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Preface

Despite many efforts, relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan are still tenuous; but now, once again, efforts to improve these relations are hastened. The Afghan Ambassador in Pakistan Omar Zakhilwal, during an interview, said that the two countries must improve bilateral relations because there is no proper way than improving relations between the two countries.

Since a while, Pakistani officials are making friendly remarks about Afghanistan and are trying to improve relations with this country. Pakistani officials have also demanded from Afghan officials to stop anti-Pakistan remarks so that these relations may improve. Whether the recent efforts would play a role in relations between the two countries or not, is a question that beside other issues is analyzed in this issue of the Weekly Analysis of the Center for Strategic and Regional Studies.

In the second part of the analysis, you would read about the countermeasures of the Afghan government for natural disasters. Winter in this year seems to be colder than the other years and since the beginning of winter, many Afghans are killed in various provinces of the country due to rain fall and cold weather and many others need immediate help. Natural disasters have always resulted in casualties and financial losses, but, in this regard, the Afghan government is yet to undertake effective measures. In this regard, you would read in the second half of the weekly analysis.

New efforts to improve Pak-Afghan relations



Since the past several weeks, some countries are making diplomatic efforts in Kabul to improve the Pak-Afghan relations. In this regard, efforts by England, which has offered to mediate between the two countries, is mention worthy. It is the first time, after the Heart of Asia Conference, that foreign diplomats have undertaken such efforts.

On the other hand, in the first month of 2017, Special Representative of the Afghan President and the Afghan Ambassador in Pakistan Omar Zakhilwal met the leader of Pakistani group of Jamiat-e-Ulama-e-Islami Mawlana Sami-ul-Haq twice. During the second meeting, the Afghan President Ashraf Ghani also talked with Mawlana through telephone. Most of the Afghan Taliban have received education in Mawlana's madrasas and, due to education in Haqania madrasa of Mawlana, some Afghan Taliban have chosen the term "Haqani" as their last names.

Besides that, the leaders of some other groups in Pakistan such as Pakistan people's party and Awami National party also made remarks about the improvement of relations between Kabul and Islamabad.

How were the Pak-Afghan relations during the National Unity Governments (NUG)? What are the consequences of tenuous Pak-Afghan relations? Whether tensions in these relations would end or not? And what is the future of these relations? Here we have tried to answer these and other similar questions.

Kabul-Islamabad tenuous relations

After the formation of the NUG in Afghanistan, the Pak-Afghan relations experienced as much ups and downs that was unprecedented in the history of relations between the two countries.

After the formation of NUG in Afghanistan, relations between Kabul and Islamabad improved. First, the Afghan government gave many privileges to Pakistan and then Pakistan gave special protocol to the Afghan President, kind of protocol that, previously, Pakistan would give only to Chinese and Saudi leaders.

But after the intensification of insecurities and the first Murree talks, when the Taliban did not come to the negotiation table, suspicion in Kabul-Islamabad relations increased. Later-on, the Turkham incident occurred and the Afghan government, for the first time, rejected a country's (Pakistan) financial aid.

Due to these tenuous relations between the two countries, more than five hundred thousand Afghan refugees returned from Pakistan, the value of trade between the two countries decreased to about one billion dollars and transition of Afghan goods through Pakistan also diminished.

Are tensions going to end?

The history of tenuous relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan goes back to creation of Pakistan. After the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan tensions between Kabul and Islamabad increased. At first, there were two fundamental issues in Kabul Islamabad relations: unacceptance of the Durand line and supporting the movement that demanded the creation of Pashtunistan.

The above mentioned issues (indirectly), insecurity in the country, Taliban's sanctuaries in Pakistan and Pakistan's failure in bringing the Taliban to the

negotiation table were issues that played a role in deterioration of Pak-Afghan relations.

In current situations, the foreign diplomats' efforts would improve relations between the two countries in the short run, but these relations would rely on the above mentioned issues in the long run.

England had previously mediated between Kabul and Islamabad during Karzai's term and even the three countries had held several trilateral meetings but these efforts did not have remarkable outcomes.

Besides that, if the Afghan senior officials' idea about Pakistan's ability to bringing the Taliban to the negotiation table is changed, the Pak-Afghan bilateral relations would improve, but currently the improvement of these relations seem impossible.

The future of bilateral relations

Although some people believe that unless the above mentioned fundamental issues are resolved between Pakistan and Afghanistan, improvement of the relations between the two countries would be impossible, but there exists countries in the world that, ignoring their border issues, have established strong economic relations with each other. Therefore, it is possible for Afghanistan and Pakistan to have better relations even without the settlement of Durand line's issue, but it would rather need a fundamental scheme and plan on behalf of the two countries.

Currently, the Kabul-Islamabad relations rely on two issues: first, Pakistan's promise to the Afghan government to stop the Taliban from using Pakistan's soil against Afghanistan. Second, undertaking such a behavior by both Kabul and Islamabad, regarding the peace talks, that would result, with the observation (not mediation) of Pakistan, in facilitation of talks between the Afghan government and Taliban's office in Qatar. Thus relations between the two countries would improve in the short run and also the way will be paved for better relations in the long run.

Natural disasters in Afghanistan and countermeasures against them



Natural calamities kill and displace many Afghans every year. Besides casualties, the affected people and people who are displaced as a consequent of natural disasters are faced with many problems, but the government, on the one hand, lacks preventive measures and has poorly reacted after the occurrence of such events.

The Afghan Chief Executive Dr. Abdullah Abdullah, in a meeting of the ministers' council of Afghanistan on 30 January 2017, said that the recent snow falls in various provinces have caused many casualties and economic losses and, in this regard, called for immediate aids. He said, "Snow falls are more intensified than that we have been prepared to.

Based on the statement of Afghanistan National Disaster Management Authority (ANDMA), 21 people have killed and 16 others are injured in various natural disasters (cold weather, snowing and raining) in various provinces. The statement adds that in these disasters, 21 residential houses were totally destroyed and 59 others were partly destroyed.

Officials in Jawzjan province have also said that 47 people, most them children, are killed, due to the cold weather, in Darzab district of this province. They have said that these people are killed due to lack of access to health centers, road blockades and lack of shelters.

Since, after security events, natural disasters are the second type of events that cause more casualties in Afghanistan, here we have tried to analyze natural disasters and preventive measures against them.

Natural disasters and counter mechanisms

There are various types of natural disasters such as earthquake, storms, thunder, flood, avalanche, drought, high temperatures and etc. Some of the natural disasters are caused directly as a result of human activities on earth. For instance, air pollution and deforestation are the two deeds of humans that result in floods.

Generally, natural disasters are adverse events that occur in various types and in various places in all over the world and cause human and financial damages. Although, these events cannot be totally prevented, but by undertaking some preventive measures, its damages can be reduced to minimum levels.

Based on the studies that were conducted in areas of natural disasters, there are for stages to reduce human and financial losses in a natural disaster:

First: before the occurrence of the incident;

Second: when the signs of a natural disaster are appeared;

Third: during the occurrence of the incident;

Fourth: after the occurrence of the incident.

The most important stage is before the occurrence of the incident when we can use all the facilities of the administrations that are created to fight against these disasters and at this stage, these administrations must enhance their capacity to counter such calamities. In addition, these organs must inform people and must, with its preventive measures, decrease the level of human and financial losses.

Natural disasters in Afghanistan

Afghanistan is a mountainous country and, therefore, in this country there is high level of earthquakes, avalanches, storms, floods, landslides and etc. Cold weather in the winter and thoughts are natural challenges that Afghans have to most often deal with.

Afghanistan is the 12th most prone country to earthquakes in the world, 24th to floods and 22th to droughts.

Estimated statistics show that between 1970 and 2012, approximately 9 to 20 thousand people are killed by earthquakes in Afghanistan. Only in 2012, about 383 natural incidents have occurred which have affected 258 thousand people in 195 districts. 479 people are killed in these incidents.

The 1998 earthquake in Afghanistan was one of the deadliest natural events in Afghanistan which, besides financial damages, killed four to four and a half thousand people in Takhar province and injured more than ten thousand others. Major earthquakes have also occurred in 2002, 2005, 2009, 2010, 2013 and 2015 which sometimes killed hundreds of people; the epicenter of most of these earthquakes were Hindu Kush Mountains. Another natural incident that is said to be unprecedented in the modern history of Afghanistan was landslide in Argoi, Badakhshan province in 2014, which left more than 2500 dead. 300 residential houses were destroyed in this incident.

The organs that fight against natural disasters are responsible to detect threats and find ways to decrease them and in case of the occurrence of an incident, they must immediately conduct the rescue operations and undertake the reconstruction process in the affected areas.

The activities of the administrations that fight against natural disasters have not been effective in the past year and, spending immense amounts of money, they have failed to address people's challenges. Lack of management, facilities and experts in this area are the most serious challenges of the Afghan government. The relevant administrations always speak of preparations, but when the incidents occur, they fail to address these incidents and, consequently, people suffer heavy human and financial losses.

This year's winter and the government's measures

Currently, there are 1.2 million Internally Displaced Peoples (IDPs) leaving in worst situations in Afghanistan. In the meanwhile, more than 800 thousand Afghan refugees have returned from neighboring countries. The internally displaced people and the newly returned refugees are the main victims of this year's cold weather and until now dozens of them are killed in cold weather and snow falls.

The Afghan Chief Executive, in the meeting of ministers' council, called for 550 million dollars of aid to address human situation in Afghanistan in 2017 and added that, based on the estimation of the United Nations, 9 million people are in need of humanitarian aids this year.

Minister of ANDMA Wais Barmak, during a press conference, said that previously 700 million Afghanis had been appropriated to address natural calamities but now, with the increasing security incidents and IDPs, this amount was raised to 1.6 billion Afghanis.

While the NUG promoted the department of ANDMA to the state's ministry of ANDMA and pledged to improve its legal foundations, administrations and capacity. But, unfortunately, the Afghan government has been slow regarding the fight against natural disasters and yet no change has occurred regarding in various fields of the fight against natural disasters. The activities of this institution is still confined to register natural incidents and to help the affected people after the incidents.

In addition, the ANDMA has several other domestic and foreign correlative institutions such as OCHA, UNICEF, IOM, IMMAP, UNHCR, WFP, ACBAR and ARCS; but still these institutions have failed to undertake preventive measures and decrease the level of damages. The main reason behind this failure is the structure of these institutions which needs serious attention of the government.

The end

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