

The Intra – Afghan Dialogue and Challenges Ahead



After 18 months' negotiation, the US and the Taliban finally signed the peace deal on Saturday, 10th Hoot, 1398 in Doha, Qatar. The agreement was signed in presence of representatives from 30 countries between Zalmay Khalilzad, special representative of US for peace and Mulla Abdul Ghani Beradar, head of the Taliban's office in Qatar.

Under the terms of the deal, foreign forces will withdraw from Afghanistan within 14 months and it will be guaranteed that the Afghan soil will not be used against the security of the United States and its allies. Both sides agreed on a lasting ceasefire and release of 5000 prisoners of the Taliban by the Afghan government and 1000 prisoners of Afghan government by the Taliban. In addition, Intra-Afghan negotiation will commence in less than two weeks in Norway. With closing the peace deal between the US and the Taliban, an important part of the peace process was accomplished and the intra-Afghan dialogue, which will be discussed in this analysis, is expected to inaugurate very soon.

Formation of the negotiating delegation

As the peace deal was signed between the US and the Taliban, The Afghan government and political parties have not been able to form a delegation to



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negotiate on behalf of the Afghans and disagreements can still be discerned regarding its formation. Although many plans have been signified to articulate the structure of the intra-Afghan talks, but none have attained utter consensus of all sides. Apparently, a plan establishing a representative board, preferably to be called as “National peace counsel”, can be relatively more realistic strategy to resolve the disagreements. Out of the National peace council, which may include 80-100 members from all groups and parties, a reliable delegation of 10-12 members can be selected, who can carry out the negotiations with the assistance of the national peace counsel. This will not only lead to harmony and political consensus among the political groups and figures, but it will also be able to enter the negotiations with the Taliban as a government-inclusive unit of negotiators. Consequently, the delegation will be not only all-inclusive, but will be small and effective. The strategy will only be effective if a team of advising specialists assist the negotiating delegation and share their experience and advice throughout the process. (1)

It is being said that Mohammad Ashraf Ghani, President of Afghanistan has proposed formation of a delegation of 8 members with limited authority to carry out the intra-Afghan negotiations. Also, a government body under the name of “high council of reconciliation” will be established to make big decision for the peace talks (2).

Need for Purposiveness and solemnity during negotiations

Afghanistan is being devastated in the flames of war since four decades. The war has hugely affected the physical and nonphysical resources of the country. Deaths, wounds, refuges, drug addictions and others are the outcomes of war. Dozens from both sides and the public are being killed and injured every day and the economy is moving downwards day to day. As a decent opportunity has been created to end the war and establish a lasting peace, therefore, it needs to be utilized so that the destructions being caused by war can come to an end and peace and security can be cherished in the country.

Although efforts were made to end the war and bring peace to Afghanistan, but the upcoming intra-Afghan talks are exceptional due to two reasons. First, there is a national, regional and international consensus regarding intra-Afghan peace



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negotiations. Secondly, all involved sides in the issue of Afghan peace are included in the discussions. The Intra-Afghan dialogue is the only harmoniously accepted method to reach an agreement regarding the formation of the government, amendment of the constitution, distribution of power.

The objective of intra-Afghan talks is to end the war and bloodshed in the country. Therefore, the first goal of both sides should be trust building and reduction in violence, which will consequently lead to a lasting ceasefire. Conversely, imperious and avaricious behaviors, which have been witnessed by the nation during the last four decades, will only cause continuity of war and sufferings.

Subsequently, all necessary issues such as preparation for reformation, protection and empowerment of national establishments, amendment of the constitution, limits of freedom of the people and others should be categorized and prioritized and should be discussed with utter tolerance and patience. Discussions over all issues may take more than months. However, prolonged discussions should not lead to apathy and discontinuity of talks. Intra-Afghan dialogue should continue until a comprehensive agreement is prepared and signed between both sides.

Challenges facing the intra-Afghan dialogue

After the peace deal between the US and the Taliban, prisoner release issue has become an obstacle for the intra-Afghan talks. Sher Mohammad Abbas Stanikzai, member of negotiating delegation of the Taliban has said that based on the peace agreement, the US is obliged to release five thousand prisoners of the Taliban, in exchange for one thousand prisoners of the Afghan government. The Afghan president, Ashraf Ghani reacted to this matter and said, “Prisoner release issue is not within the authorities of the United States and will be discussed during the intra-Afghan dialogue”.

These statements are disclosed as the Taliban still do not officially recognize the Afghan government and are not ready to discuss the conflict issues with the government (3)

On the other hand, it has been eighteen months since the US-Taliban negotiation have commenced. However, the government and its related bodies have not been able to establish national peace council, so that a delegation can be introduced for



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peace talks. In addition, dispersion and dissension between the government and political parties and politicians is another challenge toward intra-Afghan peace talks.

Despite local national, regional and international consensus over peace, there still are elements that consider peace against their interest, thus, create obstacles for it. Such groups and bodies will certainly strive to find ways in order to sabotage the intra-Afghan dialogue.

As proven with previous experiences, power is still something that Afghan officials are keen to hold on to. Therefore, thirst for power can be reflected as a direct challenge for the Intra-Afghan talks. Considering the lobbying attempts by the officials and politicians, it can be perceived that power is prioritizing over peace.

Conversion of peace efforts into national, regional and international competition can be perceived as another great challenge for Intra-Afghan dialogue. As conflicts of interest exist on national, regional and international level, and interests will be preferred over peace, therefore, supporters of the peace process and the negotiating team should be sensitive and wise while making decisions.

Lack of flexibility and humility among both sides is another key challenge for the Intra-Afghan dialogue. In this regard, both sides need to be patient and tolerant. They need to work on strategy that can be accepted by all. Most importantly, the signed agreement between the US and expected agreement between the Taliban and the national side should be deliberately executed.

Outcome

After forty years of war, a golden opportunity has been provided for bringing peace to our country. Regional and International consensus about peace has occurred and all internal groups and bodies believe that negotiation is the only resolution for the problem.

Presently, it is up to the Afghans to wisely utilize the opportunity, so that any chance for continuity of war can be eliminated. Even if the war continues for some more years, both sides will consequently sit around the table and resolve the issue through negotiations. Therefore, the current opportunity should not be wasted and the interval of war and destruction should be shortened.



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3. Tolo News.

World Largest Democracy and Discriminatory Policy Against Muslims



On Sunday (March 1, 2020), a number of Hindu fanatics took on Muslim demonstrators in the North Eastern part of the Indian capital, New Delhi. At the attack, 50 Muslims were killed and 400 others were wounded. Moreover, two mosques, houses and shops of Muslim were set on fire and all Muslim residents in the area have fled their homes as a result of fear from Hindus assailants.

Muslim's protests had instigated approximately three months ago, following the amendment of the Indian Citizenship Law. According to the law, all non-Hindu minorities can have Indian citizenship, but Muslims are cruelly exempted from this. Muslims regard this as a violation of the Constitution of India and outright discrimination against them. The immoderations and violence against Muslims in India has been more likely since the BJP came to power. Bloody Sunday events are one example of this. The Indian police are also accused of collaborating with fanatical Hindus on the day of the incident. This analysis seeks to shed light on the different dimensions of this matter.

Concrete Role of Muslims in Indian History

India, the land of thousands of religions and the most democratic country in the world, is one of the most spectacular regions of the globe which is usually called



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seventy-two nations. The diversity of religions, faiths, ethnicities and cultures has made this country unique in the world.

Indian religions have deep historical roots that contemporary Indians have them in mind. South Asian old culture has at least 4500 years of history, which primary transmitted to India as religious texts. The artistic heritage as well as the logical and intellectual participation owed most to the religious thought of this land. Hinduism, Islam, Jainism, Buddhism, Christianity and Sikhism are the main religions in India.

India is a very religious country. Indians can easily accept different religions. In fact, Indians live side by side with tolerance and forbearance because they are pluralistic, and therefore believe in polytheism.

Hinduism is the religion of this country and 80% of the people in India follow it. Besides Hindus, Muslims are the dominant religious group that plays a complementary role in Indian society.

India is comprised of 200 Million Muslims which officially constitutes (12.1%) and actually roughly 20 percent of the entire populations. Muslims ruled India for 800 years, and the Indians, despite their different religions and cultures, enjoyed security, justice, and equality at that era and India became a symbol of wealth, commerce, civilization and science at the times.

Indian historian Kishuri Saran Lal, a Hindu, says:

The difference between the Islamic occupation and the British occupation was as the one between Heaven and Hell. India had become the richest land in the world when Muslims saw India's progress in science, construction, and commerce, but the British focused on nothing except the plunder of Indian resources and enslaved the nation and killed millions who were involved in wars against the invader Great Britain.

In India, Muslims are not allowed to be politically active and have not got a dense population that is in a particular area (except Kashmir whose case is completely different); but in other parts of India Muslims live with Hindus. Meaning that they are not concentrated on a particular city or region, state, or place. They don't have much power because of this problem. A Muslim who wants to work must be a member of one of India's most influential parties, such as Congress or the BJP.



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So they usually operate within the framework of these parties. Even the Jamaat'e Islami has nothing to say politically.

Current Situation of Muslims in India

After the partition of Pakistan and Bangladesh from India, which led to many political and social conflicts, the Muslims were weakened on charges of trying to divide India, and this social group, which had become an accusative religious minority, became exposed to insecurity.

Jawaharlal Nehru, the founder of New India and his party at the time, rushed to the aid of Muslims to absolve them of the charges. Since then, this tradition has been established among Muslims to regard the Congress Party as their supporter and friend. But Muslims in recent years have realized their mistake and have found that both parties have only sought for their votes.

After the demolition of the historic Babri Masjid at the hands of extremist Hindus and the disregard for Hindu parties, Hindu Muslims realized the essence of Hindu parties. India's Muslims have played a major role in shaping the country's vibrant civilization for centuries, and a glorious period in its history has now become a minority whose role and destiny have been subjected to complex political games. In recent years, there has been a calculated effort to marginalize the Muslim community and to diminish its importance every day. The ruling Bharatiya Janata Party has consistently supported Indian policy for Hindus by intensifying propaganda against Muslims as the country's largest minority since taking power in the last three years.

In a report describing the situation of Muslims, the South Morning Herald newspaper wrote: Now Indian politicians are clearly saying that there is no room for Muslims in India and that millions of Indian Muslims should be expelled.

Even after the parliamentary elections in 2014, some members of the BJP wanted to expel a large number of Bengali-speaking Muslims from North Eastern India. Ruling party leaders believe that Muslims are not actually citizens of India but are intruders who have been forced into India from neighboring Bangladesh.

A number of local media have stresses that the current Modi government of India's Prime Minister should expel millions of people before the election next year.



A Declining Democracy

The International Committee on Religious Liberty recently said in a report that religious freedom in India has been declining in 2017 as nationalist Hindu groups continue harassment and violence against non-Hindu groups.

The victims of these acts include Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists as well as Hindu Dalits. These groups face challenges such as acts of violence or intimidation, loss of political power, increased feelings of deception and strangeness, the US Committee on Religious Liberty added. In 2017, conditions for freedom of religion in India has continued to decline.

Former Indian Interior Minister Amit Shah had once said: "We will continue on the path of America and Israel. And, the next move is to change the names of Islamic places, which have been put on display by Muslims. The ruling party leaders pick Indian names for Agra City in Uttar Pradesh, where the Taj Mahal is located. They also want to change the name of Ahmadabad in Gujarat and the city of Dadullah. Critics say removing Islamic names is a way of disabling Indian Muslims and refusing to give them a share of Indian history and glorious past.

India's Muslims believe the BJP's extremist government is seeking to put pressure on Muslims with the intent to have them emigrated. More than 200 people were injured and more than 50 were killed in clashes over the past week. Hindu extremists fear the rapid spread of Islam in India; The number of Muslims in the country has increased by about 3.5%, according to statistics from 2010-2015, despite the government's restrictions showing the growth of two Islamic religions. The burning of Muslim sites, the expulsion of Muslims and the recent rejection of Muslim citizenship that have been resident in the eastern part of India for years, signifies the inherent and longstanding hostility of Hindu extremists against Muslims residing in the Indian subcontinent.

It is very disastrous that despite their vivid history, there is no place for Islam and Muslims in a land where its leaders advocate democracy and freedom of expression and faith.



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