



## Center for Strategic & Regional Studies

Kabul

### **Weekly Analysis-Issue Number 119 (May 23 -30, 2015)**

Weekly Analysis is one of CSRS' publications, which significantly analyses weekly economic and political events in Afghanistan and the region. The prime motive behind this is to provide strategic insights and policy solutions to decision-making institutions and individuals in order to help them to design best policies. Weekly Analysis is published in local languages (Pashto and Dari) and international languages (English and Arabic languages).

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## Preface

The Afghan government has distributed weapons in certain Northern provinces to the local people and tribal elders which has triggered the criticism of different internal and international institutions. Human Rights Commission and internal security commission of National Assembly has criticized the act of the government and they considered it as a threat for the future of Afghanistan. Interior ministry has also expressed that it would not distribute weapons for civilians but will support “peoples’ revolt” against Taliban.

The war-torn country had witnessed such militia groups in the past who were not proved in the interest of none of the sides. The experience had been tested in the past too. Despite that, the same experience is to be tested in Kunduz province where recent insecurities have been the top news story. Now, the question is in spite of having 350 armed forces what is the need for militias? Wouldn't the militias turn into a threat in the future?

From the other side, the repeated visits of Pakistani officials to Kabul and their statements have also been the top story. It seems that the Pakistani officials try to get benefit of the emerged opportunity in Kabul to make its relations with its neighbor country. Now, Kabul tests the notion “Kabul's enemy cannot be friend of Pakistan.”

Has Pakistan's policy been changed regarding Afghanistan? Can Kabul bring peace and security by satisfying Pakistan?

The Analysis desk of “Center for Strategic & Regional Studies” tries to find answers for the aforesaid topics.

## Afghanistan: Can new Militias Work?



After the expansion of sweeping insecurities in northern Afghanistan the local officials decide to form local militia groups to tackle the threats posed by Taliban to the local government. Mohammad Omar Safi, Kunduz government disclosed formation of a one thousand-person local militia group to fight against Taliban.

Now, the question arises, can such militia groups maintain security in the country? And more important is that will the central government be able to control the newly formed groups at the end of the mission? Who can guarantee that the group will not turn into another challenge?

The experience of the last communist regime (1979-1991) shows that the need for militia groups was felt when the government lost confidence on its security forces. Now, has the country entered in such a condition?

### **The Arbakies (Militias) of Gen. Petraeus**

When Gen. David Petraeus was appointed as the commander of international forces in 2010 in Afghanistan he expressed his decision of Militia to tackle Taliban attacks.

Petraeus applied the same idea in Iraq. His decision of militia groups with the support of *Sunni* tribal groups could weaken Al-Qaida temporarily, but he did not take into account that the situation in Iraq and Afghanistan are different. Afghanistan had already experienced the idea. The role militias played in civil war of Afghanistan was very vivid.

### **Against DDR Program**

The “Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration” (DDR) was initiated in Afghanistan after the US invasion and oust of Taliban. The core reason behind DDR was to pave the way in the war torn country for economic development.

The program took start in Afghanistan in 2003 under surveillance of UN and with the financial support of Japan, which was the top-first donor to the program.

According to the program, the irresponsible armed groups were disarmed, because the duty of security and defense was put on the shoulders of national police and army. No one except these forces was not allowed to have weapons. In the meantime, the local irresponsible warlords were to obey the orders of central government.

From the beginning, the setbacks of the program were very clear. Because most of the surrendered weapons were worn-out that could clearly express the intentions of the warlords.

Later on another program of weapons collection started under the name of DAYAG. But that was not better than the previous DDR.

### **Militias on Ethnic Lines**

If the government is to form militia groups, it is not possible but to organize them on ethnic lines and tribal tendencies. Each commander of militia group will select his subordinates from his own ethnicity. In the meantime the ethnic tensions in the provinces cannot be denied. Therefore, if members of one ethnicity joins the militia group the other will feel threatened and for them the only option will remain to join the armed opposition of the government.

## **The Experience of Arbakies in Provinces**

The Afghan government just values to defend an area against the armed opposition, but sometimes the defense results on the weakness of the government.

The core example of that is Kunduz where the governor talks of one thousand armed militia. In this province, the Arbaki militias have been active for the last few years that turned the life bitter for people. The Arbakies ask money from the people for the pretext that the government does not pay them. In sometimes even international institutions have published reports regarding people harassment by the Arbaki militias.

In 2012 an incident happened in Kunduz that even the governor could not justify it. In late August of the year, some Arbakies killed dozens of children, elders and women in “Loy Kalam” village after the killing of their local commander by Taliban.

In response to peoples’ demonstrations the then governor told reporters that the militias had no links to the government and they were “irresponsible armed people” who fight against Taliban. It was the first time the secret was disclosed that still irresponsible armed groups are present who are neither national police nor Arbakies, but are fighting against Taliban.

The question arises, if these people have no links with the government, then from which source do they receive arms and money?

## **Conclusion**

The militias can be useful if they are under direct command of national police, but practically it seems difficult.

The militia groups in Afghanistan are under the command of a local warlord who does not have good background among the people. The militias do not accept restrictions being imposed in national police admission. They are as free that much remain loyal to the warlord. Being free from any restriction turned them into a menace for the people.

The Human Rights Commission of Afghanistan accused the Arbakies for 80% of human rights violation in the country. One of the commission’s commissioner expressed to the

media that their study reveals that the militias violate human rights by harassing the women and children.

No difference if we name them militia or local police. What matters is their actions that cannot be controlled by the government. If worse than that is, in some provinces the government does not ask the irresponsible groups for their difference with Taliban. Therefore, the government disregard their actions.

The question being arise is that is the government frustrated of the capacity of its own security forces for the sake of security?

## Afghan-Pak Relations: The Ongoing Scenario & Future



Based on some newly published reports in Pakistan that the Pakistani government has warned Afghan Taliban unless they halt their spring operations in Afghanistan, they will “face unpleasant consequences.” Apart from this, Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif in his recent visit to Kabul had some unprecedented anti-Taliban statements. He said: “The enemies of Kabul cannot be friends of Islamabad.”

Since few months, especially after the formation of National Unity Government under President Ashraf Ghani’s leadership, the relations between Kabul and Islamabad have been constructed and the visits of the high level officials have also increased. It seems that Kabul has left its traditional hostile policy towards Islamabad and expects the same from its neighbor.

At the same time Wall Street Journal has published a report claiming talks between Taliban and the Afghan government high peace council in China. An initial meeting of Istanbul process has also been convened in Islamabad where deputy Afghan foreign minister, Hekmat Khalil Karzai represented Afghan government.

## Recent Relations of Kabul-Islamabad

With the change in relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan the high level visits have also been increased. In just few months advisor to PM Sharif, Sartaj Aziz paid three visits, Chief of Army Staff General Raheel Sharif three visits, and DG ISI General Rizwan Akhtar paid four visits to Kabul. Besides this, Pakistan commerce minister, Khurram Dastgir, Khaybar Pakhtoonkhwa Chief Minister Pervez Khattack, leaders of Pakhtoon nationalist parties (Afrasyab Khattak, Aftab Sherpaw and Achakzi), chairman of PPP, Asif Ali Zardari and former PM Yousuf Raza Gailani have also visited Kabul. Rumors of Mawlana Fazal Rahman and Siraj-ul-Haq's visit is in circulation.

The core reason behind the unprecedented visits of Pakistani leaders to Kabul might be to some extent changed approaches of the countries regarding each other. The NUG in Afghanistan has been pursuing a pivot to Pakistan in its foreign policy. If Pakistan's approach has not changed that much, at least some of their statements make the Afghan officials optimistic.

The pivot to Pakistan in Kabul's foreign policy had impacts on Afghan government itself too. From one side the Afghan government is under severe criticism and from the other side the new approach has provoked the Afghan Taliban too. Though the new policy of Afghanistan can affect Taliban to some extent, Taliban consider themselves as free. Therefore, the increase in Taliban's spring attacks shows the anger of the group. Such an increase proves to some extent Taliban's freedom.

## Has Pakistan Changed?

The discourse arise regarding Pakistan when Pervez Musharraf stepped down and PPP reached to power that has Pakistan really changed its policy towards Kabul? Later on in 2013, the discourse once again posed when Nawaz Sharif won election. But neither in Zardari's tenure nor in that of Sharif the approach of Islamabad has not been changed.

After the formation of national unity government in Afghanistan and the deadly attack on an army school in Peshawar of Pakistan, a mentality emerged that Pakistan's approached has changed. The Afghan government was also optimistic and gave privileges to Pakistan.



In Afghanistan's pivot to Pakistan only Pakistan benefitted. Pakistan not only gained privileges, but also it was able to put Afghanistan away from India, the traditional friend of Afghan governments.

### **Peace Talks & Recent Rumors**

Last week wall Street Journal reported of Taliban envoy direct peace talks with high peace council members in Urumqi of China. It further claimed that the talks convened with the help of ISI and China. The report was widely quoted in Afghan and international media. But Taliban rejected the talks and termed it as "Propaganda" and considered peace council as "fake".

It has been said that the Secretary of High Peace Council, Masoom Stanikzai participated in Talks with Taliban members Mullah Abdul Jalil, Mullah Mohammad Hassan Rahmani and Mullah Abdul Raziq. But keeping Taliban official statement in consideration, no official member of the group has participated. Sources confirms to CSRS that aforesaid persons are not members of Taliban Qatar political office. It also looks likely that these persons might have mediated between Taliban and Peace Council carrying messages to both the sides. Stanikzai was nominated Defense Minister a day after the China talks.

Had Taliban real members participated in China talks, Pakistani media would have published the news as a success story. It has published many false report earlier. For instance, recently Pakistani media published reports revealing that *Qari Din Mohammad Hanif*, member of Taliban Qatar office had visited Islamabad and peace talks would be officially initiated in Kabul. Later on, evidences proved the report false. Now, if Taliban members have left Islamabad for China talks, then Pakistani media outlets would have published the report. These evidences express clearly that participants of China talks on behalf of Taliban were not members of the group's political office in Qatar.

It is not clear yet, whether the talks happened as the high peace council member's claim. No document leaked to media to prove talks between Taliban and high peace council.

## **Pakistan's Promises & Tense War**

Pakistan promised Afghan government of cooperating in peace talks, while Taliban launched their unprecedented summer operation with such intensity. Taliban expressed their dissatisfaction regarding Gahni's policy towards Pakistan. It was the first time the group criticized Afghan government's policy regarding Pakistan.

Taliban's intensified summer operations may express the level of Pakistan leverage on the group. Now it has been said that Pakistan warned the group to halt their ongoing operations. But one thing is very clear that Pakistan has exploited its fake leverage on Taliban and it has benefitted from the card in negotiation table. On other hand, President Gahni's policies have also unintentionally approved the fake role Pakistan has drawn for itself.

The Afghan government faced the same problem in the past. The NUG has not been able to at least win the hearts and minds of Kabul residents by good governance let alone the remote citizens. Since the formation of new government, people in Kabul miss the former government under Hamid Karzai's leadership. The failed policies of NUG can be the core reason behind such mentality.

## **Future of Kabul-Islamabad Relations**

The recent joint visit of Nawaz Sharif and Raheel Sharif may have decreased the concerns of Afghan officials by their statements, but the relations of Kabul-Islamabad will revolve around:

- Security in Afghanistan; and
- Peace Process.

Pakistan has had positive statements regarding peace and security in Afghanistan, but nothing has changed on the ground, rather the security has been deteriorating. According to a survey of UNAMA in first four months of 2015 difference assaults have claimed the lives of 974 and 1963 civilians have been wounded. According to NYT report in first four months of 2015, 1800 troops of Afghan national army were killed and 3400 wounded.

The reason why Afghan officials are still optimistic regarding Pakistan's role and still waiting is one, and that is whenever the Afghan concerns increase Pakistani media initiate a media game and publish some reports increasing the optimism of Afghan officials. But the scenario will not sustain longer and relations of Kabul will be related to peace and security in Afghanistan. Both the sides committed two mistakes during the new relations:

**First:** Afghan government thought that Pakistan will be able to bring Taliban into negotiations table; and

**Second:** Pakistan expressed as Taliban are completely its puppets and whatever it wants can be done.

Therefore, Pakistan is being taken responsible of any action against security in Afghanistan. The Afghan government is also under public pressure and as a result the relations between the two countries will deteriorate once again.

The End

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**Contact Us:**

Email: [info@csrskabul.com](mailto:info@csrskabul.com) - [csrskabul@gmail.com](mailto:csrskabul@gmail.com)

Website: [www.csrskabul.com](http://www.csrskabul.com) - [www.csrskabul.net](http://www.csrskabul.net)

Contact: (+93) 784089590

