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Preface

Two months ago, due to Pakistani initiative to install a security gate at Torkham, bloody clashes occurred between Afghan and Pakistani security forces, which long for several days. Since then, the Pak-Afghan ties under the National Unity Government saw its lowest ebb compared to the last two years. The Torkham incident had also affected the bilateral trade, Afghan refugees in Pakistan and some other aspects of bilateral relations.

The Pak-Afghan bilateral ties directly depends on the security and stability in Afghanistan and the success of the Afghan Peace Process; therefore when the Quadrilateral Talks, a Pakistani proposal was failed and Pakistan could not bring the Taliban to the negotiation Table, the Pak-Afghan relations became tenuous. Recently efforts are being made to improve relations between the two countries; but how much did the border clashes affects the bilateral relations? And what is the direction of Kabul-Islamabad relations? These are the questions that are analyzed in this issue of the weekly analysis.

In the second part of the analysis you would read Dr. Abudl Baqi Ameen the Director General of the Center for Strategic and Regional Studies interview with CSRS about his recent visit to Qatar and his meeting with the members of Taliban's Political office. Besides that you would read the report of afghan delegation's visit to China under 2016 Think Tank Exchange Program.

The Pak-Afghan ties Since Torkham Incident



The Kabul-Islamabad relation reached to its lowest ebb since the establishment of National Unity Government (NUG), and the trust deficit is dominant between the two countries. However, now Torkham gate is nearly completed by Pakistan, while the afghan government on terms it as a violation of bilateral agreements. Besides, the Afghan refugees are made target of the escalating tensions between the two countries. According to the Afghan Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation, more than 20 thousand Afghan refugees had been repatriated in the last one week. The Afghan refugees in Kurram agency have also been told to return within week.

On the other hand, Pakistani officials have also made successive statements about the Afghan peace process in the last two weeks. Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's Advisor on Foreign Affairs Sartaj Aziz Pakistan has recently said that the peace talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban would start in a near future. In the meantime, the US Commander in Afghanistan General Nicholson, in his meeting with Pakistani Chief of Army Staff General Rahil Sharif has also spoken to reinstate the Afghan peace process. Besides that, a delegation from the Taliban's political office in Qatar has also traveled to China and the Pakistani Chief of Army Staff will also visit to China on official visit.

At the climax of bilateral mistrust and before revival of peace talks, building trust seems priority. The question is why has Kabul's suspicion has augmented against Islamabad? How much effective was the Torkham incident in deteriorating the bilateral ties? What are the main problems in Pak-Afghan ties? And to which direction is the Kabul-Islamabad relations heading?

Clashes at Torkham border and the deepening trust deficit

Recent border clashes between the Afghan and Pakistani security forces in Turkham which lasted for several days was the first of its kind in the history of Pak-Afghan relations at Torkham border. The clashes not only deteriorated relations between the two governments but also sparked hatred in two nations against each other. This situation had influenced trade, transit, healthcare and soft power.

After the incident, the trade level between the two countries began to reduce, wheat import to Afghanistan was affected; the number of Afghan patients in Pakistan decreased; the Afghan businessmen focused on transit through Iran rather than Pakistan; and the hatred between the two nations increased which led to reduction of the number of Pakistani workers in Afghanistan and gradual repatriation of Afghan refugees from Pakistan.

The border clashes have raised mistrust and removing the trust deficit seems difficult at present times. . This mistrust between the two countries is clearly

apparent from the Afghan President's interview with Salim Safi and also from the interview of the Pakistani Ambassador in Afghanistan Sayeed Abrar Hussain.

Change in Kabul's policy towards Islamabad

After the formation of the NUG, the Afghan President Ashraf Ghani came ahead with the risky policy of rapprochement towards Pakistan and gave unprecedented privileges to Pakistan. Some members of the Afghan Security forces was sent to Pakistan for training; the bilateral cooperation agreement was inked between ISI and the Afghan National Directorate of Security; the Afghan government distanced itself from India and the Afghan President did not travel to India even after seven months from the formation of the NUG; the demand for heavy weapons from India was postponed; the leader of Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan Latifullah Mehsud was handed over to Pakistan (although it was the Americans who had captured Mehsud, but it was a decision merely made by the Afghan government to hand over him to Pakistan) and later the Afghan government participated in the Quadrilateral Peace Talks an initiative by the Pakistani government.

On the other hand, Pakistani Political and Military officials successively visited Afghanistan and each made promises about peace in Afghanistan but Pakistan in a greater part failed to fulfill these promises.

After the bloody explosions in Kabul the Afghan President's rapprochement policy towards Pakistan was highly criticized by the Afghan media, members of the Afghan Parliament and former government officials and thus the Afghan government's stance against Pakistan gradually changed.

The roots causes of Pak-Afghan tensions

The followings are the reasons behind the deteriorating Kabul-Islamabad relations under the NUG:

First: showing off more than capability; After the formation of the NUG the political and military officials of Pakistan either intensively did not fulfilled its

promises or had promise more than what they can deliver. Leaving aside the question of whether Pakistan deliberately did not fulfill its promises or was unable to do so; Pakistan's promises had increased hopes in Afghanistan and when these promises went unfulfilled the hopes were replaced by disappointment and mistrust.

Second: Security in Afghanistan; the increased insecurity was the main factor behind the tensions in bilateral relations between the two countries. Bilateral relation with Pakistan is directly related to security situation in Afghanistan; the more upheaval in insecurity the more tensions between the countries.

Third: the Afghan Taliban and Pakistan; the presence of the Taliban in Pakistan is another factor behind Kabul's suspicion.

Fourth: the Durand line and border management; the Durand line has affected the bilateral relations more than any other issue so far. The border management program of the Pakistani military which the Afghan government believes that this program may be a part of the efforts toward recognition of Durand line and hence this border management program has recently raised tensions in bilateral relations. Moreover, due to border management program the security forces of the two countries were engaged in armed conflict with each other at Torkham gate.

Fifth: Indian Influence in Afghanistan; India's influence in Afghanistan has also deeply affected Afghan-Pak relations and this factor is the main element of Pakistan's policy towards Afghanistan.

Sixth: instability in Pakistan's policies; although Pakistani senior officials and Pakistani Ambassador in Afghanistan Sayeed Abrar Hussian criticizes the Afghan official by saying that the Afghan government's stance regarding the Taliban is unclear; because from the one hand, the Afghan government demands peace talks with the Taliban and on the other hand, it urges Pakistan to conduct military operations against the Taliban. However a closer look into the Kabul-Islamabad bilateral relations in the past several years narrates that the unstable policy of the Pakistan towards Afghanistan. Pakistani government and military wants to maintain balance between the Afghan government and the Taliban and has lost

its way to help whom? Taliban or the Afghan government?. On the one hand, if they want to pressurize the Taliban to satisfy the Afghan government, on the other hand, they are afraid of the Afghan Taliban's harsh response and are concerned that enmity with the Taliban would in the short run result in diminishing their influence over the group and in the long run would reduce their influence in the future Afghan government, if Taliban are a part of it.

The direction of Pak-Afghan relations

Currently the distrust atmosphere is dominant not only between the two governments but also between the two nations across the Durand line. Given the statement of the Afghan senior officials it seems that neither the Afghan government would participate in the Quadrilateral Peace Talk nor would it make effort to improve relations with Pakistan.

The deteriorated bilateral relations can only improve either by the efforts of Pakistan or a third party - such as China. China's role seems to be effective in the issue because now not only China is interested in stability and security in Afghanistan but also it sees the improved Pak-Afghan relations are in its interest.

Dr. Amin: We propose a scheme for the intra-Afghan reconciliation to the Taliban/ interview



Preface

The Taliban's Political Office in Qatar was officially opened in 2013; but due to the 'Taliban flag' and banner -“The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan”- issues the Afghan government did not recognize this newly formed office. In the past several years, the Taliban has always stressed on the role of Qatar Office for official peace talks with the Afghan government and through this office it has announced its stance in various international meetings and conferences.

The Director General of the Center for Strategic and Regional Studies Dr. Abdul Baqi Amin visited Qatar on July 24 and has met the members of the Taliban's Political Office. The CSRS media group has interviewed Mr. Amin about his recent trip to Taliban's political office in Qatar and the Taliban's position on Afghan peace process.

The Afghan war is now totally became an intra-Afghan war and its victims are solely Afghans, in this regard, how did you find the Taliban's stance on Peace, is it changed?

Answer: As you have mentioned, we had discussed the Afghan issue and the peace process with the head and members of the Taliban's Political Office in Qatar. They said, "We are not happy to kill Afghans and we are really sad that Afghans are becoming the victims of this war; those who die in the ranks of Afghan police and army are our Muslim brothers and the United States of America deliberately wanted to make this war an intra-Afghan war". In our meetings, they had clearly said that they want to stop the killing of Afghans.

Generally what was their opinion about peace? And what was their position regarding the Quadrilateral Peace Talks?

Answer: If I answer in a short sentence, the Taliban's representatives said that they want peace and that the war is imposed on them; the Taliban stressed that they are completely independent from Pakistan and the Afghan government's request from Pakistan in bringing the Taliban to the negotiation table was inappropriate move, because, Pakistan cannot do so and this is the reason why the Quadrilateral Talks fails.

According to Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR), the assassination of Mullah Mansour has created many obstacles in the way of the Afghan peace process. Perhaps you may have concluded from the ideas of the Taliban representatives, has killing Mullah Mansour really created obstacles in the way of Peace?

Answer: According to the representatives of the Taliban, Mullah Akhtar Mansour did not oppose peace, but, opposed Pakistan's representative role of Taliban and dominance over the peace process. That is why three months prior to his death; he kept himself out of the reach of Pakistan and was threatened by Pakistan. According to the members of the Taliban's Political Office he was committed to peace which is not contradictory to Afghan national interests and forming Qatar's political Office was also his initiation.

I personally believes that killing of Mullah Mansour has increased obstacles in the way of peace and increased mistrust over the US and Pakistan because the Taliban believes that Mullah Mansour was eliminated by the joint efforts of the US and Pakistan.

If you may tell us specifically, has the assassination of Mullah Akhtar Mansour changed the Taliban's position?

Answer: I think that killing Mullah Akhtar Mansour has not altered the overall stance of the Taliban. The Taliban seemed tired of the war and believed that the perpetuation of war is not in the interests of Afghanistan; but they claimed that they are “dominant in most parts of Afghanistan and have comprehensive civil and military organizations; Americans are defeated in Afghanistan; and now is the time for Afghans to reach a consensus among themselves to find a way to end the continuous war in the country”. The Taliban representatives told us that they do not want monopoly of power and are ready to reach a consensus about the country's future through an intra- Afghan reconciliation.

You said that the Taliban are ready for peace talks through an intra-Afghan reconciliation, and on the other hand the Afghan government has repeatedly invited the Afghan Taliban to join the peace process, then where does the problem lays that the peace talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban do not starts?

Answer: The Taliban says that the Afghan government is not committed to peace, and they (the Afghan government) only talks and do not take practical measures. About Karzai's term, the Taliban said that “he criticized us for not having a specific address but when our office was opened in Qatar he did not recognize it; when peace negotiations were planned in Turkmenistan, he stopped it. The Taliban also said that they had met Ashraf Ghani before the elections and there was mutual understanding between them but when Ghani seized the power, he signed the bilateral security agreement with the US and allowed them to conduct night operations in Afghanistan and later he outreached to Pakistan for peace talks in a manner as if the Taliban were under Pakistan's control; therefore these are all the steps that neither indicate goodwill and nor willingness for peace. The Taliban

further said that they will continue fighting until the US troops withdrew, but if the date of US soldiers' withdrawal was set and guaranteed then reaching to a consensus over other issues will be easy.

If you tell us briefly, what was your objective to visit Qatar and to meet the Taliban representatives?

We presented our peace proposal to the Taliban. Based on our proposal a meeting of influential Afghans that have an impact on various political parties must be organized and at the end of the meeting a secretariat must be established to bring the opinions of the two sides closer and to decrease trust deficit between opposing parties. Besides that a pro-peace committee with the combination of countries in the region and international community must be established which must provide facilities to the peace secretariat, the regional countries and international community will then work to convince other countries regarding peace and should guarantee the promises and commitments made regarding peace. After taking these measures if anyone was not willing to join peace talks or was creating obstacles in its way should be introduced to both Afghans and the world, and all parties will pressurized them to join peace talks.

What was the opinion of the Taliban representatives regarding your proposal and intra-Afghan reconciliation?

They totally agreed to our proposal and they assured us that in order to resolve the Afghan issue they are ready for intra-Afghan reconciliation and if a group devoted to Islam and Afghanistan take the initiative, they (the Taliban) will cooperate with them to find a way for the current war in the country.

The Taliban representatives said that the Pugwash conference provided us the opportunity to come to understand many Afghans and due to these conferences they were successful to eliminate afghans suspicions; but they said that they still supports an Afghan mediator group to take the initiative and to manage the process in a way that leads to a long lasting peace in the country.

You have mentioned an intra-Afghan reconciliation, how can it happen, what is its mechanism?

Answer: I think that all Afghans are now committed to peace; all that is needed now are the sincere and influential people to take the initiative and gain the trust of those who seek peace and to rally the nation behind them and conduct peace talks in several stages:

First: They have to convince all Afghans for peace and in this regard must eliminate all the obstacles.

Second: They should convince the neighbors and countries in the region that peace in Afghanistan is in their interest and they should play a positive role in the peace process.

Third: It must find sincere international support from international organizations such as the United Nations (UN) and Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). It must also attract the attention of those Islamic and European countries that are sincerely against war. Thus the role of the supporter countries must be organized in a way that on the one hand, they should facilitate peace talks and on the other hand, they must play a guarantor role.

Fourth: a sensible message must be promoted that put an impact on the policymakers of those countries who have anti-peace policies. For instance, most of the analysts accuse the US that apparently supports the peace process but in reality it manages the war in Afghanistan.

Thank you!

The CSRS Academic delegation visits China



A delegation of the Center for Strategic and Regional Studies (CSRS) visited China under "2016 Think Tank Exchange Program".

Along with CSRS delegation, delegations from other Afghan research centers also visited China in this program.

The official 12-day trip (17-29 July) was organized with the assistance of the Chinese Embassy in Afghanistan. The Senior Manager and researcher of the CSRS Hekmatullah Zaland and Ahmad Bilal Khalil, CSRS research analyst, was a part of Afghan delegation.

The 9 member delegation of the Afghan research centers visited Chengdu and exchanged views with the Chinese Professors and researchers in Institute for

Disaster Management and Reconstruction (IDMR) and in Institute of South Asian Studies, Sichuan University.

In the second part of the trip, the Afghan delegation visited the Chinese capital Beijing on 20th July and attended round tables with the Chinese researchers, Professors and Afghanistan-experts in China Institute of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR), China Institute of International Studies (CIIS), Peking University (PKU) and the Chinese National Defense University.

On July 22, the delegation visited the Afghan Embassy in China and informed the Afghan Ambassador Janan Mosazai about the China trip. The Afghan delegation also shared their ideas regarding further improvement in the bilateral Sino-Afghan relations with the Afghan Ambassador.

In the last part of the trip, the delegation visited Shanghai on 25th July and discussed various issues with Chinese professors and scholars in Shanghai Institute for International Studies (SIIS) and Shanghai University of Law and Political Science.

Generally, the bilateral Afghan-Chinese relations, the opportunities and the challenges in the way of bilateral cooperation between the two countries, security situation in Afghanistan, the Afghan Peace Process, Quadrilateral Peace Talks, Pak-Afghan ties, regional projects (such as; one belt, one road) and some other relevant issues were broadly discussed during this trip.

Before their return on July 29, the Afghan delegation also visited some historic places in China.





The end

Contact Us:

Email: info@csrskabul.com - csrskabul@gmail.com

Website: www.csrskabul.com - www.csrskabul.net

Office: **(+93) 784089590**

Contact with Officials:

Dr. AbdulBaqi Amin, General Director of CSRS: (+93) 789316120 abdulbaqi123@hotmail.com

Hekmatullah Zaland, Senior Manager: (+93) 775454048 hekmat.zaland@gmail.com



Note: Please let us know your feedback and suggestions for the improvement of Weekly analysis.