**Afghan Peace A mirage?**

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The present methodology chosen to address Afghanistan’s woes is aimed to achieving a ‘quick fix’. This methodology is a mirage. A thoughtful analysis is required of the Afghan matrix to achieve peace mission. If most players are awarded limited or no share in the division of power, there will be a negative cascading impact leading to internal warfare and disenchantment.

Biden has a great deal to contend with. Afghanistan platter is half cooked and that is an understatement. Though decisions may take time to crystalize, how Biden’s government decides to approach the Afghan situation will determine the direction where the peace process will likely go [or not] in years to come.

The tunnel vision agreement on table with only Taliban will fail to achieve the purpose for the simple reason that too few in Afghanistan support it. Signing an agreement with Taliban alone in February 2020, did not stop Taliban from attacking civilian populations, as they understand this being the only way to draw attention to themselves for attaining a place in peace negotiations. This is exactly the strategy Taliban followed. Acts of violence committed has offered them greater leverage.

Biden needs to ensure inclusion of other stakeholders [internal structure] so more people have an interest in ensuring sustainable peace. The agreement itself does not address issues of conflict in ethnic divisions, nor corruption issues by the government functionaries.

Sustainable peace process includes understanding between armed ‘spoilers’ and the unarmed members of the civil society.

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Here rises an interesting question. Principled negotiations underline each stakeholders own interests. With one group armed, the other segment unarmed, the balance between both is strikingly unbalanced. How does the negotiation, if entered into between all internal stakeholders, ensure the armed group not to enforce their code of living on the unarmed group? The latter is obviously vulnerable. Wholesale compliance forming the base of an agreement is bound to fail, or at least, faces a high chance to fail.

The Taliban may be trying to agree upon a workable system, for Allied forces to withdraw, however, what the framework in a minus-allied forces set-up will look like has neither been discussed nor thought out. For example, what shall be the role of Islam and women right? Islam is one and same for all. The fallout comes when different interpretations stand to clash with each other. Will change of government lead to assuring empowerment to the Afghan women? Expecting an overnight changeover is a point of non-discussion. However, wearing a burqa and attaining education as a right are two different poles allowing a lot of space for dialogue. And it is not just the Taliban leaning towards rigidity. ‘Distressingly, not only the Taliban but important segments of Afghan society appear to be growing more conservative, embracing doctrinaire versions of sharia that call for reducing women’s rights and freedoms.’ [Jon R. Allen & Vanda Felbab-Brown in Brookings,edu September 2020]

Some in U.S promote an exit irrespective of the outcome in Afghanistan. This will be a huge error. It will be laying open grounds to be used by terrorist outfits of different shades and hue.

Can Taliban ensure, and deliver on their understanding with the U.S to contain all other outfits in not being a danger? This, in spite of best intentions, may not be possible. A failed agreement, or an indefinitely prolonged one can impact the U.S interests. It will cause frustration with the spoilers leading to acts of violence and endangering the reduced number of American forces in Afghanistan. It can lead to more Afghans displaced and on the run to save their lives from bloodshed in their homeland. The terrorist groups, can increase greater ground control. This will inevitably lead to more terrorist groups on the rise in Afghanistan. A failed and/or prolonged peace process will lead to a spillover in neighboring areas leading to regional instability. Russia, Iran, India, China and Pakistan have deep rooted interests in Afghanistan.

Biden needs to ensure therefore that talks on peace are not stalled. It may be a good idea to include a third party mediator in the talks between U.S and Taliban. On the other hand, U.S needs to engage in talks with non-armed group representatives also including a third party mediator.

Talks with nations with interests in Afghanistan is a third forum Biden needs to open. U.S is not on same page with some off the countries. Like Iran. Russia. However, so far as Afghanistan is concerned, U.S needs to garner their support if peace is to become a reality.

Biden may like to look into the possibility of extending support at different levels like economy, politics etc. This has to be a side agreement. The subtext often gets ignored. This will help deter the Taliban from making promises at this point so the allied forces leave without any intention of keeping them.

Corruption at government level needs to be addressed. President’s directly overlooking financial aspects, like collection of funds, allocation to public use, paying government employees, so on and so forth.

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The international community must urge ad support for a well-rounded Afghan public peace process. To use the input from the second tier of representatives [civil society] and how the international community with support to U.S can help achieve this.

There is no doubt that at the end of the day, there has to be a political settlement. Only ongoing continued engagement at multi levels taking place simultaneously can achieve this. Rigidity to any set of those involved will be self-defeating. Tough compromises have to be made to make this work.

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