

Current negotiations are excluding Afghans: Is it time for an Afghan national referendum?

By [The Afghan Youth Peace Volunteers](#)

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Theme: [US NATO War Agenda](#)

In-depth Report: [AFGHANISTAN](#)

The people of the world are questioning the lazy and fearful presumption

that a few human beings are better than the vast majority;

why should the 1% unjustly hoard

unequal Wealth, Power and Privilege?

The people of the world are awakening each morning, deciding,

“We breathe the air, eat our bread,

work and sleep in the same way,

so enough of the nauseating selfishness

that dictates the captivity of millions at the commands of a few.”

It is an awakening of our souls.

We are breaking free!

We have a voice.

If a war was being waged in the U.S. we would expect Americans to demand an end to the war and to have a say as to how it should end.

Likewise, the people of Afghanistan want to have a say in the negotiations to end the Afghan war.

After all, [in 2011, a record number of 3021 Afghan civilians lost their lives](#). Afghans who risk losing their lives should have a say in the negotiations, ironically engineered by [the very players who are killing them](#) (the UN reported that ‘anti-government elements’ - the Taliban and other insurgent groups - were responsible for 77 per cent of conflict-related deaths in 2011, while 14 per cent were caused by ‘pro-government forces’ - Afghan, U.S. and international security forces).

But, fatally, the 30 million people of Afghanistan have no say in these negotiations. They are not represented at the negotiation table.

The Powers have left them out, as is the routine, like the [token civil society presence at the Bonn II Conference](#).

But in 2011, we witnessed [the Protester Time Magazine Person of the Year](#) questioning and changing the inequitable status quo, and wanting to be at the negotiation tables.

This awakening on the streets of Tunisia, Egypt, Syria, Bahrain, Greece, Spain, Chile, Mexico and Wall Street is conscientious, and contagious.

The citizens of the world are now saying together, "We have a voice!" By far, they are non-violent protesters who are risking imprisonment and death for freedom from unsustainable socio-economic inequities, thus demonstrating that they are not the 'savage' 99% who must be disciplined and controlled by the 'virtuous' 1%.

That's why ordinary Afghans like the Afghan Youth Peace Volunteers are rooting for the ordinary Egyptian's clear stand against military rule.

["Down with military rule!"](#)

The Afghan Youth Peace Volunteers trust in the small, determined, truthful conversations they have through the [Global Days of Listening](#) program, Skype-to-cell phone conferences through which they have spoken to ordinary people from the United States, Canada, Sweden, Australia, Singapore, Cambodia, Vietnam, Germany, Italy, South Sudan, South Africa, Rwanda, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Egypt, Israel/Palestine, Denmark, Poland, Czech Republic, France, Mexico, Pakistan, Iraq, Iran, India, and others.

So, who says ordinary Afghans can't converse decently or negotiate for genuinely peaceful relations?

We see this work of deliberate listening as our conscience, our resistance, our statement, our solidarity, our shared pain, and our participation in a global awakening to 'Occupy!'. Through this action of listening to ordinary people, we call the world to ["Occupy the Afghan Airwaves!"](#)

In one of these conversations 2 months ago, the Afghan Youth Peace Volunteers spoke with Miss S., a young Egyptian activist. Miss S said, "Sorry we 'forgot' about Afghans in the busyness of our revolution. Like you, even till the day before the Egyptian revolution, I never thought that the day would arrive when ordinary Egyptians can overcome their utter hopelessness to stand together. But, our human hopelessness is also your human hopelessness, so we should stand with you! We face the same, root problems. "

We won't know what 30 million ordinary Afghans want until we ask them

Afghans are also feisty Protesters like the Egyptians, but are too divided and hemmed in by the combined violence of the U.S./NATO/Afghan government/Taliban/insurgent/regional war, a violence that is experientially deadly when they take to the streets, like when [12 Afghans civilians were killed and 80 wounded by German troops in Takhar province for protesting in the streets against a NATO night raid that killed 2 men and 2 women](#). Wouldn't ordinary Americans take to their streets if the [Voice of America reported NATO admitting to the killing of 8 children between the ages of 6 and 14](#) in their state, like the killing of 8 Afghan children in Kapisa Province while shepherding on the hills?

This will be the Afghan tragedy, that Afghans are too divided to reach a critical mass on the streets today, and so won't be heard.

The Afghan government, or the Taliban, or the U.S./NATO elite have not sought to hear Afghan grievances voiced in the privacy and relative safety of Afghan homes, especially from behind barbed-wired, bullet-and-bomb-proofed worlds.

Does the world know that most ordinary Afghans are so tired of wars, and that they are repulsed by all their killers, as humans are naturally prone to be, regardless of whether the gun-or-bomb-wielding killer is a Talib, an Afghan warlord or criminal, a Pakistani, an Arab, an American or an ISAF soldier from one of the 49-country NATO coalition countries?

Does anyone know the survival pain of having to choose the least bad of all the bad options? Yes, to some Afghans, the U.S./NATO coalition may be the least bad of the bad options, but that may be similar to choosing the Libyan revolutionary militia with their UN/NATO supporters over Gaddafi, or perhaps even choosing between one of the millionaire Republicans and President Obama.

Does the world know the life pressures for [35% of Afghans who live below the poverty line and a similar percentage unemployed](#), while they face [one of the most corrupt governments in the world](#)?

Does the world know that approximately 15 million destitute, [unseen Afghan girls and women fear a possible return of the Taliban past](#)?

Have you ever heard Afghan Engineer ZA from the Transitional Justice Group saying that these U.S.-Taliban negotiations are a game?

Have you ever heard Afghan media professional Mr. EA say that the people might as well not exist?

Have you ever heard Afghan university student Mr. SA remind us of the [imposter 'Taliban shop-keeper-negotiator from Quetta Pakistan'](#)?

Have you ever heard Afghan female activist Miss WA protest the culture of impunity fueled by Afghan war leaders, the Taliban AND the U.S./NATO elite?

To the Afghan Youth Peace Volunteers and many of their Afghan friends like Engineer Y and Miss WA, these current negotiations over 30 million Afghan lives excludes 30 million ordinary Afghans, and are held by the 1% Afghan and global elite primarily for their own interests.

In whose interests are the current U.S./Taliban negotiations being held?

The Obama administration wants to win the U.S. elections this year. Though the Afghan War isn't a key election issue, the Obama administration wants a 'victorious exit' while maintaining a long term presence.

The administration is banking on U.S. citizens to believe that the Afghan War is being fought against terrorists for U.S. security. Military and foreign policy elites may also be hoping for the continued lack of awareness and consequent apathy of U.S. citizens towards the pitfalls

and dangers of 'trading' with the Taliban for a U. S. 'victory and exit'. The U.S. seems willing to include some of the Taliban in some power-sharing deal in the post 2014 Afghan government.

But do Afghans agree with the intentions of these negotiations?

Long-term interests of the U.S. and Nato, in Afghanistan, including regional control particularly as regards China, Russia, Pakistan and Iran, can be reasonably secured by signing the [U.S. Afghanistan Strategic Partnership Agreement](#) to establish joint military bases in Afghanistan beyond 2014. On February 14th, 2012, Defence Secretary Leon Panetta said that [the U.S. and Afghan governments are weeks away from clinching this Agreement](#), which will allow them to [focus further on the use of Special elite forces](#) to conduct 'counter-terrorism' operations from these bases.

To paint 'victory' in the Afghan war for voter consumption, as they have painted 'victory' in Iraq, the U.S. military has insisted on 'progress', contrary to reports from the [International Red Cross of the worst security situation in 30 years](#), [the United Nations report of a 39% increase in violence](#), the [U.S. January 2011 National Intelligence Estimates of a 'very bleak picture of a stalemate'](#) and most recently [Lt Col Daniel L Davis's whistle-blowing confession](#) of the 'gulf' between the U.S. government's false claims to have progressed, militarily, in Afghanistan, and the 'bad to abysmal' ground tactical situation he observed through interviews with 250 soldiers in the Afghan killing fields.

Negotiating with the Taliban is a way to gain an honorable exit by suggesting reconciliatory civility, an effort at diplomacy, albeit a militarized diplomacy.

The U.S./German/Qatar-Taliban negotiators are adopting age-old force in their method, rather than genuine diplomacy. Hillary Clinton states in elementary school-style that the U.S. policy is to ['Fight... talk, build'](#). The Taliban of today also lay claim to a new ethos quite similar to 'Fight... talk, build'.

The Afghan Youth Peace Volunteers are irritated that today's governments are proud of this silly 'Rambo' image, promoting a global culture that dresses might as right.

'Fight! Talk! Build!' 'Fight! Talk! Build!'

'Build'??

The ex-Governor of Kabul, Dr. Zabiullah Mojaddidy, had quit his job in 2011 due to a lack of support from development ministries and the Presidential Palace with regards to his ideas for the reconstruction of Kabul City.

The Taliban realize that, since 1994, they have lost popular ground support for their violent actions. As a result, [new Taliban codes of conduct to avoid civilian killings](#) have been issued.

A 'direct' way for the Taliban to 'negotiate' for influence in the post 2014 Afghan power arrangements while bypassing the people is to deal with the U.S. government, whom they know calls all the shots in Afghanistan (they refuse to deal with the Karzai government whom they consider a puppet government) . Now, thanks to the U.S., the Taliban even have an office, a concept so unpopular in Afghanistan that they have to locate it in Qatar!

They are demanding the release of their fellow Taliban from Guantanamo, and are clear about their 'jihad', as when Qari Yousuf Ahmadi, a spokesman for the hard-line Islamist movement, said, ["Our struggle and jihad will continue until we have installed a complete Islamic government in Afghanistan, regardless of the year 2014 or 2015 when the foreign troops say they will leave Afghanistan."](#)

[The Taliban will oppose the U.S. Strategic Partnership Agreement.](#) One of their consistent demands, an ultimatum to which America is not about to accede, is that all foreign troops leave Afghanistan.

So, while analysts scrutinize these U.S. and Taliban interests, who raises any debate about the interests of the majority of people living in Afghanistan's villages and cities?

Negotiators are not acting in the interests of ordinary Afghan and U.S. people

In stark 'un-democracy', the current negotiations are working against the interests of ordinary Afghans.

As in Iraq, Libya and now Syria, the U.S. government with their NATO partners appear careless about [a potential Afghan civil war breaking out](#). [The ex-UN Envoy to Afghanistan Kai Eide recently warned of a potential civil war](#) if negative trends are not reversed. Kai Eide noted that Dr. Sima Simar, the Director of the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission, had written to him in late 2010 to say that 'the Afghan people are losing hope'.

What is even more insidious is the *fuelling of* civil conflict and local warlordism with the American military paying and arming the opportunistic [Afghan Local Police](#) (local Afghan armed militia). This is creating multiple, uncontrollable U.S.-weapon-supported warlords who may fire much more randomly at U.S./NATO soldiers and Afghan citizens than the formal [Afghan security forces who have killed 70 and wounded 110 U.S./NATO soldiers since May 2007](#).

The current negotiations may well be remembered as responsible for the armed mayhem that may break out among the conflicting players after 2014, as is happening in Iraq today after years of U.S. military design.

Importantly, making deals to possibly persuade some elements of the Taliban to 'close an eye' to the establishment of joint military bases in Afghanistan would amount to fanning the fire of indiscriminate anti-Americanism that is sweeping across Pakistan and regional countries, and make the world a much less secure place for ordinary U.S. people.

The Afghan media professional Mr. EA said, "Trading power with the Taliban may break the back of even those Afghans who 'support' the U.S. presence in Afghanistan, forcing Afghans to conclude that the U.S. government is a traitor of Afghans, betraying them to the Taliban for their own interests."

Yes, many Afghans wish to reconcile with the 'Taliban', but they desire a way of negotiations very different from the 'politicized negotiations' being imposed on them. The Afghan Youth Peace Volunteers wish for negotiations that 'talk and build **without** fighting', negotiations based on restorative justice, not vengeance.

The negotiations that Afghan mothers would pray for are negotiations that would end the war and place the human needs of their families first. They would not want to have their

killers placed in power and certainly not at the expense of bread or justice.

The U.S. negotiators have neglected the basic bread and butter needs of Afghan and U.S. people so much that during a week when the U.S. spent \$2 billion dollars on the Afghan war, Afghan children froze to death in an internally displaced persons camp. A New York Times article asked, “ ‘After 10 years of a large international presence...and at least \$3.5 billion of humanitarian aid and \$58 billion of development assistance, [how could children be dying of something as predictable — and manageable — as the cold?](#)’ ” . Similarly, they’re not spending as much blood and treasure on the [more than 40 million Americans who are living below the poverty line.](#)

But the Obama administration may be underestimating the Occupy movement’s awakening influence on the U.S. electorate in the face of Wall-Street-style capitalism, amidst global economic crises and austerity measures. Our hope is that ordinary U.S. citizens both inside and outside of the Occupy movement will protest these inequalities heaped on them while expensive and un-examined ‘Fight, talk, build’ U.S. wars are fought across the world.

Will the UN, or anyone, find out what the people’s interests are? A call for an Afghan national referendum

The new UN Envoy to Afghanistan, Slovakian Jan Kubis, said, “Any effort to end the conflict in the country can succeed only if it is based on [wide participation, on representative participation](#), not only of political forces but eventually of civil society.”

Our concern is that Jan Kubis speaks of civil society as a voice that should be consulted ‘eventually’, that is at some later time, perhaps even when all deals have already been made.

We fully agree with Mr Jan Kubis that the people should have wide, representative participation, but we think that in a democracy, that should come first, not ‘eventually’.

And where in all these negotiations are the Afghan women?

Oxfam warned about the risk of [the Afghan government sacrificing women’s rights in order to secure a political deal with the Taliban](#) and other armed opposition groups. Earlier, in March 2011, a USAID senior official had said that [‘Gender issues are going to have to take a back seat to other priorities’](#), including a desire at the top levels of the Obama administration to triage the war and focus on the overriding goal of ending the conflict.

To genuinely resolve this global dilemma in Afghanistan in the democratic interests of ordinary Afghans, we suggest **an urgent Afghan national referendum on the current negotiations over the future of Afghanistan**, conducted by the United Nations Mission to Afghanistan, as according to the stated wish of UN Envoy to Afghanistan Jan Kubis.

The **Afghan national referendum** would raise important questions like whether ordinary Afghans want negotiations to bring Taliban leaders into positions of power.

This may augment other debates and enquiries.

Worried about the claims of whistleblower Lt Daniel L Davis , [Rep. Frank Wolf, R-Va., is urging Defense Secretary Leon Panetta to create an independent study group to review U.S. strategy in the sandbox.](#)

Likewise, in the international mess of forceful threats and politicking in Egypt, Libya, Syria, Bahrain, Iraq and many other countries, we suggest a Global Commission to examine using war as a political method. Such a commission could focus on Afghanistan as a case study that tragically demonstrates the futility of the 10 year war in Afghanistan, so costly in human lives and resources, only to end up with negotiations that exclude the interests of ordinary Afghan and U.S. people.

The Afghan Youth Peace Volunteers are a grassroots group of multi-ethnic, ordinary Afghans working towards non-military solutions for Afghanistan, based on non-violence, unity, equality and self-reliance. <http://ourjourneytosmile.com> and <http://globaldaysoflistening.org>

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