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Preface

Recently hopes for peace and reconciliation in Afghanistan once again revived. The CEO of National Unity government affirmed that the peace negotiations with the Taliban, the main armed opposition group of the government, would start “soon”. President Ashraf Ghani also consulted the *Jihadi* regarding the peace process.

National security advisor to the president, Mohammad Hanif Atmar was dispatched to Qatar –the only host for Taliban envoys- for talks with Qatari authorities.

In addition, with the inauguration of the new unity government both the parties expressed interest for the negotiations. The Pakistani government also ensured Afghan government about its promises regarding the peace negotiations, which is considered to be started in next March.

What is the background of negotiations with the Taliban? What were the obstacles for negotiations between the Afghan Government and the Taliban? And what are the opportunities and barriers for the success of the peace process? The answer for the above questions would be discussed in CSRS’s Analyses.

The First Step on the Difficult Path to Peace



It was in late 2009 when Taliban believed that the U.S. failed in its mission for which Afghanistan was invaded. Therefore, the Deputy of Taliban leader, Mullah Mohammad Omar, Mullah Abdul Ghani Biradar suggested to the leader of the Taliban to agree with the negotiations if the Americans really demand and end their presence in Afghanistan.

Till 2009 the international community believed that Taliban do not have any other strategy except war. But when the US expressed inclinations towards the peace process, Taliban leader let an expert delegation proceed the process.

It was essential to choose people of their choice to pursue the expanded mission. Mullah Mohammad Omar directed to convert the Political Committee of the Islamic Emirate, which did not have any oblivious activity, to Political Office. Mullah Taib Agha was selected as head of the newly founded political commission instead of Mullah Agha Jan Mutasim, who previously headed the political committee. When the Political Office was founded they established some contacts with Kai Eide, the Special envoy of UN to Afghanistan.

The Concerns of Pakistan

In Dec 2009, Taiyeb Agha expressed in an interview with London based Al-Hayat Arabic newspaper, that they are ready for direct talks with Americans in case they demand.

Even before the interview Pakistan felt that without its permission the Taliban are trying to start negotiation with the U.S., and the inventor of this movement is Mullah Abdul Ghani Biradar. As the result, "ISI" arrested Mullah Biradar in an U.S. army joint

operations in Karachi. The aim of Pakistan for joint operation with the U.S. was to create space between the Taliban and the U.S. to cause obstacles for the direct negotiations between them.

The First Contacts:

But the Taliban continued their attempts. For building background for contacts with the U.S., their first contacts started with the representatives of Germany Bernd Mutzelburg and Michael Steiner for mediation. The attempts of a German diplomat Rudiger Konig, who was German Ambassador in Islamabad during 1997-1998, and later on became German Ambassador in Kabul (that time Taiyeb Agha was Ambassador of Islamic Emirate in Islamabad, and that time Rudiger Konig and Sayed Taiyeb Agha became friends) paved the way for trust between them for strengthened the process, and some meetings took place with the delegations of the U.S. The Americans were emphasizing that the Taliban should have an official address out of Afghanistan. The Taliban accepted their request.

Why the Taliban have Chosen Qatar?

The Taliban has given four conditions for the country that could be the host of office of the Taliban:

1. It should be a Muslim country.
2. It should not be a neighboring country.
3. It should not have sent military forces to Afghanistan.
4. It should not have done enmity with the Taliban After 2001.

Based on these conditions the countries like Turkey, UAE, and Jordan could not be the host of the negotiations. As after 2001 some of the Taliban leaders were imprisoned in Saudi, so based on this enmity it also could not be the host of the peace negotiation. Based on these conditions the Taliban accepted Qatar a reasonable place for peace negotiation.

On the other hand, ten members of the political office were selected as the authoritative delegation for the office of Qatar. At the beginning six of them went to Qatar and after sometime the remaining four of them went there. Later on, some other members also became the part of the officials of the Qatar's office.

Pakistan Opposes Qatar

Since the beginning Pakistan was against the office of the Taliban in Qatar, and it wanted that the office should be opened in another country like Saudi Arabia, Turkey, or UAE. This issue caused the U.S. to be concerned about the role of the Taliban's office in the peace process, and changed its policy about the office of Qatar, though in various occasions the leader of the Taliban Mullah Mohammad Omar has given the message that the Taliban's office in Qatar was the only address for peace negotiations.

It seems that in the negotiation of Pakistanis and Ashraf Ghani, Pakistan forced its desire on Afghanistan that the peace negotiations should take place in any other country, except Qatar, therefore Afghan government emphasizes that the negotiation should take place anywhere else except Qatar. This issue can be the source of dispute for starting the negotiation process.

Guarantee for complete Pull-out of US forces

The position of the Taliban is that while the main enemy and reason of their war is the U.S., so firstly the negotiation should take place with the U.S., so they will be sure that the U.S. will withdraw all of its forces from Afghanistan, and it does not ask for bases in Afghanistan. Though it seems that the U.S. has given green light to the Taliban that they will withdraw its overall forces from Afghanistan at the end of 2016, but because of the lack of the Taliban's trust over the U.S. the Taliban want to give mediation to a superpower country, so the country will insure the Taliban for the promises that the U.S. gives. The only permanent member of the UN Security Council that has good relations with the Taliban is China, meanwhile it is a trusted country to Pakistan. It is not coincidental if the formal website of the Taliban publish an optimistic article about the positive rule of China in the peace negotiations.

Silence Policy

The Pakistani media reported that the leader of the Taliban has given permission of the peace negotiation with the government of Kabul, therefore the negotiation may start, but yet they did not say anything about the location of the negotiation.

The Taliban did not reject these reports directly, but they reported that their formal position is expressed only by their spokespersons, and the reports that are established except them, those are not accepted by them. The Taliban are concerned that reporting such news before starting negotiation is used as advertising tribute against them.

But the positive point in the latest newsletter of the Taliban is that there is some flexibility visible in it. In this newsletter there is nothing mentioned about the exit of foreign forces from the country before the start of negotiation. But they mentioned that the trip of the new defense minister of the U.S. Ashton Carter to Afghanistan was an obstacle for the negotiation; because he emphasized for revision of the decision of exist of the U.S. forces in Afghanistan. The Taliban believe that the U.S. does not have stable position, therefore they cannot trust the promises given by the U.S.

The Achievements of Pakistan:

But yet the Pakistan was able to get the below privileges from Afghan Government:

1. Afghan government completely revised its foreign policy with India with the request of Pakistan. It was one of the demands of Pakistan, which it was asking for many years.
2. Submitted some Pakistani Taliban to Pakistan and also submitted 15 stable warriors to the Chinese government.
3. Secretly allowed the Pakistani military to enter Afghanistan for following the Taliban if needed.
4. Afghan military officials can get military education in Pakistan.
5. Earlier Afghanistan was accepting the Durand line as an imaginary line, but with the new policy it will be converted to a trench, and the issue of Durand between the two countries will be ended silently.

Result:

It seems that the negotiation between the Taliban and the U.S., and then between the Taliban and the Afghan Government will start, but meanwhile the war will also continue. In the negotiations, the Taliban will give privileges in any field, but they will never give up their demand of implementation of Sharia in Afghanistan. Because if they pull back themselves in this field just a little bit, they will fail in all of the fields.

So we can predict that the negotiation will be complex, and will take time, and it seems that the major part of negotiation will be negotiation between religious scholars of both the parties. In any condition, there is hope that this transformation will be a positive step toward ending the bloodshed war that took 36 years, and even the global superpowers were also weak for finding solutions for it through coercive power.

Peace Process: Background and Obstacles toward Success



The mistake that the U.S. and Afghan leaders done after the incident of 9/11 of 2001 in Bonn, it was same as the mistake that the Mujahidin done after the withdrawal of the Soviet Union forces from Afghanistan. In the conference there were two big groups, which later on started war against the U.S. and international forces during the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan, those groups were the Taliban and the Hisb-e-Islami. Not only these two groups were not invited to the Bonn Conference, but they were also excluded from taking part in the power of the upcoming government in the country.

Later on, in 2002 and 2003 there was not any share in the government given to them, nor was there any negotiation with them. But when in 2005 the Taliban got strengthened some of the countries, to which security and authority was given in some provinces, started negotiation with the Taliban. For example, the British Forces started negotiation with the Taliban in Helmand Province, and the French Forces started negotiation with the Taliban in Tagab and Kapisa, these negotiations took place before the U.S. and the Taliban negotiations. In a low level, after these negotiations the Taliban started negotiation with the Special Representative of UN for Afghanistan Kai Eide¹.

While in 2008 Barak Obama won the presidential election in the U.S. under the slogan of “Change” and “Ending War”, on the other hand he increased the number of the U.S. forces in Afghanistan, in addition the process of negotiation with the Taliban started in 2009, the Taliban started negotiation with two parties (the U.S. and the Afghan

¹ Read the details of the Taliban and the UN negotiations in the book of Kai Eide “The Power Struggle over Afghanistan”:

Government) in Qatar, Germany, UAE, Japan, Tajikistan, and Turkey; but because of the arrestment of Mullah Biradar in Pakistan and opposition of Hamid Karzai with the flag and board of the Islamic Emirate in the office of Qatar, the negotiation process completely stopped; but later on, after the exchange of a U.S. soldier (Baw Bergdal) and five Taliban leaders, once again the negotiation between the U.S. and the Taliban resumed.

The Attempts of New Government for peace:

During the presidential election of 2014, both the famous candidates Ashraf Ghani, and Abdullah have given promises to the nation that at the first step Ashraf Ghani will start negotiation with the neighbouring, regional, and then global countries: he spoke with the Turkish President Recep Tayyeb Erdogan in Kabul, and had trips to China, Saudi, and Pakistan, these attempts mean that peace process is one of the most important part of Ashraf Ghani's foreign policy.

While one of the military schools of Pakistan was attacked, it influenced the policies of Pakistan, and the idea of Pakistani militants and Pakistani politicians became one single idea against the Pakistani Taliban. Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif expressed the policy of Pakistan against extremism within 21 articles with the approval of all military, intelligence, and political parties' leaders, and said that Pakistan is changed regarding extremism.

Later on Pakistani officials had some trips to Kabul, while in March Raheel Sharif came for third time to Kabul and promised for the readiness of the Taliban for negotiation, for peace process Ashraf Ghani also started meetings with the social activists, religions and Jihadi leaders, and politicians, and he asked many of them to write advises, and strategies regarding this topic to him.

It is important to know that where the negotiation between the Taliban and the Afghan government will take place, and who, from both parties, will participate in the negotiation. Based on their experience and policies the Taliban may emphasize on Qatar, but yet the Afghan Government did not choose any country for negotiation. Regarding this issue Ashraf Ghani asked many people for advises, and the final decision may be with him.

Overall, the issue of place is not that much important, and it is not important to delay the negotiation for its place; but the main issue is the agenda of the negotiation, because it is the agenda of the negotiation that can stabilize the future of the country, and the same agenda may face both the parties with closed doors.

The Points of Disagreement for both the Parties:

Before starting negotiations both the parties should have reasonable answers for the below points, so the negotiation will not face any challenge and will not delay again;

1. The existence of foreign forces in Afghanistan and their military bases:

To what extent the Taliban can accept the existence of the U.S. forces in Afghanistan? Will be the Afghan Government ready to give green sign to the U.S. for its exit up to the end of 2016? Because, up to date the Taliban kept up their fight for the mentioned reason, and after the withdrawal of the U.S. forces they will not have any other reason to keep up war! So it is important for both the parties to compromise on something that is acceptable for both sides. At the first stage this agreement should be the gradual withdraw of the U.S. forces from Afghanistan, because even if the Taliban want the withdrawal of the foreign forces from Afghanistan, it will take at least one year.

2. Emirate or Elections?

The second important issue is either the Taliban want to establish Emirate once again, or they are ready to participate in the system of elections? If the Taliban want Emirate, there is at least the necessity of asking a Loya Jirga or referendum, to clarify what the majority of the nation want? As the Taliban are not accepting presidency and elections, so it is important that the trustworthy religious leaders from both the parties discuss it through a commission.

3. Constitution:

Another aspect that not only the Taliban but also Hezb-e-Islami (Hekmatyar) also criticize it, it is the issue of amendment of Constitution. It is the most important issue that Afghan Government and the Taliban disagree on; some high-ranking officials in Kabul says that Constitution should be the redline and the government

should not deal with the Taliban out of the Constitution; but with the inauguration of the unity government and the establishment of the CEO position the Constitution was questioned, and Ashraf Ghani created a position that is against the Constitution. While they create such post that is not mentioned in the Constitution, so why they cannot amend the Constitution for the national interests and peace of the country?

Steps that Cooperates the Success of Peace Process:

For the success of peace process it is important to consider at least the below points:

- The government should make a group of such religious scholars by which it will convince and quite the opponents of peace.
- The government should not look to the Taliban as the instruments of Pakistan, but it should negotiate with them as an Afghan party.
- The government should arise the topic of peace process as a national interest in media.
- Both the parties, the government and the Taliban, should convince the women activists who are against the peace negotiation. If they are not convinced, the government and the Taliban should create a group of women activists to struggle against those who are against the negotiation of peace process.
- At the last stage of the peace negotiations the Afghan government and International Organizations should work on the ways and provide the opportunities of employment to return the refugees that are living in Pakistan.
- For negotiation with the Taliban, the government should select such delegation that does not have history of rivalry with the Taliban, and they should act as the real mediators between the two parties.

Opponents of Peace:

There are some countries in region that count the peace process and close relation with Pakistan as a risk to their investments in Afghanistan, and even now by using some networks and personalities they destroy the peace process and negotiation inside the country under various names. To prevent the obstacles created by those countries in the peace negotiations, the government should compromise with those countries, and insure those countries that with the peace process not only their security will not be challenged, but their legal interests will be also more secure.

The neighbouring countries of Afghanistan and the regional countries should be insured that by peace and security in Afghanistan, not only the peace and stability of those countries will be secured, but it will also provide a great opportunity for economic development of the region.

The End

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