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Post-Conflict Reconciliation in Sri Lanka: A Time for Reflection

Rohan Gunaratna

With the end of the ethnic war in Sri Lanka, reconciliation efforts have gathered momentum from diverse sectors of society engaging in all forms of rehabilitation and reconciliation.



To promote reconciliation, 100 young musicians from all districts of Sri Lanka performed in unison on March 6, 2012. Kalasuri Arunthathy Sri Ranganathan, a champion of peace, organized the event. Photo Credit <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e9yjJK7ftNc&feature=email>

The course of Sri Lanka's history changed on 19 May 2009. Since the dismantling of the LTTE on the banks of the Nanthikadal Lagoon, Sri Lanka has not suffered a single terrorist attack.

Immediately after the fighting ended, Sri Lanka focused on three different areas - humanitarian assistance, socio-economic development and political engagement. Of the civilians displaced during the final stages of the fight against LTTE, almost about 265,000 have been resettled within two and a half years. As per the Ministry of Resettlement only 6,022 remain in the resettlement camps as on March 2012.

Today, there is unprecedented economic development in the north with the economy of Jaffna growing at 22% compared to 7% for the rest of the country. At the same time however, the government is facing significant challenges in its engagement with the Tamil political parties. Despite the historical baggage, many Tamil politicians belonging to the Tamil National Alliance (TNA), including even those who empathised with the LTTE, wish to live in harmony. With the LTTE cutting off the Tamil political leadership tree, there is a need to groom mainstream Tamil politicians, especially young and upcoming leaders willing to serve all communities.

The Context:

To unite the Sri Lankan social fabric, polarized by three decades of conflict, the government in partnership with the private sector and community organizations engaged in a series of programmes aimed at reconciling the hearts of the affected communities. Although the operational threat has been dismantled, the LTTE ideology of separatism, hatred and suspicion still lingers among a few.

After defeating the LTTE, the Sri Lankan government launched a multifaceted reconciliation enterprise. Spearheading the initiatives is the Kadirgamar Institute of International Relations and Strategic Studies. Reconciliation is a part of the mandate of the Kadirgamar Institute named in honour of the late Lakshman Kadirgamar, a former Foreign Minister of Sri Lanka who was assassinated by the LTTE on 12 August 2005. A much loved Sri Lankan Tamil, Mr. Kadirgamar's vision was for all communities of Sri Lanka to live in dignity as equals.

The Kadirgamar Institute has planned a series of events to engage the diverse sectors of the society to promote reconciliation. The targeted segments include (1) business, (2) education, (3) higher education (4) media, (5) religion, (6) community, (7) youth, (8) diasporas, (9) women, (10) sports, (11) political parties, (12) security forces, (13) rehabilitation (14) unions (15) ICT (16) NGOs and (17) art and culture.

On 24 November 2011, the Kadirgamar Institute convened its inaugural National Conference on Reconciliation. This was followed by the National Conference on the Role of the Business Community in Reconciliation on 26 February 2012 which was lauded as highly successful. A live webcast, including in Tamil, created an opportunity for those outside the conference venue to participate in the conference. Many key business leaders who have invested or contemplating to invest in the North and the East participated in the event. Among the speakers was the respected Sri Lankan business leader Mr. Eassuwaren who supported 52 former LTTE cadres to get married. He provided the women with sarees, the men with their traditional garments, and substantial cash gifts. A wonderful celebration was held to mark this event with Vivek Oberoi, an Indian artiste performing for the participants.

Mr. Eassuwaren has now started a series of enterprises to support the beneficiaries - the former members of LTTE - to fully reintegrate into society. They have embarked on certain enterprises i.e. the making of 'handunkuru' or incense sticks that would bring them a livelihood.

Rehabilitation

The rehabilitation programme had six key components (1) religious and spiritual rehabilitation (2) educational rehabilitation (3) vocational rehabilitation (4) social and family rehabilitation (5) recreational rehabilitation and (6) psychological rehabilitation.

The first step in the national reconciliation process was the rehabilitation of former LTTE cadres. About 12,000 former members of the LTTE underwent rehabilitation. Initially, it was not very clear how the Sri Lankan government would deal with these elements. Instead of taking the beaten path of retributive justice of prosecuting the LTTE cadres, the government invested in a strategy of restorative justice, where former LTTE cadres were rehabilitated and released. Imbued by a culture shaped by loving kindness (Metta), no Sri Lankan objected to giving the former LTTE cadres a second chance in life. Even though some of the LTTE cadres were involved in killings in the past, the response of the Sri Lankan government and the public at large was to bring them back to mainstream life. According to reports by the Ministry of Defence, so far about 10,049 former Tamil Tigers have been rehabilitated and reintegrated in to the society.

Under religious and spiritual rehabilitation, the beneficiaries were given opportunities to reflect. They listened to sermons, read religious books and meditated. Under educational rehabilitation, the beneficiaries were given opportunity for education. Only about 60% of them had studied up to Ordinary Level. Many were illiterate. The end of the conflict provided these misguided men and women golden opportunities to study and transform into productive citizens. In many ways, these rehabilitation centres became learning institutions.

Of the 12,000 Tamil Tigers, about 500 were children below 18 years of age. The Sri Lankan government gave them opportunities in education. Except those who opted for vocational training, almost all were admitted to the Hindu College in Ratmalana, a prestigious school near Colombo. A few children also enrolled for university education. Some of them have even entered medical schools.

Under vocational training programme, the private sector played a crucial role in providing opportunities to the beneficiaries to develop new skills. Under social and family rehabilitation, the contact with the family members, including visits became frequent. Under recreational rehabilitation, the beneficiaries played and learnt sport. They played in mixed teams with different ethnicity which groomed new friendships.

Under psychological rehabilitation, the beneficiaries were engaged in the creative arts and in mentorship programmes. Many important personalities, from the government, the private sector, the recreational sector, or media, came and addressed the beneficiaries. These role models from their own ethnic and religious communities gave them hope. The low-cost rehabilitation programmes run by the Sri Lankan military was supported by International Organisation for Migration (IOM), UNICEF and a number of Western and other governments.



An example of young musicians promoting reconciliation. Photo Credit <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e9yjJK7ftNc&feature=email>

Mainstreaming Thinking

There is almost no likelihood of any of the 11,500 rehabilitated Tamil Tigers going back to violence. They saw what the conflict was and they experienced it personally. During the conflict most of them lived in a bubble. As a former LTTE cadre said: “they lived in a parallel universe.” Informed by LTTE propaganda, they didn’t experience the reality of what happened in Sri Lanka. Now with new opportunities, they want to rebuild their lives. Today, they are enjoying time with their families and friends.

However, a segment of those who live overseas, want Sri Lanka to return to conflict. So far the government has failed to reach out to the diasporas especially those who are still under LTTE influence.

A Holistic Approach to Reconciliation

Sri Lankan case is a good example of how the private sector, community organizations, the international organizations, NGOs and the government came together to rehabilitate and resettle former militants. The investment in rehabilitation has created tremendous prospects of greater stability in the country. Similarly, it is very important to make an even greater investment in the general population of the North and the East. The 30 years of conflict has obviously generated tremendous suspicion and mistrust. The bombings and attacks by the LTTE in the south and the military operations in the north polarized the thinking of the people in the North and the South. To build harmony and to bridge this divide, reconciliation is the tool.

The Kadirgamar Institute also hosted a National Conference on the Role of Education in Reconciliation on 13 March 2012. Several principals of schools including those that had forged exchange programmes between the north and the south participated in the conference. They included former Principal of Holy Family Convent, Sister Canice Fernando, Mr. Javed Yusuf, the former principal of Zahira College and Mrs. Nirmalee Wickremasinghe, the Principal of Ladies College who has been a role model in bringing children of diverse ethnic and religious communities together.

The conference shared efforts of these model schools with others that did not have exchange programmes. The progress made so far should be consolidated and the efforts sustained, especially by introducing bilingual teaching opportunities and exchange programmes.

Today, the most challenging issue for Sri Lanka is to restructure its education system to produce Sri Lankans, and not Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims. As an educator himself, the Monitoring MP for Education, Mr. Mohan Lal Grero, recognized the challenges. Most Sinhalese Buddhists grew up as Sinhalese and not as Sri Lankans. Similarly, in Tamil schools, the children grew up as Tamils and not as Sri Lankans. The same is with some Muslim schools. The conflict polarized the communities and created a sectarian education system that segregated Sri Lankans by ethnicity and religion. If a new system can be created, it will benefit every Sri Lankan. They will come to know the richness of growing up with different ethnic and religious groups. This will help reduce mutual mistrust or suspicion as well.

Conclusion

In many ways, the genesis of the Sri Lankan conflict is in the politics of language. A few years before her death, Mrs. Sirimavo Bandaranaike, the first woman Prime Minister met with Prof. Bruce Hoffman, one of the leading counter terrorism specialists in the US. When Mrs. Bandaranaike was asked, "Madam, what caused the ethnic conflict?" She was very clear in her answer: "it was the Sinhala-only Act." Then I said, "Madam, it was your husband the late SWRD Bandaranaike who introduced the Act?" She said, "Yes, that is true but that divided our country in many ways."

The polarization leading to the conflict could thus be attributed to a significant extent to politicians irrespective of which party they belong to - the governing party, the opposition or the TNA. There is a tendency to play the ethnic and even the religious card especially during elections to get votes. Therefore, in post-conflict Sri Lanka, it is very important to develop a norm and an ethic against the exploitation of ethnic and the religious differences which can again damage the social fabric of Sri Lanka.

In April 2012, the Kadirgamar Institute is planning a National Conference on the Role of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) in Reconciliation. With the National Conference on the Role of the Youth in Reconciliation, the strategy will be to strengthen the existing and growing partnership between the youth of the north and the south. With the National Conference on the Role of the Diaspora in Reconciliation, the strategy will be to engage the diasporas and migrant communities. With the National Conference on the Role of the Arts and Culture in Reconciliation, the strategy will be to engage the public through song, dance, puppetry, and music to build a harmonious living. The arts have mesmerized people across ethnic and religious divide for centuries. After years of conflict, these platforms can be harnessed to bring people of diverse communities together.

In addition to government, private sector and community efforts, reconciliation is also taking place naturally. There is an atmosphere of overall goodwill especially involving those who lived through the conflict from the beginning. Furthermore, the youth of the north and the south were less driven by racial and religious prejudices and more by economic opportunities. In the North or the South, East or the West, the people were committed to building bridges of hope and friendship. Most people in Vanni said: "What I need is security, a job, a house, and I need to send my children to school." Their concerns are not different from the people elsewhere.

Addressing such issues should be the focus - not playing politics and dividing the country by ethnicity and religion. Ethnic and religious prejudice is largely limited to the elite in Colombo and few who live outside the country. In contrast, the people in the rural areas want to live in peace. There should be reflection and discussion about these key issues confronting the ordinary people by the elite and the intellectuals.

In the past, many missteps precipitated the vicious conflict with huge humanitarian costs. To prevent a recurrence and make progress, it is time for all Sri Lankans to take a hard look at the mistakes that need to be undone and learn from and reinforce the initiatives that have produced harmony and prosperity in the country.

GLOBAL PATHFINDER

The ICPVTR Terrorism Database – Global Pathfinder - is a one-stop repository for information on the current and emerging terrorist threat. The database focuses on terrorism and political violence in the Asia-Pacific region – comprising of Southeast Asia, North Asia, South Asia, Central Asia and Oceania.

Global Pathfinder is an integrated database containing comprehensive profiles of terrorist groups, key terrorist personalities, terrorist and counterterrorist incidents as well as terrorist training camps . It also contains specific details and analyses of significant terrorist attacks in the form of terrorist attack profiles.

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The UNHRC Resolution on Sri Lanka: Politics and Ground Realities

Nadisha Sirisena

This article discusses the politics behind the adoption of the UNHRC resolution on Sri Lanka and its impact on the ground.

After much hype and discussion at the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC), the resolution sponsored by the United States titled Promoting reconciliation and accountability in Sri Lanka, was adopted on 22 March 2012. The resolution was passed with 24 countries voting in its favour, 15 voting against it and 8 abstentions.

This resolution welcomes the recommendations made by the Sri Lankan government's Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission (LLRC) in its report. Additionally, the resolution calls for greater accountability as it notes that the LLRC report does not adequately address this issue. The LLRC was appointed by the President of Sri Lanka on 15 May 2010, to focus on the causes of conflict, the effect of the conflict on the public and provide recommendations on national unity and reconciliation. The LLRC submitted its report to the President on 15 November 2011.

The UNHRC resolution has been severely condemned by the Sri Lankan government and part of the Tamil diaspora. The Sri Lankan government was of the view that it was an interference and detrimental to the reconciliation process. On 23 March 2012, Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa stated that Sri Lanka would not tolerate any interference in its internal affairs by any other country. Minister Mahinda Samarasinghe, the head of the Sri Lankan delegation to Geneva, said that the government needs more time to come up with the a clear strategy for reconciliation and peace made since the end of the civil war in May 2009. The vocal elements of the Tamil diaspora feel that the resolution is too lenient on the government and fails to give political powers to the Tamils in the north and east of Sri Lanka.

During the process of the UNHRC session, the resolution underwent numerous changes. India voted in favour of the resolution. However, Indian Permanent Representative to the UN in Geneva, Dilip Sinha worked behind the scenes with the US Permanent Representative Eileen Chamberlain Donahoe, to assist in changing the text so it would be more acceptable to all members of the UNHRC and Sri Lanka. The contentious line of the resolution requiring the Sri Lankan government to accept the UNHRC technical advice was changed to in consultation with, and with the concurrence of the Government of Sri Lanka. This would mean that UNHRC would now need to both consult and receive concurrence of the Sri Lankan government before it takes any action in respect of Sri Lanka.

US sponsored resolution demonstrates the carrot and stick approach adopted to deal with the situation during the last days of the fierce fight between the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam (LTTE) and the Sri Lankan security forces and the way and means to move forward. Soon after the adoption of the resolution, the US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, emphasized that the “United States, together with the international community, sent a strong signal that Sri Lanka will only achieve lasting peace through real reconciliation and accountability, and the international community stands ready to help. The next steps are clear....,” Clinton urged, the Sri Lankan government needs to implement the constructive recommendations of the LLRC and take the necessary measures to address accountability issues.

On the other hand, as a noted legal scholar Martti Koskenniemi pointed out, the resolution betrays double standards on the part of Washington. According to Koskenniemi while invading Iraq, the US did not care whether its actions were lawful or unlawful in the eyes of the UN or the international community at large.

At the same time, while the US was pushing for the adoption of the resolution, Clinton promised Washington’s readiness to work with the Sri Lankan government and announced plans to meet with the Sri Lankan Foreign Minister. On 22 March 2012, the US State Department removed the ban on selling maritime and aerial surveillance equipment to the Sri Lankan military. It was also reported that Sri Lanka has been offered a substantial exemption from the US sanctions on Iran.

The amended resolution, as adopted by the UNHRC is only about implementation of the LLRC recommendations. In a way, it is an endorsement of the Sri Lankan government’s own account of the events during the last phase of the conflict and its own recommendations to move forward after the defeat of the LTTE. There was no trade or travel embargoes on Sri Lanka or any hints of US troops landing on Sri Lankan soil, as some critics in the country feared. In addition, the language of the resolution was substantially restructured in a way so as not to appear as interference in the internal affairs of Sri Lanka.

India, the most important stakeholder country, engaged in a delicate balancing act. During this session, India went against its own long-standing policy – not to support any country-specific resolution in any multilateral forum. For example, when in 2009, the US introduced a similar resolution on Sri Lanka, it was defeated largely due to the Indian initiative. However, a combination of factors compelled New Delhi to support the latest resolution targeting Sri Lanka. This could be attributed to India’s desire to strengthen its ties with the US and also to the pursuit of its strategic goals, such as gaining membership in a restructured and reformed security council.

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Topical areas of interest are terrorism and political violence, organized crime, homeland security, religion and violence, internal conflicts and all other areas of security broadly defined.

Article length could be anywhere between 800 to 1500 words. Submissions must be made before the 15th of every month for editing purposes and for inclusion in the next month's edition.

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isuravi@ntu.edu.sg

Also, New Delhi feels that the Sri Lankan government has not addressed the issues of power sharing and protection of the rights of the Tamil people in the north and east of the country in a sincere and serious manner. India also has to placate the sentiments of the political parties in the state of Tamil Nadu and Indian Tamils as a whole, given the widespread protest against the treatment of Sri Lankan Tamils. Nevertheless, it was largely New Delhi's initiative that tempered down the language and the content of the resolution.

The Sri Lankan government has made much positive progress with resettlement of internally displaced persons (IDPs) which is discussed in the preceding article. According to the statistics released by the Ministry of Resettlement, as of 21 March 2012, 264,777 IDPs have been resettled in their villages, while 6,022 remain in the IDP camps. In addition, the Ministry of Defence reported that 10,049 ex-LTTE cadres have been rehabilitated and released since May 2009.

The remaining ex-LTTE cadres are slated to be released in mid-2012. The former combatants received training in vocational skills and were exposed to a number of rehabilitation programmes which has substantially reduced the chances of recidivism. Moreover, initiatives like the National Reconciliation Conference and the follow up conferences on the education and private sector participation in reconciliation, would help enrich the discourse on every aspect of the reconciliation process and find a way for harmony in the long-term. At the same time, the Sri Lankan government needs to move faster and in a more determined way towards a political solution which will benefit all ethnic groups.

In the ultimate analysis, the government needs to focus on the betterment of all the citizens irrespective of the ethnicity and the religion. The government has one year to implement the LLRC recommendations, the issues that it promised to implement and address including accountability, devolution of power and the protection of human rights. Therefore, the time now is not to spend nation's collective energy in analyzing and reacting to the UNHRC resolution, but to work for reconciliation as a matter of utmost urgency.

One Step Forward, Two Steps Back: Hope for a Sustainable Settlement Fades in Afghanistan

Adam Simpson *

With the recent massacre of 16 Afghan civilians by a rogue US soldier, there have been possible concerns about the strategic partnership taking a different turn of events.

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A mourner cries over the bodies of Afghan civilians, allegedly shot by a rogue US soldier. Photo Credit: Mirror.co.uk <http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/afghan-killing-spre-horror-us-soldier-759887>

The massacre of 16 Afghan civilians by a US soldier in Panjwai, Kandahar province on March 11 has inflamed tensions between the United States and Afghanistan, and calls into question the chances for future stability as the US-led military mission transitions security responsibilities to Afghan forces in advance of a 2014 country-wide pull-out.

The mass shooting follows a series of events that have marred the mission and damaged relations between the Afghan and US governments, including the desecration of dead Taliban fighters by US Marines, the retaliatory killing of four French soldiers by an Afghan soldier in January, and the burning of Qurans by US soldiers at the Bagram Air Base in February.

The Quran burnings, described as accidental by NATO officials, sparked six days of riots and violence that left thirty people dead across the country, including six US soldiers. The event bore similarities to a previous incident in April 2011, where protestors demonstrating the burning of a Quran by a Florida pastor attacked a United Nations compound in Mazar-i-Sharif, killing eight UN workers and four Afghans.

Attacks against US and NATO service members by Afghan troops have also spiked in 2012. Since January, 16 of the 44 American service members killed in Afghanistan have died in what are being referred to as "green on blue" attacks. According to Pentagon data, there have been 45 attacks by Afghans on NATO colleagues since 2007, with 75% of those occurring in the last two years.

Civilian support and cooperation between NATO and their Afghan counterparts remains critical to employing a successful counterinsurgency strategy against the Taliban. One of the key issues remaining to be seen is if local Afghan clans and sub-tribes will continue to work with US and Afghan forces as part of the transition process. If these groups seek to reduce the role of US forces sooner, a transition to an Afghan-led system could occur faster.

Not the tipping point

Washington however insists that while the murders have eroded trust and added tension between the US and the Afghan people, the act will not be a tipping point in the war, even as calls to hasten a transition in Afghanistan and orchestrate a faster hand-over of security responsibility to Afghan forces are voiced in the country's politically charged home arenas.

A muted public response

The slayings in Panjwai came only weeks after the latest Quran burning incident, but the public response to the shootings has been oddly muted in comparison.

It is possible that the tempered public response is a result of war-weary Afghans having grown accustomed to dealing with civilian casualties over decades of fighting. Since 2001, deadly night-raids and airstrikes by coalition forces have killed thousands of civilians, causing many Afghans to live in constant fear. The night-raids - where troops enter sleeping villages to ferret out insurgents and suspected terrorists - are particularly unpopular among Afghans, and have raised the ire of Hamid Karzai himself, who considers them a violation of Afghan sovereignty. US military commanders however, consider the night-raids an essential tool in anti-Taliban efforts. It is likely that a deal will be hammered out between Karzai and US forces to agree on protocol for future raids, thus allowing them to continue in spite of the public's displeasure.

Peace talks stall

A larger question is how the slayings will affect ongoing talks with the Taliban, who have capitalized on the negative press surrounding recent incidents as they attempt to build a stronger position in the country and appeal to Afghans who are fed up with the war. The Taliban have vowed revenge for the “savage, blood-soaked and inhumane” killings, and recently, eleven suicide vests were allegedly discovered inside the heavily guarded Ministry of Defense. Members of the Afghan army – or possible Taliban insurgents who have infiltrated the army - are suspected of plotting to bomb eleven buses filled with Afghan soldiers.

Also following the murders, the Taliban announced they are pulling out of peace talks in Qatar. They voiced frustration with the “shaky, erratic and vague standpoint of the Americans.” Moreover, US negotiators insist that the Afghan government had to be a part of any negotiations – something the Taliban does not accept – a point punctuated by the assassination of former Afghan President Burhanuddin Rabbani through a bomb concealed under the turban of a Taliban envoy in September 2011.

Fuel on the fire

The killings in Panjwai, coupled with the Quran-burning at Bagram, have severely reduced the US’s bargaining position vis-à-vis the Taliban, who believe they will reassert control in Afghanistan following the exit of international forces in 2014. While the Taliban have clearly grown stronger since being nearly crushed at the outset of the war, it is becoming increasingly evident that they will not be able to impose a settlement on Afghanistan or attain full control. This inability in itself is a dangerous predicament and leaves the country in a fragile and volatile position; something it is already all too familiar with.

Afghanistan’s recent history has been marred with periods of vicious conflict, including the Mujahedeen resistance against Soviet troops that was followed by civil war amongst various warring factions. The hardline Taliban regime of 1996-2001 never actually controlled the whole of the country, but has waged a relentless and brutal campaign against Karzai’s government since being uprooted in 2001.

It wasn’t long after Operation Enduring Freedom was launched to oust the regime and install a democratically elected government that the Taliban had become seemingly dormant. In reality, however they were quietly re-grouping in Pakistan with surreptitious government support, gaining strength and intensifying until ISAF peacekeepers were forced to recognize in 2004 that their mission had morphed into full-blown counter-insurgency. Now, almost ten years later with talks stalling and a sustainable settlement yet to be realized, the Brussels-based International Crisis Group (ICG) claims that “all indicators point to a fragile political order that could rapidly disintegrate into a more virulent civil war.”

Recognizing their position

The Taliban will eventually return to the bargaining table, but their timing will depend on how Washington repairs the trust damaged by the recent incidents. The Taliban need to negotiate a settlement, because they recognize that retaking Kabul and securing victory has fallen beyond their means. Though plagued with issues around security, loyalty and funding, the Afghan army and national police forces are increasing in strength and have considerable firepower to repel any serious attempts by the Taliban to take the capital city.

The Taliban also recognize that the civil war and power struggles that have been ongoing between Pashtuns, Tajiks, Uzbeks, and Hazaris will continue beyond 2014. Moreover, the Taliban continue to engage in a regional power struggle of their own with Pakistan, though they remain dependent on the latter for safe haven and sanctuary. The Taliban also remain intensely distrusted by the Tajiks, Uzbeks, and Shia Hazaris who comprise more than half the Afghan population.

There will be no such thing as an “easy” victory in Afghanistan, and more war is not an attractive alternative even for the Taliban.

But are negotiations still doomed to fail?

An elusive, complicated peace and the looming threat of civil war

There is a concern that US might cave to external pressures and pull out of Afghanistan “with or without a settlement.” In a recent report, the ICG claims that “the negotiating agenda has been dominated by Washington’s desire to obtain a decent interval between the planned US troop drawdown and the possibility of another bloody chapter in the conflict,” and that current negotiations were unlikely to achieve a sustainable peace because they were dominated by the US and hampered by a “half-hearted and haphazard” approach by the Afghan government.

The report also claimed international involvement in negotiations to date has only served to embolden “spoilers” like insurgents, government officials and war profiteers who now recognize that the international community’s most urgent priority is to exit Afghanistan with or without a settlement in place.

But even this analysis seems to simplify the difficulties in negotiating peace and appropriate power-brokering for Afghanistan. Afghanistan and other countries in the region remain united in the belief that the best way towards a stable, peaceful country is to achieve some semblance of inclusive political settlement, but the implications for such a scenario run deeper than just the roles of the US and its allies, the Afghan government, and the Taliban.

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Not only would such a settlement have to see the Taliban sever ties with Al Qaeda, end all violence, accept the Afghan constitution, and agree to protect the rights of women (it is arguable that Afghan women have the most to lose in any future settlement that would concede any progress of the last decade, such as rights to education), a deal perceived to give the Taliban preferential treatment in any manner would undoubtedly “spark a significant backlash from the Northern Alliance, Hezb-i Islami and other major factions” that are seeking seats at the negotiating table.

Bruce Riedel, a former CIA analyst and current senior fellow in the Saban Center at the Brookings Institution also points out that any peace settlement will require a regional strategy that includes not only Pakistan but also key stakeholders like Iran and India, who could easily derail negotiations if they perceive they are being left out of the process. These countries play significant, complicated, and even duplicitous roles in the geopolitical struggles that have engulfed Afghanistan.

Avoiding a “rush to the exits”

There are simply too many players involved in a peace settlement in Afghanistan to expect that a Washington-brokered power sharing agreement will last once the US and its NATO allies exit the war. It is plausible that any deal struck wouldn't even hold long enough to ensure that all progress of the last ten years isn't thoroughly reversed. Instead, the ICG feels that the current settlement process, which has been slow, complicated, and insubstantial to date, should be mediated by the United Nations.

The US refutes the assertion that they - along with their allies - will be in a “rush to the exits” in 2014. They claim to be committed to finding a viable solution in Afghanistan; a position supported by ongoing US-Afghanistan negotiations toward reaching a Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA) that would lay out a framework that will determine the role of the US military post 2014. Such an agreement would certainly send a powerful message to the Taliban that the international community remains committed to staying the course in Afghanistan, which ostensibly leads to finding a solution through the nascent peace talks in Qatar.

But even the best outcome for Afghanistan – a carefully crafted power-sharing settlement and ceasefire agreement with the Taliban supported by the regional powers and developed through legitimate political means - requires ongoing cooperation between coalition forces and the Afghan population. The negotiation process - much like the transition process - cannot be rushed. However, with recent events serving to raise levels of distrust between NATO forces and Afghans, it seems that for every step forward being taken in Afghanistan, two are being taken back. And with no guarantee that trust will be restored anytime soon, hope for a sustainable peace settlement and an effective transition of security by 2014 is fading.

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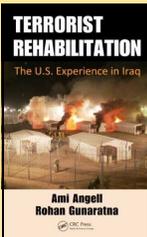
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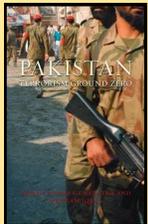
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Events and Publications



- Terrorist Rehabilitation: The US Experience in Iraq (CRC Press Taylor and Francis Group, 2011) by Dr. Ami Angell and Dr. Rohan Gunaratna

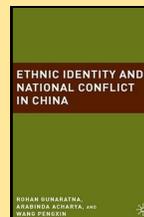


- Pakistan: Terrorism Ground Zero (Reaktion Books, 2011) by Dr. Rohan Gunaratna and Mr. Khuram Iqbal



- International Aviation and Terrorism: Evolving Threats, Evolving Security (Routledge 2009) by Dr. John Harrison

Watch this space for upcoming events at ICPVTR



- Ethnic Identity and National Conflict in China (Palgrave Macmillan 22 June 2010) by Dr. Rohan Gunaratna, Dr. Arabinda Acharya and Mr. Wang Pengxin



- Targeting Terrorist Financing: International Cooperation and New Regimes (Routledge 2009) by Dr. Arabinda Acharya