

## War and peace: on Kabul's peace proposal with the Taliban

Afghan President [Ashraf Ghani's offer of talks with the Taliban](#) is the most comprehensive peace proposal to have come from Kabul since the U.S.-led invasion of Afghanistan in 2001. Speaking at the Kabul Process, a two-day security conference in the city with more than 20 countries including India represented, Mr. Ghani promised to recognise the Taliban as a political party, called for confidence-building measures and asked them to recognise the Kabul regime and the constitution. The Taliban was told to open an office in Kabul; passports and freedom of travel were offered to those involved in negotiations. This is not the first official attempt to make peace with the Taliban. In July 2015, Taliban and Afghan government representatives held talks in Pakistan. But the talks collapsed when it emerged that Taliban leader Mullah Omar had died two years earlier. Ever since, the Taliban has stepped up its violent campaign, killing thousands. This time the difference is that the Afghan government has come up with a seven-point plan of engagement with the Taliban and invited the group for talks without preconditions: the previous formulation was that the Taliban should choose between war and peace. Mr. Ghani has not set any time limit for the Taliban to respond. He has said the views and proposals of the Taliban would be considered, thereby lobbing the ball into the Taliban's court.

Pakistan welcomes Ghani's peace offer to Taliban

Mr. Ghani's offer comes a month after U.S. President Donald Trump ruled out talks with the Taliban. The Trump administration has also [committed more troops to Afghanistan](#). But given how much Kabul relies on the U.S. for support, it is unlikely that Mr. Ghani would have made such a significant offer to the Taliban without U.S. consent. The reason could be desperation. After more than 16 years of war, the Afghan government is helplessly watching the Taliban spread its influence across rural areas. In the east, the Islamic State has gained ground. Over the years the U.S. had tried tactics including a troops surge, putting pressure on Pakistan to use its leverage with the Taliban and promoting secret talks. But nothing worked, and the Taliban has established a strong presence in almost two-thirds of Afghanistan, and is constantly on the offensive. It has shown a capacity to strike at the most fortified positions in Kabul, but knows it cannot capture the city as long as the Americans remain committed to the government's security. Therefore, both sides have an incentive to break the stalemate and try direct negotiations for a way out. If the Taliban accepts Mr. Ghani's proposal, that could set the stage for a constructive engagement between the militants and the government, and provide hope for some much-needed relief to the war-hit Afghan people.

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