



EU AFGHANISTAN PEACE SUPPORT MECHANISM

میکانیزم حمایت اتحادیه اروپا
از پروسه صلح افغانستان
د افغانستان د سولې څخه
د اروپایي ټولني د ملاتړ تگلاره



Afghan Views on a Ceasefire

Salah Consortium Position Paper # 2

August 10, 2020

Key Points for Intra-Afghan Dialogue Participants & Negotiators

- The several short-term ceasefires between the Government of Afghanistan and the Taliban over the last two years have been important for Afghan civilians from a humanitarian standpoint.
- Afghans are grateful the Government of Afghanistan has been courageous enough to offer these ceasefires, and that the Taliban has accepted and abided by them.
- But for a ceasefire to be effective and sustainable it must be done *as part of negotiations* to reach and end to the ongoing conflict.
- As both sides of the conflict sit down in the coming days and weeks for the first round of formal face-to-face talks, we encourage them to immediately discuss the parameters of a comprehensive, indefinite and nation-wide ceasefire while talks continue.
- We similarly encourage the international community to apply concerted diplomatic pressure on both parties to put a ceasefire at the top of the agenda, to then adhere to any subsequent ceasefire agreed upon.
- We do not believe, however, that the absence of a comprehensive ceasefire is reason enough to delay the start of talks. Afghans need to start talking to Afghans in a formal way. The fewer pre-conditions on starting talks the better.

- Yet, for the talks to gain any credibility in the eyes of the Afghan people, a ceasefire will need to be *one of the very first* outcomes of the talks. The longer discussions continue without an agreement to stop the bloodshed, a combination of mistrust and fatigue will undermine efforts to reach agreement on core issues.
- Therefore, Afghan civil society eagerly awaits the announcement of a ceasefire *during* the first round of talks. And we stand ready to both promote, and, where possible, monitor a ceasefire in our communities.

Background

This issue brief is informed by 7 Town Halls convened across Afghanistanⁱ from December 2019 to January 2020.ⁱⁱ A total of 421 participants, including 203 women, from a cross section of Afghan civil society – tribal elders, union representatives, university professors, religious scholars, former mujahideen, internally displaced persons and refugee returnees, provincial peace council members and government officials – debated issues related to the Afghan peace process and developed action plans for advocacy. Supported by the Swiss International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) and the European Union, these Town Halls elevate civil society voices in the national peace process. Additional insight was gathered from a Salah Consortium peace perception survey



EU AFGHANISTAN PEACE SUPPORT MECHANISM

میکنیزم حمایت اتحادیه اروپا
از پروسه صلح افغانستان
د افغانستان د سولې څخه
د اروپایي ټولني د ملاتړ تگلاره



of 6448 individuals across 34 provinces conducted between December 2019 and January 2020 and through key informant interviews with a dozen provincial Peace Secretariat members from across the country in August 2020. To place these recent findings in perspective, Salah examined scholarly literature on the use of ceasefires in conflicts across the globe in the last half century, as well as data from the Asian Foundation's yearly survey of the Afghan people.

Previous ceasefires: positive but realistic

There have been three national ceasefires in the almost two decades of conflict between the Taliban-led insurgency and the Government of Afghanistan and its international military backers. All have come within the last thirty-six months, all were linked to the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, and all have been brief, together accounting for only about 14 days of peace.

Afghan views on these short-term ceasefires have been positive but realistic. Beyond increased personal security tied to the cessation of hostilities, they have allowed freedom of movement, which in turn facilitates medical, financial, and food aid, as well as the reunification of family members, if only on a temporary basis. As such, from a humanitarian and psychological perspective, even these ad hoc and short-lived periods of peace have been welcomed by Afghans.

Broad support for even short-term ceasefires is unsurprising given the steady rise in fear for personal safety among the Afghan population: from 48% saying they "always" "often" or "sometimes" fear for their or their family's safety in 2012 to 75% in 2019. Critically, and linked to the issue of ceasefires, fear of encountering the Taliban is at 93% and fear

while travelling from one part of the country to the other is almost 80%.ⁱⁱⁱ

At the same time, there is little confidence among those we spoke with that these one-off efforts will – on their own and absent the framework of intra-Afghan political negotiations – lead to either a groundswell of Taliban defections or extend organically in length. Indeed, while localized ceasefires and non-aggression agreements have raised hopes, Afghans do not see these informal arrangements as a replacement for a national

Previous National Ceasefires

June 12 - 20, 2018. President Ghani declares a unilateral ceasefire to coincide with the Eid al-Fitr holiday marking the end of Ramadan. The Taliban accept and the resulting ceasefire extends beyond the three-day holiday for a full eight days. Though seen as a catalyst for eventual talks between the U.S. and the Taliban, hopes for a more lasting reduction of violence are dashed when the Taliban overruns the Ghazni provincial center less than two months later and refuses ceasefire overtures throughout 2019.

May 24 - 26, 2020. The second Eid al Fitr ceasefire occurs in the context of prisoner swaps between the Government of Afghanistan and the Taliban. Hostilities resumed with Taliban attacks on ANSF in Parwan and ANSF air raids on Taliban in Zabul the day after the truce expired.

July 31 - Aug 2, 2020. The three-day truce over the Eid Al Adha holiday coincides with the Government of Afghanistan's release of 317 Taliban prisoners. Though the truce holds, an Islamic State attack on a prison in Jalalabad a day after the holiday ends kills 29 and briefly frees hundreds of inmates. The attack underscores the reality that peace with the Taliban does not necessarily equal peace in Afghanistan.



EU AFGHANISTAN PEACE SUPPORT MECHANISM

میکانیزم حمایت اتحادیه اروپا
از پروسه صلح افغانستان
د افغانستان د سولې څخه
د اروپایي ټولني د ملاتړ تگلاره



ceasefire. This perspective mirrors the current understanding of the peace process more broadly—that is, while local efforts were critical, in the absence of any concrete national level political deal, these local efforts would remain very local.

Support for a Ceasefire as Part of Intra-Afghan Dialogue & Negotiation

An overwhelming 93% of the over 6,000 individuals from all 34 provinces surveyed by the Salah Consortium in December 2019 and January 2020 are in support of a country-wide ceasefire as a component of any forthcoming intra-Afghan dialogue and negotiation.^{iv} This support shows little variation between men and women, is consistent with a 2018 survey conducted by Salah, and remains relatively strong across all regions of the country.

Beyond serving as an important confidence building measure and providing some of the same humanitarian benefits as the short-term ceasefires, Afghans view ceasefires as a means of ensuring a more inclusive and a better coordinated peace process.

For example, while women's involvement in the peace process – at all levels – depends on a diverse set of factors including social pressure and education, basic insecurity is also consistently cited as a barrier to participation. To the extent that ceasefires reduce violence and facilitate freedom of movement, this will result in more participation from women and, critically, more diverse female voices from less accessible areas.

Inclusion extends beyond the gender realm. More freedom of movement (for both sides of the conflict) will lead to greater inclusion of rural areas and of Afghan government officials outside of Kabul. The greater freedom of movement brought by a ceasefire will also facilitate more coordination between local

and national peace processes – a key concern of Afghan citizens and government representatives outside Kabul.

A ceasefire should be at the top of the Agenda though not necessarily a precondition for talks

The sequencing of a ceasefire in the context of negotiations is an important aspect of the emerging peace process. A look at experiences from around the globe provides some needed context. Some peacebuilders and mediators argue that a ceasefire should be a necessary first step for humanitarian reasons, to create a conciliatory atmosphere, and to effectively freeze the battle lines to ensure that both parties' cost-benefit analysis does not continually shift.^v In Northern Ireland, a preliminary ceasefire had the positive effect of pushing the negotiation process forward.

Yet, there is considerable evidence that premature ceasefires, though likely to reduce casualty rates in the near term, tend to increase the intensity of resuming hostilities and delay the type of lasting settlements needed to sustainably end conflict.^{vi} These studies suggest that interrupting the conflict *during the negotiation process*, after a consensus on how to deal with the root causes of conflict has been reached – if not a final resolution to these issues – is the best means of reaching a sustainable end to the conflict.

A majority of the 6,000 Afghans surveyed by Salah said a ceasefire and end to hostilities should be the top Agenda item during intra-Afghan dialogue and negotiations.

But there was a difference of opinion as to when a ceasefire should occur. Some members of Provincial Peace Secretariats we interviewed believe that a ceasefire must proceed the start of negotiations. Other say



EU AFGHANISTAN PEACE SUPPORT MECHANISM

میکانیزم حمایت اتحادیه اروپا
از پروسه صلح افغانستان
د افغانستان د سولې څخه
د اروپایي ټولني د ملاتړ تگلاره



that the immediate absence of a ceasefire should not delay talks. Both agree, however, that the longer talks progress without a comprehensive ceasefire, the more these negotiations will lose trust and credibility in

the eyes of the Afghan public and among the negotiators themselves.

ⁱ Kandahar, Nangarhar, Bamyan, Kunduz, Balkh, Herat and Paktia. Town Halls drew participants from surrounding provinces to ensure coverage from all 34 of Afghanistan's administrative units.

ⁱⁱ The SALAH consortium was founded in 2013 by five Afghan civil society organizations that felt the need to join forces to address peace, governance and human security issues during and after 2014 transition. Salah operates in all of Afghanistan's 34 provinces. Members include: [Afghan Women's Educational Center](#) (AWEC), [Equality for Peace and Democracy](#) (EPD), [Cooperation for Peace and Unity](#) (CPAU), [Peace Training and Research Organization](#) (PTRO), [Sanayee Development Organization](#) (SDO), and [The Liaison Office](#) (TLO).

ⁱⁱⁱ [A Survey of the Afghan People: Afghanistan in 2019](#). The Asia Foundation. pg 60.

^{iv} People's Perceptions on the Peace Process Afghanistan. Salah Consortium. March 2020.

^v See for instance: Barker, T. (1994) "Editorial: Culture Wars." *Studies in Art Education*, vol. 36, no. 1; Anderlini, S. N. (2004) "Peace Negotiations and

Agreements." in *International Alert and Women Waging Peace (WWP), Inclusive Security, Sustainable Peace: A Toolkit for Advocacy and Action*, London: Alert, 2004, pp. 16–32.; Touval, Saadia (1995) "Ethical Dilemmas in International Negotiation." *Negotiation Journal*, October: 333–337.; Smith, S. (2003) "Ceasefire." *Beyond Intractability*, October, at <http://crinfo.beyondintractability.org/essay/ceasefire>.

^{vi} See for instance: Mahieu, Sylvie. "When Should Mediators Interrupt a Civil War? The Best Timing for a Ceasefire." *International Negotiation* 12 (2007) 207 - 228; Clark, R. P. (1995) "Negotiations for Basque Self-Determination in Spain." in I. W. Zartman (ed.), *Elusive Peace: Negotiating an End to Civil Wars*. Washington: Brookings Institution; Zartman, I. W. (1995) "Conclusions: The Last Mile." in I. W. Zartman (ed.), *Elusive Peace: Negotiating an End to Civil Wars*. Washington: Brookings Institution.