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America's pursuit of a peace accord that won't offer peace

[World \(/category/world\)](/category/world)
[C Christine Fair](https://www.firstpost.com/author/c-christine-fair) (https://www.firstpost.com/author/c-christine-fair)
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For nine years, Washington has pursued talks with the Afghan Taliban to end a war that began on October 7, 2001. This week, Zalmay Khalilzad, Donald Trump's special envoy for ending the war, told *The New York Times* that after six days of talks in Qatar, American negotiators and Taliban agreed on "a draft of the framework" for some future accord.

Washington is considering a complete withdrawal of US-led forces in exchange for the Taliban committing to direct talks with Afghan government for a ceasefire. *The New York Times* anointed the framework as the "biggest tangible step towards ending a war that has cost tens of thousands of lives and profoundly changed American foreign policy". It seems as if many observers, in rank cupidity, are mistaking a framework for a US exit with a deal to bring to peace in Afghanistan while believing the Taliban can or will fulfil their promises.

According to Khalilzad, the Taliban committed to preventing Afghanistan from being a base for terrorists. A Taliban official, speaking on the condition of anonymity, told the BBC that both sides agreed to form separate working groups on: a time frame for the withdrawal of US-led forces and a commitment from the Taliban to prevent al Qaeda from using Afghanistan as a base.

While Washington wants the Taliban to negotiate a ceasefire with the Afghan government directly, they are disinclined to do so because they dismiss the government as an American puppet. The afore-noted Taliban official said they are conferring with their leadership the demand to negotiate a ceasefire with Kabul. He, however, did not believe the deal would depend on either direct negotiations or the ceasefire.



Zalmay Khalilzad at the Afghan peace talks. Twitter @US4AfghanPeace

It's difficult to tell where American credulity ends and mendacity begins. Washington knows it lacks the will to muster a military victory though the US armed forces have sustained the canard that Trump's "policy" is producing battlefield wins. Washington has tried to convince the Taliban that they cannot win either. This is absurd and the Taliban, as well as their Pakistani patrons, know it.

The Taliban need not govern or defeat the Afghan and American-led forces. They merely need to preclude the Afghan government from exercising hegemony of violence.

Wizened observers know the Taliban have the upper hand for several reasons: they are going nowhere, they know the Americans want out at any cost, and the stakes in Afghanistan for their Pakistani *dullahs* are high as Kabul has forged relations with its near and far neighbours, including India, to diminish Islamabad's coercive power.

Afghan President Ashraf Ghani, responding to the news from Khalilzad, said, "We are committed to ensuring peace...But there are values which are non-negotiable, for example national unity, national sovereignty, territorial integrity, a powerful and competent central government basic rights of the citizens of the country."

In contrast, the Taliban have insisted upon an interim power-sharing agreement without contesting elections, instituting Islamic law, dispensing with much of the constitution and reversing gains in women's rights.

The Americans seem more than willing to sell out the Afghans, despite the enormous loss of life and expenditures. Arm-chair Afghan analysts ridiculed sceptics, arguing that a commitment to keep al Qaeda from operating in Afghanistan has never been on the table.

While this is technically true, it is not that it could not have been. After the 9/11 attacks, President Pervez Musharraf dispatched his ISI chief, Lt Gen Mahmud Ahmed, to persuade the Taliban to give up Osama bin Laden to a Muslim country. However, Ahmed told the Taliban to hold out. Musharraf sacked him and the Americans invaded Afghanistan on October 7. While we will never know if a different outcome could have been secured with another negotiator, we know that the Americans were never committed to resourcing this war for an ensemble of reasons that changed over time.

Defeat, most importantly, was a foregone conclusion when Washington went to war with Pakistan as its key partner. It was like hiring an arsonist to put out the fires he continually starts. Pakistan was always the centre of gravity of this conflict yet the Americans could never find a way of countenancing this reality.

With the Americans dead set to withdraw, it's clear that Washington, once again, will serve up Afghanistan to Pakistan on a platter. With the Afghan security forces struggling and American military and financial support likely to evaporate, the government faces a serious challenge. And this is exactly the opportunity Pakistan has been waiting for.

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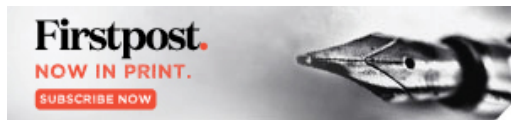


Saleem Bikanerwala

Dr. Fair, this is a sad state of affairs. You have stopped short of saying what should the US be doing in this case? What is the solution for having peace in Afghanistan but not at the expense of the regressive policies that the Taliban is sure to impose?

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