

The US-Taliban Talks Are “Renewing” the US Occupation of Afghanistan

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Reporting from Kabul: *The US is spearheading a “peace negotiation” campaign with Taliban since weeks in Qatar’s capital city, Doha. The US special representative on Afghanistan Reconciliation, **Zalmay Khalilzad**, has been spelling out the details of conclave through his twitter account. There is no Afghan or international journalist or correspondent allowed on the scene to report on actual minutes of the meeting that allegedly took place.*

This “peace project” has been dragging on for weeks. There is no guarantee that the US-Taliban talks will end in a desired result for people of Afghanistan. It is possible that months-long talks will land in trouble due to fundamental disagreements. .

History tells us that such symbolic talks have tricked us by deceitful rhetoric into another war or crisis. We have only heard in media that several rounds of negotiations have been staged so far, but we haven’t witnessed any practical development or actual scenes, as did US warplanes strike bare deserts for years in its war on ISIS in Syria while media would report conversely. The talks are tantamount to private meetings attended by US and Taliban, none of which belongs in Afghanistan, nor any of them represent the true concerns of the Afghan people.

On March 12, the bilateral talks finished without any breakthrough for an Afghan peace deal. The minutiae development in the agreement included Taliban’s severing of ties with Al Qaeda and ISIS, which is not a big deal for observers. The other items of the agenda are the withdrawal of US forces as well as preventing Afghan soil from being used against others.

For now, these developments could be seen as a last resort option for US policymakers to take an urgent turn in relation to their foreign policy war stance formulated in the immediate wake of 9/11, leading to the illegal invasion of Afghanistan on October 7, 2001.

Taking account of this fact, peace is will not be easy to achieve. We are now entering into the third week of the bogus peace dialogue between the US and Taliban without any substantive achievements. It is more like a US propaganda machine that has raised “unfounded hopes” among Afghans. It is a display of efforts to the people of America that we haven’t lost the war to the Taliban.

Amid peace talks, as a close observer, I can notice a rise of optimism and favoritism in relation to the US among many Afghans who have been misled and who fail to understand the unspoken facts regarding the US-NATO war. In this regard, propaganda is paying off. It’s bringing “a new life” to the US occupation of Afghanistan.

What the weary people of Afghanistan want as an outcome of the overhyped Doha talks is a meaningful and permanent truce as well as the establishment of peace to bring an end to daily casualties occurring across the country.

The Western media tend to focus on selected issues pertaining to the US-Taliban meetings, e.g. The US proposal of a five-year troop withdrawal schedule; whereas the Taliban negotiators insist upon a total withdrawal within a one year period.

Even if the US troop withdrawal takes effect, it will never be an all-out plan. The Trump Administration believes, that more US forces on the ground means a larger military budget that needs to be slashed, as it did with reversal of many domestic plans to cut huge costs. The US will possibly bring down the number of soldiers from 15,000 to 8,000 that would be enough to maintain operations in nine mega bases throughout Afghanistan and serve as mouth-shutting response to critics.

In the same way, President Trump has ordered to slash the number of US security forces at the US Embassy in Kabul that amounts to 1,400 and replace them with trained and loyal Afghan forces, according to the Afghan media. This scheme will apply in other areas including military bases that will help cut millions of dollars for Washington.

This so-called cost reduction policy was dictated during the Trump Administration, and it doesn't necessarily mean the withdrawal of US forces, nor the abandonment of US military presence. When addressing US servicemen in Iraq, Trump said that we can't serve as International Police and "defend these countries", unless they pay for the costs. He pointed out:

"Our troops are deployed in countries that you might not know their names, isn't it ridiculous"

The Doha-based negotiations was highlighted when US **Secretary of State Mike Pompeo** said that he hopes there is sufficient progress in deliberations for him to travel in the next couple of weeks to so to speak "move it further". Of course, his comments were meant to throw weight behind it. His comments contradict his early remarks that called the Taliban a "terrorist group". In his speech to Future Farmers of America, he said:

"I have a team on the ground right now trying to negotiate with the Taliban terrorists in Afghanistan, trying to find a way to achieve an Afghanistan that's not at war, that's not engaged in violence, that doesn't present a threat to the United States of America"

This US-led campaign is also aimed at confusing both the international and national leaders involved in some way in Afghanistan's war. The US has to work in such a way as to retain EU support for the war in Afghanistan, because they have too grown fed up with the issue of the Taliban, with regard to underlying costs of deploying their troops in Afghanistan.

The US-Europe tensions, China and US competition, India-Pakistan rivalry, Iran-US hostility, Israel-Iran enmity, Saudi-led promotion of Wahhabism, US-Russia arms race, and many more conflicts have a concrete bearing on Afghanistan which constitutes a geopolitical hub in central Asia.

Afghanistan's death toll has reached a record level as media reports 100 to 200 dead every week. Former Afghan security advisor **Hanif Atmar** who is running for president in 2019 said in a gathering held on "8 March" in Kabul that almost 51,000 Afghans have been killed and 98,000 injured only in the last five years, according to Voice of America Dari. This figure stands in sharp contrast to UNAMA's biannual report on Afghan casualties that usually release manipulated statistics on death toll.

Iran and Russia have also armed their own brand of militants inside Afghanistan in the border regions with Central Asian countries.

Washington is now working to dissolve the Taliban group into the power base of Afghanistan, on the one hand, to demonstrate that it has won the Afghan war not by military means but through diplomatic channels, and on the other hand, it seeks to integrate the militant group into its puppet government in Afghanistan to protect its strategic interests and jointly call for another war against ISIS or Al-Qaeda.

The Taliban's project has long been outdated as the group's size and strength, by comparison, has questioned the US power in the face of Americans and rest of the world.

In 2007, United States Geological Service (USGS) survey discovered nearly \$1 trillion in mineral deposits in Afghanistan, according to mining.com. Five years ago, it was found that this poor country has \$3 trillion worth of underground deposits including oil and gas, iron ore, gold, copper and lithium. The USGS used high-tech radiation in mapping and collecting information about exact sites of reserves. It used hyper-spectral imaging technology and shared the gathered data with mine firms.

Evidence reveals that the UK was cognizant of these reserves and their value ten years ago, according to the Afghan media (Afghan Paper), but refrained from disclosing any information to the public, which came to surface some years ago when the UK was at odds with the US over these minerals situated mainly in southern Afghan province of Helmand, where US later stationed thousands of its troops in addition to nearly 10,000 British troops already deployed in only one province that was not wholly in war.

According to recent data, there are almost 1,400 registered mines in Afghanistan, while the US has discovered more than twice that number. Despite this wealth of mineral resources, the impoverished people of Afghanistan have not seen the potential proceeds of billions of dollars worth of minerals, which could contribute the economic development of key sectors of the economy, resulting in tangible changes in the country's living standards.

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