

## RETURN TO CHAOS IN AFGHANISTAN?

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: Effect of policies and politics of developed & developing countries on India's interests

“The Doha deal is likely to provide a face-saving exit for the U.S. and an electoral trump card for U.S. President Donald Trump.” Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, the leader of the Taliban delegation, and Zalmay Khalilzad, U.S. envoy for peace in Afghanistan, in Doha on February 29. REUTERS

The [U.S.-Taliban deal in Doha](#) will probably lead to another civil war in Afghanistan, instead of a lasting peace. The deal should have followed an intra-Afghan dialogue between President Ashraf Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah. Instead, it expects that an intra-Afghan dialogue will follow, leading to peace and stability. An intra-Afghan dialogue has been elusive since the establishment of the Afghan High Peace Council in 2010 by then President Hamid Karzai.

**Also listen:** [Breaking down the U.S-Taliban peace deal | The Hindu In Focus Podcast](#)

At the most, the [Doha deal](#) is likely to provide a face-saving exit for the U.S. and an electoral trump card for U.S. President Donald Trump. It will also legitimise the Taliban as a political actor in Afghanistan.

President Trump desperately wanted to seal this deal. His primary objective is not to ensure stability in Afghanistan by making the Taliban a stakeholder in any future political framework; instead, it is domestic. Mr. Trump wants to be seen as the deal-maker who brought American troops back home and ended the longest U.S. war. And he wants this before the U.S. presidential election.

The second objective of the U.S. is a face-saving exit from Afghanistan. The focus of the deal is on the Taliban severing its links with other international terror groups such as al-Qaeda and the Islamic State (IS). Mr. Trump can sell the deal to his domestic audience by stating that American troops can return home as the Taliban will not support any other international terrorist groups in Afghanistan. After all, the U.S. troops entered Afghanistan to neutralise al-Qaeda and Osama bin Laden after 9/11.

Undoubtedly, the biggest beneficiary of the Doha deal is the Taliban. First, the deal legitimises the Taliban as the primary actor in deciding the future of Afghanistan. The Taliban has been waiting for this moment, waiting for this deal. It was fully aware that the U.S. troops would not stay on indefinitely in Afghanistan. Perhaps, the Taliban's advisers also knew how desperate Mr. Trump would become and therefore decided to play the strategy of 'hit and wait'. The Taliban increased the intensity of violence in the last few years, without breaking off negotiations with the U.S. It never agreed to a ceasefire; even when the proposed deal in 2019 was cancelled in the last minute by President Trump, it continued with this strategy.

The Taliban also did not yield to the intra-Afghan dialogue proposal by the U.S. It consistently stated that it does not recognise the elected government in Kabul led by Mr. Ghani. It continued targeting the Afghan security forces making 2018-19 one of the most violent years in recent Afghan history. The Taliban has also been consistent with another position — that any dialogue within Afghanistan will take place only after the foreign troops leave.

The Taliban leadership will be smiling now as they have not yielded to any of the American

demands. True, they have agreed not to support al-Qaeda and the IS, but there is no al-Qaeda today in Afghanistan. Moreover, the Taliban is fighting the IS internally. Hence, yielding to this American demand will not affect its position in Afghanistan.

The Taliban will wait and watch the American troops draw down further in the next three months. It may not target them but it will continue fighting the Afghan security forces. The U.S. will watch this drama and perhaps use it as a strategy to retain a residue force. It could do this to watch Iran. This would be acceptable to the Taliban.

The [deal may talk about an intra-Afghan dialogue](#), but is the Taliban interested in it? The Taliban's objective would be to capture Kabul, and not share power there with anyone. An intra-Afghan dialogue should have preceded the Doha deal. The Taliban never wanted to negotiate with Kabul. Had it wanted to, such a negotiation would have taken place earlier. After all, the Afghan High Peace Council was established with the same purpose. The Taliban targeted many of the Afghan High Peace Council members, including the chairman of the Council, Burhanuddin Rabbani, in 2011. The Taliban will probably scuttle any attempt towards an intra-Afghan dialogue. Even if it agrees to a dialogue, it may use some pretext or the other to walk away from it — for example, the prisoner swap clause in the Doha deal (which would see the government release 5,000 Taliban prisoners and the Taliban release 1,000 captives), which President Ghani says his government never agreed to. Hence, a principal objective of the deal would be a non-starter.

Finally, the deal came at the wrong time. Kabul remains deeply divided. Instead of ushering in political stability, the 2019 elections situated Mr. Ghani and Mr. Abdullah in opposite camps. Both have declared victory and both have announced formation of their own governments. The U.S. should have brought both the leaders on a common platform and negotiated a deal, as it did after the presidential election in 2014. As a result, a national unity government was formed with Mr. Ghani as the President and Mr. Abdullah as the Chief Executive.

However, this time, neither did Zalmay Khalilzad, the U.S. Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation, pursue a serious strategy nor did President Trump have the patience to negotiate with two regional satraps, far away from Washington. Instead, they decided to deal with the Taliban and leave Kabul to its own fate.

To be fair to Mr. Trump and Mr. Khalilzad, Mr. Abdullah and Mr. Ghani should have realised the futility of their internal divide. Perhaps, both saw it as part of their final push to have their authority stamped on Kabul. That move backfired. Now they have to face the onslaught of the Taliban either individually or together.

The question now is not whether there will be another civil war in Afghanistan, but when. With the divide between Mr. Ghani and Mr. Abdullah in Kabul, any announcement on government formation is likely to increase the fault lines in the bureaucracy and the Afghan security forces. This is what the Taliban is probably expecting. Instead of engaging in any internal dialogue, the Taliban will attempt to impose itself on Kabul and the rest of Afghanistan.

The Afghan security forces may not collapse in the immediate withdrawal; they will fight back. The Taliban will want to capture the cities one after another, as it did in the 1990s. The Afghan security forces will try to prevent this from happening. All this will probably lead to what the majority of the Afghans want to avoid — a return to chaos.

D. Suba Chandran is a professor and a dean at the National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bengaluru

You have reached your limit for free articles this month.

Register to The Hindu for free and get unlimited access for 30 days.

Already have an account ? [Sign in](#)

Sign up for a 30-day free trial. [Sign Up](#)

Find mobile-friendly version of articles from the day's newspaper in one easy-to-read list.

Enjoy reading as many articles as you wish without any limitations.

A select list of articles that match your interests and tastes.

Move smoothly between articles as our pages load instantly.

A one-stop-shop for seeing the latest updates, and managing your preferences.

We brief you on the latest and most important developments, three times a day.

\*Our Digital Subscription plans do not currently include the e-paper ,crossword, iPhone, iPad mobile applications and print. Our plans enhance your reading experience.

*Why you should pay for quality journalism - [Click to know more](#)*

Please enter a valid email address.

To reassure Indian Muslims, the PM needs to state that the govt. will not conduct an exercise like NRC

Subscribe to The Hindu now and get unlimited access.

Already have an account? [Sign In](#)

Sign up for a 30-day free trial. [Sign Up](#)

To continue enjoying The Hindu, You can turn off your ad blocker or Subscribe to The Hindu.

[Sign up for a 30 day free trial.](#)

**END**

Downloaded from **crackIAS.com**

© **Zuccess App** by crackIAS.com