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US-Taliban peace talks and regional stability in Central Asia

Following the six days-peace talks held in Doha between the Taliban and the US Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation, Zalmay Khalilzad, the perspective to achieve a condition of stability and security in Afghanistan after 18 years of fighting appears a realistic option.

Even if several conditions should be satisfied by the involved actors – first of all the establishment of new relations and cooperation framework between Taliban and the Kabul's current government – also NATO Secretary-General Stoltenberg has recognized that the progress of peace talks with Taliban and their will to negotiate are encouraging steps, mainly because Taliban will work to prevent international terrorist groups (namely Daesh and Al Qaeda) from basing themselves in Afghanistan. (*Pentagon and NATO chiefs say Taliban talks have been encouraging*, ABC News, January 28, 2019, <https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/pentagon-nato-chiefs-taliban-talks-encouraging/story?id=60676803>).

The need to promote a dialogue with Taliban has progressively become a necessary option not only for the United States but also for Russia and some Central Asian bordering countries, like Uzbekistan or Turkmenistan, in order to involve Talibans in a framework of cooperation providing security both in Afghanistan and in the region. As a matter of fact, Russia considers the Talibans as a potential partner to prevent a potential takeover of the Islamic State, exploiting the incompatible ideological divergence opposing Taliban (which pursue national goals in order to create the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan) *versus* Daesh's transnational targets (Fabio Indeo, *Afghanistan peace conference: the Russian "regionalism"*, in "Strategic Observatory", CeMiSS, no.2, 2018, p.46).

Uzbekistan hosted a Taliban delegation in August 2018 to discuss on regional stability, highlighting that they should be involved to protect cross-border infrastructures, such as the Termez – Hairaton – Mazar-I-Sharif railway and the regional electric grid connections.

Moreover, in February 2018 Taliban vowed to support and protect the realization of the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India gas pipeline (TAPI) in the areas under the control of the Islamic Emirate,

due to the positive impact on the Afghan people (Catherine Putz, *TAPI Moves Into Afghanistan, Taliban Promise to Protect the Project*, The Diplomat, February 27, 2018, <https://thediplomat.com/2018/02/tapi-moves-into-afghanistan-taliban-promise-to-protect-the-project/>): TAPI's construction will be strategic for Asghabat's government to diversify export routes.

The next round of talks – scheduled at the end of February – will show the Taliban's will to implement this draft agreement accepting or not US demands to respect a long-term cease-fire and to directly negotiate with Afghan government representatives to successfully enhance the peace-process. Following the achievement of these conditions, the US could decide to withdraw its military troops and trainers from the country. At present, Taliban declare that they do not plan to rule the country alone, but they will be available to be involved in a future government (*Taliban Says Not Looking For Monopoly On Power' In Afghanistan*, Afghanistan Times, January 30, 2019, <http://www.afghanistantimes.af/taliban-says-not-seeking-monopoly-on-power-in-afghanistan/>).

However, the main issue to solve it that the Taliban refuse to deal with the government in Kabul, also asking that foreign troops must leave before it will agree to a peace settlement.

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