

US - TALIBAN PEACE DEAL: UNDER THE SHADOW OF GLOOM

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 Analysis

The US-Taliban peace deal on February 29 2020 brought a glimpse of hope that conflict would be resolved and peace would prevail in Afghanistan. Yet on March 25 2020, a 400 year-old Sikh community temple was attacked by a militant group that again doomed the peace effort. It is believed that this attack was the handy work of extremists with Islamic State's affiliation. Aside from sabotaging the peace deal, this attack also happened when Afghanistan is facing Coronavirus. The country's already crippling health system is struggling to control the spread of the virus is in an even bigger agony as there is no unified government in place to deal with the current crisis. The US also refused to bail out the country if Afghanistan's political classes continued to fight for power and failed to end their political differences.

The Kabul regime ordered to lockdown the country for three weeks, leaving essential

services to open such as Pharmacies and grocery stores. In the Taliban's areas of control, they also take measures such as prohibiting the public from roaming freely without any necessity and to stay in their houses. They also told the people to keep themselves and their surroundings clean as much as possible. The Taliban also distributed essential goods among the people so they could protect themselves; they also alerted the imams to warn the people of the consequences of spreading the virus if they don't implement the given instructions.

There is no doubt that the US-Taliban peace deal brought relief to the Afghan people. According to this agreement, the US shall be obliged to withdraw its entire military forces along with its allies and Coalition partners. It includes all non-diplomatic civilian personnel, private security contractors, trainers, advisors, and supporting services personnel within 14 months.



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But the lingering question is about how long this peace deal will be implemented. In general, the Afghan people perceived the US as an occupying force, not a liberating one; meanwhile, the current Afghan government is seen as a US' puppet. Currently there are two factions in Afghanistan, one of Ashraf Ghani and the other of Abdullah Abdullah, both claiming to be the head of the new government after bitterly contested in last year's election. US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo recently visited Kabul to ask both Ghani and Abdullah to resolve their differences to allow the peace deal to take place.

Afghans are also not very fond of the Taliban, the Afghan people have been resilient throughout history and they have never accepted the dominance of any power be it external or internal. Therefore no government has ever succeeded to establish their rule completely in Afghanistan except for some brief period.

The US also failed to finish the Taliban's insurgency after toppling their government following 9/11, and the Taliban regime lasted in different parts of Afghanistan approximately for the following five years.

Successive US administrations started to realize that they were not in the position to win the war in Afghanistan despite possessing very high standard military technology and invested a lot of money.

Finally Washington realized that military cannot be the solution of Afghan's political problem and started to negotiate with those whom the US regarded as terrorist. In this context the US tried to reach to the Taliban in Doha, Qatar, without involving its own puppet government in confidence in Kabul. This approach created a kind of disappointment among US' Afghan allies. But Washington felt constraint to withdraw its armies from Afghanistan as soon as

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possible to contain the casualties, after admitting defeat in the third longest war in its war history after Vietnam and Iraq.

Therefore the US wanted a respectful exit from Afghanistan to avoid further humiliation. It also reflects the country's frustration with Afghanistan. When the US asked the Taliban to first talk to the Afghan government to develop an intra-Afghan consensus, the Taliban declined the proposal and preferred to have a talk with the US directly, bringing its own conditions to the table. Ironically the lone super power of the world had no choice but to accept the Taliban's conditions.

The talk started in Doha in 2018 where the Taliban maintained their office. Some progress and hick-ups came in their negotiation; once President Trump even refused to continue the talk with the Taliban due to a car bombing in Kabul, where it killed one US personnel. Yet after this brief disruption, talks were resumed once again.

According to US officials, as far as withdrawing the troop as per timeline is concerned, it would depend on the Taliban's sincerity on how much they are concerned about the peace deal. This means that to keep the peace deal alive, the Taliban has to distant itself from foreign militant groups such as Al-Qaida and the Islamic State and not to provide them a launching pad to carry on their activities against the US and its internal and external alliance. But it would not be easy for the Taliban to accept the US' "democratic and liberal vision" remedy for the future development of Afghanistan. After the successful negotiation with the US, the new Taliban leadership is expected to show its flexibility as far as human rights is concerned; meaning they would not adopt measures in their governing policies as they have done before, despite their strict adherence to local tribal law and customs.