



Why the Taliban should accept Afghanistan's ceasefire offer

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After a particularly violent summer, Afghanistan's president, Ashraf Ghani, proposed a three-month ceasefire with the Taliban this past Sunday, to begin on Monday. It follows a first ceasefire implemented during Eid al-Fitr, in June, which saw both Afghan security forces and Taliban insurgents refrain from attacks.

The big picture: The Taliban have not officially accepted or rejected Ghani's offer. But if the Taliban want its demands — which include a U.S. troop withdrawal from Afghanistan and direct talks with the U.S. — met, the group needs to increase its legitimacy. Accepting Ghani's ceasefire is a low-cost opportunity to do so.

The Taliban are militarily strong and have continued to challenge the Afghan government in recent months, as evidenced by the attacks in Farah, Ghazni, and Kunduz. But as the war in Afghanistan enters its 18th year, a consensus has emerged among all stakeholders — the U.S., the Afghan government, Afghanistan's neighboring countries and the Taliban themselves — that the ongoing war in Afghanistan can't end without a political solution. For example, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asia Alice Wells met with Taliban officials in Qatar last month to restart peace talks, and continues to urge Pakistan to persuade the Taliban to negotiate.

The Taliban of course can simply reject the ceasefire and continue attacks on Afghan security forces. But in accepting Ghani's offer, the group would show a serious interest in a political solution. It would also distinguish itself from other violent militant groups operating in Afghanistan, such as ISIS, which launched rockets on Kabul residents celebrating Eid on Tuesday.

The bottom line: A second ceasefire right now is in every major stakeholder's interest — even the Taliban's. And while it would in all likelihood be insufficient to create legitimate and lasting avenues for political reconciliation, it is an essential step toward peace in Afghanistan.

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