

Steps Toward Stability in Afghanistan

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Background

Afghanistan is at a critical time in its history. Over the past two decades, we have made tremendous gains mainly laying the foundations of the Islamic Republic to promote people-centric governance, human rights, freedom of expression, and education among other democratic ideals. The people of Afghanistan desire to build upon these gains and achieve lasting peace that will lead to stability for the benefit of Afghans and the region.

Peace for Afghans is a comprehensive term that addresses not only the issue of talks with the Taliban but also requires intensive and collective top-down and bottom-up approaches to eliminate factors that create the conditions for war.

Much has happened thus far to advance peace and stability in Afghanistan, and yet much more needs to be done to accomplish this noble objective. In February 2018, the Afghan government extended an unconditional offer of peace talks to the Taliban. In June, a nationwide three-day ceasefire over the Eid holidays was implemented. They gave Afghans tremendous belief that peace is possible.

In November, the Afghan government presented a comprehensive roadmap to peace, and announced a negotiating team.

As 2019 began, Afghanistan's journey toward peace continued with nationwide consultations with the Afghan people.

In February, 15,000 women were consulted from all 34 provinces on what would be acceptable to them in a peace agreement, and 3,000 of them came together in Kabul to endorse that agenda.

In April, the Afghan government organized a historic and inclusive Consultative Loya Jirga for peace, which laid out the people's demands for a peace agreement.

As we prepare to take the next step in this process, we are committed to the principles of inclusivity, sustainability and dignity. The Afghan people have demanded a ceasefire to immediately stop the bloodshed; they have demanded that talks must happen between the Afghan government and the Taliban; and they have demanded that the Islamic Republic be preserved as the foundation of our nation-state. We want not only to preserve the gains we have made but also to maintain the foundation that will allow us to advance those gains.

To build upon the past efforts and take steady steps toward stability with an aim to end the bloodshed as soon as possible, the Afghan government will undertake thorough national and international inclusive consultations to implement a 7-Point Peace Plan for Stability that is laid out in this document. These 7 points are not necessarily sequential.

The 7-Point Plan for Stability

Top-Down Negotiations

Point 1) Negotiations with USA + NATO

We propose to the US to jointly develop an implementation mechanism and plan with Afghanistan for withdrawal of US forces and a CT cooperation framework for the post withdrawal period. This could build upon the US's discussions with the Taliban and salvage parts of the past year's efforts that were undertaken by the Americans.

Point 2) Negotiations with the Taliban

Once the Taliban have assurances (only assurances at this stage) that foreign troops, which they claim to be the problem, will leave, the previously constructed inclusive 15-member Negotiations Team will participate in negotiations with the Taliban. These potential negotiations will be of utmost importance to Afghans and they will be carried out in an inclusive and consultative manner. This is to ensure that all Afghans feel represented and their voices shape the outcomes. Before the negotiations begin, the Afghan people and government demand the Taliban to enter into a mutual ceasefire a) to prove that they have maintained unity of their command and b) to provide space for successful talks. The Afghan government's objective in undertaking the negotiations will be to finalize a peace agreement with the Taliban. Detailed plans for a ceasefire as a pre-condition to the talks as well as the negotiations process are developed separately.

Point 3) Negotiations with Pakistan

Points 1 and 2 have been emphasized by the US and the Taliban but we also want to address the root of the problem and that is Pakistan.

This Point will aim to provide mutual assurances between Afghanistan and Pakistan. Afghanistan needs to know that Pakistan will not continue to harbor terrorists and nurture terrorism in the region, and Pakistan needs to know that Afghanistan can be an earnest partner for trade, commerce and energy projects that can help boost Pakistan's economy.

Consensus Building with Regional and International Partners

Point 4) Discussions with Neighbors, Region, and the Islamic World

This will provide mutual assurances of non-interference between these countries and Afghanistan, and assurances by Afghanistan that it will continue to evolve into a country that emanates economic possibility instead of regional instability. With an economic-centric and regional connectivity approach, we can work together for shared interests of the region which will reinforce peace and stability. Simultaneous to efforts undertaken in Points #1, #2, #3, Afghanistan will request some of the countries in this category to facilitate track 2 or track 1.5 peace dialogues with the Taliban. Mechanics of these dialogues will be constructed separately.

Point 5) Discussions with the West + International Organizations

We aim to engage the European Union, European countries, the United Nations, the World Bank and others throughout the peace process. Afghanistan will partner with countries and entities in this category to design and implement comprehensive development programs that can chart us on a long-term path to development in our post-peace agreement phase. These countries and entities may also have the role of guarantors in potential peace agreements.

Bottom-up Stability

Point 6) Strengthen Institutions at the National Level

To sustain and strengthen the peace which could potentially be achieved with efforts outlined above, Afghanistan will need to continue to strengthen the Islamic Republic as a system of governance, further strengthen the ANDSF, improve governance and curb corruption, and work out mechanisms for systemic political inclusion of all Afghans.

Point 7) Address Grievances at the Local Level

Each district of Afghanistan has its own unique drivers of conflict. They need to be identified and addressed. Promoting rule of law, strengthening traditional conflict resolution mechanisms, rural development programs, and mechanisms to include people in local politics will be the focus of efforts in this category.

Immediate Concrete Steps

In order to garner national and international support to this plan and further refine it, the Afghan government will undertake the following concrete steps in the short-term:

1. **Organize a Mini-Jirga:** This Jirga will bring different political factions, key civil society actors, representatives of families of the victims, representatives of youth and women groups together to hold inclusive consultations about the way forward and build unity for it.
2. **Form an Alliance Consultations Group:** Afghanistan will invite working level representatives (Special Representative or equivalent) from 12-15 countries and international organizations to participate in a 1-day conference in Kabul to collectively reflect over the past efforts and lessons learned and provide consultation for the way forward.
3. **Holds Intra-Afghan Dialogues:** Afghanistan will request potential partners to organize a series of intra-Afghan dialogue to ensure momentum is maintained and channel of communication is open between the parties to the conflict. Unlike official negotiations, intra-Afghan dialogues will not require a precondition.

While key components of the plan will continue to be consistent, this will be a living document that will evolve as a result of consultations at national and international levels.

End of Document.