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Preface

After the death of the former Jihadi leader and chief of Afghanistan's High Peace Council (HPC) Pir Sayed Ahmad Gailani, once again, debates are raised about the HPC and its future. It is the third time that HPC remains without a chief.

The weak role of HPC in the Afghan peace talks with the Taliban on the one hand and the Afghan governments need to this council as its address for peace talks on the other hand are issues that, once again, make the fate of HPC debate-worthy. But what the government must do regarding HPC and, this time, what will be the fate of its leadership? These are question that, alongside with other issues, are analyzed in the first part of this issue of Weekly Analysis of the Center for Strategic and Regional Studies (CSRS).

In the second part of the analysis you would read about Afghanistan-Uzbekistan relations. The Uzbek Minister of Foreign Affairs, along with a high ranking delegation, came to Kabul last week and besides meeting the Afghan President and other senior officials, signed five agreement of joint cooperation with the Afghan government. Afghanistan had established weak relations with Uzbekistan in the past years, but now it seems that the two countries are trying to improve these relations. In the second part of the analysis, we have analyzed the background and the current situation of Afghan-Uzbek relations.

The fate of the High Peace Council (HPC)



Head of the National Islamic Front (Mahaz-e-Meli Islami-e-Afghanistan) and head of the High Peace Council (HPC) Sayed Ahmad Gailani, due to the heart illness, died at age 84 in Ghazi Amanullah Khan Hospital.

Sayed Ahmad Gailani was the third head of HPC. The HPC did not have any achievements in the past years except for the peace deal between the Afghan government and Hezb-e-Islami (HI).

The role of HPC in the Afghan peace process under Gailani's leadership, evaluation of peace efforts, the fate of the peace agreement between Hezb-e-Islami and the Afghan government, and the future of HPC are issues that are analyzed here.

The evaluation of the HPC

Seven years passed since the formation of the HPC, but if one evaluates its role in the peace process, one will find out that its peace efforts can be classified into three categories:

1. This council joined a number of people under the name of armed oppositions of the government and commanders with the peace process;
2. It had limited achievements in the peace talks with the armed oppositions of the government.
3. It has played a role in the peace agreement with HI.

First; based on the official statistics, between 2010 and the third quarter of 2015, HPC has joined about 10578 armed individuals with the peace process, 988 of whom were group leader. These people also submitted 8101 heavy and light weapons to the Afghan government. However, it must be noted that these statistics are official statistics and no independent institution has confirmed it. Raising a question, some people also criticize the HPC, whether really this number of people have joined the peace process or this process have been politically dealt with or officials have distributed money among their supporters under the name of peace with the armed opposition of the government?

Second; even though HPC has not been able to bring the Taliban leaders to the negotiation table, but the Afghan government has had conducted some direct talks with the Taliban in Urumqi and Murree. However, neither these meetings were HPC initiative nor did they have desiring outcomes in the peace process.

HPC under the leadership of the Pir Sayed Ahmad Gailani

The first head of the HPC was Ustad Burhanuddin Rabbani and after his death, his son Salahuddin Rabbani was appointed as the chairman of HPC. HPC had no leader for one year when, after the formation of the National Unity Government (NUG), Salahuddin Rabbani was appointed as Minister of Foreign Affairs. Finally on 2 Hoat 1394 (solar year), simultaneous with the commencement of the quadrilateral meetings for the Afghan peace process, Pir Sayed Ahmad Gailani was appointed as the head of the HPC.

Gailani had played a role in the Afghan Jihad, was a moderate, was not involved in the Afghan civil war, did not have any enmity with the Taliban, had some influence among the Taliban through his sufi order, and had expressed his condolences after the death of Mullah Mohammad Omar, therefore, he was a suitable choice to head HPC. These were the characteristics that a head of HPC must have, but his old age and illness were creating obstacles in the way of his work, that is why his son Sayed Hamid Gailani controlled the daily affairs.

After Pir Sayed Ahmad Gailani's appointment as the chief of HPC, the peace talks between Hezb-e-Islami and the Afghan government also started. Since the Afghan National Security Advisor Hanif Atmar and Gailani had played a key role in these talks, while signing the peace accord in the Afghan Presidential Office, the HI delegation particularly thanked Hanif Atmar, Pir Sayed Ahmad Gailani as well as the Afghan President.

The fate of the HI-NUG peace deal

Pir Sayed Ahmad Gailani was a proponent of the peace deal between the Afghan government and HI. Now, after his death, suspicions have increased about this deal and it comes at a time that after several months since the signature of the peace deal with HI, not even a single article of this deal is implemented.

Although, recently and particularly after the death of Pir Sayed Ahmad Gailani, the Afghan government made several remarks saying the peace deal will soon be implemented, they are committed to it and that its provisions will not change, but the three key articles of this deal, which are the removal of Hekmatyar's name from the UN blacklist, releasing the HI prisoners and building refugee camps for the HI refugee, are yet to be implemented. Some foreign and internal circles had also created obstacles in the way of these talks. 100 HI prisoners, whose cases are finalized by the Afghan Attorney General Office, not initiative are taken to release them.

The future of HPC

After the death of Pir Sayed Ahmad Gailani, the future of HPC is questioned, given the following points:

- The high expenses of HPC;
- Its weak role in the peace process;
- Finding a suitable person to head HPC

First; there exist no exact statistics about the expenses of HPC, but still according to some institutions, the council has spent more than \$872m on Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Program (APRP).

Second; on the one hand, HPC has a weak role in the peace process and, on the other hand, the Afghan government have valued National Security Council and some senior Afghan officials' efforts in the peace process in the past, therefore a question rises whether the government needs this council or not? It means that the Afghan government must fundamentally reconsider its peace agenda and, given the role that HPC has played in the peace process in the past, no matter how influential individual is appointed as the head of HPC, this council cannot play the role of a mediator in the peace process nor will desiring outcomes be achieved.

Third; if the government still emphasizes on the role of HPC in the peace process, appointing someone with similar characteristics as Gailani would be challenging. There are rumors that the Afghan President is seeking to appoint Sayed Ahmad Gailani's son Sayed Hamid Gailani as the new chief of HPC, as after the death of Burnuddin Rabbani, the government had appointed his son as the head of HPC. On the other hand, the former Minister of Information and Culture Abdul Bari Jehani had written in his article that the Afghan government, at first, wanted to appoint Unis Qanoni as the chairman of HPC, but he had not accepted the little privileges that he could get from this council. Therefore, there is some possibility of this post, once again, being used as political bribe by the government.

The growing ties between Afghanistan and Uzbekistan



The Uzbek Minister of Foreign Affairs, along with a high ranking delegation, came to Kabul on Monday. The delegation met President Ghani and other senior Afghan officials and signed five agreements of bilateral cooperation between the two countries.

Uzbekistan is one of the most powerful neighbors of Afghanistan, which have many commonalities with this country, but, compared to other Central Asian Countries, Afghanistan have had weak relations with Uzbekistan.

After the Bonn Conference and the formation of the new Afghan government, although Afghanistan established relations with Uzbekistan, but these relations were not as improved as relations with other Central Asian countries. After the formation of the National Unity Government (NUG) in Afghanistan, officials of the two countries tried to further cooperation between the two countries.

Here you would read about the background of the Afghan-Uzbek relations, requisites and opportunities of these relations and the significance of signature of the recent agreements between the two countries.

The background of Kabul-Tashkent relations

Uzbekistan, with having 137km border with Afghanistan, is a northern neighbor of this country which has more than 30 million population and is one of the most populous countries in the Central Asia. Relations between the two countries go back in times that the two countries were a united (one) region and Samarqand was part of Ahmad Shah Abdali's empire.

Afghanistan and Uzbekistan were, once, governed by communist governments. At that time the two countries had boasted close relations in areas of culture, politics, education, trade and etc.

After the overthrow of the Soviet Union in 1991, Uzbekistan declared independence and Afghanistan was one of the first countries to recognize its independence and after one year, during the Presidency of Ustad Burhanuddin Rabbani, Afghanistan opened its embassy in Uzbekistan.

During the civil war in Afghanistan, cooperating with some engaged groups, Uzbekistan established relations with the involved parties in the country. Back then, Uzbekistan supported General Dustem, from Uzbek ethnic group who was also one of the main involved parties in the Afghan civil war and controlled vast areas in northern Afghanistan. At that time, besides smuggling drugs, Uzbekistan was selling weapons and other military equipment in Afghanistan.

After the collapse of Kabul at the hands of the Taliban, Uzbekistan, on the one hand, closed its border with Afghanistan and did not recognize the Taliban government and on the other hand, created the "Six plus Two Group on Afghanistan"¹ in 1997 in order to end the civil war in Afghanistan, which operated till the 9/11 incident but did not have desiring outcomes.

The post-2001 Kabul-Tashkent relations

After the overthrow of the Taliban regime and formation of the new government in Afghanistan, once again, the two countries established relations and opened embassies on each other's soils. The Afghan government signed agreements in

¹ Wikipedia "Six plus Two Group on Afghanistan" https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Six_plus_Two_Group_on_Afghanistan

areas of economy and trade with Uzbekistan and based on these agreements, Uzbekistan agreed to cooperate with Afghanistan in areas of transit, electricity, road construction, agriculture and etc.

Transferring electricity from Uzbekistan to Afghanistan and constructing the first railway in Afghanistan, which connected the Termez city of Uzbekistan to the Hairatan port of Afghanistan, were the two major projects between the two countries. In 1391, 1392 and 1393, most of Afghanistan's imported electricity was provided by Uzbekistan.²

However, Afghanistan's relations with Uzbekistan were somehow more tenuous than other Central Asian countries and efforts have been made to improve these relations as well.

After the formation of the NUG in Afghanistan, Uzbekistan was one of the countries that were included in the first circle of President Ghani's foreign policy and the Afghan President tried to improve relations with this country in order to enhance economy, transit and etc.

Ghani believed Uzbekistan to be the closest way to connect Afghanistan to China and Russia, therefore, in an unprecedented move, passing through Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, the Afghan government succeeded to connect Afghanistan to China by railway. In September 2016, the first Chinese train reached to the Hairatan port of Afghanistan and transported Afghanistan's exporting goods in its way back to China.

The NUG has also inked agreements with Uzbekistan in other areas such as the agreement to rise electricity imports from Uzbekistan by 10%, purchase wheat, improve transit and trade between the two countries and etc. these agreements have, to some extent, facilitated trade for Afghanistan and has freed Afghanistan from other countries limitations.

² "Afghanistan in the past one and a half decades", a research and analytical report of CSRS about the situation of Afghanistan, Chapter of Energy, page 272, publishing year: 1395 solar year.

Requisites and opportunities in Afghan-Uzbek relations

- **Transit and trade:** Uzbekistan was one of the significant supply routes for international troops in Afghanistan and approximately 70% of their needed oil was being imported to Afghanistan through this way, therefore, this country became more significant than ever.
Afghanistan is a land-locked country and needs the transit routes of its neighbors for trading and transiting. Currently, the value of annual trade between Afghanistan and Uzbekistan is \$350m,³ but still there is room to improve. In addition, Uzbekistan is also a land-locked country and Afghanistan can connect it to sea.
- **Struggle against extremist groups and drug smugglers:** some extremist groups (Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan under the leadership of Taher Uldash and Juma Namengani), who had entered Afghanistan during the Taliban regime, despite many efforts, were unable to extend their activities in Uzbekistan and finally retreated to Afghanistan and Pakistan. Fight against drug smuggling is another common factor that can be facilitated with cooperation between the two countries.
- **Various commonalities:** besides neighborhood, Afghanistan shares common religion, culture, ethnic groups and history with Uzbekistan. The two countries, therefore, have vast mutual interests and, therefore, close relations between them is in the best interests of both countries.
- **Change in the Uzbek foreign policy:** after the demise of Islam Karimove, Shawkat Mir Ziyayef succeeded him and brought some changes in Uzbekistan's foreign policy. The new President seeks to promote relations with countries in the region especially Afghanistan and this is an opportunity to improve relations between the two countries.

Recent bilateral agreements

In recent visit of Abdul Aziz Kamelove to Kabul, officials of the two countries signed five agreements of bilateral cooperation. These agreements were signed in

³ Read more here: <http://www.acci.org.af/da/component/content/article/38-news/1048-n.html>

areas of struggle against drug smuggling, cooperation between the foreign ministries of the two countries, cooperation in areas of transport infrastructures and other projects and creation of a joint security commission and the roadmap of cooperation between the two countries.⁴ The “Afghanistan-Uzbekistan Chamber of Commerce” also opened office to expand trade between the two countries and other agreements were also signed in areas of purchasing Ambulances, medicine, electric and construction equipment.

Signature of these agreements is a new chapter in Kabul-Tashkent relations, which is very important in economic fields for on the one hand, Afghanistan is like a bridge for Uzbekistan that connects this country to the South Asia and on the other hand, Uzbekistan is a short route for Afghanistan that would connect this country with China and Russia.

In the meanwhile, signature of these agreements also signify that, unlike the case in 2014, Uzbekistan is no longer afraid of the situation in Afghanistan and now signature of these agreements and the Uzbek President’s invitation from the Afghan President to visit Uzbekistan shows that this country wants comprehensive relations with Afghanistan.

The end

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



⁴ Read more on the presidential office’s page: <http://president.gov.af/fa/news/298463>