

Intra-Afghan dialogue must succeed

Malik Muhammad Ashraf October 23, 2020

The hopes pinned on the intra-Afghan dialogue in regards to finding an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned reconciliation in that war ravaged country in the backdrop of the peace deal signed between the US and Taliban, remain elusive as ever and the situation is quintessential of the adage that there are many a slip 'twixt' the cup and the lip. The violence, incidents of terrorist acts and clashes between the Afghan security forces and Taliban which should have subsided to propel the peace process unfortunately continue unabated with a potential to destroy the peace process. The latest attacks by the Taliban in Helmand province under the control of Taliban for many years makes things more complicated.

No wonder then that the special envoy to Afghanistan for the Trump administration who has played a pivotal role in the deal between the US and Taliban had to warn that the continued unrest and violence could endanger the agreement reached between the two sides and push the entire region into yet more chaos and further fighting.

No saner mind and those who believe in peace can take an issue with what the US envoy has said. The deal between the US and Taliban has created a historic opportunity for peace in Afghanistan after decades of strife and conflict. But regrettably the things are not as simple as one would like them to be which requires a lot of foresight and commitment on the part of all Afghan stakeholders to ensure that the opportunity is not wasted. Surely there are many elements within and outside Afghanistan who do not wish peace returning to Afghanistan.

Prime Minister Imran Khan was right on the money when talking to the visiting chief of Hizb E Islami Gulbuddin Hikmatyar he said that spoilers within and outside Afghanistan were dead set against the Afghan peace negotiations for their vested interests. Wishing a successful outcome of the peace process he rightly reiterated that there was no military solution to the Afghan conflict and the success of the intra-Afghan dialogue was the only way forward. He also reaffirmed Pakistan's resolve to foster closer cooperation with Afghanistan.

It is pertinent to point out that Pakistan has made earnest efforts at the multilateral forums as well on the bilateral level to promote the process of reconciliation in Afghanistan and also played a pivotal role in facilitating the dialogue between US and Taliban which eventually led to the signing of the peace deal between them and also paved the way for intra-Afghan dialogue. Not only that, it also has been making persistent and unrelenting efforts to remove the mistrust of the Afghan leadership and orchestrating bonhomie between the two countries. It was a result of these efforts that Abdullah Abdullah the Chairman of the High Council for National Reconciliation of Afghanistan visited Pakistan recently.

Peace in Afghanistan is essential not only in the interest of Afghanistan and its people but also for Pakistan and the entire region, besides eliminating the curse of terrorism. Pakistan earnestly feels that peace in Afghanistan means peace within its own territory. Her efforts in facilitating dialogue between US and Taliban as well promoting Afghan-led and Afghan-owned process of

reconciliation are dictated by its own strategic interests as well as her commitment to regional peace and security which make them beyond reproach and mistrust.

Unfortunately at the moment intra-Afghan dialogue seems to go nowhere. The fighting that continues to rage in Afghanistan is inimical to the efforts for peace and could scuttle the ability of the Afghan government to keep order in the country and deal with the chaos which has marred peace since late seventies. The Taliban are doing very little to stick to the ceasefire that they had agreed to. Their record of keeping promises in the past also has been quite dismal. That makes things really difficult.

The Afghan interlocutors therefore need to understand that they and their people need peace for the prosperous and peaceful future of their posterity which would also be crucial for peace and tranquillity of the entire region with which interests of Afghanistan are inextricably linked. They must show flexibility and also be vigilant against the forces trying to thwart the peace process or creating hurdles in it. It is the people of Afghanistan who have suffered enormously during the last four decades and it will be them who would continue to pay the price of instability if the peace process fails to achieve the desired results. The Afghan leaders both in the government and Taliban owe it to their people to restore peace in the country. Therefore, the intra-Afghan dialogue must succeed in ending conflict in Afghanistan. History will never forgive them if they fritter away the opportunity and re-plunge the country into an unending internecine conflict.

Malik Muhammad Ashraf

The writer is a freelance columnist. He can be reached at ashpak10@gmail.com.