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In this issue:

- Preface 2

The Heart of Asia Conference and a new turn in Pak-Afghan Relations

- The last one year of Pak-Afghan ties..... 4
- The fresh wave of bilateral ties..... 5
- Warm Welcome to Ashraf Ghani..... 5
- Reinitiating the Peace Process..... 6
- Impacts of this Conference on relations of Afghanistan and the Regional Countries 7
- Evaluation of the "Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process" Conference..... 9

President Ghani's Visit to Europe: Achievements and Commitment of Aids

- Germany and the continuation of Aid to Afghanistan..... 11
- Italy and continuation of aid to Afghanistan..... 11
- Achievements from the Visit to Sweden..... 12
- Meeting of NATO Ministers of Foreign Affairs in Brussels..... 13
- Achievements of the Visit to Europe; from Commitment to Action..... 13

Preface

The Fifth 2-day Ministerial Conference of the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process (HOA-IP) was held in Islamabad. President Ghani was not expected to participate in this conference; however, he participated in this conference and moreover, gave a lot of importance to it. 14 HOA-IP member countries, 17 supporting countries and 11 international organizations participated in this conference. The main purpose of this conference is to strengthen the regional cooperation and helping the Afghan peace process, and the hopes for reviving the stalled peace process and mending relationships with regional countries are also emerged from the latest conference once again.

The Pak-Afghan ties have had a lot of ups and downs in the last year. Fresh waves in the Pak-Afghan ties, recent commitments regarding the Afghan peace process, bilateral meetings of the regional countries on the sidelines of the “Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process (HOA-IP)” and also the impacts of this conference are analyzed here.

You will read about the six-day visit of Afghan President to European countries in the second part of the Weekly Analysis. President Ghani briefed the media about the achievements of his visits to France, Germany, Italy and Sweden and called it “fruitful”. In this trip, Sweden promised \$1.2B and Germany 380 Million Euro as aid to Afghanistan. Although, Omar Zakhilwal, the President’s advisor on economy said that Germany and Sweden have not promised new aids and these are the aids that had been promised in Tokyo Conference 2012. However, it does not matter whether these aids are newly promised or previously promised, the question is that how much these aids are practical?

These are the issues which will be discussed in details in this issue of weekly analysis.

The Heart of Asia Conference and a new turn in Pak-Afghan Relations



The Fifth Ministerial Conference of the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process (HOA-IP) held in Islamabad, Pakistan, on 08-09 December 2015. The first conference on this process was held in Istanbul in 2011. Senior officials of most of the regional countries participated in this conference; among them were the Chinese Foreign Minister, Wang Yi, Indian External Affairs Minister, Sushma Swaraj and Iranian Foreign Minister, Jawad Zarif.

Afghan President Ashraf Ghani went to Pakistan in order to participate in this conference. Pakistan warmly welcomed Afghan President. The most senior Pakistani political and military officials were there at the airport to welcome him.

Along with participating in the conference, Afghan President also had bilateral meetings with officials from India, Iran and China on the sidelines of the conference.

Moreover, Pakistan and India also held a bilateral meeting on the sideline of the conference and discussed about mending the ties between both countries.

The Pak-Afghan ties have had a lot of ups and downs in the last year. The Pak-Afghan ties in last one year, the activities of HOA-IP conferences and also the impact of Ashraf Ghani's recent visit to Pakistan on the Afghan peace process are analyzed here.

The last one year of Pak-Afghan ties

Last year, the Afghan president, unlike the past 14 years foreign policy, tried to build good ties with Pakistan; he provided several privileges to Pakistan and he, in order to please Pakistan, increased the distance from Delhi. Hence, the visits of senior officials increased between Kabul-Islamabad.

After the ties mended, strong promises on the peace process were given and hopes for the successfulness of this process were increased. By the way, a series of bloody explosions rocked the Capital Kabul, the war became extended to the North of the country and insecurity incidents became increased in the entire country. Besides insecurities, the promises of Pakistan on that it would make the Taliban to have negotiations with the Afghan government became delayed from a date to date.

After the Shah Shaheed bloody incident in Kabul, the Pak-Afghan ties went worse. This scenario made the Afghan media, Parliament and the local people suspicious about Pakistan and at all, the internal pressures on the National Unity Government (NUG) increased. Therefore, the NUG changed its policy and started efforts to rebuild ties with India. From the other side, Pakistan, insistently, emphasized on reinitiating the Afghan peace process and it got use of "Pashto" card, also. Besides that, the regional diplomacy also became active to resume Afghan peace process and due to this the ties between Afghanistan and Pakistan entered into a new phase.

The fresh wave of bilateral ties

In the last few months, the Kabul-Islamabad ties were so frozen and as the insecurities increased in the country, the Afghan President Ashraf Ghani clearly stated that “Afghanistan is in an undeclared war with Pakistan” and therefore, it conditioned the mending ties and reinitiating the peace process to an international guarantee from Pakistan.

Some days ago, a number of Pakistani Pashtun nationalist leaders visited Kabul and they were also carrying the message of Pakistani premier that if President Ghani meet him on a sideline of the Paris Climate Change Conference.

However, meeting with Nawaz Sharif in Paris was not a part of the Afghan President’s agenda, but due to the encouragement of Pashtun leaders and the pressures from China and the US, Ashraf Ghani met Nawaz Sharif in a trilateral meeting and, then, in another bilateral meeting as well. In these meetings, Nawaz Sharif invited the Afghan President to participate in HOA-IP and, for the first time, announced the quadrilateral policy regarding the Afghan peace process, in which China, America, Afghanistan and Pakistan is taking part.

According to some sources, the Afghan president was impacted by Nawaz Sharif’s words, and of course, he became more encouraged after the Pakistani Army Chief of Staff held a video call with him and invited him to Pakistan. Also, the increasing interest of the US and China in Pak-Afghan close ties caused pressures on Ashraf Ghani to become increased in order for relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan to become normal. Due to these two reasons, Ashraf Ghani traveled to Pakistani in order to participate in HOA-IP.

Warm Welcome to Ashraf Ghani

Ashraf Ghani was welcomed so warmly in Pakistan. It was the sort of welcome normally reserved for visits from prominent Pakistani allies like the president of China or the king of Saudi Arabia. However, that sort of welcome also surprised

the Afghani side itself. The reasons for this sort of welcome to Ashraf Ghani in Pakistan are as follows:

- Pakistan wants not to lose the Afghan government alongside the Taliban;
- Pakistan wants not to lose Kabul due to latest visits of Haneef Atmar and Hekmat Khalil Karzai to India;
- The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has changed the minds of Pakistani political and military leaders; now, they are also busy on negotiations with Balochs and Bugti's family in order to solve this problem. Besides that, it wants security to be provided in Afghanistan because it has role in succeeding this great project;
- It was a diplomatic protocol in order to show their veracity to the international community and the participants of HOA-IP.

Reinitiating the Peace Process

As long as the HOA-IP ended, hopes for resumption of the second round of the peace negotiations between the Afghan government and the Taliban emerged. In the bilateral meeting between the Afghan President and Nawaz Sharif, the Pakistani Prime Minister (PM) in Paris, Nawaz Sharif suggested a quadrilateral meeting for the peace process to be held this time; America and China alongside Afghanistan and Pakistan would be also participating in this process.

Afghanistan-Pakistan-USA and Afghanistan-Pakistan-China trilateral meetings and Afghanistan, Pakistan-USA -China quadrilateral meetings were held on the sidelines of HOA-IP. The Afghan-led peace process was emphasized in these meetings, according to the statements released by Pakistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Three new topics regarding the peace process were discussed in these talks; they are as following:

First: Afghanistan, Pakistan, USA and china agrees to work together to create a conducive atmosphere that encourages Taliban groups to engage in meaningful and sustained negotiations¹;

¹ For further studies see <http://mofa.gov.pk/pr-details.php?mm=MzMyMw,,>

Second: China and America would also participate in the negotiations directly in order to eliminate the mistrust and suspicion between Kabul and Islamabad;

Third: The Constitution of Afghanistan would be respected².

On Wednesday night, Pakistan's military chief General Raheel Sharif held a meeting with Ghani to discuss a possible timeframe for "reinvigorating" the Afghan peace process. Therefore, the Afghan Foreign Minister said: "... our allies, in this case U.S. and China and of course Pakistan, have expressed their willingness to work with Afghanistan on peace and reconciliation process. And we very much hope that his effort will result in a result-oriented peace process where we will see some positive moves in the coming weeks..."

Impacts of this Conference on relations of Afghanistan and the Regional Countries

The leaders of regional countries met each other in a part of the HOA-IP in order to mend their bilateral relationships, and this conference also played a role in mending the Pak-India and Pak-Afghan ties.

Pak-India Ties: However, the Indian premier, Narendra Modi, as an initiative, invited the leaders of South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) to India, and so the Pakistani premier Nawaz Sharif was invited in this group, also. If this symbolic action was neglected, the Pak-India ties were too knotty. Both of the countries fought on border issues for several times, they suspended the negotiations and their frozen political relations even impacted Sports (start of Cricket matches between them is influenced by politics).

Indian Foreign Minister Sushma Swaraj attended Islamabad as a result of Pakistan's invitations and since 2012; she is the first Indian senior officials that travel to Pakistan.

Indian Foreign Minister Sushma Swaraj held separate talks with the Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and his advisor Aziz on the sidelines of HOA-IP. In this

² For further studies see <http://mofa.gov.pk/pr-details.php?mm=MzMyMw,,>

bilateral meeting, both sides condemned terrorism and resolved to cooperate to eliminate it. Also, they noted the successful talks on terrorism and security related issues in Bangkok by the two NSAs and decided that the NSAs will continue to address all issues connected to terrorism. Both sides, accordingly, agreed to a Comprehensive Bilateral Dialogue and directed the Foreign Secretaries to work out the modalities and schedule of the meetings under the Dialogue including Peace and Security, CBMs, Jammu & Kashmir, Siachen, Sir Creek, Wullar Barrage/Tulbul Navigation Project, Economic and Commercial Cooperation, Counter-Terrorism, Narcotics Control, Humanitarian Issues, People to People exchanges and religious tourism³.

Pak-Afghan Ties: The participation of President Ghani in the “Heart of Asia” Conference caused a fresh wave of ties with Pakistan; both sides expressed coordination for the resumption of peace process. This conference, temporarily, eliminated mistrust between both countries; however, fruitfulness of it would be directly linked to the successfulness of the second round of the peace process and its consequences would be seen in the upcoming month, then.

Afghanistan-China Relations: President Ghani met Chinese Foreign Minister on a sideline of the conference; the important improvements in these talks are as following:

- Afghanistan requested to join the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) in order for this bank to help Afghanistan in building railway in Afghanistan and connecting Afghanistan with China through Wakhan Port;
- The Afghan side suggested for joint cooperation with China, Afghanistan and Germany in electricity production, house construction and development sector. The Chinese Foreign Minister welcomed this suggestion and called for establishing a committee regarding this issue;
- The Afghan side is ready to transfer gas pipeline from Turkmenistan to China;
- The Afghan government officially requested the Chinese government to encourage the company working on the Aynak Copper Mine to fulfill its promise regarding building the railway.

³ For further studies see Pak-India joint statement <http://mofa.gov.pk/pr-details.php?mm=MzMyMg>

- Afghanistan officially requested for Chinese assistance in equipping the Afghan Air Forces (AIF)⁴.

Afghanistan-Iran Ties: Emergence of *Daesh* group in Afghanistan, Chabahar Port and the Water Management were the issues discussed by Afghan and Iranian officials. The Iranian side, to a large extent, enlightened the issue of *Daesh* and the importance of Chabahar Port; and the Afghan President talked about concerns of Iranians about the issue of Helmand Water and said that there is an agreement present regarding this and the representatives of both sides would talk about its implementation, later⁵.

Evaluation of the “Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process” Conference

The HOA-IP that was started due to Turkey’s initiative in 2011, it provides a new agenda for regional cooperation in the ‘Heart of Asia’ by placing Afghanistan at its center and engaging the ‘Heart of Asia’ countries in sincere and result-oriented cooperation for a peaceful and stable Afghanistan, as well as a secure and prosperous region as a whole. However, these conferences are held from a while and the Afghan side, unlike past, has taken more interest in it in the last two year; but it has not done anything beyond mending relationships.

In 2011, the ties between Afghanistan and Pakistan were frozen; however, it, for several times, as a result of Turkey’s intercession, through Heart of Asia Conference, was tried to mend relations between both countries.

Besides that, this conference has played role in mending relations between other countries in the region. For example, the relations between India and Pakistan were so frozen and it was nearly impossible for them to hold a meeting on the level of foreign ministers; but the Heart of Asia Conference 2015 paved the ground for bilateral meetings between both countries.

⁴ For further studies see Presidential statement: president.gov.af/ps/news/56708

⁵ For further studies see Presidential statement <http://president.gov.af/ps/news/56709>

President Ghani's Visit to Europe: Achievements and Commitment of Aids



President Ghani had a six-day official trip to European countries and visited France, Germany, Italy and Sweden; and briefed the media about his achievements from this trip on Monday (7 December). The President, firstly, visited France and gave a speech at the Paris Climate Change Conference and met his French counterpart, there. He, then, visited Germany, Italy and Sweden and signed some agreements with those countries. The statement from the Presidential Palace called this trip a “fruitful” visit. The statement states:

“Last week, President Ashraf Ghani cemented long-term partnerships between Afghanistan and some European nations with concrete commitments to deepen and broaden their support of the Afghan government and people for decades to come. President Ghani achieved his goal of renewing Afghanistan’s partnership with Europe just as EU governments were setting their future priorities for international aid.”

The government of Afghanistan claims that during the past year, it has worked hard to rebuild strategic partnerships that advance Afghan interests. Steps have included: the transparency and accountability measures announced in the Realizing Self Reliance Agenda and reported to donors at the Senior Officials Meeting in September; the successful implementation of IMF measures and achievement of all conditions and benchmarks for the first time since 2005; the realization of domestic revenue and budget allocation targets; and the creation of a clear plan for development aid.

Germany and the continuation of Aid to Afghanistan

In President Ghani's visit to Germany, the government of this country promised that Germany will provide €250 million through Ministry of Development and €180 million through Ministry of Foreign Affairs through 2020, with priority cooperation in good governance and sustainable economic development, energy, drinking water supply and sanitation, and basic education and vocational training.

Germany will contribute €25 million to Peace Program. It looks like this amount would be spent on creating jobs for those who leave insurgency and joins the reintegration process.

Germany agreed to explore the possibility of creating investment guarantees to facilitate German private sector investment and to find ways to connect Afghan products to the port of Hamburg to establish a value chain for Afghan products.

Italy and continuation of aid to Afghanistan

Another country that the President paid a visit to Europe was Italy. Italy, during the years after 2001, has provided Afghanistan with assistance in the areas of military, economy and capacity building especially related to the judiciary.

Italy will provide finance up to €65 million for a 75-kilometer railway to connect Herat with Iran's rail network, a project whose pre-feasibility phase had been completed and needed funding to begin work. Italy will also provide an additional €29 million to complete construction project of Herat International Airport.

Italy will provide finance up to €92 million for investment in Herat City-Chaste Sharif corridor/road and infrastructures

Same as Germany, Italy has also pledged to facilitate investment by Italian businesses in Afghanistan, particularly in energy sector.

Italy and Afghanistan signed a cooperation agreement in the field of culture, science and technology.

Achievements from the Visit to Sweden

Sweden was one of those countries that were providing assistance/aid to Afghan refugees in Pakistan even from the very beginning of jihad against Soviet Union. Swedish Committee for Afghanistan (SCA) was active in Peshawar at that time.

In Ashraf Ghani's visit to Sweden, both sides signed a development cooperation agreement that paves the road for further accountability of aid disbursement to the government and enables it to track total aid on- and off-budget.

On this basis, Sweden agreed to continue its support through 2024 with a contribution of \$1.2B.

Sweden agreed to explore state-supported and private-sector investment in renewable energy projects in Afghanistan. It also agreed to help provide vocational training to Afghans.

Meeting of NATO Ministers of Foreign Affairs in Brussels

The Afghan Minister of Foreign Affairs visited Brussels and attended NATO Foreign Ministers meeting after the end of official visit of the Afghan President on Tuesday, December 1, 2015. Representatives of Japan and South Korea, that are not considered as members of NATO but have part in the Resolute Support Mission, had also participated in this meeting, also.

In this meeting, the NATO Secretary General praised the capabilities of Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) in war and said that the Resolute Support Mission will be extended for another one year until the end of 2016. Meeting of NATO Ministers of Foreign Affairs in Brussels became agreed upon the following three points:

- 1-** They agreed to sustain the presence of their Resolute Support Mission, including in the regions of Afghanistan, during 2016. This will be approximately 12,000 troops.
- 2-** They started work to secure funding for Afghan national security forces until the end of 2020.
- 3-** They agreed to further develop their Enduring Partnership with Afghanistan. In that respect, they also reaffirmed their commitment to establish a civilian-led presence that will follow after their Resolute Support Mission (2016).

Achievements of the Visit to Europe; from Commitment to Action

The President's trip to Europe once again carried out commitments in order to receive help in the areas of development, security and economic, but the main question in this regard is that whether the present government of Afghanistan has the necessary capacity to get use of these aids well?

If only financial aids could solve the problems of a country, Afghanistan, which received tens of billions of international aid during the past 14 years, should have much better situation than of today. The experience of the past 14 years showed

that the lack of needed capacity to absorb aids reasoned widespread looting led by a few people and the majority of the people of Afghanistan did not get any benefit from them.

The main promise of President Ghani to the people, during the Presidential Elections, was that he will appoint trustworthy and professional individuals on governmental posts and that he will struggle against corruption seriously; however, in practice, the situation of NUG's Cabinet is worse than it was in Hamid Karzai's era.

The commitment of NUG to fight corruption started with reviewing the Kabul Bank scandal; but this commitment went under question when one of the bank robbers came out of prison to sign a contract of a Smart City with the government.

Although, countries such as Germany, Italy and Sweden have pledged to help Afghanistan and President Ghani also considers it as a major achievement for himself and his government, but due to lack of capacity and widespread corruption that struggle against it by the NUG is summarized in words only, it seems unlikely that the committed countries would fulfill their commitments to Afghanistan; unless a basic and deep change in Afghanistan is not occurred in order for the committed countries to ensure that the funds gathered from taxes of their people will not waste as a result of war or corruption in Afghanistan as they were in past fourteen years.

The End

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Note: Please let us know your feedback and suggestions for the improvement of Weekly analysis.

