into Afghan society, and to bring an end to the violence. Previous efforts included the Afghanistan New Beginnings Programme (ANBP)'s Disarmament and Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR), Disbandment of Illegal Armed Groups (DIAG) and, since 2005, the Afghan-led The Program Takhim-e Solh or Strengthening the Peace Programme (PTS).

Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration

The idea to reintegrate insurgents is not very new. It is interesting to see that its history goes back to the period following the initial successes of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF). Such a program emerged as a considerable option under the conditions of the urgent need for a new strategy in the midst of the deteriorating security situation in the war-torn country. President Hamid Karzai's interest in reaching out to the disaffected Pashtuns was also one of the driving forces. Karzai himself was eager to explore some kind of compromise with the Taliban even before he was elected to office. In part, this was due to his close relationship with many Taliban figures that became more evident after his election in 2002.

Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) program was undertaken from February 2003 to July 2006. DDR was a core part of Afghanistan's New Beginnings Program (ANBP), a United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) initiative responsible for Security Sector Reform (SSR). Achieving the DDR program's goals was an integral part of enabling the Afghan government to establish a monopoly on the use of force, a crucial step in its efforts to protect citizens from threats and uphold the rule of law. Convincing insurgents to give up their arms and dismantle their forces constituted an

important part of it. In the two years after the Bonn Agreement was signed the security situation in the country was relatively stable, the society supported efforts to establish peace, and the politicization of the security sector that began once the agreement was signed had not yet become fully entrenched. Unfortunately, this opportunity was not seized, and the international community's failure to engage fully with the DDR process limited the positive effect of DDR on SSR, as well as generating problems for the state-building process.⁶

Takhim-e Solh

Strengthening the Peace Programme (PTS) or the "strengthening peace initiative" was formally introduced in February 2004. Broadly speaking it offered those rank and file insurgents willing to renounce violence against Afghan and coalition forces and pledge support to the Afghan state the opportunity to rejoin their tribal communities. The program was based on the assumption that many combatants do not join the Taliban for ideological reasons and can therefore be convinced to lay down their arms.⁷

High-level Taliban and individuals accused of war crimes were deliberately excluded from this process. Only mid- and low-level insurgents were eligible for the program. Takhim-e Solh petitioners had to undergo background checks to ensure that they are not accused

⁶ Caroline Hartzell, *Missed Opportunities: the Impact of DDR on SSR in Afghanistan*, *United States Institute of Peace Special Report* No. 270, Washington DC, USIP, April 2011.

⁷ According to the interviews conducted by the International Council on Security and Development (ICOS) in March 2010, many young men join insurgent groups for a regular income and a sense of empowerment and identity they cannot find elsewhere, rather than for ideological reasons. The findings of the report reveal that in Afghanistan these young men have a number of serious, legitimate grievances - corruption, civilian casualties, a lack of jobs and services, and a failure to establish the rule of law - which have created high levels of anger among civilian populations. See, "Operation Moshtarak: Lessons Learned", *Small Wars Journal*, smallwarsjournal.com/.../moshtarak1.pdf (Access date: 06.03.2013).

of any serious crimes against the Afghan people or coalition forces.⁸ As a result of this program, over 2.000 individuals laid down their arms. It should also be added that PTS was not initially a program open to detainees in US custody but in 2005, its scope was expanded.⁹

Despite limited success at the initial stage, the PTS program suffered some major setbacks. The experience with the rank-and-file and medium level insurgents failed to create a durable reconciliation eliminating the possibility to return to conflict. Reasons were various. Procedural deficiency included lack of institutionalization and adequate structures of the demobilization process. It was unable to validate appropriately insurgent credentials. Besides, an effective monitoring mechanism in the aftermath of formal demobilization process was absent. Providing socio-economic opportunities presents even a tougher problem given the hard task of job creation in a devastated economy. Paying the fighters not to fight can hardly be a remedy too. First of all because the external actors' financial support does not last forever and those Taliban members who are not deeply integrated into the new political system could join criminal groups or start fighting again once the international money runs out. Providing security to defectors is equally difficult since the Taliban has systematically targeted those who have defected so far, killing many.¹⁰ In principle, those who successfully completed the program were supposed to be given support to settle and live peacefully. However in several cases the participants of the program were not actually kept

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⁸ "Ex-Taliban Insurgents Pledge Allegiance to Afghan Government", *American Forces Press Service*, U.S. Department of Defense, May 28, 2005, <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=31552> (Access date: 07.03.2013).

⁹ Luke Coffey, "Detainee Operations in Counterinsurgency Operations: Lessons from Afghanistan 2005-2006", *Small Wars Journal*, September 1, 2009, <http://smallwarsjournal.com/blog/journal/docs-temp/282-coffey.pdf> (Access date: 08.03.2013).

¹⁰ Vanda Felbab-Brown, "Negotiations and Reconciliation with the Taliban: The Key Policy Issues and Dilemmas", *Brookings*, January 28, 2010, p. 2. http://www.brookings.edu/~media/Files/rc/articles/2010/0128_taliban_felbabbrown/0128_taliban_felbabbrown.pdf (Access date: 07.03.2013).

safe and some of them were not treated by international security forces in keeping with the PTS agreement that resulted in the erosion of the trust between the Taliban that were willing to reconcile and the government. The achievement of the program remained limited due to the other factors as well. Finally, the PTS program progressively lost its credibility due to Afghan leadership's shortcomings and larger governmental failures, which led the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, and the USA to abandon their financial support.¹¹

What is New?

Talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban marked a clear departure from previous US policy in the sense of considering the three key US conditions (the militants must renounce violence, end any alliance with al-Qaeda and agree to respect the Afghan Constitution) demanded for the exploratory talks as "desired outcomes".

In a speech to the Asia Society on February 2011, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton gave strong signals of this approach declaring that Washington was launching a diplomatic surge to move this conflict toward a political outcome that shatters the alliance between the Taliban and al-Qaeda, ends the insurgency. Clinton announced that the United States was willing to hold talks with the Taliban even without an initial agreement with these words:

*"As military pressure escalates, more insurgents may begin looking for alternatives to violence and not just low-level fighters. Both we and the Afghans believe that the security and governance gains produced by the military and civilian surges have created an opportunity to get serious about a responsible reconciliation process, led by Afghans and supported by intense regional diplomacy and strong US-backing."*¹²

¹¹ Michael Semple, *Reconciliation in Afghanistan*, United States Institute of Peace Perspectives Series, Washington DC: USIP Press, 2010.

¹² "On U.S.-Taliban Talks, Look at 2014 and Work Back", *Global News Journal, Reuters*, February 20, 2011, <http://blogs.reuters.com/global/tag/talks/> (Access date: 06.03.2013).

The Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Programme

The APRP is an attempt to respond to some of the criticisms of the previously implemented and not highly successful reintegration programmes. It awarded greater leadership roles to Afghan institutions, sub-national governance structures, local actors, and communities. It also devoted significant attention to the communication and coordination between different implementing partners, included concerns about individual and community security and grievance resolution, and made an effort to understand and address the reasons behind why men join the insurgency.¹³

The APRP has two pillars: on the one hand it aims at tackling the issue of rank and file soldiers -defined as “reintegration”- and, on the other it targets “reconciliation,” that is understood as political talks with the more senior leaders of the Taliban. The APRP strategy is based on the assumption that reintegration will lead to a de-escalation of conflict, because of disarming insurgents, result in better security conditions and a corresponding strengthening of the rule of law. At the same time, it rests on the premise that insurgent leaders will be interested in “reconciling” because of the incentives being offered, such as amnesties and third-country settlement.¹⁴

However, there seems to exist a shared understanding of the terms “reintegration” and “reconciliation” between Government of Afghanistan and international stakeholders they differ in their understanding of the sequencing of the two processes. While the Government of Afghanistan believes that both disarming the insurgents and initiating political dialogue with the insurgency need to take place simultaneously to bring the conflict to an end international

¹³ Deedee Derksen, “Peace from the Bottom-Up? The Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Program”, *PRIO Paper*, Oslo, PRIO, 2011.

¹⁴ Tazreena Sajjad, “Peace at all Costs? Reintegration and Reconciliation in Afghanistan”, *Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit*, Issues Paper Series, October 2010, p. 3.

stakeholders generally tended to classify reintegration and reconciliation as independent, rather than interrelated, processes, anticipating a level of sequencing for them to be effective.¹⁵

Ripeness for a Negotiated Solution

According to the academic literature, parties to a conflict enter into a negotiation process because they believe there is a possibility of obtaining a better outcome than is offered by the status quo. Willingness to engage in negotiation increases especially when maintaining the conflict requires greater and greater costs. In other words, when a “mutually hurting stalemate” occurs that urge parties to realize that they cannot escape from the deadlock by escalating the conflict.¹⁶ Such a stalemate is especially motivating if augmented by a recent or impending catastrophe.¹⁷ Secondly, for the parties to be receptive to negotiation some optimism is also required. The minimum level of optimism which is necessary for the start of negotiations often derives from a belief that the other side is also motivated to achieve a settlement and therefore likely to make some concessions.¹⁸ However, in order to achieve reconciliation optimism must increase as negotiations goes along. In the Afghan case, it was not possible because of the continued level of military escalation by both sides. For optimism to be sustained outlines of a possible agreement should also be worked out.¹⁹

¹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 27.

¹⁶ I. William Zartman, *Ripe for Resolution: Conflict Resolution in Africa*. 2nd ed., Oxford University Press, New York, 1989.

¹⁷ Moorad Mooradian and Daniel Druckman, “Hurting Stalemate or Mediation? The Conflict over Nagorno Karabakh, 1990–95”, *Journal of Peace Research*, No. 36, 1999, pp. 709–27.

¹⁸ Herbert C. Kelman, “Some Determinants of the Oslo Breakthrough”, *International Negotiation*, No. 2, 1997, pp: 183-194.

¹⁹ For the “Readiness” concept developed by Dean G. Pruitt See, Dean G. Pruitt, “Whither Ripeness Theory?” Working Paper, No. 25, *Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution*, George Mason University, 2005.

What Motivated the Taliban to Enter into Talks?

The Taliban leadership was interested in talking to Afghan government not because of the unbearable cost of enduring the conflict but to explore ways to accelerate US withdrawal from Afghanistan. What encouraged the US was not an optimism emanating from a belief that the Taliban is motivated to achieve a settlement but rather pessimism with respect to the war that can not be won in Afghanistan. On the Taliban front, the US decision to withdraw constituted the main source of optimism.

The Taliban leaders had never believed that the High Peace Council (HPC) was intended to negotiate a political settlement. The Taliban declared on the website of the “Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan” how they viewed HPC with these words:

“The very structure and endeavours of the peace high council is cosmetic, being part and parcel of the American war strategy in view of the fact that they do not consider the withdrawal of foreign forces from Afghanistan as their main objective nor they recognize it as an important and vital item of the agenda. However, it is the essential demand of the majority people of Afghanistan and of the region. Still more, they do not follow a roadmap that would lead to a decisive stage where peace and reconciliation will become a must and indispensable.”²⁰

The Taliban’s uncompromising stance *vis a vis* the reconciliation process could also be understood in the following remarks:

“Nowadays, we hear two hot topics: the negotiation between the Islamic Emirate and USA and the withdrawal of foreign troops from Afghanistan. But unfortunately, America wants to

²⁰ “Peace Council’s Efforts, Symbolic and Dictated”, *Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan*, January 11, 2010, http://shahamat-english.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=4339:peace-councils-efforts-symbolic-and-dictated&catid=2:comments&Itemid=3 (Access date: 07.03.2013).

pave way for elimination of the current armed Jihad and resistance under the name of negotiation and further ensconce themselves in Afghanistan under the pretext of drawdown. These ploys can be read on the faces of the top brass of Pentagon, the rulers of the White House and their caressed surrogate Karzai."²¹

In fact, the Taliban leadership opened the door to deal with the High Peace Council in order to affect the central issue of the foreign troop presence. Regardless of the fact that the talks were "preliminary" rather than substantive, the Taliban certainly posed the question whether the United States was prepared to offer a timetable for withdrawal in substantive negotiations.

The "road map" proposed by the Taliban assumed that the United States would have to play the key role in any negotiations. Assuming a step-by-step approach, the Taliban argued that first of all, confidence-building measures should be introduced before any negotiation and called for the United States to end its night raids while the Taliban would stop attacks on government personnel and infrastructure. The Taliban considered negotiation on the central issues of the withdrawal of all foreign troops from Afghanistan and the Taliban's renunciation of ties with al-Qaeda after the implementation of such measures. According to this approach only after an agreement reached on foreign troops and al-Qaeda, negotiators would tackle the question of an internal political settlement, which would revolve around changes to the Afghan Constitution.²²

Escalation within a Negotiation

As Zartman explains, escalation within a negotiation can be a bargaining strategy. The costs inflicted or that could be inflicted are a lever either to bring the other party back to the negotiation table or to

²¹ "Negotiation or Ploys, What is it?", *Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan*, May 28, 2011, http://shahamat-english.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=7919:negotiation-or-ploys-what-is-it&catid=3:articles&Itemid=5 (Access date: 05.03.2013).

²² Gareth Porter, "Will Rabbani Hit Derail Afghan Peace?", *Al Jazeera*, September 26, 2011.

obtain the concessions it was previously unwilling to make. However, escalation and negotiation are opposite actions, one to increase conflict and the other to decrease it. Not only do they head in different directions, but they also demand different attitudes and convictions: one to beat the enemies and the other to come to terms with them. They thus seem to be mutually incompatible.²³

West believed that killing Taliban fighters keeps up military pressure that might eventually lead to a negotiated outcome. Obama's surge increased the killing and capture of Taliban, but killings by the Taliban have surged even more steeply. For their own reasons the Taliban, also see military pressure as sound strategy. Taliban have managed to sustain a high level of violence in Afghanistan despite the US troop surge. Violence rose 51 percent from spring 2010 to spring 2011 -putting the Taliban in a position where it might credibly claim its military strategy successful in advance of diplomacy.

Once the Taliban leadership became aware in early August of the outlines of the "strategic partnership" pact between the US and Karzai government allowing for the maintaining of US bases in Afghanistan until 2024, they saw no reason to continue negotiations with the HPC, and on September 20, 2011 Burhanuddin Rabbani was assassinated by an unidentified attacker blowing to pieces any notion of reconciliation with the Taliban.

Major Challenges

The US "strength" is reflected in the fact that it killed and captured more Taliban than ever and its "weakness" in the fact that it will hand over the fight to Afghan security forces, regardless of what the enemy does, by 2014.

²³ I. William Zartman, "Structures of Escalation and Negotiation", in I. William Zartman, Guy Oliver Faure eds., *Escalation and Negotiation in International Conflicts*, International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis, Cambridge University Press, 2005, 165-185, p.165.

The US escalation strategy proved counterproductive. Rather than choosing escalation, enforcing a ceasefire would have been the serious gesture to convince Taliban leaders that the West is genuinely interested in peace. As argued by Braithwaite and Wardak, in case the ceasefire enforced and reduced the killing of innocents, that advantage would be strong, even if it were not reciprocated by the enemy. Continued suicide bombings in the face of a NATO ceasefire would undercut the Taliban's claim of being on the side of the people.²⁴

No matter negotiations with the leadership and reintegration of the rank and file sought simultaneously or subsequently the two processes are not mutually supportive unless negotiations with the leadership of the Taliban successfully improve. Otherwise, the leadership cadres would likely sabotage the reintegration and reconciliation of the rank and file insurgents.

From a narrow counter-insurgency perspective, did these negotiations split the Taliban leadership, and thus weaken its operational and command structures? It is difficult to give a positive answer since the Taliban including the leadership, is already far from monolithic but instead a label that is applied to many armed groups and individuals that are only loosely aligned.

Ironically, the identification of Taliban poses one of the biggest problems to officials who engage in talks with senior commanders. Talks often collapse after discovering that they are dealing with an impostor as in the case of the secret high profile talks with Mullah Akhtar Muhammad Mansour a senior commander of the Taliban. He was not Mansour at all and was not even a member of the Taliban leadership.²⁵ Of course, the worst was the assassination of Rabbani by a fake senior Taliban.

²⁴ John Braithwaite and Ali Wardak, "Is Killing Taliban a Good Idea?", *Inside Story*, December 07, 2011, <http://inside.org.au/is-killing-taliban-a-good-idea> (Access date: 07.03.2013).

²⁵ Dexter Filkins and Carlotta Gall, "Taliban Leader in Secret Talks Was an Impostor", *The New York Times*, November 22, 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/23/world/asia/23kabul.html?pagewanted=all> (Access date: 07.03.2013).

Reintegration of the rank and file, the process by which ex-combatants gain civilian status and sustainable employment is the last stage of the applied strategy of Disarmament (the physical removal of the means of combat from ex-belligerents), Demobilization (disbanding of armed groups) and Reintegration (DDR). Since reintegration is a critical component of post-conflict peace-building, successful outcomes can hardly be expected in an environment of instability and continued violence.

Afghanistan's neighbours remained among the most fervent opponents of the idea. India, Iran, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Russia opposed to any negotiated arrangements that would permit the Taliban either to be treated as a legitimate force in Afghan politics or to return to power in Kabul after having been ejected from the capital by force. However, despite their considerable differences, they share a common interest in preventing Afghanistan from either being dominated by any single power or remaining a failed state that exports instability.

Taliban Representatives in Qatar

The US-Taliban talks formally started in January 2012, but the militants left the negotiating table in March, citing Washington's failure to fulfill the conditions for peace negotiations to proceed. A series of gestures was considered to inject momentum into the tentative reconciliation efforts that included opening an office abroad as well as the possible transfer to Qatar of Taliban detainees from the US military's Guantanamo Bay prison.

The Afghan government has agreed to opening an office for Taliban in Qatar on condition that the negotiation process is only be led by the Afghan High Peace Council headed by Salahuddin Rabbani, with other current contacts from other peace supporting nations a mere advice and support for the process.²⁶

²⁶ "No Taliban Qatar Office, Unless Direct Talks with government ...", *The Wakht News*, January 30, 2013, wakht.af/.../3212-no-taliban-qatar-office-unless-direct-talks-with-gov.

The conditions put forward by The High Peace Council initially involved the following:

- The office should only be used for negotiations.
- The office should be in Afghanistan if the situation suits, if not in one of the Islamic countries preferably in Saudi Arabia or Turkey.
- First arrangements should be made without intervention of the host country.
- War should be stopped in Afghanistan before the start of negotiations.
- Armed oppositions should cut all their ties with al-Qaeda and other terrorist networks.
- The achievements of last decade should remain unhurt.
- Afghan constitution must be respected.
- The sovereignty of Afghanistan must be recognized.
- Pakistan must support peace negotiations because the bases of the armed oppositions are there.
- Elected powerful representatives from both sides should continue the negotiations.
- None of the third parties can interfere without consultation with Afghanistan.²⁷

According to the joint statements of Obama and Karzai “as a part of the outcome of any process, the Taliban and other armed opposition groups must end violence, break ties with al-Qaida, and accept Afghanistan’s constitution.”²⁸ Though the approach sought by Obama and Karzai no longer entails pre-conditions as starters, currently the most intractable issue blocking the development of the

²⁷ “Seven Taliban Leaders Take Families to Qatar”, *Tolo News*, December 29, 2011, tolonews.com/en/.../4836-seven-taliban-leaders-take-families-to-qata.

²⁸ Habib Toumi, “Taliban Opens Bureau in Qatar”, *Qatar News*, January 15, 2013, www.pulseofkuwait.com/News/news.php?id=14 (Access date: 08.03.2013).

peace process still seems to be the insistence of Taliban from Washington the release of all their prisoners first, besides its ongoing refusal to accept the government of President Hamid Karzai, even though talks have been continuing for two years between the Afghan Taliban and the Karzai government.

Despite its initial reactions to the opening of an office in Qatar, Pakistan is now fully supporting the Taliban's new address outside Afghanistan.²⁹ Islamabad considers the transfer of senior Taliban cadres - including the group's former second-in-command - to the Gulf state of Qatar as part of efforts to facilitate the peace and reconciliation process in Afghanistan. Yet Islamabad also insists that the Qatar initiative should also invite the Haqqani network -the insurgency group in Afghanistan with connections to al-Qaeda- to the negotiating table.³⁰

According to the recent news, the Afghan High Peace Council has put forward a document called "Peace Process Roadmap to 2015" that include provisions for the Taliban's becoming a political party and anticipation that some of the most important government positions could be opened to them, including provincial governorships, police chief jobs, and cabinet positions.³¹

Putting Taliban at the core of any peace process underestimating other ethnic groups' grievances carries the danger of widening the ethnic divide in the country that may explode after the NATO withdrawal. Afghanistan cannot achieve a sustainable peace without broader support from the Afghan people themselves that necessitates

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²⁹ Mariana Baabar, "Pakistan Agrees to Taliban Opening Office in Qatar", *The News*, March 04, 2013, <http://www.thenews.com.pk/Todays-News-13-21360-Pakistan-agrees-to-Taliban-opening-office-in-Qatar> (Access date: 07.03.2013).

³⁰ "Pak to Transfer more Taliban Leaders to Qatar to Facilitate Afghan Peace", *Zee News*, March 4, 2013, http://zeenews.india.com/news/south-asia/pak-to-transfer-more-taliban-leaders-to-qatar-to-facilitate-afghan-peace_832931.html (Access date: 07.03.2013).

³¹ Alissa J. Rubin and Declan Walsh, "Renewed Push for Afghans to Make Peace with Taliban", *The New York Times*, February 16, 2013, topics.nytimes.com/topics/reference/.../r/alissa...rubin/index.html (Access date: 07.03.2013).

including all stakeholders in the process and addressing their grievances. Polls indicate that a large majority of ordinary Afghans support a peace deal in which the Taliban share power but do not dominate. Currently, senior members of the powerful Tajik and Hazara factions, both of which suffered greatly under Taliban rule, charged that they had been left out of the deliberations blaming Karzai for acting on an ethnic basis.³²

In order to make external actors a part of peace-building efforts in Afghanistan these efforts should be coupled with diplomatic initiatives to ensure their commitment to Afghan neutrality and resolve existing border disputes. Ideally, the United States should also use its influence to reduce tensions among the various regional actors -and especially India and Pakistan- in order to decrease their tendency to see Afghanistan as an arena for conflict or to view the Taliban or other non-state groups as long-term strategic assets. In other words, a multi-dimensional political strategy has to be developed by Afghanistan's neighbours as well to foster dialogue and achieve an agreement to limit their interference in Afghanistan.

Still, President Hamid Karzai of Afghanistan, Pakistan, the United States, and the Taliban all have different visions of how to achieve peace after 2014. In such an environment, the process of exploratory talks with the leadership of the Taliban has several setbacks. First of all, in an open-ended process where there is victory nor defeat for both sides' parties, the degree of stress emanating from uncertainty is likely to be very high. In such situations, parties are more inclined to increase their advantage against each other using all their capabilities, including violence.

The success of reconciliation in Afghanistan requires an enduring victory of the state- and nation-building efforts already under way. The concept of reconciliation is being used in the narrow sense to express a political settlement. However, realities on the ground prove

³² *Ibid.*

that Afghanistan's needs can only be fulfilled in a comprehensive peace building process that involves reconciliation that entails efforts to develop a shared vision of an interdependent and fair society, to acknowledge and deal with the past, build positive relationships, achieve significant cultural and attitudinal change, and substantial social, economic, and political change.³³

ÖZET

ABD'nin Afganistan'ın geleceği konusunda Taliban'la gerçekleştirmekte olduğu görüşmeleri inceleyen bu makale, Amerikan Yönetimi'nin probleminin askerlerini çekme kararı almasına karşılık temel siyasal hedeflerini gerçekleştirememiş olduğuna dikkat çekmektedir. Bu ortamda Taliban ile elde edilecek bir çeşit uzlaşının ABD'nin çekilişi karşısında artan kaygıları bir ölçüde azaltacağına inanılmıştır. Aslında Taliban'ı silahsızlandırma ve topluma yeniden kazandırma konusunda 2003'ten bu yana çeşitli girişimlerde bulunulduğu görülmektedir. Bu çabaların son girişimden önemli bir farkı üst düzey Taliban güçlerinin sürecin dışında bırakılması yönünde olmuştur. Önceki süreçlerin bir başka ayırt edici özelliği de ABD'nin Taliban'la yapacağı görüşmelerin ön koşulu olarak silah bırakmalarını, El-Kaide ile ilişkilerini kesmelerini ve Afgan Anayasası'nı tanımalarını istemiş olmasıdır. 2010 yılından itibaren başlatılan girişim çerçevesinde bu ön şartların sürecin sonunda yapılacak anlaşmanın gerekli parçalarına dönüştüğü, ayrıca ABD'nin mağlup bir taraf gibi algılanmaması için Taliban'a yönelik savaşın şiddetinin arttırılarak sürdürüldüğü görülmektedir.

Makale uzlaşma yolunda müzakere sürecinin başlatılablmesinin asgari koşulunun her iki tarafın da birbirlerinin bu sürece olan ihtiyacına ve dolayısıyla da birtakım ödünler vermeye hazır olduğuna

³³ Brandon Hamber and Gráinne Kelly, "Reconciliation: A Working Definition, Democratic Dialogue", September 2004, <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/dd/papers/dd04recondef.pdf> (Access date: 07.03.2013).

inanması olduğuna dikkat çekmektedir. Ancak ABD'yi böyle bir sürece iten Taliban'ın motivasyonlarına yönelik bir iyimserlik değil, aksine Afganistan'daki savaşın gerçek anlamda kazanılamaz olmasına yönelik bir kötümserliktir. Taliban'ın da iyimserliği ABD'nin tutumunda değişiklik algılamasından değil, onun çekilme kararı almasından kaynaklanmıştır. Makale, ABD'nin bir taraftan Taliban ile müzakere arayışlarını sürdürürken diğer taraftan da çatışmanın şiddetini arttırmasının beklenenin aksi sonuçlar doğurduğunu söylemektedir. Katar'da açılan Taliban bürosuna değinirken, Taliban'la müzakere sürecinin dışında bırakıldığını hisseden kesimlerin varlığına da dikkat çeken makale, barış sürecinde Afganistan'da asıl hedeflenmesi gerekenin devlet ve ulus inşası olduğunun altını çizmektedir.

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