

Achieving Peace in Afghanistan

Two States; One Homeland

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Despite the United States' withdrawal from Afghanistan, and ending its longest war ever, conflict in Afghanistan continues. However, the new conflict is between the Taliban and its Afghani adversaries, particularly the forces of the Islamic State. Therefore, the Afghani people and the Taliban need to see peace prevail in their country before conflict widens and all parties lose control of it. And though the US had helped the Afghani people make noticeable progress in education, women's rights, and economic conditions, the US failed miserably to build a functioning government in Afghanistan. In addition, ending American engagement in Afghanistan according to the 2020 peace agreement has created a chaotic situation that threatens the modest progress which the Afghani people have accomplished over the last 20 years.

Now that the US is out of Afghanistan, it has no military power to influence the course of the Afghani internal conflict. The only leverage that the US and its western allies have today is financial aid and possibly expertise to help the Afghani people build their national institutions and train them how to manage them properly. So, without being generous in providing financial aid, the West will lose Afghanistan and get in return a continuous stream of refugees that deepens conflict at home and raises the level of racism in both Europe and America.

For the Taliban to succeed in pacifying the moderate Afghani forces, it has to initiate a constructive dialogue with all ethnic and religious groups in Afghanistan and demonstrate a sincere desire to work with everyone to achieve peace while being open-minded to all new ideas. For every participant in the Afghani peace process to feel secure and make the necessary compromises, the West should help them by offering as many incentives as possible. If peace were to be achieved in Afghanistan, the peace process has to be initiated by the Taliban themselves, and this can come only if the West provides enough economic and political support to enable the Taliban to pacify most of the Afghani people.

In the absence of peace, civil war will most likely resume, causing widespread violence, misery, and insecurity that deepen the current refugee crisis, leading millions of people to flee Afghanistan to neighboring countries and Europe. If this were to happen, President Biden could find himself spending the last two years of his presidency defending his decision to pull out of Afghanistan and justify failure. Ideological forces, on the right and left, tend to make compromises when they feel weak; but go for the maximum they believe in when they feel strong, regardless of the human and material cost. The need today is for rationality to prevail to avoid destruction and rebuild human relations across political, cultural, and ideological lines.

I believe that the chances of reaching a peaceful settlement acceptable to all parties are weak but possible. However, a constructive and workable political settlement has to be based on an unconventional formula; something never tried in the region. This is why I suggest creating two states in Afghanistan living side by side in peace while sharing the entire country. In the 1990s I developed the Shared Homeland model to deal with ethnic conflicts like the Palestinian, Cyprus, and Kashmir conflicts. (Mohamed Rabie; Conflict Resolution and Ethnicity, Praeger, 1994). For the sake of analysis, let us call the intended states the West and East Afghani states or the North and South Afghani states, depending on the outcome of negotiations.

According to the shared homeland model, the country will be divided into two states taking into consideration the current position of each party. The Taliban state will have its legal, educational, social, cultural, political, and economic systems. Likewise, the other state will have its legal, social, educational, cultural, political, and economic systems. Each Afghani will have the right to choose his/ her identity at the time of creating the two states. However, there will be no borders between the two states, giving the Afghani people the freedom to move from one state to the other to live, visit, study, and do business. The only restriction is that no person who belongs to one state is allowed to participate in the elections of the other state. Both states will have one army, but two separate police forces.

To facilitate the implementation of such an arrangement while giving each party enough incentives to accept it, the West needs to do the following:

1. Guarantee international recognition for each state and membership in the UN and all organizations and institutions affiliated with it.
2. Provide each state with \$3 billion annually for 15 years to build its state institutions, develop the national economy, train workers and create jobs for the unemployed, upgrade and expand schools and universities, and build housing for the poor. It is further suggested that the annual aid package be divided between the US (\$2 billion), and the European Union (\$1 billion).
3. Avoid involvement in Afghani internal affairs and rely on civil society organizations to help control corruption, develop plans and programs to build a fully integrated economy, and coordinate the implementation of all plans across Afghanistan.
4. The two Afghani states would form joint committees to coordinate security and economic and investment matters.

Since it is estimated that the US has spent on the Afghan War \$2.26 trillion over the last 20 years; an average of \$113 billion a year, the suggested \$3 billion annual aid package would be about 2.6% of what the US spent annually. After 15 years, a more educated generation will have grown up under the new systems of governance to lead and manage changed circumstances and observe global rules of state conduct at home and abroad.

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