

# POINTS OF AGREEMENT AND DISAGREEMENT AND STANDS OF THE INVOLVED PARTIES IN THE AFGHAN ISSUE

23 June 2021



## PREFACE

National and international efforts are being made to end the ongoing long war in Afghanistan. This war not only has brought misery to the Afghan people but also has regional and international adverse effects. The complexity of Afghanistan's issue has not only internal aspects, there are also regional and international factors play a significant role in the Afghan issue. Though the reasons behind the extension of this bloody war of Afghanistan are the complexity of the issue and foreign interference, but overall, strong determination of Afghan nation can end this war. Currently, it seems that disagreement points in the Afghan issue have diminished and, conversely, the agreement points have increased, but unfortunately, there is no apparent strong vision and efforts to eradicate these slightly tiny disputed points. Apart from internal aspects, the disagreement points regarding Afghanistan's issue on the regional and international levels have also lessened. This paper discusses the current stands of internal, regional, and international actors in Afghanistan's issue and the points of agreement and disagreements among them.

## THE STANDS OF INTERNAL PARTIES

### First: Afghan Government

The current governing system, specially, the government is sustained by the help of international community and therefore its stands are directly under the effect of international community precisely under the decisions of the United States. That is why, whenever the strategies of the United State towards Afghanistan have changed, the Afghan government has also altered its stands and positions. Since the Afghan government is a vital part of the issue, the government's stand and its agreement and disagreement directly affects the peace process.



In the past, the stands of the Afghan government regarding peace were mainly focused on attracting military aids of international community so that they can completely beat their opponents or at least stop them from military opposition through peaceful settlement with the government's conditions. Now, after almost two decades of war, specifically after the last fluctuations, nearly all sides are convinced that war isn't the solution. It became evident when, in the last two years, the stands of international community and specifically of America altered about Afghanistan's issue, and recently, they have decided on complete withdrawal of their troops from Afghanistan. Therefore, here we focus only on the stands of the current government and leave aside the positions of the previous governments.

The stand of the Afghan government is now divided into two parts. One is that of the president's and the other is the position of the High Council for National Reconciliation (HCNR) who are currently in charge of the affairs of the government and has formed the current government in a participatory political agreement. Even though the political agreement of the government gives full authority of the peace process to the HCNR, but the last two years proved that the presidential palace is always the first to talk about the peace process. At the same time, Dr. Abdullah Abdullah, Chairman of the HCNR, has different stands and tries to play his own role in the peace process.

**First Stand:** If we have a look at the presidential palace's stand, we see that Afghan government even now, emphasize on the implementation of the [2018 peace roadmap](#) for Afghanistan. In this peace roadmap, the president had emphasized that a sustainable and durable peace shouldn't be sacrificed for short-term benefits, and therefore, he had explained this process as a long and time-taking one. This roadmap has also focused on Afghan government-owned and Afghan government-led process which some of the politicians marked as an

obstacle on the path to the success of the process and even now some see it as an obstacle.

In his position towards peace, the president's focuses and emphasizes on elections. The peace roadmap [states](#): "Afghans need an elected government for approving and ratifying peace agreement, implementing it and leading a social reconciliation." President Ghani still [emphasizes](#) this, but with a variation from the past, that now he is ready for [early elections](#) and even says that he and his team members wouldn't be candidate, but he is not ready to give up the power without elections. This is one of the disagreement points among the Taliban, Afghan government and other politicians because even inside the government some are convinced that in the current situation elections are not only an impractical offer but also it can be an obstacle in the process. On the one hand, the Taliban are [not ready](#) for any kind of elections under the control and observation of current laws and institutions. On the other hand, the failed experiences of the past elections led to mistrust in election processes nationally and internationally, and it is now difficult to rebuild the trust that elections could be transparent under the rule of current government.

Following the sharing of the new US peace plan for Afghanistan by the US Special Representative Zalmay Khalilzad and the announcement of a proposed intra-Afghan conference in Turkey, President Ashraf Ghani explained his peace plan for the conference in a gathering early in April, 2021 under the title of peace roadmap for Afghanistan, which mostly reflects the viewpoints and positions of the government, particularly, the president and his team. He [said](#), "We want the continuity of the system, not the sustainability of ourselves." He emphasized that the peace government can be formed within the framework of the Constitution, however, we can determine its functions through mutual consent. This is a three-phase roadmap for peace in Afghanistan. The first stage includes political agreement and ceasefire, the second stage is peace government and elections, and

the last stage is state-building and long-term activities. He stated that no one should think the president and vice-presidents would resign, and the only source of legitimacy is the people's votes, therefore, transition should be brought through elections, but he is ready not to be a candidate in the elections. According to him, the content of the Constitution should be discussed among Afghans and the rules and principles proposed by others are not acceptable to him. So, it seems that the Presidential Palace disagrees on complete agreement on the future of Afghanistan in a conference like the proposed Istanbul Conference, and most of the peace-related matters should be managed under the current government, what the government calls an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned process.

A few weeks ago, in an [article](#) to Foreign Affair Magazine, President Ghani acknowledged for the first time that if peace is achieved, he is ready to step down, as he also supported the interim government plan to manage the transition period. But he still gives some conditions emphasizing on maintaining the republic system, ceasefire before anything else and some other points.

In short, the government wants to monopolize the peace process, and to make peace in the sense that the government has for peace. The government's perception of peace is that the Taliban should join the government formed under the leadership of President Ghani, and they will be given the positions they want. In this way, the government wants to repeat its peace model with Hizb-e-Islami. However, the stand of Presidential Palace alternates with the increase and decrease of pressure and whenever the circumstances changes, which led to sort of instability of the situation and no one is able to anticipate about the future.

**Second Stand:** The other political partner of the government has a different stand about the current situation as well as the peace process. Therefore, there is currently no internal consensus on peace. For this reason, Dr. Abdullah Abdullah, Chairman of the High Council for National Reconciliation (HCNR), and his related politicians were not present at the gathering held for presenting the peace

roadmap. Afterwards, during the preparation of the peace plan for Istanbul Conference, disputes and tension have been seen among them. The second vice-president Sarwar Danesh accused the High Council for National Reconciliation (HCNR) of behaving insultingly with the president's peace proposal and labelled the draft peace plan prepared by the HCNR as imperfect.

The viewpoint of Dr. Abdullah, Chairman of the High Council for National Reconciliation, and his team about the peace with the Taliban and the future system is not too clear, and it seems that this political partner of the government determines his position with the change of situation. After the start of intra-Afghan peace talks in Qatar, when the position of the Presidential Palace was against the formation of interim government, Dr. Abdullah implicitly supported it. But before the announcement of the complete withdrawal of foreign troops from Afghanistan, he made some statements that shows his disagreement with interim government. In these remarks, Dr. Abdullah's view was that interim government can't bring us peace. Later, when the US announced the withdrawal of all its troops from Afghanistan and offered a draft peace plan for Afghan peace, the High Council for National Reconciliation (HCNR) with modifying the plan once again showed that they agree on interim government. With offering this peace plan, it seems that the High Council for National Reconciliation (HCNR) disagrees with the peace agreement under government's supervision and prefers an international conference to decide the future of Afghanistan under the observation of international observants.

The view of the High Council for National Reconciliation (HCNR) and its affiliated political parties is therefore not very clear and they prefer to observe the situation because they believe that Taliban's point is ambiguous and it seems that they are in fear of the Taliban's regime getting back to power. That is why, Mohammad Yunus Qanooni, member of the leading committee of the High Council for National Reconciliation (HCNR) and former vice president, once

raised the issue of a “Second Resistance” against Taliban. Dr. Abdullah Abdullah also once said that the stand of the Taliban is always ambiguous.

## **Second: The Taliban and Other Insurgents**

The Taliban’s stand so far evades on complete withdrawal of foreign troops and their stand regarding intra-Afghan settlement is blur and with no details. That is why the president [writes](#) in his article to Foreign Affairs Magazine, “It is far less clear, however, what the Taliban want. They demand an Islamic system—but that already exists in Afghanistan. For any negotiations over a political settlement between the Afghan government and the Taliban to succeed, the Taliban must articulate their desired end state with clarity and detail.”

Overall, the Taliban at least have affirmed in different times that they are not seeking a monopoly on power and they want such an “Islamic” system in Afghanistan in which all segments of the society sees themselves. The Taliban have always insisted that the type of the system is on the agenda of intra-Afghan negotiations that will be agreed upon at the negotiation table.

In recent months, as demands for an explanation of the desired Islamic system for the Taliban increased, they published an article on their official website about the nature of their ideal Islamic system; still they discuss generalities. The article states that the Taliban wants a system in which everyone’s rights are protected and the president’s job is not to serve the Washington interests. A part of the [article](#) says, “We want an Islamic system that preserves our religious values, national benefits, our culture and our traditions.” Therefore, the Taliban have not yet presented a clear picture of their desired Islamic system, which made this process more complicated because the government side emphasizes on maintaining the republic governing system, and the Taliban’s stands [show](#) that the current government and democracy is by no means acceptable for them. That is why after the Moscow Conference, the



opposition of extended “Troika” to the restoration of the Islamic Emirate in Afghanistan in their joint statement provoked the Taliban’s reaction, saying in a conference that the type of governing system would be decided by the Afghan nation and they won’t walk back from their demand of the Islamic system.

The government has always asked the Taliban for ceasefire and mostly linked all other matters to practicing ceasefire. But the Taliban’s position is that temporary ceasefire can’t solve the problem, and based on Doha agreement, ceasefire is part of the intra-Afghan peace negotiations which will be negotiated after agreeing on some other matters. The Taliban see President Ghani’s peace plan as a demand for their [surrender](#) and say that the continuation of the government made under the shadow of foreign forces is unacceptable to them; rather they want a fundamental change. The Taliban mainly disagree to the influence of the US and NATO in decisions about the future of Afghanistan and see the Afghan government as part of this influence. The Taliban’s stand is not to participate in any conference that decides about the future of Afghanistan before the complete withdrawal of foreign troops. However, they conditionally [agreed](#) to attend the proposed Istanbul Conference, but still one of their conditions is that this conference shouldn’t be deciding on any matter.

### **Third: Afghan Political Sides**

Beside Afghan government and the Taliban, the other important side of the issue which currently plays a crucial role in shaping the future of the country are various political figures and political parties. Currently, most of these politicians and political parties stand in opposition with the government. That is why the government, especially the president tries to gather most of these political personalities and the leaders of the political parties under the name of the High State Council to pave the way for national consensus on the peace process and the future of the country. In the past, various political sides have [criticized](#) the



government for lack of political consensus and even called the government's call for ceasefire unrealistic.

Overall, the political parties and other political sides and personalities were in opposition with government's stand regarding interim government. Most of the politicians believe that interim government is the only solution and the current government should get ready for giving up power.

## THE STANDS OF FOREIGN SIDES

### First: America and International Community:

The signing of the Doha agreement between the US and the Taliban and the subsequent announcement of the complete withdrawal of their troops by the now government of the United States proved that the US and NATO want to put an end to the Afghan war. The unconditional withdrawal of US and NATO forces from Afghanistan marked their escape from this war but at the same time they want to ensure their interests in Afghanistan and the region. Subsequently, [reports](#) have been spread that the US is trying to build military bases in the neighboring country, Pakistan, to control the situation in Afghanistan which faced strong reaction of the Taliban. The Taliban in a [statement](#), without naming any country, warned the neighbors that giving military bases to foreign troops will be a "historic mistake" and by doing so they will face serious reaction of the Afghan nation.

The United States and international community supports interim government for succeeding the peace process as they have even agreed with the Taliban about a "new Islamic system" in the agreement of Doha. That is why America wants to end Afghan war for themselves and reduce their economic burdens. At the same time, they want to remain influential and effective; and therefore, they want to stay in touch with those who can take power in the future.

## Second: Regional Countries:

Regional countries are the other important side that has direct effect on the failure or success of the Afghan peace process. Among regional countries, Pakistan, Iran, India, China and Russia are the most involved countries in Afghanistan's issue. It seems that Pakistan's interests with the Taliban are slowly slipping out of coordination, so Pakistan wants to cooperate more clearly in the Afghan peace process compared to the past and wants to get privilege and concessions in exchange. That is why, recently, there have been reports that both of the countries work on a security agreement that might grant Pakistan historic concessions, like Kunar's Water and the Durand line. Pakistan is apparently ready to deal on the Taliban because with the U.S withdrawal their interests gradually diverge.

India, on the other hand, is worried about Pakistan's role and sometimes expresses fear of restoration of Taliban's regime in Afghanistan, but generally, is not against succeeding the peace process. Iran, however, is not directly involved in the peace process as Pakistan, and has remained silent, but there are worries if Iran sees its interests in danger, it can create obstacles to the peace process and even the future stability of the country. Earlier, Iran's and Taliban's relations were for the shared goal of the withdrawal of Americans but since then, Iran's [policy](#) is to avoid relations with the Taliban. Iran thinks if the peace process fails, there is the possibility of the Taliban getting into power that is why succeeding the peace process can somehow ensure Tehran's interests in Afghanistan. For this reason, Iran has also [agreed](#) to Taliban's demand of an "inclusive Islamic government". On the other side, Russian and China even if they are optimist to the withdrawal of American troops, at the same time they have concerns too. Therefore, they prioritize peace with Taliban so that the regional insecurity does not threaten their security.

## THE CONTROVERSIAL AND AGREED-UPON POINTS OF AFGHAN PEACE

Observing the current state of Afghanistan's issue, it seems that the main issues in the causes of war are resolved. The fundamental cause of war in the country was the presence of foreign troops. This issue is now in the stage of complete resolution. Besides this, many other basic controversial points have been resolved between the two involved sides of the war, like the transfer of power to an interim government is now accepted by all sides. Still, we see no evident progress in the peace process, what are the reasons behind this? What are the fundamental issues that have delayed the peace process? At the same time, which are the agreed-upon points that the involved parties completely or partially agreed on?

### A. AGREED-UPON POINTS

**First: Complete Withdrawal of Foreign Troops:** The main cause for the Taliban to fight was the presence of foreign troops which was resolved after America's announcement of the complete withdrawal of its troops. Afghan government whose attempt was assuring the presence of foreign forces, has also now accepted this fact and propose it as an opportunity for peace. Other political sides are also expecting the complete withdrawal of foreign troops, but some politicians and political sides are concerned about foreign troops' withdrawal before achieving an agreement of peace due to the fear of repeating those dreary experiences of the past.

**Second: Interim Government:** In the past years, an obstacle on the path to peace was the rejection of transitional government by the Afghan government. Various political sides believed that peace could not be achieved without the advent of an interim or caretaker government. Now, the Taliban, the government, internal political sides, and also international community agrees on handing over the



power to an interim government. And with this, the obstacle is to a considerable degree vanished even there are some concerns specifically from the government's side regarding the way of handing over power to an interim government. The type of such an administration is also questionable to many, but most of them want it to be entirely impartial, and shouldn't come into existence from the division of power because coalition governments had negative outcomes in the past.

**Third: The Constitution:** In the past years, the constitution was considered by the government as a red line in the peace process and this issue was also an obstacle, but now the Afghan government agrees to amend the constitution and is ready to negotiate about this with the other side.

**Fourth: Basic and Human Rights:** Human rights is part of the constitution but specifically, women's rights and the freedom of speech were considered as obstacles in the peace process in the past years that the Taliban were not ready to accept. But the Taliban has repeatedly proposed this [issue](#), ensuring that they respect all human rights including women's rights and freedom of speech in the light of Islam. This issue is also not an issue of the early stages of the peace process, rather it must be decided by the Afghan people and agreed upon in a Loya Jirga.

**Fifth: Islamic System:** After the presence of foreign troops, the main reason of war is the issue that is proposed from Taliban's side is establishing as Islamic system in Afghanistan. Even though both of the involved sides are in controversy that whether the current government is Islamic or not, the Taliban haven't given any details and clarifications about the structure and nature of the Islamic system they want. But there is consensus among all parties on the Islamic system and its details can be discussed.

## B. CONTROVERSIAL POINTS

Generally, the fundamental issues have been agreed upon and the controversial points are less which mostly revolve around the division of power. Regarding these, the following points are of consideration:

**First: The Type of Government—Republic or Emirate:** Generally, it is agreed that the system of Afghanistan will be Islamic, but the type of the system is debatable. Afghan government and other political sides are concerned if the Taliban emphasize on Emirate while the government still proposes republic as the red line. President Ghani wrote in his article that after the ceasefire, the republican system will be retained, under which an interim government will be established.

**Second: Elections:** The government's position is that elections are the only way of legitimize power but since there is still no consensus on the type of system, the issue of elections also remains as a controversial one. On the other hand, the current elections system is a flawed system, and in a situation like now, elections might create problems and worsen the conditions. On the other side, the Taliban have made it clear that they are not seeking monopoly on power. They want a system in which all parties can see themselves, but specifically they haven't expressed their viewpoint regarding the type of electing government leadership.

**Third: Ceasefire:** The government and some other political sides emphasize on ceasefire before any other matter and then the peace process should be continued, but the Taliban see ceasefire as a part of peace negotiations and they believe that before peace agreement, ceasefire is useless.

Overall, these points of disagreement are not insolvable. If the talks continue, it will easily be resolved. Currently, the continuation of talks is vital so that the present controversies meet solutions.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Still there are fears that the involved parties are seeking the way to gain or retain power by force and war. The past dreary experiences proved that the monopoly of power through force is impossible for both sides. That is why the way of peace should be prioritized and either side should not create further obstacles on the path to peace so that the ongoing bloodshed can be stopped as soon as possible.
- Currently, in comparison to any other time, there are many agreed-upon points and so less controversial ones, but still the war continues and Afghans pay a very heavy price on a daily basis. So a grave demand from the parties involved is to work for rooting out the present controversies and getting to an agreement by negotiations.
- It seems that the current disagreements root from the issue of power-sharing. Considering the past experiences, the coalition governments were all failures, in the first stage an impartial interim government is needed and then both sides should work towards an electoral government.
- Ceasefire is a fundamental issue and the current bloody situation must be stopped immediately. Observing the current situation, there is no other way except ceasefire that can build trust for both of the involved sides which is so vital for peace. If the Taliban are in fear of losing the key to pressurize the government, they can decide about interim government and ceasefire at the same time.
- The parties involved should realize that in the first stage, in one or two conferences, a complete agreement on controversial issues and specifically those relating to values. They could be left to the Afghan people to be involved in decision-making on these issues.
- However, the international community, neighboring and regional countries agree on majority of the matters about Afghanistan's issue, but regarding the

elimination of concerns of the neighboring and regional countries high steps should be taken, so that their concerns are not viewed as barriers to the peace process.

- Internally, even though the agreed-upon viewpoints got closer but there is still no national consensus about peace and post-peace matters. In this part high steps need to be taken so that the controversial issues are resolved through national understanding.

The end

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