Virtual Event | Prospects for Peace: A Conversation with Afghanistan’s National Security Advisor

TRANSCRIPT

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- Ambassador Hamdullah Mohib, *National Security Advisor to the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan*
- Ambassador Husain Haqqani, *Director for South and Central Asia, Hudson Institute & Former Ambassador of Pakistan to the United States*

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Husain Haqqani:

Good morning and welcome to our viewers around the world. I'm Husain Haqqani Director for South and Central Asia, head at the Hudson Institute. Almost two decades after American led coalition forces went into Afghanistan to eliminate Al-Qaeda sanctuary, provided by the brutal Taliban regime. And one year after the United States signed a peace agreement with the Afghan Taliban two months into the Biden administration, we want to have a discussion on where things stand in relation to Afghanistan. The Biden administration has slowed down the American rush to the exit in Afghanistan. And the state department says all options remain on the table regarding the withdrawal of American troops, and that they have not made any final decision about America's full posture in Afghanistan. At the same time, it remains a reality that most people in the United States want this long military engagement of the United States to come to an end.

In early March, in a letter to president Ashraf Ghani, secretary of state or shovel any secretary of state Tony Blinken proposed a UN led peace conference in Turkey, aimed at forming an inclusive Afghan government. This conference is supposed to compliment a separate meeting among envoys from the U.S, China, Russia, Pakistan, Iran and India, to discuss a unified approach to supporting peace in Afghanistan.

The Taliban have not kept their end of the bargain so far. There has been no reduction in violence from their side in Afghanistan, since their agreement with the United States. And there are those who think that the agreement was a mistake. Instead, the U.S. should talk more to the government in Kabul.

Today we are fortunate to have with us today, his excellency Hamdullah, Mohib the national security advisor to the president of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan since 2018. Dr. Mohib was Afghanistan's ambassador to the United States from 2015 to 2018. And before that, he served as deputy chief of staff to the president of Afghanistan.

He understands, he belongs to a younger generation of Afghanistan's and he understands their sentiment. These are young people who either saw the brutality or know of the brutality of the Taliban, when they controlled Afghanistan before 911, and do not want it to be repeated.

And many of them are also critical of the policy that has led to a longer engagement of the United States, than might have been necessary. And the idea of a hurried exit. Ambassador Mohib, I would like you to make some opening remarks, and then we can start having a discussion. What is the road to peace in Afghanistan, in the view of the government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan?

Hamdullah Mohib:

Thank you ambassador Husain Haqqani for your opening and the introduction. I would also like to take this moment to say hello, to friends, Afghan compatriots and colleagues from my time in DC. This is a very timely event to discuss some very important issues and matters that are currently in the headlines. And I thank you ambassador, and the Hudson Institute South and Central Asia programs for this opportunity. The Afghan government has been at the center of peace efforts for the past few years. And we have had some very important milestones to that effect.

The peaceful agenda of April, 2019 in which a broad section of Afghan society came together, from across the country to deliberate on what questions of peace are and answer them, that resulted in the green light to proceed with negotiations with the Taliban.

This was an important occasion where the government's mandate to engage in talks was formally endorsed by the nation. Accordingly, we took bold steps in this direction. Fast forward to 2020 after the
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U.S. Taliban deal was announced, and the Afghan government had to make tough decisions to release the hardened Taliban convicts.

We organized another peace law agenda in August, 2020. On this occasion as well, the 4000 Afghan representatives from across the country deliberated for three days, and offered an olive branch to the Taliban. Agreeing with the release of their convicts in exchange for the freedom of Afghan national defense, and security forces held hostage by the Taliban.

The Afghan negotiating team, a diverse and empowered group of individuals, men and women and members of the minority, have engaged the Taliban with consistency and urgency to make real progress on issues of substance that affect the Afghan people directly.

Such as a ceasefire, issues of humanitarian access, the end of targeted terrorism against members of the media and civil society. The Taliban whose cohort was touted initially as a power to make important decisions on peace. This is the Doha cohort, have turned out to be underwhelming.

Both in their willingness to make tough calls, but also in the seriousness of their engagement. They have dimmer, evaded, drugged their feet and even avoided substantive engagement. We saw the most egregious example of this in January this year. The two negotiating teams ended round one and decided to reconvene on January five after a break.

But while our team made it to Doha at the appointed date to start the talks, the Taliban were nowhere to be seen. For a few days, literally nobody had any idea of their whereabouts. 15 members of the Taliban on the UN sanction list went out. It turns out they were taking tours of Taliban suicide academies in Pakistan, and visiting their injured fighters in Karachi.

Then they flew to Moscow and Tehran. In this way, they’ve used the privilege of UN security council travel exemptions, to avoid the negotiations and maintain secret rendezvous with their terrorist cohorts across the viewer line.

And when the group returned to Doha 20 days later, they were singing a different tune. Instead of talking about peace, they were talking preconditions to negotiations, something in the air in Quetta and Karachi that I guess changes your thinking.

All of these of course happened as the Taliban outfits were prosecuting an all out war against Afghan state and society. Targeted terrorism against activists, journalists, judges, prosecutors, and civilians. Under this circumstance, the Afghan government is very clear in it’s position.

One, we're pursuing all possible avenues to get to dignified and lasting peace. We will not be the first to pull out of negotiations. The judgment of history and the need of the hour would not support that. But we are also meeting Taliban’s terrorism with tough minded pragmatism on the battlefield.

We're not turning the other chief. On the international level, we're using all options on the table, including pushing for a review of the U.N. travel exemptions, to prevent abuse and misuse. And proposing for listing key Taliban members, who have planned, directed and executed the escalation of their terrorism.

The government of Afghanistan is also actively pursuing a regional approach to bring about consensus among our neighbors and regional actors around the common denominator of counter terrorism and counter narcotics, which are shared threats.

We’re also pursuing aggressive regional activity in energy transit projects, using Afghanistan status as a land break between South and central Asia to build on common denominators and appeal to the self interest of our neighbors. Not only that, we’re also going further a field traversing the lapis lazuli route to get to the Caspian Sea and European markets.
President Ghani’s policy of multi alignment, whereby we enhance our alignment of interests with all our regional and local partners, but avoid becoming a party to their disagreements. And this is the guiding principle of our foreign and national security policy.

Mutual respect and interest and trust will enable us to achieve the end state of a sovereign united peaceful and democratic Afghanistan, capable of expanding the gains of the past 19 years. This end state articulated by president Ghani is also supported by our key partners and allies, including our foundational partner the United States, allies in NATO and partners in the EU.

As announced by my office and the White House after my call with NSA Sullivan on January 22nd, Afghanistan maintains close ongoing dialogue in consultation across various levels with the United States, involving both NSCs and other tenants, including with ambassador Khalilzad.

We welcome the restoration of the traditional channels of bilateral relations. And to these consultations, we are actively feeding into the ongoing U.S. political review. As part of these consultations, the government has shared several key policy documents, that share our view on various important aspects of our bilateral relationship, including peace and counter terrorism.

With respect to high level diplomatic initiatives, such as the event in Turkey, the government is off the opinion that we will remain open to any initiative that could take us closer to the goal of a dignified peace in a democratic unified Afghanistan, capable of preserving our gains of the past 20 years, including women’s rights and the rights of minorities. Thank you ambassador again for your time.

Husain Haqqani:
Thank you very much ambassador for your time. Let me just begin by asking a question that everyone in Washington is asking. Is the Afghan government prepared for some power sharing with the Taliban as the price for peace? And if so, on what conditions?

Hamdullah Mohib:
Let me say that we are willing to make any sacrifices that are required for durable peace in Afghanistan. Starting with the power sharing, but is power sharing our real problem? We find a lot of disagreement with the Taliban on multiple issues. As our negotiating team in Doha has found out, that we have differences of opinion on foreign policy on domestic policy, on the rights of women, on the rights of minorities.

We have differences of opinion on how we treat our neighbors and what they would be allowed to do in the relationship and the partnerships that need to be held. I think that if power sharing is the only issue that we have to discuss, it is the easiest to get through, because it’s structural we can get down to truck to easy division of responsibilities or perhaps power if that’s all. But this is a very elitist way of looking at the problem.

It doesn’t solve what the Afghan people want, and that is a stable Afghanistan with a government and a system that answers to their demands and their needs. And for that, we must have a rigorous and substantive negotiation with the Taliban, on first defining how we are going to view our policies, domestic and foreign. And how our people will see our systems in the future and then get down to the power sharing part, which I think is the easiest part that we would have to deal with.

Husain Haqqani:
Are you saying that the Taliban has so far shown no flexibility in their ideological and philosophical outlook, and they still have the same views that they used to have with some modifications, and that is what is actually holding up the talks?
Hamdullah Mohib:
Absolutely. Our negotiating team that has been engaging with the Taliban reports back to us that they don't see any change in Taliban from the time that the little stunt that they had during their regime. We are yet to see the change in Taliban's posture and Taliban's opinions and Taliban's policies, that we all hoped would come because there was a lot of buzz around a changed Taliban. We don't know what that changed Taliban looks like yet, because we haven't seen a change.

Husain Haqqani:
There has been a lot of criticism of president Ghani for not being inclusive, not about the Taliban, but about non Taliban, political leaders of Afghanistan. And the thought that criticism is spilling over into the American media. There was an article very recently in Newsweek, by a former aide to former president Karzai. That suggested that president Ghani was somehow the obstruction. How do you explain that? And what is your response to those criticisms?

Hamdullah Mohib:
Our government, as you know, was formed after the elections last year. And post that election, we had serious discussions and negotiations with the main opposition leader, Dr. Abdullah, who is now the head of the high council for national reconciliation.

And as a result, we had a power sharing an agreement and 50% of the candidates seats went to Dr. Abdullah's allies. And they're currently in their places. The cabinet is split 50, 50 and Dr. Abdullah leads the main efforts on peace. And that council includes everybody, including government members that sit in that council to discuss the future of our country.

I think we have been the most consultative. We can possibly do be, president Ghani consults all the leaders when there is a major event. But the responsibility of day to day activity of the government, is the responsibility of the government.

That's what the people voted president Ghani into office, and that's why we're sitting here doing what we have to do late into the nights is to deliver on those activities. And this is a responsibility I think some members perceive inclusivity, as giving them share and the responsibility of the governance which is not feasible.

Are they engaged? Are they being consulted on major issues? Absolutely. We think that that's not only an important thing to do, it's necessary to ensure lasting peace in Afghanistan. We want to make sure that all opinions are considered when we make decisions, because in the end, history will remember us by the decisions we make and those decisions need to be reflective of all walks of life.

And sometimes that means we have to make some tough decisions and include other people that perhaps are not all on the same page. In the Afghan opposition, this is a republic as any other where else, we have lots of different voices and sometimes giving space to one voice also can bring this criticism from others who oppose it.

Husain Haqqani:
Basically you're saying that Afghanistan's friends and those concerned about security and awareness plan should not be too concerned about this elite sniping in Kabul. And that, that's just for the cost in terms of how political manipulation and machination takes place?
Hamdullah Mohib:
Sometimes we feel that the expectation of the international community on our friend from Afghanistan is contradictory. On the one hand, they want us to be democratic and hence we've spent so much time on elections policies, the parliament and other. The normal procedures and normal way of business for a republic to do.
And then at the other extent, they expect us to act like a dictatorship where we can dictate to people more on how and what they should act. The reality is that if we are a democracy, there ought to be different voices, there ought to be criticisms. But does it mean that criticism is right? Every criticism is not the same.
We have to evaluate what we're hearing and understand where it's coming from and how factual that criticism is. We unfortunately have a very active political society, and there is nothing else for them to do.
In the United States, you have these think times where former politicians can join and be a part of the dialogue, in Afghanistan that doesn't exist. The only way to remain active and of value, is if you are seen as an opposition. And so you must create criticism sometime, even if it's not factual.

Husain Haqqani:
You spoke about the republic several times. The Taliban say that the republic is not acceptable to them, that they want the recreation of the Islamic Emirate. In fact, there have been some statements saying that the legitimate ruler of Afghanistan is the Taliban Emir.
And therefore, all that is to be negotiated is the withdrawal of foreign troops. Is that a more fundamental issue that people sometimes understand and talk about, in relation to Afghanistan and the peace process in the U.S.?

Hamdullah Mohib:
I'll take that in two parts that question. One, a leader must be among its people and must be seen. No one has seen Taliban leaders, not just the Emir that they claim, but even lower level officials have not been seen by the Afghan people. They don't know what they look like, they don't know where they live. They do know where they live, but in hindsight. They don't know what their financial situation is, how they live, what are their values. All they know them through is names and violence. And that can not be called legitimate leadership by any means as a people.
And then when it comes back to the republics question this is not something we’re just promoting because we are here and in a government. This is not a government position. Again, this is the position that the people voted and want to see. People fear Taliban, they don't want the Taliban too. They fear that.
They want to see their interests reflected in the government and they want their voices being heard. The Republic provides an opportunity for all groups to come together. Taliban is not the only group in Afghanistan, they're not the only reality of this country. It is a reality, but a part of it. The government or the republic represents Jumbish e Islami, Jamiat e Islami, Hizb e Islami, and it will have a place for Taliban, but it also represents other democratic groups and parties, civil society, media, and all of that has a space in the republic for. The reason we insist on the republic is because it can represent or provide opportunity for all of these groups to peacefully converge and create a system that is answerable to the Afghan people.
The Taliban’s Emirate is not accommodating, or cannot accommodate all these other interest groups that are in Afghanistan. And they’re by no means smaller than the Taliban. If their interests were not represented in the state again, they couldn't become an insurgency like the Taliban became when they were not represented in the government and they were not included upon.

When we represent, when we say that we want a republic, we say it because we think that this is the only way to reach a stable and a peaceful Afghanistan, which will not have reasons inside the country for another war.

We want the war to come to an end. We want this killing and the suffering to come to an end. And in that to do that compromises must be made on all sides, and that compromise can be made in the republic.

Husain Haqqani:
The Taliban say that they have a approach that they call a talking and fighting, meaning that they will continue to talk, but they will also continue to fight. That basically means that they can continue to attack, which they have been doing. How prepared is the Afghan government to do it? And what is the critical contribution of the United States in that fighting?

If the United States pulls out, how are you positioned to continue the fight? Because that's the reason why ambassador Khalilzad says there has to be a deal before America withdraws. And several people who think that, that deal is not necessary because after all, when the Soviets withdrew, they did not have a deal about the future of the government in Kabul. And the government that they had supported in Afghanistan, the Najibullah government lasted for almost four years after the Soviet withdrawal. And it fell only because the Soviet Union collapsed. Explain to us the ground situation on the Afghan's government's capabilities in being able to keep the Taliban away. If there is no conclusion to these talks in time before an American withdrawal.

Hamdullah Mohib:
Last year secretary Pompeo tweeted as one of the achievements of the United States, that no American soldiers had been harmed since the February deal with the Taliban. And that speaks to the capabilities of the Afghan government and the Afghan security forces. We have been engaged in that fight since the war has not stopped.

In fact, Taliban increased their activity. This winter was the bloodiest of all. In previous years, the level of violence and the level of casualties had been lower than this year's winter. They changed their tactic to targeted killings and roadside bombs, instead of using truck bombs and suicide attacks in the cities.

But they continued their violence all throughout the country, in all walks of life. We have been responding to that. The ANDSF has been deployed. Has had the core responsibility for this.

Husain Haqqani:
The Afghan National Security Force.

Hamdullah Mohib:
The Afghan National Defense and Security Forces. They have been solely responsible for all this protection and operations. We do seek help from the United States and this was reflected in their agreement with the Taliban. When we are under attack, we still rely on some of the air power the United States has in Afghanistan.
We rely on some of their RSR, ISR capabilities, which we're still developing. I think for our partners who may be concerned about the capabilities of ANDSF, I want to assure them that you should be proud of helping us rebuilt our national defense and security forces. They're extremely capable. They're volunteer based, no one has been forced to come to join the army, yet they do. And they continue to defend their state that they believe in their country, that they believe in and the values that they believe in. They are a capable force with all that violence raging.

When we had close to 150,000 foreign troops in our country, and all of that burden was shifted to the Afghan security forces. And yet we're able to keep our momentum, means that there is something in place.

I'm confident that the Afghan Security Forces can hold on their own. I have said this before that our problem is not in capability anymore. It's not a connected problem. It is a financial problem. What needs to be ensured is that we can sustain the ANDSF.

Now, can the Afghan government do that at current standard? No, with our own resources, we cannot. We will require some technical help, and we will require some financial support for some time to see. And that's what we're proposing to the administration, to the new administration, to support the Afghan Security Forces, to find a way to support the Afghan Security Forces for a longer period financially.

And then we can work on other issues on the side. This will also improve our prospects for peace, because for as long as the Taliban and their sponsors believe that the U.S. withdrawal would result in the collapse of the Afghan government, they will continue this policy that they currently have. They will have a hard line and they will not negotiate in earnest. But as soon as they realize that this is a long term commitment, they will not be able to inspire their fighters. Even now the Taliban are having trouble. The fighting that went in Helmand and Kandahar revealed some of the weaknesses of the Taliban.

First, Taliban sent fighters from Helmand to Pakistan wherever they needed. When they attacked the Helmand, they believe that they would have enough forces there. Unfortunately, they didn't, many Taliban don't believe in this war anymore.

They believe that after the agreement with the United States, there is no legitimacy for this conflict. The international body of ULMA has come and issued statements through out except for one country. All other countries including Qatar, India, Indonesia, many ULMA have come forward in Kuwait.

They have all come forward and said that there is no legitimacy for this conflict. The Taliban rank and file have been affected by this. They had to bring fighters from Taliban to Helmand to fight and also to Kandahar. Of course, fighters from Farrah were not used to the territories so they took a lot of casualties and were not happy about this.

They also brought fighters from Zabul who were not happy about this in return. We are seeing a weakening Taliban rank and file as a result of this deal, the legitimacy is known. And also the ANDSF continues to show its strength, despite this increased level of violence against them.

And with little support, we think that this capability, that is a joint asset of the Afghan government and our international partners chief in that who is the United States, has the capability to defend Afghanistan against an insurgency against terrorism and counter narcotics. They do counter narcotics, should it have continued financial support.
Husain Haqqani:

Do we have a number in mind for those people in America who say hey 19 years is long enough, we've spent blood and treasure in Afghanistan? What you're proposing is that we no longer lead the Americans to spend their blood. There's already a very small American force compared to 150000 that was there at one time. This is just a minuscule number.

But that too can be phased out without difficulty, as long as there is a financial commitment. What kind of financial commitment are we talking about? It would obviously be relatively cost effective for the U.S. to pay for the ANDSF, without having to take casualties for the American side. And make sure that the Taliban never come back into par with the brutality that they had before. Why has that not moved forward so far that proposal?

The U.S. policy makers have two sets of problems that they need to address. One is the number of troops in Afghanistan that are involved in combat. We're not talking about troop numbers who are stationed here for other purposes or protection of embassy, any future planning of disasters, prevention of disasters, but those who are engaged in violence or in combat in Afghanistan.

That's one question. To reduce that number so they no longer need combat troops here. I will also caution against the not confusing that with train and assist, because we do have train and assist that not always is active military sometimes there are contractors, but we do have that.

And it's not just Afghanistan, every country has foreign training advisement system capabilities in their military forces. And the second is on the huge numbers of money spent in the country, again in defending Afghanistan. They have a set of challenge of counter terrorism and counter narcotics.

Now, if they withdraw these troops who are not involved in combat, then what happens to counter terrorism? And what happens if the space is then available to narco trade militia that once ruled 1990s, what do we do about this?

We propose that the United States and other NATO partners channel the support it currently gives to Afghanistan through ANDSF in special forms of the ANDSF, which is about $5 million in total coming from the United States and $1 billion coming from our other NATO partners.

And we will use those resources to do those three things, counter terrorism, counter narcotics, and counter insurgency. It will solve both of those problems for the U.S. They will not have to maintain combat troops. I must state that combat troops is important and emphasize on that.

And they will not have to spend an unknown amount of money defending or fighting terrorism in this region. Now, any other expenses they might have for maintaining any level of troops would be dependent on what U.S. policy is.

Husain Haqqani:

Basically you're saying that excessive focus on quick withdrawal that began with the U.S. process of negotiations with the Taliban, is actually not as important for the future of Afghanistan. What is more important is determining what kind of government Afghanistan will have. You are open to having the Taliban join the government, but as one of the players, as long as they agree to the rules that the views of the majority will prevail.

And that they cannot force their version of Islam down the throats of all of Afghans. And that, that will be the basis of negotiation that the U.S. needs to talk to you about what security support they can give to the Afghan national defense forces, so that they can phase out their own combat troops out of Afghanistan.
Hamdullah Mohib:
Absolutely. In preparation for this, what we have done is we've brought all our special forces in the army and the police and at the ANDSF together under one command. Now these are forces that are being trained by the best, by Americans and NATO troops. They have different capabilities, but they are prepared for this terrain.
And they currently do almost 97% of the offensive operations in Afghanistan. And indeed they have been effective against Daish, they've been effective against Al-Qaeda, and they've been effective against the Taliban.

Husain Haqqani:
Daish is ISIS, right? Daish is ISIS for the American viewers?

Hamdullah Mohib:
What you would call ISIS king. They have been effective against all of those. And these are the most transparent institutions in the Afghan system. They were built from ground up by U.S. and NATO allies and they've been trained by them.
There is no question of any corruption or ghost numbers among them. They are dedicated to the war to the fight that they're involved in right now. And they believe in the core values of defending their territory and their people against terrorism. And they're very capable. And the U.S. know these leaders and these forces very well.

Husain Haqqani:
Now, what do you say to those who say that, that is all a recipe for forever war. That as long as the Taliban are able to recruit and they are able to have their insurgents and you're able to have some financial support that keeps your forces able to fight them, that there will be a war forever. And to avoid that maybe a lot more concessions need to be made to the Taliban. What do you say to them?

Hamdullah Mohib:
We are not prepared for a war we can not make peace. The Taliban will only use this opportunity that is afforded to them for peace to drag this process along, and to wait out the withdrawal of foreign troops before they can impose their rule on the Afghan people. Which I know will not be acceptable to the American people and all our other partners.
And they would have to make the return because I know the conscience of our allies would not be able to tolerate Taliban rule in Afghanistan. And unfortunately it also means that the conflict will not end. People will not surrender to the Taliban. People cannot surrender to the Taliban. It's one thing to accept them as a reality and bring them into the fold of the governance space, it's another to live under their tyranny.

Husain Haqqani:
Basically, accept the people, the people who have become Taliban, but not accept the ideas that the Taliban bring for the future of Afghanistan.
Hamdullah Mohib:
There will be space in the democratic Republic of Afghanistan for the Taliban's values their believes as any other party would have. But the rule or the system here would have to tolerate their opposition as well.

Husain Haqqani:
And they can of course, convince a majority of the people to vote for them or support them, and then change the rules accordingly if they can have the support of the majority. Is that the idea that you are espousing?

Hamdullah Mohib:
Absolutely. The Taliban need to be responsible to the Afghan people both ways. This is not a broadcast system. The Taliban currently broadcasts what they do and they want people to take that as their word. They say they're fighting against an invasion when there isn't one. They say they're fighting against foreign occupation, when there isn't one.

They say they want to bring a just system, but you'll find from open source research, that the Taliban system is one of the most corrupt systems that is founded on illegal mining, illegal logging, illegal taxation and also on narcotics. Now how can someone call or a group call itself just, when that is the base of its finances, and its leaders are known to be major narco traders.

Husain Haqqani:
And of course they have been among their demands, in the process for example, in return for the release of a hostage an American hostage that they have in return and while demanding release of more prisoners. They have often demanded the release of major narcotics figures that are arrested and in prison in the United States.

Hamdullah Mohib:
Now the Taliban made a lot of claims, but they are not open to the scrutiny of the public. And the last 20 years Afghanistan has built a very open society. These people are used to responsiveness from their leaders and their government and their system. And they openly criticize perhaps some of the most critical media outlets in Afghanistan, who question everything and are used to this and take this as a norm.

I think the Taliban are underestimating what kind of a public in Afghanistan they will face. Again, I will repeat what I said earlier, they're feared, they're not respected, they're not loved, they're not liked even. They're feared.

Husain Haqqani:
Have they broken from Al-Qaeda? Because that was one of the promises that they made in the Doha agreement. And there was a UN report that said that they haven't, what's the state of play on that question?

Hamdullah Mohib:
Again, there's independent reporting on that, but outside of Afghan sources, Afghanistan government sources that verified that the Taliban have not broken with Al-Qaeda. In fact, our position is that they
cannot break with Al-Qaeda. They are so ingrained into the Taliban system that they will not be able to do so.

And if they do open, what kind of an Emirate would it be? The Taliban and Emir cannot be an Emir of just the Afghan people an Emir of what they call an Emir. An Emir would be an Emir of all faithfuls. Now, if it's restricted to a geography, it cannot be an Emir and there can’t be an Emirate. It really needs the fundamentals of the Taliban regime.

Husain Haqqani:
It’s important to remember that the Al-Qaeda leader Osama Bin Laden had sworn an oath of loyalty to the Taliban leader at the time Mullah Omar. And what you have said so far suggests that the Taliban, at least in their ideas and beliefs haven’t changed, even though their tactics have changed after moving to Doha and wanting to talk.

Based on what you’ve shared with us, I see that there are two or three suggestions coming from you. One is that the U.S. negotiate with the Afghan government about a longer term commitment for the Afghan National Defense Forces. And that once that is there, the U.S. will no longer need to have combat forces in Afghanistan.

The second thing I hear from you is that the Taliban are welcome to be part of the Afghan Republican Government and have a share, but they cannot and will not be allowed to impose their views and beliefs on the entire country. And the third that you want to continue to engage, talking to them and go through all the processes that have been put in place. Is it realistic that any of these processes will work out given the earlier two conditions?

Hamdullah Mohib:
We are not dealing with hypotheticals. This is the fate of 34 million people in a large country in a very critical part of the world. There is no option, but to reach for what is real and what will work to bring stability to this country that has seen enough suffering.

Husain Haqqani:
In a nutshell, what do you think American policy towards Afghanistan should be that works towards peace, but also towards disengagement of a military nature for the United States?

Hamdullah Mohib:
Afghanistan is in a different place than it was in 2001. The American people helped Afghanistan rebuild our country, rebuild our institutions. Now, does it mean that some of those institutions need reforms? Absolutely. And does it mean that we need to improve some of our services? Absolutely.

But we have been fixing the system while fighting a war. It needs to be understood that the commitment from the Afghan people is towards a democratic Afghanistan, that wants to be an ally to our partners who have helped us build this. And we want to build on those gains as we go forward, and utilize the potential that has been created.

We think that this is an opportune moment for peace. There is an opportunity for the Taliban to take. It’s also an opportunity for Pakistan to utilize, to normalize relations. And we’re pursuing all those avenues.

I think it’s important that we remain ambitious on the political front with the negotiations, but also to be realistic and have our plan Bs and Cs ready. We cannot put all our eggs in one basket and then cry over it if it fails. We have to have our backups to even give our plan A more of a chance to succeed.
Husain Haqqani:
Any final thoughts that you would like to share with our viewers today?

Hamdullah Mohib:
I think Afghanistan has remained in the thoughts and prayers of the American people. I have seen it first hand during my tenure as ambassador in the United States. I know what the American people aspire to, and I know their frustrations as well. What I would like them to know is that the Afghanistan today is a very different place, than what they saw and what the introduction of our country was to them. The capabilities they have helped us build, are going to help us maintain a stable Afghanistan for a very long time to come. They have a partner in this region, a strong partner in this region, and we'll continue to be. We look forward to a shared future, a peaceful future, a prosperous future together. I am confident in the capabilities of the Afghan as the defense and security forces. I think with this dialogue that we have began with our partners in the U.S. government, we will be able to create an environment that will bring that long term stability to Afghanistan. Sometimes, it might seem slow and frustrating, but this is a path that we must take. And we must test all avenues for peace in Afghanistan.

Husain Haqqani:
It seems that the Afghan national security advisor Hamdullah Mohib seems ready to talk and fight at the same time, and Afghanistan he says, is prepared to do that. It needs economic assistance and long term commitment from the United States, but may not need combat troops forever. So that may be something for a lot of people to think about here in Washington, DC. Thank you very much ambassador Mohib. Thank you to the audience for watching this show. Hudson Institute, this is Husain Haqqani saying, "Good bye."

Hamdullah Mohib:
Thank you Ambassador.