

What is an Acceptable Price for Peace?

Rise & Shine, September 15th

Ephesians 2:14-16

For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it.

Questions:

1. How do you feel about inviting the Taliban or any other foreign adversary to America in the name of peace?
 2. Is compromise necessary in achieving peace? When is compromise unacceptable?
 3. How far would you go in opposition to your friends to make peace with an enemy?
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In the News

The U.S. and the Taliban: The bloody road to on-and-off peace talks

President Donald Trump made a bombshell announcement last Saturday, via Twitter, about plans for a secret Camp David meeting with the president of Afghanistan and representatives of the Taliban — only to say he had canceled the talks. It was the latest development in an 18-year-long war waged in Afghanistan between the United States and the Islamic fundamentalist militants.

The Taliban rose to power in Afghanistan in the 1990s amid the fighting among various factions following the collapse of the Moscow-backed government in Kabul. The Taliban ruled under sharia law, enforced by the Ministry of Virtue and Vice, a religious police force.

Soon after the 9/11 terror attacks, on September 18, 2001, President George W. Bush signed a resolution authorizing the use of force against those

responsible: al-Qaeda, with the support of the Taliban. Soon after, the U.S. launched its first air strikes on Afghanistan after the Taliban refused to hand over al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden.

Over the course of what has become America's longest war, more than 2,400 U.S. servicemen and women have died in Afghanistan, as have approximately 1,000 NATO and coalition forces. The U.S. has spent more than \$2 trillion on the conflict.

When President Obama took office in 2009, he ordered a troop surge to handle the increase in violence from extremist attacks. Later that year, Mr. Obama announced additional forces to be deployed. Afghan security forces officially took over the war in 2014, but thousands of U.S. troops remained to deal with the continuing instability.

Since then, the Taliban has steadily gained more power and more territory. Taliban militants now control more of Afghanistan than at any time since the 2001 U.S. invasion, giving them more leverage, and a crucial seat at the negotiating table. There are about 14,000 American troops still in the country.

For nearly a year there have been nine rounds of U.S.-Taliban talks, with former U.S. Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad serving as President Trump's Afghanistan envoy. The Taliban want U.S. and NATO troops out of Afghanistan as quickly as possible, while the U.S. seeks guarantees that the Taliban will not allow the country to become a haven for extremist groups like ISIS.

Just last week, Khalilzad announced that he had come to an agreement "in principle" with the Taliban for the withdrawal of about 5,000 U.S. troops within 135 days of a deal being signed. The deal, reached after months of negotiations, is intended to open the way for so-called "intra Afghan" talks to end the fighting and reach a full political settlement. However, deep suspicions remain, and it is still unclear whether the Taliban will agree to full talks with the government. Previously, the Taliban have said they were willing to meet government officials purely in a personal capacity and not as representatives of the state.

Then, on Saturday, President Trump made the surprise announcement that peace talks with the Taliban had been canceled. Mr. Trump tweeted that he "called off peace negotiations" in the wake of last week's car bomb attack near the U.S. embassy in Kabul that killed one American service member and

another NATO soldier, as well as at least 10 civilians. Now, President Trump says negotiations with the Taliban are off, and now the U.S. military is ramping up the fight.

Afghan President Ashraf Ghani was surprised at the cancellation. He had been informed in advance that the Taliban had been invited to Camp David, a senior Afghan government official confirmed to CBS News. The official said the U.S. called off Ghani's visit, and denied that the cancellation was a protest move by the Afghan government.

Also surprised by Mr. Trump's announcement were the Taliban, who warned in a statement that it would lead to a prolonging of an already-long war, and the loss of more American lives.

Mr. Trump's move was criticized by members of both parties. Republican Congressman Adam Kinzinger, of Illinois, tweeted: "Never should leaders of a terrorist organization that hasn't renounced 9/11 and continues in evil be allowed in our great country. NEVER. Full stop."

Congressman Adam Schiff, a Democrat and chairman of the House Intelligence Committee, tweeted: "Negotiations to end America's longest war are not a reality show, and an ill-prepared summit — as with North Korea — was not the answer. Let the diplomats do their work."

"Face the Nation" host Margaret Brennan reports that, according to U.S. and Afghan officials, the reason the Trump administration called off the talks goes deeper than the president's tweet, in which he claimed the Thursday bombing promoted him to cancel. There had been no ceasefire agreed to by either side, and negotiations had been continuing Thursday even after that bombing. Talks had also gone on despite the deaths of 15 other U.S. military personnel since the beginning of the year.

A senior administration official told Brennan that it became apparent that the Taliban negotiators did not have full command and control of those Taliban fighters who'd conducted the attack. In addition, key details of the agreement were still unfinished.

The Taliban publicly have said they would not travel to the U.S. until a deal was signed. There was confusion on this point; on "Face the Nation"

Sunday, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo told Brennan the administration did believe the Taliban had accepted its invitation.

There had also been the backdrop of disagreement within the Trump administration, particularly between Secretary Pompeo and now former national security advisor John Bolton, on whether a reduction of U.S. troops could happen with or without a negotiated deal.

Romans 12:19

Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord."

Luke 6:27-28

"But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you."

Prayer for Peace Among the Nations (BCP p.816)

Almighty God our heavenly Father, guide the nations of the world into the way of justice and truth, and establish among them that peace which is the fruit of righteousness, that they may become the kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
Amen.