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Preface

The news of President Ghani's letter to Pakistani officials has been widely circulated in the media and hence has caused different reactions in Afghan media outlet. The content of the letter has been outlined in the eight points, which contains some crucial issues. Though, it is not clear yet whether the letter has been really sent to Pakistani officials. Because, neither the Afghan presidential palace (ARG) and nor the Afghan foreign ministry have officially confirmed it yet.

If the letter has been really sent to Pakistani Political leadership, then why it is sent simultaneously with the signing of MoU with ISI by Afghan intelligence Agency (NDS)? Is Ashraf Ghani's harsh demands are reasonably practicable? If not then why such rumors are spread by the media?

Earlier, when Taliban-Five were released in Bergdahl swap, they were given into Qatari custody for one year house-arrest and travel ban, their term is now expiring, but the news are emerging in the media that Qatar has accepted to extend the travel ban on Taliban Five.. In this regards, Different reports are published. The Afghan high peace council has asked that Taliban-five should be handed over to Kabul in order to break the stalemate in peace process. The question is, whether the released Taliban-Five prisoners would really be useful in the peace process or not?

The Reports are also published confirming the extension of their house-arrest. What impacts would it have on the ongoing peace efforts?

In this week's "Weekly Analysis" CSRS researchers discussed the above topics.

Tough Demands from a Week Position



Recently, the Afghan President Ashraf Ghani has sent a letter to Pakistani Prime Minister, Nawaz Sharif, which is been been leaked to media outlets.

Ghani's Letter to Sharif: Reality or Rumor?

In spite of wide coverage in the media and even talks on the content of the letter is going on, but the letter is still questionable. Has the letter really been sent to Nawaz Sharif? If so, then why it is being simultaneous with the MoU of NDS (National Directorate of Security) of Afghanistan with the ISI of Pakistan? And why presidential palace and ministry of foreign affairs of Afghanistan do not clarify the complexity?

On the other hand, Pakistani officials have not acknowledged the letter yet. The Pakistani Embassy in Kabul has also showed ignorance regarding this letter.

The leakiness of the letter from the presidential palace may be for two reasons:

1. To ease the harsh public pressure regarding the MoU signed with ISI;
2. And a green light to Pakistan's arch rival to show Kabul's non-alignment.

But both the Afghan and Pakistani governments have not expressed any view on the letter publically. The public opinion in Afghanistan believes that the letter has been sent.

The Afghan media outlet not only believing in sending of the letter but also, reportedly, the content of the letter has also been leaked. Therefore, a conclusive discussion on the letter's content would not be useless.

The Content of the Letter

1. An official declaration by the political leadership of Pakistan condemning the launching of the Taliban offensive;
2. Urgently Abandoning all Taliban sanctuaries inside Pakistan;
3. A directive to extend the counter-terror campaign to the Haqqani network and verification that those responsible for the recent terror campaign in Afghanistan are arrested;
4. Place the leaders of the Quetta Shura and the Peshawar Shura under house-arrest and to initiate legal proceedings against them for threatening a friendly state;
5. A directive to all medical facilities to hand over those with war wounds to the custody of security officials for investigation and arrest;
6. Agreeing on an exchange of prisoners such as Mulla Biradar for (members of) Tehrik-i-Taliban-i-Pakistan;
7. Another directive for the factories producing fertilizer and switches for improvised explosive devices (IEDs) be allowed to sell only to authorized firms;
8. Agreement to carry out a series of simultaneous operations to deny passage to TTP (Tehrik Taliban Pakistan) and TTA (Tehrik Taliban Afghanistan), such as Baramcha.

From MoU to the Letter

Recently, the issue of MoU between Afghan and Pakistani intelligence agencies caused wide range of harsh discourses inside Afghanistan. Rumors have been heard that differences emerged over MoU between National Security Advisor, Hanif Atmar and Head of NDS Rahmatullah Nabil. Atmar has asked Nabil to sign the MoU with the ISI, but he has refused harshly. After the controversy, the MoU was signed by the Deputy Head of NDS.

Whether the reports are right or wrong, but the MoU has undoubtedly proved one thing and that is increased disagreement inside already fragile National Unity government. The adversaries are of the opinion that the commitment of Pakistan and its cooperation in peace process has yet to be proved, giving the privileges to Pakistan is not logical.

Therefore, it seems that President Ghani has been under pressure, until Pakistan is not taking any solid steps in pushing peace process in Afghanistan and exerting the required pressure on Taliban, the MoU shall not be signed.

The President has given one month deadline to take the required measures regarding the eight demands of Afghanistan. But, reportedly, the letter was sent around three weeks before, and there is no sign of any change in the policy of Pakistan. Ghani has asked Pakistan in the letter to handover those responsible for recent attacks in Afghanistan, but the war is going on with full intensity in different parts of the country.

Tough Demands

One of the reasons behind the Taliban's new intense operations in Afghanistan is that the group tries to have more vast areas in its control to reside in mountainous areas of the country instead of Pakistan. Afghanistan is even a perfect safe-haven for Pakistani Taliban who are under pressure in their country.

President Ghani has asked Pakistan to dismantle the sanctuaries of Taliban inside Pakistan, while the Pakistani officials believe that the safe-haven have been transformed to Afghanistan. In the last visit of Nawaz Sharif and Pakistani security and military personals the Pakistani side claimed that the Indian intelligence "RAW" supports and finances the sanctuaries of the militants.

Arresting Quetta and Peshawar council's members is also an ambiguous demand, because no one understands the so called "Quetta Shura" which is the central committee of Taliban where it locates.

Currently, there is neither any "Quetta Shura" and nor any 'Peshawar Shura'. The operations in northern Waziristan made the Taliban group, which is known as "Haqqani Network", to leave the area. Even the Manba-ul-Jihad madrasa of Jalaluddin Haqqani has been evacuated.

One can understand from the contents of the letter that the Afghan government has strong belief that the key Taliban leaders reside inside the Pakistani cities along with their families. That's why Ghani asks Pakistani government to- at least-impose house-arrest on the Taliban leaders.

Pakistan's Inability

Since the improvement in relations and security cooperation between the National Unity Government and Islamabad has been increased, Pakistan has tried to reestablish contacts with well-known Taliban leaders and encourage or even force them to talk to Kabul, but it has not succeeded yet.

The recent talks held in Urumqi, China, was between the Afghan government delegation and those Taliban who has no effective role in peace process. It means that Pakistan does have any access to the key Taliban leaders to encourage them for talks with Kabul. On other hand, Taliban refused any links with Urumqi meeting.

Dr. Mohammad Naeem Wardag, the spokesman of Taliban political office in Qatar insisted in his recent interview that the group is not under leverage of "any country" and their struggle goes on independently. The efforts aiming to divide the group are useless.

Conclusion

The demands of President Ghani in his letter to Nawaz Sharif reflects trust deficit as a great barrier which still over shadow the relations of the two countries. The letter clearly exposes that the Afghan Government still believes that centers of support, finance and equipment of Afghan Taliban are inside Pakistani soil and the Afghan war is being led by ISI.

When trust deficit still exists in the relations of the two countries, then why the Afghan Government agrees on the MoU with all the privileges to ISI?

The reason is BSA with the US which made Kabul to agree with all the demands of Pakistan. The preamble of BSA says:

Reaffirming the continued support of the parties for regional cooperation and coordination mechanisms, with goal of increasing security and stability by reducing tensions, uncertainty, and misunderstanding.

Therefore, Afghanistan is obliged to settle the three problems with Pakistan for security and stability:

1. Reducing tensions means the clashes or military threats of the countries, the shelling of rocket from Pakistani territory;
2. Reducing all the ambiguities, making clear all the complex issues which cause differences between the two countries. "Durrand Issue";
3. Removing the misunderstandings that the two countries blame each other for assisting the enemies of each other. The removal of these misunderstandings are not possible without close intelligence cooperation.

President Ghani has posed tough demands from a weak position, because he does not own any tool of pressure on Pakistan to pursue his goals. He is obliged to settle his problem with Pakistan which he committed to in BSA with US. The continuation of his government is too connected with the great gamble.

The Released 'Taliban Five' & Peace Process



In June 2nd, 2015 a year of swap deal between Taliban and US government has been completed. Last year, Bowe Bergdahl, an American soldier who remained in Taliban imprisonment for five years, was exchanged with five Taliban leaders jailed in Guantanamo bay. In Afghan media different bruits were circulated regarding their fate.

Initially, it was agreed upon between Taliban and US government that freed Taliban leaders will remain in Qatar for a year. It was a precautionary measure of US government to prevent the freed Taliban to lead war against their troops.

After completion of a year, CIA director John Brenna said in an interview with CNN that they would talk to Qatar officials regarding the released Taliban. In some news reports it was said that the released Taliban will be prevented of traveling until US government reach a deal with them.

On the other hand, Taliban released statement on the issue. "According to agreement, the released Taliban leaders will remain free and they can travel wherever Islamic Emirate prefers" The Taliban expressed on first anniversary of the swap.

The High Peace Council of Afghan government requested to hand over Taliban-five to Kabul, so they can play a role in peace process.

Can Released Taliban Play a Role in the Peace Process?

The request of handing over five Taliban members to Kabul seems useless based on the reasons:

Firstly: The freed Taliban were military commanders before US invasion of Afghanistan. They held military posts before being imprisoned by US. They are not diplomats and have no experience in this regard. So they cannot play vital role in peace process.

Secondly: The released Taliban leaders were in jail till May 2014. They have been unfamiliar with new wide changes in the group structure and political situation in Afghanistan since then.

Thirdly: The five were freed on endeavors of Taliban Political Office Qatar. They cannot play a role in peace without consent of Taliban's Office.

Fourthly: Some other high profile Taliban leaders have been released from Guantanamo bay before this swap deal. Foreign Minister of Taliban Wakil Ahmad Mutawakil and their ambassador to Islamabad, Abdul Salam Zaeef were released before them. In spite of having political background, they did not play any role in peace process.

Fifthly: Even if they enter in peace process, they could not perform a useful role, because most of the Taliban fighters are young and they are not familiar with them.

Parallel Peace Efforts

First: Taliban delegates in Qatar are authorized by Taliban. They try to represent the group without any influence of Pakistan.

Second: In order to gain President Ashraf Ghani's trust, Pakistan exposes as it has started negotiation between Taliban and Afghan government.

Last month, negotiations with Taliban were in the top stories of news. In Al-khor of Qatar, a seminar was invited by Pugwash international institution. Last week another meeting of peace held in Urumqi of China. In Qatar Pugwash Seminar, Taliban delegation participated, but in Urumqi meeting people who participated on behalf of Taliban, have no post currently in Taliban. Some reports stated that Mulla Jalil, Mulla Hasan Rahmani and Abdurraziq participated in Urumqi meeting on behalf of the group, but Taliban officially denied participation in the meeting.

Some media are talking of Taliban representative's presence in Urumqi meeting while the rest give the credit of Pugwash to Pakistan. One of the repetitive mistakes of the Afghan government in peace process was and is that it values Pakistan more than its actual role and this mistake not only made the process face stalemate but complexes it too.

Since the formation of "National Unity" government, President Ghani made efforts to make a break-through in the country's foreign policy. President has tried to fundamentally change the relations with Pakistan which caused criticism in the country. Ghani's government is optimistic for peace because of the promises made by Pakistan.

Pakistan promised Kabul in the last February that Taliban will participate in direct talks with Kabul in early March. The promise provoked hopes for peace. But two more months passed, too, without any tangible peace initiatives.

Why Taliban did not participate in Urumqi Meeting?

Taliban Qatar Office members were interested to participate in Urumqi meeting, but the group refused when they came to know regarding participation of Pakistan and High Peace Council members, sources close to the group expressed. Qatar Office spokesman, Dr. Naeem Wardag refused participation of the group's any delegation in Urumqi. Naeem considered it propagation against the Political Office.

Sources close to Taliban said the delegations did not participated in Urumqi, in order to remove the possibility of mentality that they were sit there as a result of Pakistan leverage. When the Qatar Office inaugurated in 2013, Pakistan got a foe stance against the diplomatic initiative of the group. ISI, the intelligence agency of Pakistan arrested two brothers of Qatar Office Head, Sayed Mohammad Taib Agha. And, Taib Agha was reportedly asked to visit Islamabad which he refused. The delegations of Taliban in Qatar visited certain countries and participated in different conferences, except Pakistan.

The Increasing Hurdles in the Way of Peace

The NUG has created more barriers in the way of peace rather to honestly support it. A source disclosed that President Ghani a meeting with Qatar Office Members and promised them of postponing BSA, during his last year election campaign. But the

president signed BSA hours after the oath ceremony, which is considered the biggest barrier in the way of peace process.

The Afghan government improved its relations with Pakistan believing that the Taliban elders are in full control of Pakistan and it can do everything. In response, the group accelerated and intensified its spring operations to prove its independence. Therefore, they are not ready for peace talks, especially through Pakistan. The group fears, Pakistan will deal on its political fate defame them.

Now, extension of the house-arrest of five Taliban commanders who were swop with Bowe Bergdahl last year will more increase the trust deficit. Because based on the deal with them, one year house-arrest term has over and now they are free. They considers the rumors of extension repugnant to the international principles. If Taliban are treated against the agreement, it will affect the future agreements with the group.

Conclusion

Released Taliban were freed by Taliban Qatar Office initiative and they are still residing there. They cannot initiate a parallel peace initiative and they have no such intentions.

High peace council believes if released Taliban leaders are handed over to Kabul, they will play a positive role in peace process while high profile released Taliban did not play a role in peace process, while they live in Kabul.

Pakistan still endeavors to gain Afghan government's trust that is why they expose so that the key of peace is with them.

Pakistan intended to benefit from the presence of Taliban Qatar Office members in Urumqi, but the meeting did not bear any fruit for Pakistan.

Efforts are made by Taliban to get rid of Pakistan influence in peace process. If Afghan government does the same, it will benefit peace efforts.

Pressurizing the released Taliban would not be fruitful to peace process, but it will make obstacles in the way of peace.

The End

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