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Preface

While the Afghan Taliban rejected participation in the Quadrilateral Peace Talks and insisted its former position; Hezb-e-Islami (Hekmatyar) showed willingness to initiate peace talks with the Afghan government. Although Hezb-e-Islami has sent its numerous delegations to Kabul plenty of times to conduct peace talks with the Afghan government but to no avail; here you would read about the reasons behind the failure of the peace talks between the Afghan government and HI and the background of peace talks with HI.

In the second part of the analysis you would read about the challenges ahead in 1395. Afghanistan and particularly the Afghan government faced serious challenges in 1394. In this year the government failed to tackle corruption, and the government's efforts in the fields of security and peace also did not have significant results; in the meanwhile, due to the deteriorated security situation and unemployment a vast numbers of Afghans went to the European countries. It seems that the situation in 1394 will also have deep impacts in 1395 and in this year the country will face some real challenges.

You would read about these subjects in this issue of the weekly analysis of the Center for Strategic and Regional Studies.

Peace talks between Afghan government and Hezb-e-Islami (Hekmatyar)



In a formal statement released on 12 March 2016, Hezb-e-Islami (Hekmatyar) stated that Ashraf Ghani had invited the party to join in the peace process and they have accepted it.¹ It has not been clearly stated whether the party was invited to participate in the Quadrilateral Peace Talks or to start direct negotiations with Afghan government.

However, HI writes in an essay on its pro-website that they have appointed two HI members to conduct peace talks with the Afghan government² and according to a source the HI delegation has also arrived in Kabul.

It is not the first time that HI shows willingness to the Afghan peace process or has sent its delegation to Kabul; previously, HI had sent its numerous delegation to Kabul for peace negotiations many times but they have never reached specific conclusions.

The background of the negotiations between the Afghan government and HI, the reasons behind the failure of these talks, and the impacts of the HI joining the Afghan Peace Process are the issue that are analyzed here.

¹ Read the special statement of Hezb-e-Islami about the peace talks with the Afghan government: http://www.dailyshahadat.com/index.php/site/lekani_details/1858

² read more here: http://www.dailyshahadat.com/index.php/site/lekani_details/1863

The background of HI and its splinter groups

HI has a forty years background in Afghan politics and the same as Jamiat-e-Islami, HI is a branch of the Islamic Movement of Afghanistan. During the Soviet-Afghan war, HI and Jamiat-e-Islami were the two most influential groups in the country. The two parties had also an important part in the Civil War which occurred quickly after withdrawal of the Soviet troops from Afghanistan; later-on when the Taliban seized power in Afghanistan, they (the Taliban) seized all the areas that were formerly being controlled by HI; thus the leader of HI Engineer Gulbudin Hekmatyar was then forced to leave the country.

During the Taliban regime, HI was marginalized from the Afghan issue but after the US attack on Afghanistan when the new government was established in Afghanistan and foreign troops came to the country; Gulbudin Hekmatyar declared the presence of the foreign troops as 'occupiers' and under the name of HI, he began armed struggle against foreign troops which is still continue.

Since 2001, most of HI members have come to Kabul and have taken part in the Afghan government. In 2004 some senior officials of the party including Khalid Faruqi met the head of Afghan interim government Hamid Karzai and cut their ties with Hekmatyar.³ Later, a party under the name of Hezb-e-Islami was also officially registered in Afghanistan; but still the people affiliated with HI in Kabul were not gathered in one party and are divided into several groups which still exist under this name; the groups of Abdul Hadi Arghandiwal, Khalid Faruqi and Waheedullah Sabawoon are its examples.

During the last Afghan presidential election, one faction of HI backed Dr. Abdullah Abdullah; the other which was called the councils of the party backed Zalmai Rasoul in the first and Ghani in the second round of the elections and the remaining members of the party backed Qutbududdin Helal. This fragmentation in the election days also indicates the split in the party.

³ Read the details about the fragmentation of the party here:

http://www.jamestown.org/programs/tm/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=26615&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=179&no_cache=1

The background of the peace talks between the Afghan government and HI

Although the exact date of the beginning of the HI's negotiation with the Afghan government is not known, but according to the HI statement these talks begin in 2010. It is noteworthy that before that HI's some members also had come from Peshawar to Kabul but it is yet to be known whether they had come by themselves or they had been sent by Hekmatyar?

After Barrack Obama won the Presidential elections in US, in December 2009 he announced the beginning of the US troops' withdrawal by 2011. Using the opportunity which was provided after this announcement and the deteriorated relations between Karzai and the United States, HI sent its delegation under the leadership of Dr. Ghairat Baheer and Qutbudin Helal for peace talks in Kabul. At that time, Hezb-e-Islami proposed a 15-point proposal, the most important of which were as follows:

1. As of July 2010 the withdrawal of foreign troops must begin and within six months they must leave Afghanistan.
2. A full turnover of security to the Afghan security forces.
3. Foreigners should not build prisons inside the country.
4. All the engaged parties will announce a cease fire.
5. Foreign fighter will not stay in Afghanistan after the withdrawal of foreign troops.
6. After the withdrawal of the foreign troops, new presidential and parliamentary elections will be held and until the new election the current President and Parliament would continue functioning.⁴

Karzai's government did not accept the proposal and thus these talks failed. Later in April 2012, once again HI sent its delegation to conduct peace negotiation with Kabul and this happened at a time where the Taliban's Political Office in Qatar

Read the 15-point proposal of Gulbudin Hekmatyar here: ⁴

http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2010/03/hekmatyars_peace_pla.php

was about to open and the Afghan government had opposed direct peace talks between the US and the Taliban. Once again the HI delegation presented their peace proposal but the Afghan government was not interested in it.

In 2013, once again the HI delegation came to Kabul for peace talks but these talks failed again. This time, one of the HI members (Qutbududdin Helal) stayed in Kabul and nominated himself in the 1394 presidential elections.

The reasons for the failure of the Peace talks with the HI

During the second term of the Karzai's presidency, the HI delegation came to Kabul several times for peace talks but these talks were fruitless and the Afghan government did not come to an agreement with them. From March 2010 to May 2013, 17 times the representatives of HI have come to Kabul⁵. After this date the representatives of HI has also come to Kabul for peace talks but these talks have failed over and over. The reasons of this failure can be listed as follows:

The weak role of HI in the Battlefield: although HI was a great party during the Afghan-Soviet war and had a large number of supporters throughout Afghanistan; but after 2001, HI did not have a significant role in the battlefield; and from this date on, some really important members of this party were appointed as high officials in the Afghan government and thus the party's power was divided. Therefore; since HI did not have any influential role in the battlefield, the Afghan government did not paid much attention to this party and also the party's conditions seemed risky to the Afghan government as same as the party itself. Instead of conducting peace talks with this group, Hamid Karzai tried to split those members of the party who had come to Kabul for peace talks (Qutbudin Helal is one of them).

Some opposing groups to HI: HI precedes enmity with some engaged parties in the Afghan issue. Besides that, during its combat against the Afghan government and foreign troops the party has released inflammatory statements addressing the northern alliance and Hazara ethnic groups. The party's positions about the

⁵ Read more details here:

<https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/adding-the-ballot-to-the-bullet-hezb-e-islami-in-transition/>

Northern alliance and the Hazara ethnic group on one hand and the vast presence of these two groups in the Afghan government on the other hand were the reasons why the obstacles were created toward the successful peace talks with this party and why the peace talks with HI failed.

The difficult conditions of the HI: as mentioned before HI presented its proposal for peace talks in 2010. This proposal contained some points that were clearly unacceptable to the Afghan government because according to some analysts from the Afghan government's policies it appears that the Afghan government does not want peace with its armed oppositions but it wants their complete surrender.

Lack of International and US support: International community and particularly the US did not paid attention to the peace talks between the Afghan government and HI; because they believed that HI did not have any significant role in the battlefield. Therefore they were more interested in talks with the Taliban.

The inclination of the government in the peace talks with the Taliban: there was an idea in the Afghan government that in order to talk separately with each insurgent group it will have to give separate privileges to each one of them and apparently the Afghan government was inclined to peace talks with the Taliban; therefore it did not pay much attention to the peace talks with HI. On the other hand

Suspicion in the peace talks: although there was a great possibility of the negotiation with HI to succeed because the Afghan Taliban had repeatedly rejected the peace talks with the Afghan government and on the other hand there were some confrontation between the Taliban and HI, thus HI wanted to act against the Taliban and thus was willing to come to the negotiation table with the Afghan government, but the Afghan government considered it as an act to gain privileges and played down the negotiations, therefore the negotiations was failed.

Fragmentation in the party: after the Jihad against the Soviet Unions, HI was fragmented more than every other party and even now beside the Hekmatyar's faction there are several other groups under the name of HI including the groups

headed by Abdul Hadi Arghandiwal, Qutbudin Helal, and Waheedullah Sabawoon. This fragmentation in the group has also resulted to the failure of the party's peace talks with the Afghan government.

Quadrilateral talks and HI

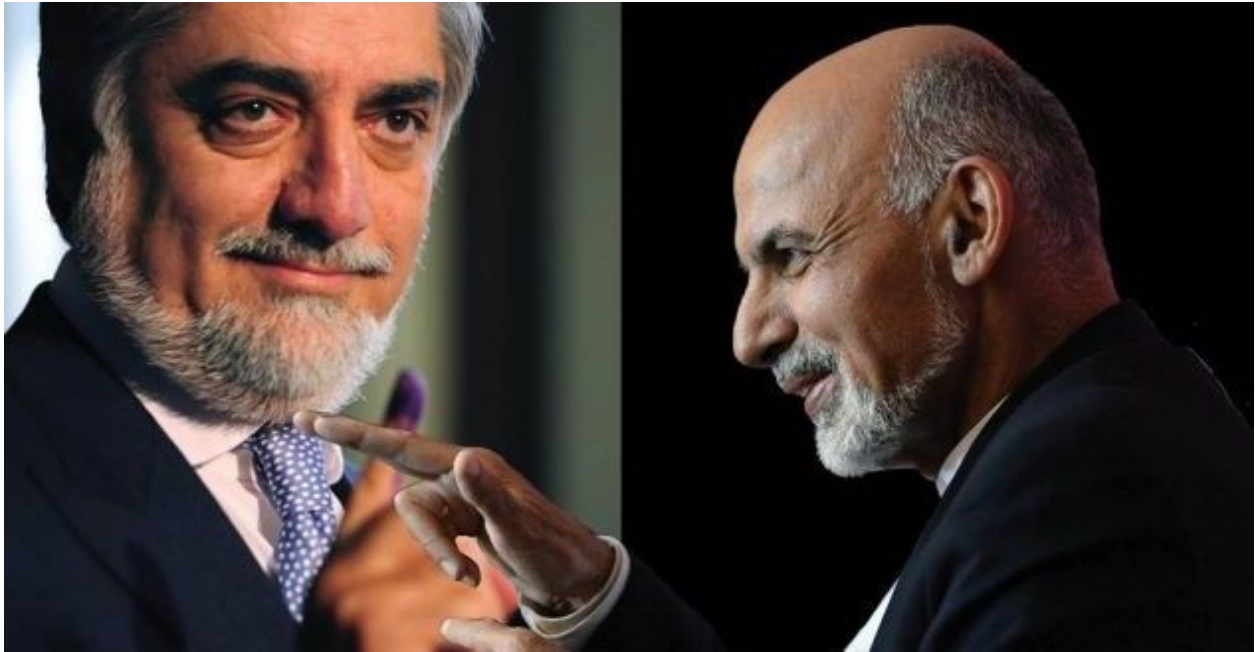
Through the Afghan ambassador in Pakistan, the Afghan President Ashraf Ghani offered HI to participate in the Afghan peace process and then HI in a statement released on 12 March accepted this offer.

HI released its statement about its willingness to join the peace process at a time that the Afghan Taliban rejected to join the peace process. According to the webpage of the HI, a delegation of HI has come to Kabul and will participate to negotiate with the Afghan government. Whether HI will only talk directly with the Afghan government or will also participate in the Quadrilateral talks is yet to be cleared. The probability of HI's participation in the Quadrilateral peace talks would be known in the upcoming weeks and after face to face talks with the Afghan government.

Since the group of the Taliban led by Mullah Akhtar Mansoor did not participate in the Quadrilateral Talks the Afghan government and Pakistan are failing in their efforts for the peace talks therefore the value of the other groups' participation in these talks has raised. Thus the Afghan government and Pakistan would try to include the Hezb-e-Islami (Hekmatyar), the Taliban's group of Mullah Mohammad Rasoul, HI group of Mawlawi Khaled and some members of the Mullah Akhtar Mansoor's group in the Quadrilateral peace talks.

Overall one can say that among the armed oppositions of the Afghan government the group of Mullah Akhtar Mansoor is the most powerful in the battlefield and if this group did not participate in the peace process the peace would not be secured in Afghanistan. But even if HI joined the Quadrilateral Peace Talks, they would not participate in the Afghan government while foreign troops exist in the country and the same as the Taliban they will stand tight on their position about withdrawal of the foreign troops and determining the schedule for the foreign troops to leave the country.

The 1395 and the challenges ahead



Afghanistan faced serious problems and challenges in the past year and one can call it the most challenging year to the Afghan government in the past one and half decade. However it is hard to exactly predict the situation in 1395, but it seems that the problems and challenges in 1394 would affect the situation in the upcoming year, and if these challenges and problems were not tackled the Afghan government may not be able to survive.

In this part of the analysis you would read about the challenges ahead for the National Unity Government (NUG) in 1395.

Peace

In its first days of formation, the NUG activated its foreign policy in order to secure peace in the country. The Afghan President Ashraf Ghani went to Saudi Arabia, China and Pakistan aiming to start peace talks with the armed oppositions of the Afghan government. As a result of these efforts a meeting on the Afghan peace process was held in Urumqi in China, but this meeting did not result to

specific outcomes. Later in Murree a touristic area near Islamabad, the first face to face talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban took place.

The Murree talks came to a halt after the disclosure of the death of Mullah Muhammad Omar and after that the Afghan-Pak relations was deteriorated for the first time after the formation of NUG.

After six months of tensions in the Kabul-Islamabad relations; due to the joint efforts of the regional countries and the United Nations once again the relations between the two countries improved and as a result, the Quadrilateral Peace talks between the US, China, Pakistan and Afghanistan began. However the Afghan government was enthusiast about the outcomes of these talks but these talks are yet to bring the Taliban around the negotiation table with the Afghan government.

Besides that; there are conflicting thoughts about the Afghan peace strategy both inside the Afghan government and among other political groups outside the government. Given the security situation in 1394, one can conclude that the peace would be a serious issue for the Afghan government in 1395. Thus, peace and a real will for peace will be the first priority of the Afghan government in 1395.

Security

In the field of security, in 1394 on one hand, the Afghan government faced a vast number of issues and its reputation was damaged and on the other hand it was a bloody year to the Afghan civilians and civilian casualties in this year was outnumbered more than any year in the past one and half decade.

In early 1394, the news about the emergence of ISIS in Afghanistan was heard. However at the first steps, the fears about the presence of ISIS in Afghanistan was due to the press propaganda and this group had no activity on the ground but then the group intensified its activities in the country and particularly in the eastern Afghanistan and thus the presence of this group proved to be bloody to

the Afghan people. According to the Afghan Ministry of Defense, within the last six months the group has killed 600 Afghans.⁶

Since both the Afghan government and the Taliban fought against ISIS, now at the end of 1394 it appears that the group is suppressed in Afghanistan. The Taliban has also played a significant role to suppress ISIS in the remote areas that were under their (Taliban) control.

On the other hand, war in the Northern provinces was intensified and from Faryab to Badakhshan, many districts were fell at the hands of the Taliban and eventually the way to the collapse of Kunduz was paved and on 28 September 2015, Kunduz city collapsed. This was the first time after the collapse of the Taliban regime in 2001, that the Taliban had seized a major city in Afghanistan. The fall of Kunduz was vastly reflected in the Afghan and international media, later the city was recaptured by the Afghan security forces after two weeks.⁷

Given the security situation in 1394, the Afghans and International Community are extremely concerned about the situation in 1395 and even a US official called it the year of “political outbreak” to the Afghan government. Therefore; security situation would be the main issue to the Afghan government and it is highly depended on the success of the Afghan government’s policies about peace. If the government succeeds in securing peace in the country, the security situation will also improve but if the Afghan government’s peace strategies did not work then it will have adverse impacts on the security situation in the country.

Corruption

After coming to power, Ashraf Ghani made a lot of promises to Afghans and International community to tackle corruption and in this regard some steps were also taken in the first few months of his presidency but the government’s actions to fight against corruption was incomplete and contradictory and in this regard there was no coordination among the officials in the Afghan government. That is

⁶ Click on the link below for more information:

<http://www.aopnews.com/isisdaesh/daesh-killed-over-600-afghans-in-six-months-defense-ministry/>

⁷ 149th issue of weekly analysis of CSRS:

<http://csrskabul.com/pa/?p=1912>

why Khalilullah Ferozi the main culprit in the Kabul Bank case was released from prison and signed the contract of building a city. Later due to the widespread reactions the contract was canceled and he was sent back to the prison.

In 1394, not only corruption did not decrease but it increased and according to the annual report of the Transparency International in 2015, Afghanistan has fallen in the ranks from the fourth most corrupt country to the second most corrupt country in the world. The International Community also believes that corruption is the greatest challenge of the Afghan government. If the Afghan government failed to tackle corruption in 1395, besides other problems it would also face the problems in attracting the International community's aids.

Migrants

Although the issue of the Afghan migrant in the neighboring countries is significant but currently the issue of the Afghan migrant in Europe is more serious and sensitive. Around 250,000 Afghans went through illegal ways to Europe and most of them were youth population of the country.⁸ The issue of migrants had negative impacts on Afghanistan; a great amount of money was taken out of the country and the country's educated youth had left the country. On the other hand, most of the Afghans who are gone to European countries are not given asylum in there and are forced to return to their homes. The Afghan refugees returning to their own country would highly put the Afghan government under pressures.

Extending the expiration date of the migration ID cards of the registered Afghan migrants and registering unregistered migrants in Pakistan are the other challenges that the Afghan government will deal with in 1395 because unlike its commitment in this regard Pakistan has not taken any practical measures.

⁸ 156th issue of weekly analysis of CSRS:
<http://csrskabul.com/pa/?p=2046>

Economy

The country was in a bad economic situation in 1394. Unemployment had reached high levels; investments decreased 30% compared to 1393 and also Afghani unprecedentedly lost its value. If the economic situation in the country continued this way in 1395, it will negatively affect the NUG. In the economic field the biggest issue is unemployment which directly affects all Afghans; but if unemployment is resolved in Afghanistan then an economic chain will start in the country and eventually the other problems will also be resolved in the economic field.

Internal differences within the Afghan government

50-50 division of power between Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah confronted the country with many problems and due to these problems after one and half year its cabinet is yet to be completed. The internal differences has resulted the provinces to be controlled by the acting governors and it has also caused problems in bringing electoral reforms and thus has face the upcoming parliamentary elections with an uncertain fate. Internal difference in the government also resulted in making contrary decisions about the Afghan foreign policy.

If the internal difference of the NUG was not resolved and it continued like this it may even result the collapse of the Afghan government.

The End

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