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In this issue:

- Preface..... 2

The leadership transition in Taliban and its impacts on current situation

- Mansour's journey from Taliban's deputy to leadership..... 4
- The former Taliban leader's peace policy..... 4
- Taliban's new leadership..... 5
- The future of peace..... 6

The Chabahar port and Kabul-Tehran-New Delhi ties

- Iran-Afghanistan-India trilateral ties..... 8
- The background of construction of Chabahar port..... 8
- Chabahr, under influence of regional and international politics..... 9
- The impacts of the Chabahar agreement on the region and Afghanistan..... 10

Preface

The Taliban leader Mullah Akhtar Mansour was killed in a US airstrike last week. Right after Mullah Mansour's killing; the Taliban issued a statement and announced the new Taliban leader and his deputies. The US government declared killing him as eliminating a major obstacle on the way of Afghan peace; but the question is, did killing Mansour paved the way to peace? What will be the strategy of the new Taliban leadership regarding Afghan peace process? And what will be the impacts of the change in the Taliban leadership on current situations in Afghanistan?

In the second part of the analysis you would read about Afghanistan, Iran and India's agreement regarding Chabahar port and its impacts on Afghanistan and the region. The agreement to expand the Chabahar transit port was signed at the presence of the three countries' leaders between transport ministers of the three countries. After signing the agreement the three leaders declared it as a major step toward economic development in the region. What will be the impacts of the Chabahar port project on trilateral relations? And what will be the impacts of the project's implementation on economic situation in Afghanistan?

You would read the analysis of the Center for Strategic and Regional Studies on above two subjects.

The leadership transition in Taliban and its impacts on current situation



The Taliban leader, Mullah Akhtar Masour had been killed by a US drone strike in the border region between Afghanistan and Pakistan on May 21, 2016.

The news about the death of Taliban leader, Mullah Mansour was first released by the US Department of Defense, saying that the US President Barack Obama had ordered the attack because Mansour was a major obstacle in the way of peace in Afghanistan. The death of the Taliban leader was later confirmed by the Afghan Presidential Office, Afghan Chief Executive Office, Afghan Ministry of Interior and National Directorate of Security.

Four days later, the Taliban issued a statement and confirmed the death of Mullah Mansour and in the meanwhile announced the new leader of the Taliban. The statement says that the Deputy of Mullah Mansour, Mawlawi Hibbatullah Akhundzada was appointed as the new leader of the group and Serajuddin Haqani and the former Taliban leader, Mullah Omar's son, Mawlawi Mohammad Yaqub was appointed as his deputies.

The impacts of Mullah Mansour's death on the Taliban group, the consequences of the change in Taliban leadership and the new leader's stance on the Afghan peace process are the issues that are analyzed here.

Mansour's journey from Taliban's deputy to leadership

Since 2001 and after reorganization of the Taliban, the Taliban leaders were repeatedly detained, imprisoned or killed. In 2007 the second senior Taliban figure, and Mullah Omar's deputy Mullah Obaidullah Akhund was detained in Pakistan and died in prison in 2010; it is yet to be cleared whether he died of natural reasons or was killed by Pakistan.

When Obaidullah Akhund was detained, Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar was appointed as the Taliban deputy and Mullah Akhtar Mansour was appointed Baradar's deputy. Following Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar's detention in 2009, Mullah Mansour was appointed as the Taliban deputy and was in charge of Taliban's organizing affairs. After Mullah Mohammad Omar's death in 2013, Mansour was a de facto leader of Taliban (although according to a source close to the Taliban, Mullah Omar had put him in charge of the Taliban's organizing and military affairs way back in 2010). But Omar's death was kept secret till July 2015 and after face to face talks with the Taliban in Murree Omar's death was disclosed. The Taliban confirmed Omar's death several days after its disclosure and appointed Mullah Akhtar Mansour as his successor. After the appointment of Mullah Mansour disputes began in the ranks of the Taliban; but few months before the death of Mullah Akhtar Mohammad Mansour disputes among the Taliban were reduced and later Mullah Zaker and Mullah Omar's family (Mullah Yaqub and Mullah Abdul Mannan) and Mullah Hassan Rahmani also supported him.

The former Taliban leader's peace policy

Since Mullah Akhtar Mansour's appointment as the Taliban deputy till he became the Taliban leader, the group experienced many ups and downs. In this period progresses were made in the field of peace in which the role that Mullah Mansour had played was pretty apparent.

In his term, the Afghan Taliban inaugurated their political office in Qatar and began negotiation with the countries in the world. The office played role in releasing some prisoners, participated to Peace conferences in other countries and expressed their positions to the world. Besides that, the first direct talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban was held during Mansour's leadership, but was unfortunately sabotaged after the disclosure of the death of Mullah Mohammad Omar.

Some districts in the Northern Afghanistan fell at the hands of the Taliban during Mansour's leadership and the most important event was the collapse of Kunduz (the sixth major city of Afghanistan) on September 29, 2015 which was under the Taliban control for two weeks.

Although he did not show green light to peace efforts of the Afghan government during his ten months leadership; but according to a source close to the Taliban, he was inclined to peace talks; but he did not wanted peace talks under the conditions that the Afghan government had put forward.

Although in official statements after the death of Mullah Omar it is said that Mansour was a major obstacle on the way to peace; but there are some analysis saying that he died because of his closed relation with Russia and the probability of initiation of direct talks after the Afghan President's recent visit to Qatar.

The Afghan Taliban have also indicated in their statement that Mansour was targeted due to non-participation in "imposed and fraud processes" it indicates the QCG meetings.

Taliban's new leadership

Although killing Mullah Mansour was a major blow for the Taliban; because he was in charge of organizing and military affairs of the Taliban and a great part of the Afghan Taliban's strategy (about peace and war) was being conducted by him; but still the afghan Taliban has twenty years of history and since 2001, some other similar events have also occurred where the Taliban leaders were either

killed or had left the Taliban ranks; but yet it has never had any significant impact on the group in military fields.

The new Taliban leader Mullah Hibbatullah was the head of military court during the Taliban regime, and after the collapse of the Taliban, he was the Chief Justice of the group and since last year he was deputy to the former Taliban leader Mullah Akhtar Mansour.

Overall, it does not seem that any revolutionary change has come to the Taliban leadership because the new leader and Serajuddin Haqani were deputies of Mullah Akhtar Mansour and recently Mullah Yaqub had also been included in the leadership council of the Taliban by Mullah Akhtar Mansour.

The future of peace

The new leadership of the Taliban is formed of characters that were close to Mullah Mansour. The followings are the reasons behind the appointment of these three figures as the Taliban leaders:

- Mullah Hibatullah is an afghan religious scholar
- Serajuddin Haqani plays significant role in the battlefield
- And the announcement of Mullah Yaqub as deputy was an effort to unite the Taliban under the new leadership

Although the new Taliban leader has not released any voice message or statement about his peace and war strategy but still since Mullah Hibatullah and Serajuddin Haqani were deputies of Mansour, their strategies in these fields will not be changed. Besides that it does not seem that any large group of the Taliban would split from them.

The parties of the Afghan war have now realized that war is not the solution of the Afghan issue and the current war will also end through negotiations, and since a great portion of foreign forces have left the country; instead of pressurizing the Taliban through other countries, if the Afghan government conducts peace efforts through an Afghan impartial mediator, the Taliban may join the negotiations.

The Chabahar port and Kabul-Tehran-New Delhi ties



The agreement to expand the Chabahar port was inked at the presence of the Afghan President Ashraf Ghani, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Iranian President Hassan Rouhani by the Transport Ministers of the three countries on Monday, May 23, 2016 in Tehran. The leaders of the three countries termed the agreement as a major step toward the regional economic integration.

The trilateral agreement was welcomed in the three countries. The US government also somehow welcomed the agreement, but two countries of the region who are considered to be the competitors of the project have not officially responded about the agreement.

With regard to the construction of the port, to what extent is it affected by regional and international politics? And what are the impacts of the project on the economy of Afghanistan and the region?

Iran-Afghanistan-India trilateral ties

Although Afghanistan has long historical relations with India and Iran, but in modern history of Afghanistan, Indian and Iranian cooperation began after the withdrawal of soviet troops from Afghanistan. Before withdrawal of the Soviet troops from Afghanistan Iran and India's interests were in contradiction to each other. From 1947 to 1991, Iran-Pakistan's interests were closer than Iran-India's interests.

After 2001, the Iran-India relations were so close in Afghanistan that construction of Chabahar port had become the symbol of cooperation between the two countries and Chabahar transit and trading port was considered the point where Afghanistan, Iran and India's interests meet. Trilateral Chabahar agreement can pave the way for a great development in trilateral and regional relations between India, Iran and Afghanistan and may expand the circle of trilateral political engagement.

The background of construction of Chabahar port

The Chabahar port is located in Baluchistan province in southeast of Iran. Strategically, the port is located in the coast of Oman and the Indian Ocean and close to the strategic Strait of Hormuz and is capable of mooring large ships. In addition to strategic location, Chabahar has abundant natural attractions. The area is evergreen and has a temperate climate; that is why it is called Chabahar (four springs).

Since Chabahar port is the way of trading between India and Afghanistan and Central Asia, it has strategic importance for India. In 2003, when BJP was in power in India, Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee inked the construction agreement of the Chabahar port with Iran and Afghanistan was also part of the agreement. But due to international suctions against Iran the construction of the port was delayed. Despite that, India has spent 135 million dollars to construct

Zaranj-Delaram highway which connects Zaranj (the center of Nimroz) to the Chabahar port and the construction phase of the project was completed in 2009 by India. Now after signing the trilateral agreement, India will spend 500 million dollars to expand the Chabahar port.

Since 2003, Iran has invested approximately 340 million dollars on Chabahar commercial zone. The annual loading and unloading capacity of the port is 2.5 million tons per year and Iranian government is trying to augment this number to 12.5 million tons. Besides that, Iran has invested a lot in building roads and railways between this city and border of Afghanistan and has also encouraged other countries in the region to invest in this port.

The final consensus on trilateral Chabahar port was prepared in 2015 and 2016 by economic technical teams and legal experts from India, Iran and Afghanistan.

Chabahr, under influence of regional and international politics

From 2003 onwards, the Chabahar port was under deep regional and international politics which will be briefly mentioned here:

- **The Afghanistan transit issue;** a major factor behind the construction of this port is rivalry and political issues of India with Pakistan. Pakistan opposes the inclusion of India in the transit agreement of APTTA. In the past, Pakistan would create obstacles on the way of trading even when Afghanistan traded with countries other than India; therefore, Chabahar is somehow a rival port against Karachi port of Pakistan.
- **India-US Civil Nuclear Agreement:** in 2005, the nuclear cooperation agreement was signed between US and India and due to this agreement India limited its relations with Iran and thus the construction of Chabahar port was delayed.
- **The US and Security Council's sanctions against Iran:** from 2006 onwards, the US and Security Council of the United Nations issued economic sanctions against Iran and these sanctions somewhat limited the trade level of the countries in the region with Iran.

- **Lifting sanctions against Iran:** after the agreement of the P5+1 group and Iran in 2015, international sanctions and pressures on Iran were left and thus other countries were interested to develop relations with Iran. The removal of sanctions also accelerated the construction of Chabahar port.
- **China-Pakistan Economic Zone and India and China's rivalry in the region:** rivalry between China and India on the one hand and China-Pakistan economic zone on the other hand are also the reasons why India initiated the construction of Chabahar port and accelerated its construction.

The impacts of the Chabahar agreement on the region and Afghanistan

The implementation of Chabahar project has a great importance in economic development of Afghanistan and trade with India and Central Asia. This connecting way would help Afghanistan and India to access new markets in Central Asia.

The Chabahar port provides the opportunity to the landlocked Central Asian countries like Afghanistan to have access to at least one other port and thus reduces their reliance on just one country for transition. Therefore the construction of this port is considered as an effort to free the Central Asian countries and particularly Afghanistan from reliance on transit way of Pakistan. On the other hand, Chabahar is closer to the Afghan Capital compared to Karachi port and Afghan traders can exchange their goods with other countries in lesser time and expenditures.

The Chabahar port has also a great significance to India. While China (India's regional rival) is expanding its activities in Central Asia through "One Road, One Belt"; India wants to be connected with Afghanistan and Central Asia. On the other hand, Chabahar opens a way to the markets of the Central Asia. Due to the diplomatic tensions between New Delhi and Islamabad, India-Pakistan relations are limited but with the implementation of this agreement, Indian goods would come to Afghanistan without trouble and without passing through Pakistan.

Former Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh had called energy security as the second priority of his country after food security. Due to India's need for oil and gas, the country is trying to increase oil and gas trade through this port. The port will also increase India's exports because through Chabahar port, the country would be able to increase its trade with Afghanistan and Central Asia.

Iran on the one hand possesses vast oil and gas reserves and wants to supply oil and gas to international markets and on the other hand wants to be the transit way of the Central Asia and thus become international transit corridor. Thus the Chabahar port is very significant for Iran. If Afghanistan-Pakistan and Pakistan-India relations were not tenuous; Iran would not have had this opportunity, but now that these relations are tenuous, the transit and economic significance of Chabahar port is multiplied.

Although Chabahar agreement is a transit and trading agreement, but besides, economic interests for the three countries, it also has political and security benefits. Politically the agreement would increase coordination between Kabul, Tehran and New Delhi.

The end

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