

# South Asia Analysis Group

Published on *South Asia Analysis Group* (<http://www.southasiaanalysis.org>)

[Home](#) > Afghan Peace Process and Plausible Strategies under Biden Administration:

---

## Afghan Peace Process and Plausible Strategies under Biden Administration:

Submitted by asiaadmin2 on Mon, 01/04/2021 - 10:13

**Paper No. 6724**

**Dated 4-Jan-2021**

By Dr. Manoj Kumar Mishra,

Initial steps towards the peace process in Afghanistan were taken in mid-2018 with senior American officials secretly traveling to Doha to open talks with the Taliban. This breakthrough was geared up with the appointment of Zalmay Khalilzad as the US State Department's special representative for Afghan reconciliation in September 2018. However, each round of talks, though starting out with some optimism, fizzled out, followed by enhanced insurgency and violence.

A conditional peace deal between the US and the Afghan Taliban was signed in February 2020, which nonetheless, could not stop the Taliban from launching and intensifying attacks against the Afghan Security Forces as the group still believed battlefield successes would determine the final outcome of the ongoing peace exercise. The tactical advantages of the asymmetric war allowed the insurgents to respond effectively to predictable attacks by leaving the area under aerial and artillery bombardment and come back after the pro-government forces had returned to their bases. On the other hand, the insurgents' unpredictable offensives dampened the patience of the government forces. While confronting the Afghan Taliban, the second half of 2020 witnessed cases of civilian casualties swelling in view of more frequent airstrikes conducted by the Afghan security forces with the assistance of the US air power.

In September 2020, intra-Afghan peace talks – a condition of the US-Taliban peace deal generated new hopes that an understanding would emerge through deliberations between the Afghan government representatives and the Taliban in the Gulf state of Qatar which would end up in designing the modalities of future governance. However, this encountered hiccups from the beginning as the Taliban resisted the very nomenclature that the other party to the negotiation used - the official name of the Afghan government, "Islamic Republic of Afghanistan". The Taliban not only questioned the legitimacy of the Afghan government, it insisted the talks to be held under the banner of intra-Afghan

dialogue and negotiations. Later, even while both parties reached agreement on the rules and procedures for the talks on December 2, 2020, agreement as regards the substantive issues appeared a very complicated and next to impossible exercise. For instance, the Taliban's insistence that the Hanafi School of Islamic jurisprudence be the guiding principle for all decisions as regards the future of the country has been resisted by the government in view of its negative repercussions on the rights of minorities.

Agreements pertaining to permanent cease-fire and power-sharing arrangement seem inconceivable in view of the trust deficit between the two parties and Afghan President Ashraf Ghani being skeptical of his own survival in power. The President appeared apprehensive that the Taliban might win sway the opposition leaders and form an interim government. Further, the Afghan government entered into negotiation from a position of weakness possibly anticipating quick reduction of American troops in the country, thus it could not be expected to negotiate in the interests of peace and stability of the country rather it may pander to the hard-line demands of the Taliban. On the other side, the Afghan Taliban continued to resort to violence as a tactic in the hope that the peace negotiations would tilt in their favor and the war-fatigued US would withdraw sooner or later by making big concessions in favor of the group.

### **Plausible Afghan Strategies**

In this larger context, the outgoing Trump administration's decision to further reduce US troops in Afghanistan is likely to be reviewed by the incoming Biden administration in view of perpetration of violence by the Taliban resorted to as a tactic and continued dependence of Afghan forces on American air support, intelligence and logistics. The new administration may be propelled to develop strategies either to rework the old agreement with the Taliban or persuade or coerce the group to meet key conditions of the agreement including pledges to reduce violence and to prevent the Al-Qaeda network from operating on Afghan soil.

The peace talks between the US representatives and Afghan Taliban indicated the American desperation to put an end to Afghan insurgency which had cost lives of more than 2,300 US troops while 20,589 returned home wounded by the end of 2019 as per US Defense Department statistics. The insurgency continues to take lives of civilians, American soldiers apart from frequent tragic killings of Afghan security personnel. In view of this, the incoming administration's strategy may be just to continue phased withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan irrespective of success and failure of peace talks so that the administration would be able to focus on areas of more strategic significance such as the Indo-Pacific region. This is the path that the Trump administration was already committed to.

The Afghan government has been overly dependent on the US for air operations, training and logistics to counter growing insurgency especially to provide for semblance of stability against violence perpetrated by the Afghan Taliban. Thus, the incoming administration may still be inclined to maintain a strategic presence in the war-torn country to keep supporting the Afghan security forces which could quickly be overpowered by the Taliban once the US leaves them to fend for themselves.

The other plausible and effective strategy for the Biden administration may be to work with other stakeholders and regional powers in order

to bring in their contacts with and influence over the Taliban and persuade the group to accept the key conditions of the deal with the US and carry forward talks with the Afghan government in the interests of peace and stability of Afghanistan.

The incoming administration may also prefer privatization of war to underscore battlefield successes and coerce the Taliban to accept the deal with the US as well as force it to negotiate with the Afghan government in the interests of peace and stability of the country. Thus, it is not be farfetched to believe that US defense firms such as Blackwater, could be brought into the Afghan theatre by the incoming administration to register battlefield successes vis-à-vis the Taliban. This strategy has relevance as it can fulfill the war objectives at the behest of Washington, absorb pressures from public to end the war abruptly and appease the war contractors. However, such a strategy can backfire in view of the possibilities of rise in civilian deaths as the war contractors are not bound by the similar and strict code of conduct like army and this can turn public opinion in the US and outside against the strategy.

To conclude, it can be argued that the US appears to have entered into peace talks from a position of weakness in a hasty attempt to end the prolonged Afghan war. Arguably, it is pursuing peace talks at a time when the Taliban's sway is undeniable both concerning territorial expansion and confidence following successive ground operations. Continuing attacks by the group aim at pushing the Afghan government further to a position of weakness. The peace process is far from being Afghan-led and Afghan-owned thus far as the Afghan government and civil society groups have been sidelined in the process.

Peace talks and negotiations approached from a position of strength can only nudge the Taliban to bring to the table pursuable objectives within the framework of a stable and inclusive Afghan polity and society. Biden administration's strategies would largely be directed at enhancing the American and Afghan government's negotiating ability vis-à-vis the Afghan Taliban. Further, any successful peace deal that the incoming administration would strive to aim at must be able to address the problems of widespread insecurity, endemic corruption, violation of women's rights and rampant drug trafficking in the Afghan society. Any hasty negotiation with the Afghan Taliban would mean the US is not negotiating peace in Afghanistan rather making attempts at a managed exit.

*Dr. Mishra teaches Political Science at SVM College, Jagatsinghpur, Odisha*

**Tags:**

[Taliban](#) <sup>[1]</sup>

[Biden](#) <sup>[2]</sup>

**Category:**

[Papers](#) <sup>[3]</sup>

**Countries:**

[United States](#) <sup>[4]</sup>

[Afganistan](#) <sup>[5]</sup>

**Topics:**

[Strategic Affairs & Security](#) <sup>[6]</sup>

Copyright ©2012. All Rights are Reserved.

---

**Source URL:** <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/node/2724>

**Links**

[1] <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/taxonomy/term/225>

[2] <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/taxonomy/term/2133>

[3] <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/papers>

[4] <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/united-states>

[5] <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/afganistan>

[6] <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/strategic-affairs-and-security>