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## Preface

Russia, China and Pakistan held trilateral meeting on Afghanistan in Moscow on 27 December 2016. Even though the meeting was regarding Afghanistan but the Afghan government was not informed about it nor was the representatives of the Afghan government invited in it; therefore, this meeting sparked the Afghan government's harsh reaction.

It seems that the ISIL's threat in Afghanistan have urged these countries to make efforts at regional levels, but the most significant issue in recent meeting was that the three countries demanded from the UN to delist the names of a number of Taliban members from the UN's black list. This meeting is held while, as during the Cold War, the region is moving towards division into two blocks. The question is what will be the impacts of this division on the region? And how will the Moscow meeting impact Afghanistan? In this regard you would read analysis of the Center for Strategic and Regional Studies (CSRS) in the first part of the Weekly Analysis.

In the second part of the Analysis, you would read about the probable deal between the Chief Executive Officer of Jamiat-e-Islami and the acting governor of Balkh province Ata Mohammad Noor and Presidential Palace. Several days ago, news were released that Ata Mohammad Noor have talked with the Presidential Palace about the privileges to be given to himself or his party and the two sides are close to reach an agreement. Senior officials in Jamiat-e-Islami have said that such talks, while another member of Jamiat Dr. Abdullah Abdullah is the government's Chief Executive, is concerning. Signs of differences in this party are apparent. In this part, you would read about the different aspects and probable outcomes of this issue.

## The varying geopolitical situation and the two new blocks



Russia-China-Pakistan trilateral meeting on the situation in Afghanistan was held in Moscow last week. Although the meeting was regarding Afghanistan but neither the Afghan government was consulted while convening this meeting nor was it invited to participate in it.

The Moscow meeting sparked harsh reactions inside the country. The spokesperson of the Afghan Ministry of Foreign Affairs expressed concern about this meeting and said that it would raise many questions. The lawmakers in Wolesi Jirga (the lower house of the Afghan Parliament) have said that holding meetings about Afghanistan without this country's participation is "meddling in Afghanistan's internal affairs". The Commander of Resolute Support Mission and the US forces Gen. Nicholson has also criticized Russia for holding this meeting and has said that Russia's close ties with the Taliban is not helping the situation.

Although, after this meeting, Russia, China and Pakistan have said that they would include other countries, such as Iran and Afghanistan, in this process, but the issue that can surprise the Afghan President is that the three countries have

reached a consensus to delist some members of the Taliban from the UN sanction lists.

The recent regional geo-politics, the probability of division of the region into two blocks, and the impacts of the Russia-China-Pakistan trilateral meeting on Afghanistan are issues that are analyzed here.

### **Changing regional scenario**

South Asia, Central Asia and Middle East are the regions that are moving toward change since 2011 and situation in these regions, either directly or indirectly, influences the events in Afghanistan.

In the Middle East, Arab Spring altered to Arab fall; civilian war erupted after uprisings in Syria and now is under world focus. A democratic state was overthrown in Egypt by a coup d'état, in the aftermath of US forces' withdrawal from Iraq, ISIL emerged in this country and expanded even to Afghanistan. The moderate Rouhani won Presidential Elections in Iran and finally settled nuclear issue with the United States, which resulted in lifting international sanctions on Iran.

In South Asia, relations between Afghanistan, India and Pakistan are complicated, and relations in this triangle have experienced many ups and downs since the recent two years. After Narendra Modi seized power in India, Indian foreign policy was activated and mostly followed the policy of marginalizing Pakistan and establishing close ties with the United States. On the other hand, Pakistani military carried out "Zarb-e-Azb" operation to suppress anti-Pakistani militants and also took the control of Pakistan's policy towards Afghanistan and India while differences were apparent between civil and military government.

Withdrawal of the US troops from Afghanistan began and currently, according to official statistics, there are 10 thousand US troops in this country. After the deteriorated relations of the Karzai's government with the United States, the new Afghan government tried to improve these relations as well as relations with regional countries.

With Xi Jinping coming to power in China, Beijing is inclined towards the West and, therefore, has put efforts to build the “New Silk Road” or as they call it “One Belt, One Road”. China also invested \$46bn in “China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)”; but in the meanwhile due to the issue of South China Sea, the US-China relations were deteriorated.

### **The new great game between the two regional blocks**

If one studies the geo-politics of the region in recent two years, one will find out that, as during the Cold War, once again, the region is divided into two blocks; but the difference is that, unlike during the cold war when blocks were formed on the bases of ideology, now these blocks are driven from regional situation and varying interests of the countries.

### **The first block: India-Afghanistan-the United States:**

India, Afghanistan and the United States are included in the first block. After the formation of the NUG, compared to the second term of Karzai’s government, Afghanistan established better relations with the United States. With the signature of the BSA with the US, this country’s fate in Afghanistan was cleared. The Afghan government allowed the US forces to carry out night raids and did not react in response to civilian casualties caused by US troops. In exchange, the United States promised aids to Afghanistan in Brussels and Warsaw Conferences. On the other hand, during the first year of its formation, the NUG did not have close relations with India, but when it was disappointed from Pakistan, it improved its relation with India.

India gave Attack Helicopters to Afghanistan and pledged \$1bn in aid to this country. The Afghan government also decided to purchase heavy weapons from India, and India gave it the green light.

On the other hand, after Modi coming to power in India, India-US relations improved. Modi had four trips to the United States up until now; in 2016, Barack Obama also traveled to India and in the same year the US Secretary of Defense and Indian Minister of Defense have had six meetings, the signature of Military

Logistics Agreement in these meetings are noteworthy, which paved the way for the two countries to utilize each other's airports in times of need.

### **Second block: Russia-China-Pakistan:**

Russia, China and Pakistan are included in the second block. China and Pakistan have always enjoyed warm relations. Chinese President's visit to Pakistan in 2015 and inauguration of CPEC further tied the two countries together. Moreover, relations between Pakistan and Russia are also improving. Russia might invest \$2bn in the North-South gas pipeline of Pakistan; this country might also enter into CPEC and might start military exercises with Pakistan as well. Besides that, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, China and Russia are strategic partners and currently their interests are more coordinated than the United States. For instance, their interests in the Middle East and their stance against the United States' presence in the region and etc.

### **Evaluation of the two blocks**

India has tenuous relations with both China and Pakistan. In his swearing in ceremony, Modi had invited the South Asian leaders, including Nawaz Sharif and the Afghan President Hamid Karzai, but still, due to terrorism and Kashmir case, Delhi-Islamabad ties remain tenuous. After the Pathankot and Uri attacks, India seeks to isolate Pakistan. In addition, due to China's stance against India's membership in Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) and China's defiance from Jaish-e-Mohammad's chief Masood Azhar, tensions had escalated in Delhi-Beijing relations. Later-on, India invited Tibet's religious leaders to India, which China strongly condemned.

On the other hand, tensions in US-Russia and US-China relations are rising as well. United States have some differences with China in terms of Yuan's value, the US is against the China's Stance regarding the South China Sea and has deepened relations with the rivals of China in the region- Japan, Vietnam, Taiwan and etc. The United States' relation with Russia is also now deteriorated capered to in 2001-2009. The two countries are involved in an undeclared cold war in Syria, Ukraine and now in Afghanistan.

It is the first time that Russia and Iran pursue a different strategy with that of India in Afghanistan. Before then, these three countries pursued almost similar strategies in Afghanistan, but Russian and Iran's close ties with the Taliban put an end to this behavior.

The regions is moving towards division between these two blocks; but the Kabul-Beijing, Moscow-Delhi and Washington-Islamabad relations are the obstacles against the formation of these blocks and deterioration of above mentioned relations would decide the fate of these blocks.

### **The impacts of the Moscow trilateral meeting on Afghanistan**

Although, Russia, China and Pakistan have held two other such meetings before this but this time this meeting was rather focused on the situation in Afghanistan. In this meeting the three countries expressed concerns over ISIL's expansion in Afghanistan and also reached a consensus to remove the names of some Taliban members from the UN black list, in order to assist in the Afghan peace process. But this decision is definitely in contradiction with the Afghan President's remarks two months ago, when he demanded from the United Nations to include Mullah Hibatullah's name in its black list.

Holding such meetings without consultation with Afghanistan and without participation of Afghan representatives/delegations means intervention in Afghanistan's internal affairs. Additionally, demanding the removal of the Taliban's name from UN's black list would draw them further closer to regional countries.

As to why Afghanistan faced such a situation that Russia, China and Pakistan hold such meetings and countries like Russia and China, which have the Veto right in the Security Council of the UN, have the same stances about the removal of the Taliban's name from the UN black list, the followings are the reasons behind it:

- **Regional geo-political situation;** geo-political situation in the region, which we described above have brought these three countries together.

- **Improper policies of the Afghan government;** another factor behind the current situation is the Afghan government's policies, which on the one hand did not maintain balance between the two rival countries and on the other hand did not take any initiative to start direct talks with the Taliban.
- **Taliban's active diplomacy;** the active diplomacy of the Taliban convinced countries like China, Russia and Iran that the Taliban's ideology is confined inside the borders of Afghanistan and that they could be better ally against ISIL than the Afghan government.

Through maintaining neutrality and face to face talk with the Taliban, the Afghan government can prevent most of the interventions of the second block; otherwise, the ongoing situation would make the Afghan war further complicated, prolonged and bloodied.



## **Jamiat-e-Islami and redistribution of political power in the presidential palace**



Some senior members of Jamiat-e-Islami do not seem to be content with the National Unity Government in Afghanistan and are making efforts to further balance political power. Recently, in this regard, talks between the Presidential Palace and Ata Mohammad Noor are revealed.

While, during the 2014 Presidential Election, most of the senior members of Jamiat-e-Islami stubbornly backed Dr. Abdullah Abdullah and even accused those who did not back Abdullah of national betrayal; but recently news have been heard that Ata Mohammad Noor, one of the stubborn supporters of Abdullah and Ashraf Ghani's opposition during 2014 Presidential campaigns, no longer trusts the Chief Executive and he himself has entered in political bargaining with Presidential Palace. Another factor behind these talks is said to be Ghani's persistence on Ata's dismissal from the governor's post in Balkh province and Ata's disinclination unless being offered more privileges.

Jamiat-e-Islami is one of the major parties in the country which fought against the Soviet Unions in Afghanistan and had the leadership of the Mujahedin in 1990s as well. Later, this party fought the Taliban Regime till their overthrow, with the help of the United States, in 2001. The background of Jamiat-e-Islami, and talks between the Presidential Palace and the members of this party with consideration of probable intraparty differences are issues that are analyzed here.

### **The background of Jamiat-e-Islami**

Jamiat-e-Islami and Hezb-e-Islami are the two parties that believe themselves to be the founders of the Islamic movement in Afghanistan. Whether which one of them is the founder of Islamic movement is a separate issue but both of them are the fragments this Movement in Afghanistan.

The foundation of Jamiat-e-Islami was put by Burhanuddin Rabani in 1970s and Rabani was the leader of this party until 2011. During the Afghan Jihad against the Soviet Union this party was one of the major Jihadi groups and played a significant role in the Afghan Civil War after withdrawal of the Soviet troops from the country.

When Kabul fell at the hand of the Taliban in 1996, Jamiat retreated to the north of the country and formed the National United Front or Northern coalition to fight against the Taliban and fought with the Taliban until the overthrow of the Taliban regime in 2001. After the 9/11 incident, when the United States started airstrikes on Afghanistan, Jamiat soon recaptured Kabul.

After overthrow of the Taliban Regime, this party have had a significant role in the structure of the Afghan government and when after the 2014 Presidential Election, Dr. Abdullah signed the NUG agreement to 50-50 distribute the political power with Ashraf Ghani, Jamiat-e-Islami became one of the significant parties of the National Unity Government (NUG).

## **Agreements between Ghani and Jamiat-e-Islami**

Besides Ashraf Ghani, a member of Jamiat-e-Islami Dr. Abdullah Abdullah was one of the leading candidates in 2014 Presidential Elections. After prolonged disputes over the outcomes of the election, finally in September 2014, the two leading candidates, with the mediation of the US Secretary of States John Kerry, agreed to form the NUG. Although, besides Jamiat-e-Islami, Dr. Abdullah was also backed by individuals from other parties but the main party of this agreement was Jamiat-e-Islami.

During electoral campaigns, Ashraf Ghani would always resonate the slogan that he would not make a “stock company”, but in the aftermath of the elections, violating the Afghan constitution divided political power with his political rival and created the post of Chief Executive which later-on triggered many internal oppositions.

Although, in order to gain the support of his party, Dr. Abdullah harshly criticized Ghani, but recently it seems that Jamiat-e-Islami and particularly its Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Ata Mohammad Noor does not seem to be pleased with Abdullah’s deeds and therefore, he himself is trying to enter direct talks with Ashraf Ghani in order to gain more political privileges. The agreement with the CEO of Jamiat-e-Islami is the second agreement to include some members of this party in the Afghan government.

On the other hand, talks between the Presidential Palace and Ata Mohammad Noor has resulted in probable intraparty conflicts and after the talks between Ata Mohammad Noor and the Presidential Palace, a number of Jamiat’s leaders and members of leadership council who were gathered in a meeting in Kabul described the talks between Ata and Ghani as unclear. Rumors are heard that Ata is trying to bypass Abdullah and get a better political position in the country because Abdullah was Jamiat-e-Islami’s candidate and, therefore, this party has the right to decide about the fate of the Chief Executive post. There are rumors as well that Presidential Palace thus wants to break the existing stalemate about General Dostum and continuing differences with Dr. Abdullah Abdullah.

## **The future of Jamiat-e-Islami**

As all other parties and groups, Jamiat-e-Islami was also faced with intraparty conflicts and after 2001, the significant members of this party such as Dr. Abdullah Abdullah, Marshal Mohammad Qasim Fahim, and Unis Qanoni were trying to marginalize Ustad Burhanuddin Rabbani as a member of this party Mohammad Ekram Andishmand, who was active in cultural aspects of this party, has written in this regard in his book “the US in Afghanistan”.

After the assassination of Ustad Rabbani, his son Salahuddin Rabbani was appointed as the acting head of Jamiat-e-Islami and, due to non-convention of the congress of the party, he still remains in this post. It seems like Salahuddin would remain in this post until the conflict between Jamiat’s elders is ended, because, comparing to other members of the party, he is the least powerful person and the elders of the party do not see him as a threat to their own future.

In the past Presidential Election and in many other following occasions, the members of this party did not have a unified position. For instance, the former Minister of Energy and Water Ismael Khan, Ahmad Zia Masood and some other significant leaders of Jamia-e-Islami were not with Dr. Abdullah Abdullah in 2014 Presidential Elections.

Currently some members of Jamiat are leading separate political organizations and only in case of serious problem or self-interest they join the party. For example, Amrullah Saleh has a movement “Rawand-e-Sabz” “the green trend”, Unis Qanoni leads a movement called “Afghanistan-e-Nawin” “the New Afghanistan”, Ahmad Zia Masood has a trend under the name of “Jabha-e-Meli” “National Front”, Ahmad Wali Masood has a foundation “the Masood foundation” and Ismael Khan leads the “Shorai-e-Mujahidin” “ the Mujahidin Council” in Herat.

Although, Dr. Abdullah has seized 50% of the power in the country on behalf of Jamiat-e-Islami but sources close to Ata Mohammad Noor has said to BBC that Ata no longer trusts Abdullah and this party would gain its share from the government.

If the leaders of Jamiat-e-Islami tried to gain interests through individual bargaining, they may gain individual interests but they would lose the unity in the party and soon this party would face serious fragmentation. Besides that, it is said that the agreement between Ata Mohammad Noor and the Presidential Palace would also decrease Jamiat's power.

## Conclusion

The Jihadi groups that fought for power in Kabul in 1990s, it seems that they would, once again, face each other in the current government and each one of them are trying to gain more privileges. Ashraf Ghani is also trying to go through any possible way to eliminate these sources of power and it was the same reason Ghani signed the peace deal with Gulbuddin Hekmatyar.

Although, Jamiat-e-Islami holds 50% of power in the government, but the senior members of the party are out the government's structure and now Ghani wants to bring Ata Mohammad Noor on the scene and thus reduce the power of his political partners who are now obstacles in his way.

The end

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

