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In this issue:

- Preface 2

Whether the direct peaceful talks have get-off the ground?

- Islamabad's meeting and the Taliban's stance 4
- The future prospects of Pak-Afghan ties 5
- Islamabad's facilitation role 5
- Pakistani Pressure and the changing Taliban policy 6
- The future of peaceful talks 7

ISIS & New Dynamism in "Khurasan Region"

- IS and Taliban 9
- IS's Response to Taliban 9
- Gulbadin Hekmatyar and IS 10
- The future of extremist groups in Afghanistan and Central Asia 10

Preface

In the last week, Taliban and afghan government's first direct talks in Islamabad were the hot issue both in local and international media. The first phase of these talks happened in Urumqi, China, and its second phase started in Islamabad.

Even though, Taliban have iterated that regarding the peaceful negotiations the sole authority is with its Political office, but apart from this many influential Taliban took part in Islamabad's peaceful talks. The question arises, why Afghan government is giving much importance to Pakistan's meditation role and what would be its outcome? Moreover why the Taliban have adopted a cautious stance?

On the other hand, the Islamic State is active and is day by day becoming more powerful in the eastern part of Afghanistan and their physical disputes with Taliban are now very much cleared. In this regard, Gulbadeen Hekmatyar had recommended to its followers that they should fight against Taliban along with Islamic State. Now the question arises what would be the outcomes of this decision and recommendation? And in addition what would be the aftermath of clashes between Taliban and Islamic State?

In this weekly analysis, the Centre for Strategic and Regional Studies has tried to give answers to the mentioned questions.

Whether the direct peaceful talks have get-off the ground?



The first known direct talks between Afghan govt. and the Taliban in Islamabad have been welcomed internationally. These talks were taken place in Murree, a tourist spot near Islamabad. Where on the Taliban's side Abdul Latif Mansour (Nephew of Maulvi Nasrullah Mansoor), Haji Ibrahim (Maulavi Jalaluddin Haqqani's brother) and Mullah Abbas took part in it, while Hekmat Khalil Karzai (deputy foreign minister), Haji Din Muhammad (a member of High Peace Council), Faizullah Zaki, Asadullah Sadati, Aasim, and Muhammad Nateqee represented the Afghan government.

Moreover, the Chinese and USA representatives were too present as observers and UNAMA, White House, Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Shareef, and the Afghan ex-President Hamid Karzai welcomed these talks.

These Peaceful talks happened due to Pakistan's initiative and the first round of it was in Urumqi, China. However, it is not the first time that the Afghan government is directly talking with Taliban but Islamabad's meeting differs with all those others meetings. But, still it is wondered whether Taliban's representatives truly represent them or not?

Islamabad's meeting and the Taliban's stance

Even though the peaceful talks with the Taliban have been started during Hamid Karzai's era, but when Ashraf Ghani became the new afghan President, the peaceful talks becomes the core issue of afghan foreign policy. In Ashraf Ghani's first foreign visit, China becomes ready to give a platform to Taliban, Afghan government, Pakistan and China for peaceful talks.

In this regard, China hosted the representatives of Taliban's political office and later in February the Chinese foreign minister while visiting Pakistan said that China is ready for a mediating role in Afghanistan. In May, the peaceful talks between Taliban, Afghan government and the High Peace Council were started in Urumqi, China, which was later rejected by Taliban. In Urumqi, the representatives of Taliban were Mullah Abdul Jaleel, Muhammad Hassan Rahmani, and Mullah Abdul Razzaq.

After the first round of talks in Urumqi, hopes were high that the second round of peaceful talks will soon took place in Urumqi, but when the Taliban rejected the Urumqi talks, as a consequence China halted to host peaceful talks in Urumqi, and then Pakistan's national security advisor Sartaj Aziz proposed to host this meeting in Islamabad. In this meeting, for the first time representatives of Taliban who were not the members of Taliban's political office but were part of Taliban took part in the direct talks with Afghan government.

Taliban also didn't reject Islamabad talks, but after taliban's declaration, it is understandable that Afghan government have talked with some officials members of Taliban but with one big difference that those who took part in Islamabad talks weren't a part of Taliban's political office.

According to the closed sources to Taliban, these peoples were influential in Taliban's hierarchy. But Taliban's political office spokesman Dr. Muhammad Naeem Wardak has rejected that no member of Taliban's political office has taken part in Islamabad's Peaceful talks. In addition, Taliban's spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid too said that it is the responsibility of political office to take part in such talking, not others.

The future prospects of Pak-Afghan ties

When Ashraf Ghani became President, Afghanistan's foreign policy towards Pakistan was completely changed, and Kabul's foreign policy became Pakistani centric. Even though, Afghan government hoped that Pakistan will play an important role in Afghanistan's peaceful reconciliation but as the time passed away Kabul became upset with Pakistan's double game and Afghan government, especially the President, came under public pressure. Therefore, in this regard, the Afghan President wrote a letter to Pakistan and hence the signs of trust deficit incurred in Pak-Afghan ties.

The trust deficit reached to its heights when both Pakistan and Afghan security forces clashed over border in Paktika province, killing 8 Pakistani and 1 Afghan security personnel. As a result, both countries summons each other's ambassadors over this border firing and this revealed rift in bilateral relations. But, after this incident, Pakistan's help in bringing the Taliban to the negotiating table was admired and the Kabul once again looks through hopeful eyes to Pakistan.

The Peaceful talks between Taliban and Afghan government was solely responsible for removing trust deficit in bilateral Pak-Afghan tie and as a result the Afghan government admired Pakistan's role in hosting and organizing the Islamabad talks. The Afghan Ministry of Foreign affairs said in its press release: 'The National Unity Government thanks the leadership of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan for facilitating the first meeting and hosting the delegation of the High Peace Council. It also hopes that this cooperation produce practical and tangible results so that both countries enjoy security and stability and both nations are rid of war'¹

Islamabad's facilitation role

Taliban from the day first of its political office is saying that their political office has complete authority and capability to hold talks, But with this clear message, the Afghan government didn't wants to hold talks directly with Taliban's Political office, instead it is holding peaceful talks with some of Taliban's former and present members with the help of Pakistani pressures.

¹ To study more, see:< <http://mfa.gov.af/en/news/press-release-on-the-first-meeting-of-formal-peace-negotiations-between-official-delegations-of-the-high-peace-council-of-afghanistan-and-the-afghan-t>>

Now the question arises, why the present Taliban wants to hold talks with Afghan government and the Islamic Emirate too didn't show any serious response to it. Its reason might be that they are holding talks mostly due to Pakistan's overt pressures. But, those who are closed to Taliban has expressed it clearly that only Taliban's political office has the right and authority to hold talks and others who do this is in their own personal capacity.

Both afghan and Pakistani government wants to divide Taliban through such talks, and since such talks, they are striving for this motive, But so far Taliban has been successful to preserve their unity. It is from here that Taliban in the last two press releases hadn't have criticized those who took part in talks and moreover they have shown themselves free of Pakistani pressures. Because, they had only contended that the sole authority to hold talks is with Taliban's political office.

Pakistani Pressure and the changing Taliban policy

Since 2007, Pakistan have overt its pressures on Taliban. For instance, Taliban's two top leaders, Mullah Ubaidullah Akhund and Mullah Baradar, were arrested by Pakistani establishment, where Mullah Ubaidullah Akhund died under Pakistan's captivity and Mullah Baradar is still under house arrest. In addition, a much closed source to Taliban has told us that since 2007, roundabout 22 top Taliban leaders have been killed by Pakistani intelligence agency, ISI.

The reason behind all this is that Pakistan wants to control Taliban's foreign policy, but as Ashraf Ghani became President and changed Kabul's Pakistani policy, the pressures on Taliban got increased and due to these pressures some members of Taliban were forced to sit in Urumqi and Islamabad talks.

As a consequence to these Pakistani pressures, Taliban have changed their policy and now they have given responsibility of internal political and external affairs to Qatar's office (Taliban's political office). In this regard, Taliban have stated in its last statement :< on this basis, from now onwards all of Islamic Emirate's foreign and internal political affairs are entrusted to the Islamic Emirate's Political office as their sole responsibility. The Political office has full capacity and agency powers to conduct or postpone, in light

of Islamic Principles and national interests, negotiations with internal and foreign parties wherever and whenever it deems suitable²

It is understandable from the above statement that Taliban is going through serious period and Pakistan's Pressure is knowable. Therefore, it is from here that the Taliban in a counter attack have given the responsibility of internal political affairs to its political office, in order to get away Pakistani pressures.

The future of peaceful talks

When the afghan delegation returned home from Islamabad, they hold a press conference and called the Islamabad talks a productive discussion with Taliban and Haqqani members and moreover had called it a vital step towards achieving peace. According to Hekmat Khalil Karzai, Taliban have shared their wish list with them, which is the withdrawal of foreign forces, and the names of Taliban in UN and USA's blacklists. In this regard, they believed that Taliban's delegation cam with the permission of their leader, Mullah Mansoor, and had complete authority in the peaceful talks. Moreover, Afghan side is hopeful that the second round of these talks will be soon started after Ramadan.

However it is felt that Islamabad's peaceful talks would play vital role in the future peaceful talks, but as the taliban have given permission to hold talks only to its political office and holding peaceful talks, instead of Taliban's political office, with others will haven't a good future and it would most probably fail.

If there weren't any pressures from Pakistani side and the Taliban were too happy with such talks, then most probably Taliban might have took part in Islamabad's peaceful talks. However, not only the Taliban have rejected such talks –Because political office is solely responsible for holding talks and no member of political office had taken part in these talks- but have given the internal political affairs responsibility too to Qatar's Taliban office. It is from here that we concludes that due to Pakistan's mediation the peace would not be a real one and the Taliban would too don't want to show itself as Pakistani stooge.

² For further studies, please visit:< <http://alemara1.org/?p=19802>>

ISIS & New Dynamism in “Khurasan Region”



Afghanistan has recently been witnessed of rapid changes. Emergence of IS or *Daesh* in some provinces of Afghanistan is a source of anxiety for the countries of the region more than inside the country.

Countries like, Iran, Russia, China, Central Asian countries and India have close eye on the developments. In reaction to the new scenario, Iran`s ambassador in Kabul said his country was ready to cooperate and help Afghanistan against ISIS. ISIS emergence in Afghanistan is a main point of discussions in Shanghai conference.

The group has not clashed the government forces in Afghanistan yet. It has kept limited their operations in eastern Afghanistan against Taliban to drive them away and find a legroom for their own.

During all these developments, *Gulbadin Hekmatyar* called Iran a country more dangerous than Israel and called the IS`s emergence a legitimate one. Evaluating all these issues are the subject of this analysis.

IS and Taliban

In early May 2015 when the reports published regarding IS clash with Taliban has been heard the later rejected. On 10th May 2015, Taliban in there official statement, called that conflict not against IS rather against a group of robbers and kidnapers. The statement maintains: “during a wide range of operations in Kot, Deh Bala districts and some other places, against murderers, robbers, kidnapers and warlords who used to kill people and commit none Islamic acts; all these areas were cleaned up from these groups. In this regard, reports the media outlets which called this conflict between ISIS and Taliban, are not true. We declare frankly that Mujahedin of Islamic Emirate are active in these areas. So media should not link these robbers with certain group and should not put people in worry.”

But it was soon cleared that what happened was not that sample. Akhtar Mohammad Mansor, Head of Taliban Leadership council, which at the same time is the vice chancellor of Mula Omer, sent a letter to AL-Baghdadi and demanded not to interfere Afghanistan.

IS's Response to Taliban

Islamic State's response to Taliban's letter was negative. The group who in eastern Afghanistan is fighting against Taliban has IS (Iraq and Syria) support.

IS's response is not just a political one. One of the leader of of IS's Khorasan province called Taliban apostates in a statement, who can be murdered. Although this statement was published with a fake name of “Abu Elyas Hanafi”, but from its style of writing and the phrases it has used in his statement shows that it is the work of “Abdu Rahim Muslimdust” the mufti of ISI'sKhorasan province. This statement declares that whoever fights IS is apostate and is hence convicted to death. This statement also mentions: “all anti ISIS groups and their supporters like Shiites and Arabic countries, are non-Muslims”. This statement includes all reasons to apostatize Taliban. For example; Taliban's relations with ISI, having friendship relations with an apostate person like Maulana Fazularhman, calling the government of Qatar as a brother by Taliban, supporting Mursi and condemning the convict to execution for Mursi by Taliban.

IS counts all these as reasons of Taliban's apostatize. According to this statement, Muslim brotherhood in Egypt is also an apostate group as like the Taliban.

IS's fatwa in Afghanistan is as accordance with Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, who have issued the same fatwa against other groups like “An Nusra”, Shiites and Yazidies.

Gulbadin Hekmatyar and IS

In the last few days, the statement published by the Islamic party of Hekmatyar has faced criticisms in social media. These criticisms forced Hekmatyar to correct his fault. His statement was ordering all Islamic Party's Mujahidin to support ISIS, if there is a conflict between IS and Taliban. This statement was interpreted as the joining of Hekmatyar to the ranks of ISIS.

If we see the policies of IS against other groups, Islamic Party of Hekmatyar cannot save himself from being called an apostate. Between all Mujahedin leaders Hekmatyar is the one, who from the beginning up to now believes in elections. But, one of the Al-Baghdadi's characteristics, which has been cited by his follower as a good point is "he is the first Muslim leader which is against elections and called this system an anti-Islamic". The problem with Hekmatyar is that there are contradictions in his decisions. For instance; in relation with IS there is two interviews of Hekmatyar published on Shahadat website, which contradict each other.

In his interview with Afghan Zvak website, he called IS a natural movement of Muslims against American and Iranian interventions in Islamic world. He stated that there is Anti-Islamic and apostate alliance against ISIS and this Anti-Islamic alliance shows the rightfulness of IS. But in an interview with Arzasht website, he says "if IS tries to create groups which belongs only to them, it will be their mistake, the same mistake of Taliban which forced them to fight against all other Islamic groups.

The future of extremist groups in Afghanistan and Central Asia

Although conflict between ISIS and Taliban is indispensable, but there is much more restriction in the path of ISIS to influence inside Afghanistan. The ideological basement which is a necessity for ISIS in order to recruit soldiers is almost destroyed by Taliban and other Islamic groups. So it is very hard to find soldiers on an ideological base.

A very suitable place for ISIS can be Central Asia. But ISIS doesn't considered this up to now as a choice. They select all their representatives from Pashtuns inside Khorasan. A large militant group in the Central Asian region is Uzbekistan Islamic Movement, which has cut off its ties with another Pashtun leader "Mula Omar", now don't know whether to join ISIS or not.

IS is a Salafi group and selects all its representatives from the same people. But Uzbekistan Islamic Movement is a strong Hanafi one. Maybe this is also a reason for ISIS not to select them as their representatives. This will be also a reason to restrain them from influencing inside northern Afghanistan and Central Asia.

Afghanistan, as a land of anger and violence, attracts attention of extremist groups. Anxiety of the region and neighbors countries and even the appearance of a dangerous group like IS doesn't cause any cooperation for bringing peace in Afghanistan. Therefore, everyone would be driven into a proxy war against challenges raised from Afghanistan, and the sole result will be violence.

The End

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