

Policy Brief October 2018

Good Governance in Peace Negotiations

About APPRO:

Afghanistan Public Policy Research Organization (APPRO) is an independent social research organization with a mandate to promote social and policy learning to benefit development and reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan and other less developed countries through conducting social scientific research, monitoring and evaluation, and training and mentoring. APPRO is registered with the Ministry of Economy in Afghanistan as a non-profit, non-government organization and headquartered in Kabul, Afghanistan with five regional offices. For more information, see: www.appro.org.af

APPRO is the founding member of APPRO-Europe, a network association for disseminating applied research findings from conflict environments, conducting training, and carrying out evaluations. For more information, see: www.appro-europe.net

APPRO also acts as the Secretariat for the National Advocacy Committee for Public Policy, comprising sub-committees on Education, Food Security, Access to Justice, Anti-corruption, NAP 1325 and Access to Health. For more information, see: www.nac-pp.net

During *Eid al-Fitr*, June 16-18, 2018, a ceasefire was declared by the Government of Afghanistan and the Taliban, resulting in large numbers of Taliban flowing into major cities of Afghanistan, to be greeted by civilians, some politicians, and the police and army personnel. The three-day ceasefire, and the low-key but significant public response to the multi-sited peace movement that began in late March 2018, have provided new hope for peace and opportunities for multi-stakeholder dialogue on what a negotiated peace with the Taliban should entail.

The starting point in the process that has led to the current discussions on a negotiated peace is, according to many, the announcement in February 2018 by President Ghani that offered recognition of the Taliban as a legitimate political group, proposed a ceasefire and a release of prisoners, promised new elections involving the militants, and suggested a constitutional review as some of the key elements of the new peace process. Significantly, the President stated: “We are making this offer without preconditions in order to lead to a peace agreement,” a statement that was welcomed by UNAMA, saying that it “strongly supports the vision for peace through intra-Afghan dialogue”. In response, the Taliban offered to begin talks with the United States, but not the Government of Afghanistan.(1)

On March 26, 2018, a sit-in for peace was initiated by a group of citizens in Lashkargah, Helmand province, in response to a suicide attack on a crowd

leaving a wrestling event at the stadium two days prior, killing and injuring tens of civilians.

The start of the peace march to Kabul from Helmand in late March 2018 and the three-day ceasefire in June 2018, in the aftermath of President Ghani’s peace talk offering, are seen by many as strong indications of openness among the sides of the conflict to a dialogue on peace. There are differing degrees of approval from government officials and the Taliban about the terms and prospects of peace. There is also a charged wave of optimism about peace, as well as strong expressions of concern about the terms of a negotiated peace – at least in some segments of the population, particularly among minorities.

This current “ripeness” for peace negotiations is, arguably, a defining characteristic of what has come to be known as a “mutually hurting stalemate” in conflict environments, a situation where the sides sustain fighting each other in protracted and sporadic battle but with no prospect of either side prevailing. Such a stalemate is also characterized by a high number of civilian deaths and casualties either as collateral in bombing and fighting raids by the government and international security forces or soft targets for terrorist attacks to cause mayhem, ethnic and religious divide, and general disorder and dissatisfaction of the populace about the current conditions as a means to undermine the government.

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In mutually hurting stalemates, two conditions are necessary for the sides of a conflict to negotiate peace. First is the persistence of a deadlock in a long conflict that cannot be overcome by either side escalating the conflict – a condition that holds true for Afghanistan. Second is the existence or possibility of a mutually perceived way out with both sides seeing that a negotiated solution is possible and that a framework, satisfactory to both parties, can be found or established to begin dialogue for peace – a condition that has yet to be met as there have been no indications that such a framework is being developed.(2)

On July 19, 2018, Afghanistan Public Policy Research Organization (APPRO) participated, with other civil society organizations, in the NATO-organized "Peace and Reconciliation Forum". As a follow-up to this initiative, APPRO released a policy brief, emphasizing the importance of asking a series of key questions to define the framework for peace, rather than compiling a list of demands that should be met through a peace settlement. The brief underlined the importance of agreement by all parties as to the relevant actors for a negotiated peace, the factors bearing influence on the actors, and the mechanisms through which multiple actors / stakeholders would engage to reach a peace settlement.(3)

On September 5, 2018, APPRO organized a one-day Open Forum in Kabul with panel-led discussions on Peace Negotiations, Elections, Gender, and Corruption. At the opening of the session, one of the panelists summed up the current conditions of peace negotiation for Afghanistan as follows:

There are several actors with their distinct perceptions and expectations of peace negotiations in Afghanistan: women, minorities, and liberals who want peace but they don't want it to cost their individual

freedoms, democracy and pluralism in the country; the ethno-nationalists who want peace but don't want it to cost their ethnic superiority in the country; the Taliban who want peace but don't want to lose power and control over the territory they have now; and the regional countries that don't want peace in Afghanistan if it is against their national interests.

During the panel-led discussion, a number of concerns were raised about the manner in which the current negotiations for peace were being conducted. Below is a summary of the main recommendations based on the points raised during the discussion.

Recommendation 1: Peace negotiations must not be held behind closed door, must be inclusive and accommodate active and engaged participation of women and ethnic and religious minorities.

Recommendation 2: Peace negotiations need a clearly defined framework with provisions based on inclusion, transparency and accountability as the key principles of good governance.

Recommendation 3: Civil society and its organizations must advocate and lobby for the presence and active and engaged participation by women and minorities in peace negotiations.

Recommendation 4: The Government of Afghanistan and its international allies must include provisions in the framework for peace to receive and act on input provided by civil society and its many organizations.

Recommendation 5: The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the National Security Council, which have taken a lead in regional and international efforts on negotiating peace, must work more closely and transparently with the High Peace Council.

(2) For additional details on ripeness and mutually hurting stalemates, see, for example: Zartman, I.W. (2000: 291). "Ripeness: The hurting stalemate and beyond", in *Conflict resolution after the Cold War*, Stern, P.C. and D. Druckman (eds.), 225–50. (Washington, DC: National Academy Press).

(3) For more information, see: <http://appro.org.af/on-mutually-hurting-stalemates-peace-building-actors-factors-and-mechanisms/>

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Recommendation 6: As well as being present in peace negotiations, specific provisions must be made, by the Government of Afghanistan and the United States Government, to ensure active and engaged participation of women and minorities throughout the process.

Recommendation 7: As early as possible in the negotiation process, the terms of a peace agreement must include provisions for transitional justice, protection of minority rights, and mechanisms to address the enmity between the local populations and the Taliban and the local population and local powerholders that have, by and large, been committing crimes with impunity.

Recommendation 8: For the peace agreement to be sustainable, it must incorporate provisions for future governance reform with explicit goals and objectives on such issues as equitable justice and fundamental rights.

Recommendation 9: A negotiated peace, likely to be reached at the national level, must include clear details on how a broad negotiated peace at the national level would translate into peace at the local grassroots level. Mechanisms will be

needed to ensure collaboration between subnational government and non-government organizations on implementing peace.

Recommendation 10: A peace agreement negotiated based on good governance principles of inclusiveness, transparency and accountability will need to be supported by a broad spectrum of governments supporting Afghanistan and have governance reform benchmarks and indicators to allow for monitoring progress.

Recommendation 11: A national campaign to increase awareness of, and support for, a negotiated peace must precede the peace agreement. Government, civil society organizations, media and religious and academic institutions must lead this effort.

Recommendation 12: Deliberations about peace must go beyond a binary vision of peace or conflict between the government and the Taliban and address decades-long socio-ethnic, linguistic and religious roots of conflict and violence, social and psychological trauma within the population, and victims' expectations and concerns.