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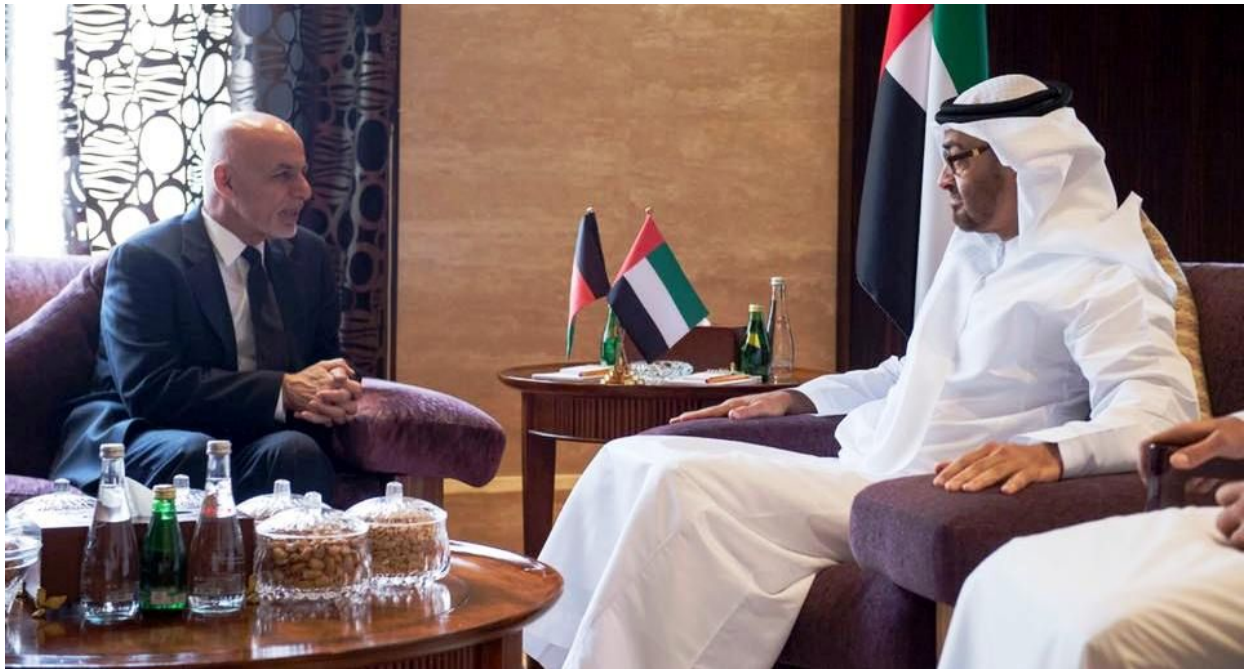
Preface

After the explosion in the Kandahar governor's guesthouse, where besides several Afghan officials, some UAE diplomats were also killed, there were concerns that this incident would shadow the political and economic relations between Afghanistan and the UAE and, due to these concern, 33 days after the incident, President Ghani traveled to UAE.

A statement issued by the Presidential Palace states that, although, the trip aimed to offer condolences to the families of the killed diplomats, but the bilateral relations between the two countries were also discussed. Right after the return of the President Ghani from the UAE, the UAE Ambassador in Afghanistan, who was injured in the Kandahar incident, passed away. The impacts of the Kandahar incident on bilateral relations between Afghanistan and the UAE, and the future of Kabul-Abu Dhabi relations are issues that are analyzed in the first part of the Weekly Analysis of the Center for Strategic and Regional Studies (CSRS).

In the second part of the analysis, you would read about ISIL's emergence and expansion in Afghanistan. Recently, the group claimed responsibility of several bloody explosions which killed and injured dozens. Concerns are increasing about the rise of the group's activities in Afghanistan. How did ISIL emerge in Afghanistan? What were their most significant activities in this country? And despite the armed struggle of the Afghan government and the Taliban, how did the group expand in Afghanistan? These are questions that are analyzed in the second part of the Analysis.

The Afghan-UAE relations after the Kandahar incident



The United Arab Emirates' Ambassador in Afghanistan Juma Mohammad Abdullah al-Kaabi, who was injured in an explosion at the Kandahar governor's guesthouse On 10 January 2017, died in a hospital in UAE. Besides the UAE diplomats, 11 others were also killed in Kandahar explosion including the deputy governor of Kandahar Abdul Ali Shams, an Afghan Senator Serajuddin Safari, a member of Wolesi Jirga Baz Mohammad Jawzjani, head of Kandahar's external affairs Shah Ahmad Saeed and an Afghan diplomat Yama Quraishi.

On the other hand, following the assassination of the five UAE diplomats, the Afghan President Ashraf Ghani visited UAE and, besides the senior UAE officials, met the families of killed diplomats.

The Afghanistan-UAE relations during the NUG, the Kabul-Abu Dhabi relations after the Kandahar incident and the future of these relations are issues that analyzed here.

Afghanistan-UAE relations; a brief background

Afghanistan has historical, political and cultural relations with the UAE. Diplomatic relations between the two countries were first established in 1973; but during the Afghan Jihad, the UAE's humanitarian and financial aids to Afghan Mujahideen and migrants increased more than ever. After the collapse of the Dr. Najeeb's government, UAE opened its embassy in Kabul but after the beginning of the civil war in Afghanistan, the embassy was closed. UAE's embassy in Kabul reopened in 2004.

Since 2001, the former Afghan President Hamid Karzai and former Afghan Ministers of Foreign Affairs have repeatedly visited the UAE and the Afghan government also signed security agreement with this country in 2013.

UAE is one of the countries that, due to humanitarian reasons, have military presence in Afghanistan. UAE has been vastly engaged in the reconstruction process of Afghanistan. For instance, since 2001, the UAE has assisted Afghanistan in the fields of health, building infrastructures (roads, schools, mosques, universities "the Shiekh Zahed Unversity in Khost province" and hospitals). According to a source, between 2001 and 2012, the UAE has provided \$1.5bn in aid for Afghanistan.

In addition, the UAE has also helped Afghanistan to eradicate polio and vaccinate Afghan children. The UAE has appropriated \$120m to Global Polio Eradication Initiative program, which is mostly focused on Afghanistan and Pakistan. Moreover, \$66m is appropriated to Pneumococcal and Pentavalent vaccines and UAE also contributes to children nutrition in Afghanistan.

According to the UAE Ambassador in Afghanistan, they have trained 18700 Mulla Imams in Afghanistan and they have planned to train 1300 more Mulla Imams, 340 of which will be soon sent to al-Azhar University.

The Afghanistan-UAE relations during the NUG

After the formation of the National Unity Government (NUG) in Afghanistan, relations between Afghanistan and the UAE strengthened, agreements were signed between the two countries, and Afghan officials repeatedly visited Abu Dhabi. For instance, President Ashraf Ghani traveled to the UAE twice, the First Vice President once and the Minister and other officials of Ministry of Foreign Affairs visited this country several times.

Currently the three following points are significant in Kabul-Abu Dhabi relations:

First; issuing statement, Afghanistan announced its support from Saudi Arabia and the UAE in the Yemen war and, later-on, joined anti-terrorism coalition under Saudi Arabia. On the other hand, Pakistan did not issue any statement to express its support from Saudi Arabia in Yemen war nor did Pakistan sent troops to this war to support Saudi Arabia, which affected the Islamabad's relations with Abu Dhabi.

Second; Afghanistan and the UAE signed a long term strategic cooperation agreement, which emphasized on security cooperation and war against terrorism.

Third; five UAE diplomats and the injured UAE Ambassador died in Kandahar explosion.

The relations after the Kandahar incident

Although, as cited in the first two abovementioned points, efforts were made to improve relations, but the bloody Kandahar attack, once again, challenged relations between the two countries.

The Afghan government, NATO and the UAE decided to conduct investigation about the Kandahar incident. Although the result of the investigations by NATO and the UAE is yet to be published but, at the beginning, the Afghan government accused the Taliban for the attack and said that the attack was planned outside Afghanistan. On the other hand, the Taliban did not accept the responsibility for the attack and said that the attack was the result of internal disputes between the

local officials in Kandahar. Thus the situation was complicated. Therefore, first the Afghan Minister of Foreign Affairs and then the Afghan President visited the UAE and met UAE officials.

In such deteriorated security situation, the Kandahar explosion also killed some Afghan senior officials including some Jihadi leaders. Foreign intelligence agencies, increasing influence of the Sunni Arabian countries (neighboring with Iran), and some other factors indicates other foreign factors in this incident.

The future of the Afghanistan-UAE relations

Although, both the Afghan government and the UAE have stated that the Kandahar incident will not affect the bilateral relations between the two countries, but still, in the short term, the incident has increased suspicions in these relation and these suspicions will increase if local officials in Kandahar were proved to be involved in this incident.

In the meanwhile, besides the relations between the two governments, the people and traders of the two countries have vast relations. Currently there are more than 150 thousand Afghan workers in the UAE and according to the Afghan embassy, until 2004, the assets of the Afghan traders in Dubai was more than \$4bn. But after the deterioration of security situation in the country and with the increase of benefits in the business of immoveable properties, most of the Afghan traders bought properties there. For instance, only in the first months of 2012, Afghans invested approximately \$60m.

Hence, since the Kandahar explosion, the UAE did not have any harsh reaction (except for the remarks of a security official) and given the vast bilateral relations, relations between the two countries may not deteriorate.

ISIL in Afghanistan: from emergence to expansion



21 people died and 41 others injured in a bloody attack in Kabul on 7 February 2017. The attack targeted the car park of the Supreme Court compound and the Khurasan branch of ISIL claimed responsibility for it.

One day after the attack, six Afghan workers for Red Cross were shot dead by unknown armed individuals and the local officials of this province said that they were killed by ISIL. However, in this regard, ISIL have not commented.

Although, after the confirmation of the emergence of ISIL in Afghanistan in 2015, the group had limited activities in this country, but since the past several months, the ISIL affiliated armed groups have been active in various areas of the country. One year after the beginning of this group's activities in Afghanistan (in early 2016), the group was less active in this country, but the incidents in 2016 proved that the group is still a threat to the country and besides Afghanistan, the regional countries are also concerned.

Emergence of ISIL in Afghanistan, its activities in various areas of the country and reasons behind its expansion in the country are analyzed in this part of the analysis.

Emergence of the Khurasan branch of ISIL

After the opposition between the successor of the leader of Al-Qaeda in Iraq Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and al-Nusra Front, a branch of Al-Qaeda in Syria, Baghdadi announced “Caliphate” on 29 June 2014 and separated its way from Al-Qaeda.

After ISIL proclaimed itself as “Caliphate” in Syria and Iraq, some people in tribal areas between Afghanistan and Pakistan welcomed it and swore allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi as the Caliph of Muslims, the most important of them being Abdul Rahim Muslimdost and the former spokesperson of the Taliban Shahedullah Shahed.

Although, at that time, ISIL was in its first stages of emergence in Afghanistan, and most of the news about the group’s emergence in the country were assumed as rumors and propaganda, but after some time, these rumors came out true and the Afghan government confirmed the group’s emergence in the country and simultaneously the group announced Hafiz Saeed as the governor of Khurasan province and Abdul Rauof Khadem as the deputy governor of Khurasan.

After the official announcement of the governor and deputy governor of Khurasan by ISIL, some Afghans and Pakistanis joined the ranks of this group; but there is no exact statistics at hand about the number of Afghans and Pakistanis who have joined ISIL. But it is certain that both Afghans and Pakistanis exists in this group.

ISIL activities in Afghanistan

ISIL first started its activities in Afghanistan through propaganda and releasing propaganda videos and pamphlets in several provinces of the country and people affiliated to this groups were seen with black flags in these provinces. Later-on, the group started its military activities from Eastern Afghanistan particularly from Achin district of Nangerhar province.

In their first move, the ISIL fighters killed 12 elders of Shinwary tribe in Nangerhar province by setting them on the explosives and then exploding them and then

they released its video. They beheaded and shot many people in Kot, Nazian and Haska Mina districts.

Besides the Eastern areas of the country, fighters affiliated to this group also killed many people in other provinces of the country. One can mention the bloody attack on Jalalabad city, shooting some civilians in Ghor province and decapitating some people in Zabel province for instance. Overall, the presence of this group in 2015 was proved bloody for Afghans. According to the Afghan Ministry of Defense, the group has killed about 600 civilians only in the last six months of 1394 (2015-2016).

The Afghan government soon started fight against this group and at the end of 1394 (2015-2016), this group was somehow suppressed in Afghanistan. On the other hand, despite the Taliban's effort to avoid conflict with this group, the Taliban also involved in conflict with this group and after the negative response, by this group, to the Taliban's letter, the Taliban's bloody war against ISIL started which played a remarkable role in suppression of this group.

Due to the Afghan government and the Taliban's fight against ISIL, The Khurasan branch of ISIL weakened at the beginning of 2016, but the group continued its attacks during 2016, the most horrific of which was the attack carried out on the Enlightenment movement in Dehmazang, Kabul on June 23, 2016, killing and injuring about 400 people. The ISIL also claimed responsibility for the attack on Shiite mourners at the Ziarat-e-Karta-e-Shakhi in Kabul, the attack on the car of the employees of the Afghan National Directorate of Security, the attack on Pakistan's consulate in Jalalabad, and the attack on Madrasa of Baqer al-Ulum in Kabul and some other bloody explosions.

In its recent report on civilian casualties, United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) attributed 899 civilian casualties (209 dead and 690 injured) to ISIL while in 2015, this number was only 82 civilian casualties (39 dead and 43 injured), which signifies ten times increase in the civilian casualties by this group.

Reasons behind the expansion of ISIL in Afghanistan

Although, ISIL could not expand in Afghanistan as fast as it did in Iraq and Syria, but it slowly expanded in this country despite the government and the Taliban's fight against them. There exist analysis that some circles inside and outside the country are intentionally exaggerating about this group, but, given the ideology of this groups, there is no room for the fighters of this group between the people of Afghanistan.

After the emergence of ISIL in the eastern areas of the country and the assassination of some Taliban fighters by them, there were analysis that the government intentionally does not fight against this group so that the group suppress the Taliban and this is one of the factors behind the expansion of ISIL activities. Later-on, some Parliament members also called ISIL a foreign project. The first deputy of Wolesi Jirga Abdul Zaher Qadir and some other members of Parliament consecutively accused foreign forces and some circles in the Afghan government particularly the National Security Council for supporting ISIL. But still no convincing proof or document is presented and mostly the fingers are raised towards the Wazirestan refugees who had sought refuge in Afghanistan after the Pakistani military's Zarb-e-Azb operation.

Besides that the followings are the main factors behind expansion of ISIL in Afghanistan:

- **Worsened security situation:** ISIL emerged in Afghanistan at a time that the country was in worst security situation after 2001. The government was busy fighting the Taliban. Using this opportunity, ISIL established a foothold in Eastern Afghanistan and started its activities from there.
- **Internal differences between the Taliban:** some Taliban members who were separated from this group swore allegiance to ISIL in Afghanistan and this allegiance helped ISIL in all aspects particularly in recruiting new fighters.

- **ISIL's weakening in Iraq and Syria:** at the beginning, the ISIL gained vast areas in Iraq and Syria and wanted to expand its activities in other areas of the world but after the formation of a coalition against the group, ISIL lost control of vast regions and thus, it failed to support its Khurasan branch as well.
- **Intelligence circles:** even at the beginning, some experts had linked the presence of ISIL in Afghanistan to regional and other intelligence agencies saying that ISIL will not be contained within the borders of Afghanistan and will expand from Afghanistan to Central Asia. The former Afghan President's chief of staff Abdul Karim Khuram also believes ISIL to be a conspiracy by the US and, in his article, he has predicted that "the war would expand to the neighboring countries of Afghanistan and would reach the borders of China and in order to implement this scheme, Afghanistan must change in to a 'Greater Waziristan'."

The end

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

