

Headlines:

- **Afghan Talks Fail Again**
- **100 Years after Sykes-Picot**
- **Sworn Enemies or Sworn Allies?**

Details:

Afghan Talks Fail Again

As the Afghan peace talks begin their 5th round on the 18th of May, in Islamabad, officials from the government in Kabul are considering a U-turn on the peace deal. The Taliban have continuously snubbed any form of negotiation with the government in Kabul, choosing instead to intensify its campaign against them this spring. As a result Omar Zakhiwal, the Afghan ambassador to Pakistan stated that the aim of the talks now was to not negotiate peace, "We have gone past that now. We are talking about serious steps that needs to be taken against the Taliban. They refuse to come to a peaceful negotiation, so we need to discuss actions needed based on that." The Taliban have not taken part in any of the four rounds of peace talks so far, organised by the Quadrilateral Coordination Group (QCG) which comprises representatives from Afghanistan, Pakistan, China and the US. The words of Zakhiwal are nothing new according to Zabihullah Mujahid, a Taliban spokesman who states, "They [Afghan government] have been giving out such statements for very long now and it doesn't scare us," Going on to say, "Our conditions are still the same. We demand the implementation of Islamic law in Afghanistan and the departure of all foreign forces." The US has left Afghanistan with a weak, unstable government and a poor security apparatus, incapable of defending against the enemy. An enemy who fought the global super power for over a decade yet still manages to cause tremors in the establishment, the need to negotiate from the Afghan government is evident of this.

100 Years after Sykes-Picot

This week saw the 100-year anniversary of the Sykes-Picot Agreement, which dismembered the Middle East after WW1, creating new nations and nationalities that had never previously existed. Much of the reporting in the western media attempted to absolve both Britain and France of responsibility, blaming the people of the region and their failure to modernise and embrace western values. Despite controlling the region through the autocratic leaders, who happily oppressed the host population to maintain western interests in the region. Despite all of this, the West has failed to convince the people of the Middle East of their values. Successive surveys over the last decade consistently point towards the masses wanted more Islam in the governance of their countries. All of this culminated in the Arab Spring, which broke the back of the rulers and their iron grip, maintained through fear. The next century is looking to be very different from the past.

Sworn Enemies or Sworn Allies?

On Tuesday 17 May 2016, the US Secretary of State John Kerry and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov agreed to co-chair a meeting of the International Syria Support Group to reinforce the cessation of hostilities agreement made in February 2016. This is in response to the worsening humanitarian situation in Syria which is being flagged up by individuals all around the world. However, such calls were indeed absent over the last few weeks where the city Aleppo was under heavy attack by the regime. In fact, it is becoming clearer that even the solution posited by the members of this meeting, including USA and Russia, includes retaining the regime in the form of a "transitional government." This does not stand well in the face of the Syrian people as explained by one opposition advisor who said, "*Kerry has been making noises about consequences for violations of the ceasefire, but I don't think they have much to offer, or anything that will change things in a significant way.*" With the lack of inclusion of rebel groups in this meeting and the lack of support from Syrians in general, one must question the true reasons behind such meetings and what lies ahead for the region as a whole.