



## Center for Strategic & Regional Studies

Kabul

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## Preface

Some serious incidents and transformations in the previous month has influenced the Afghan government's policies regarding Pakistan. For the first time president Mohammad Ashraf Ghani has used harsh language and blamed Pakistan in a recent speech, due to the possible failure of the peace process, Taliban new leader's election in Pakistan, and deadly explosions in Kabul, and subsequently sent a delegation to Islamabad.

The last incidents has not only influenced Kabul's policies toward Pakistan, but has also raised concerns regarding the peace process. Because, Kabul's closed relations with Pakistan and giving them privileges was mainly due for the success of peace process. In response to Kabul's harsh criticism, the Pakistani authorities didn't take notice of, and hence, many people differently interpreted Pakistan's silence. Now the question arises, whether there would be a paradigm shift in Afghan government's policies toward Pakistan or not?

In this weekly analysis, the center for strategic and regional studies had tried to discuss the aforementioned topics.

## Latest Incidents and their Impacts on the Afghan Peace Process



After a series of deadly attacks in Kabul, President Ghani, unlike past 10 months, used harsh language against Pakistan for the first time. He said, a war is being declared against us from the territory of Pakistan; it is an obvious enmity with a neighboring nation.

Two days before Ashraf Ghani's press conference, a series of heavy explosions shocked Kabul and according to UNAMA's research it as the deadliest day for civilians since 2009.

Before Ashraf Ghani's harsh expressions and a series of explosions in Kabul, the started peace talks in Islamabad was delayed due to revealing the secret of Mullah Mohammad Omar's death. Besides that, disagreements in Taliban ranks have raised, also. For now, the question is that which direction the peace process would take in the light of latest evolutions and incidents?

## Taliban's internal disputes

From the day the Taliban regime had been toppled and then, after some years, when they started armed struggle against NATO forces, some authorities of the Taliban left their ranks, for example, Mutaseem Agha Jan separated from Taliban ranks due to some disagreements in 2010 and started struggles for establishing an inter-Afghan peace process from the countries in the region. But, these internal disagreements didn't influenced Taliban badly, because of the existence and leadership of Mullah Mohammad Omar.

When Mullah Mohammad Omar's death was revealed, some disagreements came out in Taliban ranks, and the new opposition group began to criticize the new Ameer over keeping Mullah Mohammad Omar's death as a secret and some other issues. Mullah Abdurrazaq, the interior minister, Mullah Abdul Jalil, the deputy foreign minister and Mullah Mohammad Hassan Rahmani, the provincial governor of the Taliban regime and Mullah Mohammad Rasool were against appointing Mullah Akhtar Mohammad Mansoor as the new leader of the movement. Moreover, Mullah Mohammad Omar's family including his brother, Mullah Abdul Mannan, and his son, Mullah Mohammad Yaaqoub, have not pledged their allegiance with the new leader of Taliban.

Following these disagreements, head of the Qatar Office, Said Tayyib Agha, had also resigned due to secretly keeping Mullah Mohammad Omar's from him and why the new leader of the movement was appointed outside the country, Pakistan.

Now considering these disagreements, the new concerns on the peace process are on the rise that with the division of Taliban, who would Afghan government, now deals with for the sake of peace talks. Beside Taliban's disagreements, Mullah Akhtar Mohammad Mansoor has received support of most of the Taliban military commanders and provincial governors; the reason is that he had direct contacts and better relations with Taliban's military commanders since the last last five years. On the other hand, the leader of Haqqani Network, Sirajuddin Haqqani became appointed as his deputy and so a huge part of Taliban's military has pledged their allegiance to him.

On August 13<sup>th</sup>, Aiman-ul Zawahiri, leader of Al Qaeda, through broadcasting a video, pledged his allegiance to Mullah Akhtar Mohammad Mansoor and called him "Amir-ul Mumineen (Supreme Leader of All Muslims)". Allegiance of Al Qaeda's leader to Mullah Mansoor has challenged the existed disagreements. It looks like Mullah Mansoor will

solve his disagreements with Mullah Mohammad Omar's family through a group of religious scholars, and therefore the disagreements between the Taliban would decrease slowly, and they would not have any impact in the battle ground anymore.

### The Deadly Explosions in Kabul

Last week, deadly explosions in Kabul had impacted the foreign policy of Afghanistan toward Pakistan. On August 7<sup>th</sup>, three explosions occurred in Kabul within 24 hours, the first explosion was in Shah Shaeed locality, the second was in Qasaba locality and the third one was on Police Academy. Taliban claimed responsibly for the last two attacks but the first one had a lot of civilian casualties and economical losses, Taliban rejected having hand in this one. On August 10<sup>th</sup>, an explosion occurred in the Kabul Airport, which Taliban claimed responsibility for.

The followings explain the aims behind series of serious explosions:

**First:** Some people opposed Mullah Akhtar Mohammad Mansoor for playing an obvious role in Islamabad's Murree peace talks and showing green light to Taliban negotiators. Therefore, he, after becoming the new leader of Taliban, in his first audio message considered the peace talks as "enemy's propaganda" and with these explosions in Kabul; he tries to gain support of his opponents.

**Second:** After Mullah Mohammad Omar's death, the international media and Afghan government claimed that there are profound disagreements among the Taliban and they are going to become weak, soon. Now, the Taliban, with such attacks, wants to show their power to the Afghan government and international community that they are not yet weak.

**Third:** Naturally, Taliban warriors might have lost their morale with the death of their leader, Mullah Mohammad Omar, and on-going disagreement; therefore, the Taliban want to increase morale of their armed fighters through these attacks.

**Fourth:** However, the Taliban participated in Murree's peace talks that this would not be leaked to the media, but when it was leaked and broadly broadcasted by domestic, regional and international media; the idea of that Pakistan can make the Taliban to have peace talks empowered. Hence, they, for weakening this thought, speeded their attacks.

## **The Change in Policies of Unity Government**

The series of such attacks in Kabul changed not only Ashraf Ghani's foreign policy, but it did also impact the Kabul policy on "terrorism".

The deadly attacks in Kabul, delay in the second round of peace talks and criticism on Ashraf Ghani's Pakistan policy inside the country has caused Ashraf Ghani to change his policy toward Pakistan.

Ashraf Ghani, in a press conference, used harsh language against Pakistan and said, "Still meetings are held in Pakistan and continuation of war is being insisted from there. It has proved that there are still safe shelters for terrorism in Pakistan"... "training centers of terrorists are still functioning in Pakistan"... "We hope for peace but war against us is being declared in Pakistani soil, in reality, it is an obvious enmity against a neighboring nation and country."

Besides that, Dr. Abdullah, CEO of NUG criticized Pakistan and said that we should review our Pakistan policy. On the other hand, Ahmad Zia Masoud, special representative of the President also said that Pakistan had deceived Afghanistan under the name of peace process.

However, this policy of the Afghan government yet to be changed completely; but the upcoming two weeks will determine the course of Kabul-Islamabad relations. Following this aim, on August 13<sup>th</sup>, President Ghani sent a high-level delegation to Islamabad and perhaps this visit would be the last ditch attempt to repair ties with Pakistan.

Afghan officials' harsh reaction against Pakistan is being supported by the people. Before that, former President Hamid Karzai and his team were continuously criticizing Ashraf Ghani in order to stop the present policy toward Pakistan. For the first time, after Hamid Karzai had left the Presidential Palace, the government has taken such a position.

## **The bleak Future of the Peace Process**

President Ghani wanted to have peace talks with the Taliban via China and Pakistan, and this was his policy toward peace. This is the reason why he provided Pakistan with a lot of privileges, however, his policy became criticized inside the country and it had not had any obvious fruit except Murree's first round talks. Meanwhile, this policy instigated the

Afghan Taliban against the Afghan government. Hence, Taliban follow two wars: one, their normal/previous war and second, war for proving that they are not puppets of Pakistan.

If Afghan side did not receive practical assurance on peace from Pakistan, so this policy of the Afghan government on the peace process would face close doors more than ever. And the peace process would face a bleak Future after that, then. However, one of the following steps could be taken toward the peace process:

**First:** Efforts on dividing the Taliban would speed up, in order to gain from the Taliban's disagreements, but it would not be so fruitful.

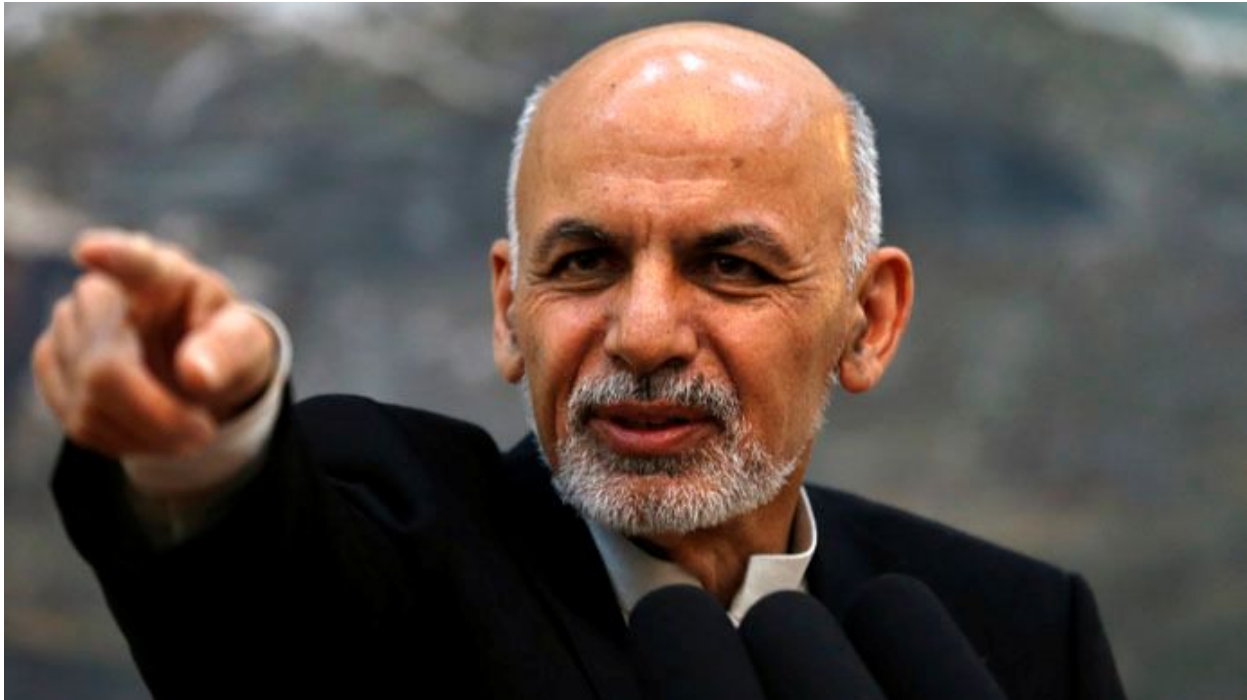
**Second:** Karzai's former policy would be followed and relations with Pakistan should become worsen.

**Third:** Kabul would get use of diplomacy and put pressure on Pakistan through Pakistan's strategic friends.

**Fourth:** it is that Kabul would keep Pakistan's door open and only request help from it in order to eliminate Taliban's compounds, and from the other hand, it would start face-to-face talks with the Taliban on the peace process.

**Fifth:** Kabul would receive assurance from Pakistan and Ashraf Ghani's policy toward Pakistan will continue until several months.

## How serious are Kabul-Islamabad tensions?



After the Unity Government and especially after the disclosure of ISI-NDS cooperation agreement between Pakistan and Afghanistan, it looks like new era of relations between both countries is begun.

Pakistan's commitment to peace process in Afghanistan and two rounds of negotiations between representatives of Taliban and the Afghan government as a result of Pakistan's intercession in China's Urumqi and Pakistan's Murree, increased hopes on that both countries are going forward to have insuperable constituent cooperation.

Pakistani high-level officials were talking, from an unexampled closeness, about relations between two countries and they were praising President Ghani for taking courageous initiatives for strengthening ties between the two countries, so President Ghani was calling Pakistan as a new ally in the war on terrorism, however, the relations has gone on obscurity in the last week.

Following the latest attacks in Kabul which killed a lot of servicemen and civilians, Afghanistan, once again, accused Pakistan for supporting terrorism and requested Pakistan to eliminate the compounds of Taliban in Pakistan, immediately and effectively.



## Returning to Karzai's Policies

The Death of Mullah Mohammad Omar came out at a time, when the next round of peace negotiations between the Afghan government and Taliban were expected to be started due to Pakistan's facilitation, soon. Therefore, some people considered the disclosure of this secret as an attempt of Pakistan to postpone the peace process and connect this with the latest harsh waves of attacks in Kabul.

President Ghani, during a press conference, considered these attacks as a “war message” from Pakistan and, with a virulent tone, accused Islamabad that it supports terrorism. The compounds of terrorists beyond the Durand Line should be eliminated, he said. It seems that Ashraf Ghani is not satisfied with criticizing Pakistan through media only; Pakistani media reported that Ashraf Ghani, on Monday, complained to John Kerry, Director of the US Department of State about the existence of terrorists' centers in Pakistan. Then, John Kurbi, the spokesman to US Department of State, said that Afghanistan and Pakistan should cooperation in eliminating centers of terrorists on both sides of the border. Quoting Kurbi, America supports the peace process between the Afghan government and Taliban and that it hopes the latest attacks of Taliban would not make the peace process vulnerable.

These expressions of the spokesman for the US Department of State in response to the request of President Ghani and CEO of Afghanistan that say, the center for equipping and supporting terrorists are located beyond our border, in Pakistan.

From the other hand, missile and artillery attacks of Pakistan on the border areas in Kunar province are restarted from the last one month. These attacks are reminder of Hamid Karzai's era when both countries have convulsive relations.

## The “Trusting Pakistan” Policy

One thing that caused the Afghan government to become furious with Pakistan is the gathering of Taliban outside Pakistan's Quetta City of Baluchistan province, where Akhtar Mohammad Mansour, was appointed as the new leader of Taliban. This adventure followed by the deadly attacks of Taliban in Kabul has provided opportunity for those who were always raising their voice against making a peace deal with the Taliban.

This evolution has empowered the ideas of the people that previously believed that Pakistan should not be trusted. Dr. Abdullah Abdullah, CEO of Afghanistan, during a speech, harshly criticized Pakistan and accused Islamabad with supporting and equipping Taliban against the Afghan government.

Some domestic and Western media consider the latest words of President Ghani as setback in his policy on establishing close ties with Pakistan; however, Pakistani officials have had soft language in this regard.

### **The Peace Negotiations and Ties with Pakistan**

One of the core issues that can put ties of both countries under pressure is the postponement of peace process. Disparities in the Taliban's ranks that are interpreted as scrimmage on power inside this movement have caused the peace process to be suspended until uncertain future.

In the past few months, the peace negotiations with the Taliban due to Pakistan's facilitation have empowered the idea in Afghanistan that the policy of Pakistan toward Afghanistan is changed, however, suspension of these negotiations from one hand and continuation of war in Afghanistan on the other hand will cause the ties to become iced to a large extent.

In the past, Pakistan could have some individuals in their control who were being made to participate in the negotiations on behalf of the Taliban and, also, these representatives were claiming that they are the real representatives of Mullah Mohammad Omar. However, Pakistan, after the death of Mullah Mohammad Omar revealed, lost this opportunity. Now, the individuals that have more support of the Taliban militants are needed to participate in these negotiations. Pakistan have make this kind of individuals to join the peace process, however, considering the morale of the Taliban and the problems they have faced after death of their leader revealed, doing this job won't be easy.

Perhaps, Pakistan would try to divide Taliban into two parts in order to get out from this problem, and then they would try to make one of these parts to participate in the peace process and thus reduce the importance of Qatar Office. Previously, Pakistan had started this job with those who were not representing the armed Taliban, however,

now, when the government of Afghanistan wants to have negotiations with members of the Taliban which have the power of “ceasefire” , it is not easy for Pakistan to pressurize and bring these to the negotiations table.

Dividing the Taliban into two groups does not mean that they would rival for having peace negotiation and/or understanding with the Afghan government but such a divergence would cause every group to repeat slogans of war and anti-peace in order to not lose the support of its warriors.

## **Conclusion**

Beside the virulent expressions of the leaders of the Unity Government against Pakistan, it does not seem that Ashraf Ghani is going to adopt the policies of Hamid Karzai between 2003-2014 regarding Pakistan.

The Meeting of Afghan ambassador to Islamabad with Mawlana Samiulhaq and the telephonic conversation of the Afghan Foreign Ministry with Mawlana, obvious and secret contacts of Ashraf Ghani with Pakistani officials in the past days and the high-level Afghan delegation's visit to Pakistan shows that the virulent speeches of Ashraf Ghani were for calming the people inside the country and Pakistani officials, realizing the pressures put on Ashraf Ghani inside the country, preferred not to take these words seriously and so they avoid to have a virulent response.

Pakistani officials, besides condemning the latest attacks in Kabul, expressed their sympathy with the government and people of Afghanistan. They were insisting that Pakistan, itself, is a big victim of terrorism.

Pakistani media broadcasted the words of President Ghani and Dr. Abdullah alongside with the expressions of Pakistan’s foreign ministry where the latest attacks on Kabul were condemned.

From the other hand, a high-level delegation including the acting-minister of Defense and the director of NDS heading by Salahuddin Rabbani, the Foreign Minister of Afghanistan attended Islamabad to have talks with Pakistani officials. However, the spokesman for the Afghan Foreign Ministry said this is a vital visit in relations between two countries and he added that the delegation would have serious negotiations with

Pakistan, but considering the problems of National Unity Government (NUG), a significant achievement could not be expected from this visit.

At all, it can be said that beside the latest tensions in relations between the two countries, the secret of understanding exists between Afghan and Pakistani officials; as a result, the virulent expressions of Afghan officials against Pakistan are not considered serious by Islamabad.

The End

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