Towards peace ATTAULLAH WAZlRI AND SALONI KAPUR | 3/8/2020

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| THE US and the Afghan Taliban on Feb 29 signed a peace deal whereby the US will reduce its troop deployment to Afghanistan from 13,000 to 8,600, with the prospect of further drawdowns in the months to come.  It is hoped that the deal will pave the way for an intra-Afghan dialogue and ultimately a power-sharing agreement.  Following decades of conflict, the latest developments raise the question of how policymakers can ensure that the anticipated peace is sustainable.  The 1980s war between Soviet forces and the mujahideen, followed by civil war, Taliban rule and the war on terror, have caused immense suffering for Afghans, who have faced violence, displacement, loss and a breal(down of traditional social structures. After decades of trauma, it is important not to overlool( the emotional costs of war and their impact on political stability.Studiesfocusing on Partition,the Holocaust and the Palestinian conflict, as well as laboratory tests on animals, have suggested that trauma has intergenerational effects.  Other research indicates that collective trauma can operate at a societal level. To prevent the cycle of violence from persisting, Afghan leaders must recognise this emotional impact of the conflicts that have besieged Afghanistan since 1979 and provide avenuesfor healing. The provision of psychological facilities at the individual level and the establishment of a truth and reconciliation commission at the societal level are options that could be considered.  There is also a need for deradicalisation, disengagement and rehabilitation. Successful rehabilitation programmes in Pakistan and Saudi Arabia could be used as models to give fighters in Afghanistan access to counsellingand vocationaltraining.  Indeed, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and the US contributed to instability in Afghanistan through their training of the mujahideen since 1979. Equally, Russia played a part in the destabilisation of Afghanistan by sending soldiers into the country. As regional and global powers, these states have both the capacity and the moral responsibility to help Afghanistan getback onitsfeetby providingaid,expertise and training.  Pakistan, Russia, China and the US were involved in efforts to negotiate with the Taliban, much to the chagrin of India, which contributed to reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan. Authors such as William Dalrymple, Sumit Ganguly and Nicholas Howenstein have argued that the IndiaPakistan rivalry has spilled over into Afghanistan; this makes it imperative for a post-peace-deal Afghanistan to carefullybalance its relationships with India and Pakistan. Perhaps Afghanistan`s best chance of stability going forward lies in adopting the non-alignment policy that former king Mohammed Zahir Shah followed.  Similarly, Afghanistan`s own history provides a potential alternative to Western democracy, which has failed to stabilise Afghanistan. As Bruce Pilbeam explains, the democratic-peace thesis promotes `a specifically Western model of politics and economics around the globe that is insensitive to the values and cultures of other societies`. In Afghanistan, social and political traditions such as jirgas, as well as Islam, provide a rich local heritage that can be drawn upon to construct an institutional framework for peace that is based on the country`s own values and culture.  Although many Afghans welcomed democracy in 2001, violence has escalated in the past two decades. Nineteen years later, the US has signed a deal with the very Taliban it toppled, meaning we are back to square one as the US seeks to withdraw from Afghanistan by handing powerover to an administration that includes the Taliban whose overthrow was the reason for the invasion of Afghanistan in the first place.  In the wake of the stark failure of the democratic-peace thesis to bring peace within Afghanist an`sborders, it is worth investigating the alternatives offered by Islamic thought and the social and legal codes of Afghanistan`s ethnic groups for bringing lasting peace and stability to Afghanistan.  Drawing on religious and tribal law need not presage a return to the oppressive regime of the Taliban before 2001. There is a rich body of work by feminist and liberal Islamic scholars such as Amina Wadud, Fatima Mernissi, Fazlur Rahman, Muhammad Iqbal and Zeenat Shaukat Ali, which policymakers can draw upon to build a postmodern, open and inclusive Afghan society that remains rooted in the country`s historical, geographical, ethnic and religious context. While the signing of the US-Taliban agreement after a week of reduced violence offers reasonforhope,the real work to ensure that the deal leads to durable stability and security begins now. Attaullah Waziri is press aide to former Afghan president Hamid Karzai. Saloni Kapur is assistant professor, International Studies at FL AME University. |