

# **Dividends to Pakistan's Economy from Afghan Peace – Challenges and Opportunities**

The Afghan Peace Process has welcoming prospects for Pakistan, which is an immediate neighbor of Afghanistan. The two neighboring countries have shared tortuous relations in the past, but the peace talks are expected to have a positive impact on their relations. The peace talks provide Pakistan an opportunity to strengthen its presence in the regional politics. The Afghan Peace Process will help Pakistan suppress the antagonistic actors in Afghanistan from prospering. The initiation of peace process was the extensive diplomatic effort by Pakistan that made the process to follow the path ahead smoothly for which Pakistan was appreciated by USA. Pakistan is ambitious to project herself as a peace loving State and also that the prosperity of the region is closely linked to having peace in Pakistan and Afghanistan. Pakistan has been making sure since the beginning that the peace process is completely Afghan owned and no external factors gain access to any kind of interference.

To encourage and improve the trade and investment relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan, National Assembly Pakistan has organized a two-day seminar titled “Pakistan and Afghanistan Investment and Trade Forum” on Monday 28th, 2020. Prime Minister Imran Khan addressed to the seminar as chief guest. 17-member Afghan parliamentary delegation, led by Speaker of Wolsey Jirga Mr Rahmani are also a part of this seminar. The USAID Pakistan has extended a supportive hand for the sake of regional connectivity and integration initiative. While addressing to the seminar, Prime Minister Imran Khan along with NA Speaker Asad Qaiser and Speaker of Afghan Wolesi Jirga (Afghanistan's parliament) Mir Rahman Rahmani insisted on boosting the trade and investment between Pakistan and

Afghanistan to generate more wealth and to encourage the industrialization. They also emphasized that the normalization of traffic between states will improve the condition of trade that has been damaged further by the pandemic.

Prime Minister Imran Khan said that the connection between Pakistan and Afghanistan is quite old and no foreign interference has ever succeeded in Afghanistan. He further explained that Afghani people have always taken their own decisions and Pakistan will be happy to work with any government that Afghani nation will choose. Prime Minister sympathetically said that the 40 years of tragedy in Afghanistan is unfortunate and it has been effecting Pakistan for past 18 years as well. He also suggested that dwelling in past has only causes mistrust but we, as nations, need to look beyond it to reassure transit trade and future investments. Following are the economic peace dividends for Pakistan and Afghanistan if the Peace Process materializes:

The first and the most significant dividend of the Peace Process is the Afghan-Pakistan trade. Both countries will be able to continue trade without the irritant of smuggling of timber, mineral resources and other goods. Afghan Peace Process will pave the way for traders to do open and legal trade which will eradicate the illicit trade in form of smuggling. This will

encourage the small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) in both countries to enhance legal trade of goods and products. The second dividend, also economic in nature, relates to creation of regional energy corridor. The end of instability, and war offers Afghanistan and Pakistan a safe corridor into Central Asia. This would create a regional energy corridor from Sixth, Central Asia into South Asia. The economy of Afghanistan can flourish if it can earn revenues by levying the TAPI Pipeline. Afghanistan will be able to extract royalties from these projects and also meet her energy requirements. Moreover, peace in Afghanistan, the "Heart of

Asia," will allow Pakistan and other South Asian countries to connect with Central Asia, which offers a great opportunity at developing Central Asia-South Asia (CASA) electricity transmission line.

Thirdly, it is significant for Pakistan's national interest to have a peaceful border at the western end. The success of the Afghan Peace talks can guarantee peace within Pakistan. If the Afghan government, Taliban and the US find common grounds as a result of negotiations, it will be advantageous in helping curb the terrorism that has caused immense damage to both nations. This will be vital for safeguarding Pakistan's security interests along the Pakistan-Afghan border. Peace and stability in Afghanistan is in the utmost interest of Pakistan.

The fourth dividend of the Peace Process relates to the role of Pakistan as a negotiator in the Afghan Peace process. The Peace Talks help Pakistan in building up her pragmatic image globally. During the entire process, Pakistan represents itself as a country that is dedicated to peaceful development in the region. Stability in Afghanistan will bring out the positive and peace loving image of Pakistan to the world, Pakistan will have a peaceful neighborhood. The rigorous efforts as a negotiator have helped Pakistan gather international appreciation. Pakistan holds a significant position in the Afghan Peace Process because as a central player, attaining peace and stability in Afghanistan would not possible without her participation. The Afghan peace talks are not only a golden opportunity for achieving peace in Afghanistan but offer a chance for Pakistan to gain a reputation of "Peace Promoter," at international chessboard of politics.

Fifthly, the efforts of Pakistan demonstrate her clear intentions for Afghanistan. The dedicated efforts on both sides, will help regain the lost trust and push both countries towards mutual cooperation. Reducing the trust deficit is

crucial for building peace in the region.

Sixth, the active participation of Pakistan in ensuring peace in Afghanistan which will subsequently lessen the influence of India in the region and in Afghanistan. This is important because India, an aggressor state, has been taking advantage of the hinges between Pakistan and Afghanistan, both trade wise and as well sentimentally. The Peace Process holds a tantamount position in the relationship of both countries.

Seventh, if Pakistan is able to lessen the influence of adversaries in Afghanistan, it would augment the communication between the leaderships and the people on both sides of the border.

The Peace Process will restart the trade, freedom of movement, economic prosperity and strengthening of defense between Pakistan and Afghanistan which will eventually help the economies to travel towards betterment since Pakistan also provides the shortest access to the sea for landlocked countries. If Pakistan's objective of bringing peace in Afghanistan materializes, great dividends for both countries will just be one arm's length away.

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## **President Trump's Visit to India: Pakistan's Diplomatic Success on Indian Soil**

The United States of America and India have come a long way from being crestfallen to being fully cooperative with each other on strategic concerns and matters. While the association between two States became sore amid India's nuclear ambitions

in 1998, Bill Clinton, former president of USA, revitalized the ties in 2000 and since then the strategic and economic ties have only gotten sturdier. Fast forward to 2019, as per Indian Ministry of External Affairs, India was anticipated to acquire \$18 billion worth of arsenal from USA along with bilateral military exercises. USA based Indian diaspora has also been very active in promoting India's interests and popularity. Indians are also among the richest immigrant communities in the USA. Despite the fact that India is the US's largest trading partner, they do business of about \$142 billion a year. The USA filed a lawsuit in the World Trade Organization against India and called it a source for US's trade deficit by subsidizing exports.

On February 24<sup>th</sup> of 2020, US President Donald Trump addressed the Indian audience in Ahmedabad during visiting India to meet with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi. While being on stage President Trump proclaimed to be all set to sell arsenal, energy and "best and most feared" military equipment of worth whopping \$3 billion to India. While making all the statements that Indian media, political leadership and audience wanted to hear, President Trump made a comment that sent a chill down their spines. President Trump, while standing on Indian stage placed on Indian soil, said that the USA is now enjoying good relations with Pakistan and all the efforts made by Pakistan are paying off well in progressing towards a new beginning, harmony, stability and reduced tensions. President Trump did not just stop there, he went on and said that the Trump administration is working very closely and positively with Pakistan to decrease the risk of militancy along the border.

President Trump's statements praising Pakistan for its efforts on Indian soil were not well received by Indian media and leadership. As Pakistani media, leadership and Pakistan's Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi highlighted that the importance of these statements cannot be denied, Indian media went frenzy and kept bringing up the past references of terror

attacks to keep the reputation of Modi government intact. The statements in favor of Pakistan made the Modi government concerned to the level where PM Modi refused to hold an unscripted press conference to avoid any more controversy which might have further killed the euphoria of Indian audience. The reference of having good relations with Pakistan at a public meeting with PM Modi cannot be accidental on part of American president and US's soft policy towards Pakistan qualifies to be an irritant for India in pursuit of having great strategic partnership with the USA.

Among all the commendations for the Modi government, President Trump was unsuccessful in mentioning his remarks over the protest happening in India over its Citizenship Amendment Act and religious persecution of Muslims minority in India. Meanwhile, Pakistan's media and political leadership is thrilled to have received an acknowledgment for their efforts, whereas Indian media has tried it best to curb the idea that Pakistan is a partner in bringing and maintaining. President Trump's acknowledgment of Pakistan's efforts is not only a manifestation of Pakistan's successful foreign policy but also have given legitimacy to Pakistan's and its citizens sacrifices worldwide. The praising statements have given a blow to India's hoax narrative that Pakistan is the problem, rather Pakistan is a part of solution in peace process which is clearly reflected by Pakistan's active participation in US-Taliban peace talks.

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# **Peace Agreement and its**

# Implementation – “Worries”

Peace in Afghanistan, a desire that is being pursued by the Afghans first and others later yet, the warmongers and beneficiaries have been making all-out efforts to keep the battleground alive so as to reap as much as they desire. Those, who have worked tirelessly for the peace must be aspiring to witness the occasion of the peace signing ceremony on February 29, 2020. Let's hope that Afghan's dream comes true and peace prevails.

During September 2019, Afghan Taliban stated that they are ready to negotiate and their doors are open for discussion. Recalling the efforts of last year, hopes were high and expectations were that peace deal would be inked but President Trump's statement of abandoning the talks stalled the process and things went wary for the time being. Sense prevailed and the negotiations were resumed after a break in December 2019. During this uncertainty period, presidential election results were announced and Ashraf Ghani was declared the President.

The ongoing peace negotiations have finally met one of its mile-stone of temporary cease-fire or “Reduction in Violence” as per understanding between the US and Taliban, for one week starting from 22 February till 29 February. Another development or speculation or announcement is the signing of peace deal that is to be held on 29 February 2020. After the seven days, if the outcome is positive, both sides will move to the next phase of inter-Afghan dialogue.

So far, the progress on reduction in violence is encouraging and hopes are high about the signing of a peace deal. The General populace in Kabul are hopeful and happy over the developments. The political uncertainties are making the atmosphere a little tense. Abdullah Abdullah, declaring himself as president and Dostum supporting him with challenging the IEC election announcement, is a hurdle in the

proceedings. Inter-Afghan dialogue, which has to kick start after 29 February, after peace agreement signing ceremony will be facing the challenge of who and whom to talk.

The peace process is likely to face: the legitimacy of the president, who will be leading the talks from the government side so, the political uncertainties will be contributing to an uncertain peace process. If the situation of political divide persists where will Kabul be moving to? How will the US react to the crisis? Will we witness another unity government like resolve or sense will prevail, according to some, and Abdullah will set-aside in wake of peace and settlement? The questions are worth consideration.

If the confrontation between the two presidential rivals continues, the option which looks workable for the US is to install an interim government. A setup that would be broad-based, comprising political cum warlords cum religious leaders, so as to avoid any criticism from Taliban especially. Most interesting would be to include ethnic representation, Pashtun from both sides, the Taliban and Afghan government side will have to form part of the group holding discussions. This way the US will be able to exercise all its options of materializing the perceived peace and settlement.

The hurdles in way are the reaction and response of political leaders like Karzai, Ghani, Abdullah, Dostum, Mohaqiq, Zia Masood and few others. The sitting parliament is likely to react with more hardened stance, as they have been electorally elected through parliamentary elections after delay of years. Taliban would agree to the interim arrangement as that would suit their long-standing mistrust over the sitting government and leadership. However, the groups within Taliban rank and file, though speculated, is also a problem which may cause delay of continuation of unrest.

The general populace response is predictable and that would be wait and see, as they are fed-up with uncertainties and are

desperately looking and expecting peace and security. Warlords are the most unpredictable faction, as they will be expecting share in interim and subsequently also. Anything short of their demands will create further instability and may stall the second step of the peace process, the Intra-Afghan Dialogue.

The situation is encouraging, in context to reduction in violence but is serious in context to political developments. Ghani and Abdullah's match over presidential result is adding to difficulties for the US and Zalmay will again be at shuttle diplomacy drive to resolve the ongoing political crisis, this time not with Taliban and Pakistan but within Afghanistan. Ghani is a US favorite and the US will try to make things go Ghani way, but making Abdullah agree is also not an easy task.

Afghanistan is not as calm as it appears, Taliban response to intra-Afghan is also to be seen in context to recent political developments. The interim set-up arrangements will also attract resistance. Other warring factions like Da'esh may also contribute to insecurity. The spoilers like India, who does not look at Taliban as an option even, may work towards their vested ends. Pakistan is likely to respond in following the US way of handling, as that suits Pakistan's option of peace with broad-based arrangements at Kabul.

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## **The Art of Diplomacy**

By Harris Ali Akakhail

US President's Special Representative for Afghan reconciliation, Zalmay Khalilzad had a prolonged visit of the Asian region, recently, and ended it up at a high note by having marathon sessions with the Taliban's political office

at Doha, Qatar. In all his previous and the latest trips, he has been registering strong observations by the Capitals he is visiting, including Kabul that to not abruptly exit Afghanistan. Although his boss (Donald Trump) wishes otherwise as he wants to pack up and be off the hook. Because in pure business terms, bills of involvement in Afghanistan have so far exceeded a one-trillion-dollar mark with exponential cost of American soldiers' lives. While in return, nothing is at hands as dividends.

While Zalmay Khalilzad was flying from Delhi to Beijing during his visit, the Taliban announced to end peace talks with him because he keeps asking regional powers to coerce them for a sitting with Kabul government for peace talks rather than negotiations with the US. The statement from Taliban was way too blunt in context of diplomacy, but it got its weightage and Zalmay Khalilzad relayed a message to see the Taliban's Qatar office team, while this was at his itinerary.

Initially, it was driven hard that the rendezvous shall be Islamabad, when Zalmay Khalilzad was at the final leg of his journey to Pakistan. However, the Taliban flatly refused to see him in Islamabad as Afghan social media, electronic media and parts of the Kabul government were already inculcating amenably that Pakistan is having a big say over the Taliban and are driving them until now. So, to dispel that advertising, the Taliban emphatically refused to see him and announced officially that there stands no chance of meeting him at Islamabad. Later, it was decided to sit at Doha without the presence of any other country's delegation, as was the case in previous meet ups when Pakistan, UAE and Saudi Arabia representatives also participated along the sidelines.

The talks at Doha had a clear head start as both sides had met in recent past, so the ice breaking phase along with exchanging goodwill gestures was already over. It was decided in principle that talks shall happen for three days and in course of lengthy sessions. But once they started, sessions

after sessions made sure to prolong the talks and stretch it to six days. Talks revolved around talibans demand for exit of foreign forces from Afghanistan and in return for US demand that afghan soil shall never be used against any country, particularly USA. Insiders say that focus of the talks was zoomed over the demands put up by two sides and how meticulously to craft a strategy for it and once a strategy for such demands is written down in the form of a covenant, who shall be the guarantors of it along with United Nations. With these two demands in focus topics of exchange of prisoners, erasing of names of higher Taliban hierarchy from U.N blacklist, Taliban peace talks with Kabul government and complete cease-fire also occupied much of the time.

The Taliban kept on pressing Zalmay Khalilzad that US and NATO forces pull out from Afghanistan in coming 6 months' time, while Zalmay was calling in for a phase-wise exit, saying within a year's time frame by minutely analyzing the security situation on ground. Consequently, Zalmay Khalilzad was asking the Taliban relentlessly that once US and NATO troops starts pulling out, the Taliban leadership must initiate peace talks with the Kabul government. At this very note the Taliban team did not pay a heed, ducked it and kept on avoiding addressing this thorny point of discussion. Taliban inelasticity in this domain was of the reason that they were still not empowered by the Rehbari Shura (Guidance Council) to decide over this subject. Resultantly, the glitch was the real bone of contention for not issuing a joint communiqué, as planned, at the end of six days talk. As Zalmay Khalilzad was off the opinion that if the joint communiqué was to say that US and NATO forces are to exit phase wise from Afghanistan within a year's time frame than it should also say that; simultaneously Afghan Taliban are going to begin peace talks with Kabul government.

The US team tried her best to end talks on a high note and take some concrete talking points out of it for her

President's upcoming state of union address. But eventually the reluctance of the Taliban to open talks with Kabul government fizzled out the desired results. The talks ended on a note that a future course of action is at sights, so let's take a pause from here and resume talks by 25<sup>th</sup> of February 2019. On almost the very last phases of talks, the Taliban announced to send over its old guard and deputy to their leader on political front, Mullah Ghani Baradar to head their Qatar political office and lead negotiations onwards. By doing so, in future exchanges with US negotiating team Qatar political office of the Taliban is now completely empowered and it does not have to look back at the guidance council for consultations. As was in case to open talks with Kabul government or not.

From the exchanges at Doha, it is evidently clear that US and the Taliban are jelling along well for the time being and one can envisage a picture-perfect scenario within a year's time frame, where Afghanistan is a no-go area for international terrorists and US / NATO forces exit makes Afghanistan look more sovereign than ever. But by calculating so, one grossly misses out that where the Afghanistan government stands in this envisioned scenario. The onus of burden lies at US to care for the Afghan government before it hammers out some sort of a settlement with the Taliban and leave. Accordingly, to cater for, Zalmay Khalilzad instead of flying straight to Washington after talks at Doha, flew towards Kabul. He sat with Afghan President Ashraf Ghani and did his best to allay his fears. Insiders did divulge from the meet that Ashraf is indeed under confident and jittery. But Zalmay Khalilzad assured Ghanni that US won't leave till talks between the Taliban and Kabul government start and get to a conclusive end.

All in all, the art of diplomacy is at his best and these talks holds too much of a learning for students of foreign policy as to how well one crafts his cards and plan them at

the right moment. Goals of both parties are set and finally it's dawned upon the world that US is in serious mood to exit Afghanistan. It shall also be kept in design that the ground reality is the factor that dictates and strengthens the interlocutors of talks at the table. As per that ground reality, it's evident that both the Taliban and US negotiating teams are testing each other nerves. For now, all is well but indeed if it ends well.

*The writer is an Afghan Expert*