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## Preface

Taliban's Political Office in Qatar is the only address through which the Taliban establishes contacts with international community and many Afghan parties. Although, during both Karzai and Ghani's presidency, this office was not recognized by the Afghan government, but now President Ghani is seeking to close this office.

At the sidelines of the Munich Security Conference, President Ghani met the Qatari Minister of Foreign Affairs and requested him to close down Taliban's office in Doha if the group continue to reject peace until upcoming summer. On behalf of Ghani this move was assumed to be an effort to tighten the circle for the Taliban in order to force them to join the peace process, but the question is why is Ghani trying to close this office? Would it pave the way for peace talks? These are the questions 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 the Munich Security Conference held in Munich, Germany. Leaders of dozens of countries gathered in Munich last week to discuss and consult about global political and security issues. Heading a high ranking delegation, the Afghan President also participated in this conference and delivered his speech to the participants. The Afghan President also met leaders of various countries. The achievements of the Afghan government in this conference and the impacts of it on peace and security in Afghanistan are the issues that are analyzed in the second part of the analysis.

## Efforts to close the Taliban's Qatar Office and the puzzled future of the peace process



The Afghan President traveled to Germany last week to attend the Munich Security Conference. Besides delivering his speech in the conference, the Afghan President also met senior officials of various countries, among them the Qatari Minister of Foreign Affairs (Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al-Thani). In the meeting between Ghani and Sheikh Mohammad, besides other issues, the two sides discussed the issue of the Taliban's political Office and the Afghan peace process.

Talking to Qatari Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ghani said that "if no positive change occurred in the Taliban's position until the upcoming spring and summer and they continued violence, sanctions, including the closure of the group's office in Qatar, must be imposed on them."

Why did the Qatar Office open in the first place? What it did until now? And what is the future of peace talks? Here we have analyzed these and other similar questions.

## Taliban's Political Office in Qatar

On 30 June 2009, the Taliban captured a US soldier Bow Bridal. The same year and years after that were the bloodiest years for US soldiers. After that the Americans also realized the necessity of the peace talks with the Taliban and added negotiation with the Taliban to their war strategy.

According to the spokesperson of the former Afghan President Hamid Karzai, in 1390, the US and the Taliban had reached an agreement to open the Qatar Office; but the US informed the Afghan government only few days after the Second Bonn Conference.<sup>1</sup> According to a source in the Taliban, before the Bonn Conference, head of Taliban's Qatar Office Tayyeb Agha was present in Germany but, due to Karzai's opposition, he could not participate in the conference.

On 3 January 2012, the Taliban released a statement about their negotiations with the US. In that statement, the Taliban had stated that they had reached an agreement with Qatar and other involved parties regarding their political office; but they had not declared its opening date.<sup>2</sup> After that statement, the Afghan government opposed the Taliban's office in Qatar and thus opening the group's office in Qatar was delayed.

Although, negotiations about the Taliban's office in Qatar had started after 1389, but it was in 1392 that the Taliban officially opened it. At that time the tenuous relations between the Afghan government and the US and the Afghan Taliban's rejecting the peace talks with the Afghan government increased the Afghan government's suspicions about Qatar office.

Therefore, in January 2013, in his speech in the Parliament the Afghan Minister of Foreign Affairs Zalmi Rasoul said that, "Taliban's office in Qatar is only for peace talks and not for political activities and we will not recognize it as long as the Taliban have not announced their preparation for peace talks with the Afghan government. If an office opens, nobody knows who would talk with who. It faces

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<sup>1</sup> See the article written by the spokesperson of the former Afghan President:

[http://www.bbc.com/persian/afghanistan/2013/06/130627\\_ab\\_afghanistan\\_us\\_taliban\\_aimal\\_faizi\\_viewpoint](http://www.bbc.com/persian/afghanistan/2013/06/130627_ab_afghanistan_us_taliban_aimal_faizi_viewpoint)

<sup>2</sup> See the Taliban's official statement about the negotiations:

<http://shahamat-english.com/english/index.php/paighamoona/28835-statement-of-islamic-emirate-of-afghanistan-regarding-negotiations>

us with a major challenge. The Taliban say that they do not talk with the Afghan government, then who they talk to, if they talked with anyone other than the Afghan government, then we would have to deal with major challenges.”<sup>3</sup>

In January 2013, when the Afghan President traveled to the US, according to his spokesperson, “the US officials included the issue of Taliban’s Qatar Office in the agenda of bilateral talks.”<sup>4</sup>

Putting some conditions, the Afghan government agreed with opening the Taliban’s Qatar office and thus, on 18 June 2013, the Taliban opened their office in Qatar; which pretty soon, due to the flag and plaque of the Taliban reading “Islamic Emirate”, faced the Afghan government’s opposition, and, on 9 July 2013, the Taliban closed the office.

On the other hand, in this office, differences rose between the Taliban which resulted in resignation of the head of the office Saeed Tayyeb Agha and his several friends.

### **Evaluation of the Taliban’s political office**

Taliban’s Office in Qatar is still unofficial; but the Taliban representatives reside there since 2013 and from there they have extended their relations with the world. Here are the most important activities that the Taliban have fulfilled through this office:

**First; its benefits to the Taliban;** the Taliban benefited from their office in Qatar in the following areas:

- The Taliban exchanged a US soldier with five Taliban prisoners imprisoned in Guantanamo;
- They released their militants from various countries such as Tajikistan and Russia;
- they attended in international conferences such as Pugwash and raised its voice to the international community;

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<sup>3</sup> Read more in this report of Azadi Radio:  
<http://pa.azadiradio.com/a/24813820.html>

<sup>4</sup> Read Eimal Faizi’s article in here:  
[http://www.bbc.com/pashto/interactivity/2013/06/130626\\_aimal\\_faizi\\_on\\_qatar](http://www.bbc.com/pashto/interactivity/2013/06/130626_aimal_faizi_on_qatar)

- Through this office, the Taliban established relations with various countries such as Russia, Iran, China and some other countries and tried to decrease their concerns regarding the group.
- After the formation of the NUG, they tried to show themselves more effective in fight against ISIL than the Afghan government.
- Through this office, the Afghan Taliban tried to contact various Afghan parties and personalities, invite them to Qatar and exchange their opinions with them.

**Second; its role in the peace process;** regarding the peace process the office did not meet the expectations. Through this office, on the one hand, the Taliban negotiated with the US to exchange prisoners and, on the other hand, they paved the way for some confined direct talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban. However, this office has not played any significant role in the official face to face talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban held in Murree, Islamabad.

### **The probable future of the peace process if the Taliban's Qatar Office closed**

Both the Afghan government and the Taliban have had ambiguous and contradictory policies regarding the peace process. For instance, the Afghan government, on the one hand, prioritizes the peace talks with the Taliban and, on the other hand, it makes decisions that increases suspicions and prolongs war in Afghanistan- such as the Afghan government's demand to include the Taliban leader Mawlawi Hebattullah's name in the UN sanction list and now the closure of the Taliban Qatar Office.

The Afghan Taliban, on the one hand, mentions the Qatar Office to be their only address for peace talks and, on the other hand, they do not show willingness for peace talks. Since the opening of the Qatar Office, it has not conducted any official talks with the Afghan government.

On the other hand, given the political activities of the Taliban's Qatar Office, the Afghan government has reached to the conclusion that this office had done more harm than good to the Afghan government. Because of its diplomacy and the changing geo-politics of the region, the Taliban's Qatar Office sabotaged some of

the Afghan government's efforts, particularly the Afghan government's efforts to form a regional consensus and joint struggle against "terrorism".

Closing the Taliban's political office, while in the past several years the Taliban has kept saying that it is only address for peace talks, would create obstacles on the way of peace and would delay this process.

The issue is not whether the Office be open or closed but rather the strategic opinions of the two sides. The Afghan government's opinion regarding conducting peace talks with a foreign party to bring the Taliban to the negotiation table has not reached any conclusion yet and it seems that it will not have desiring outcomes in the future either. Efforts to marginalize the Afghan government in the peace talks and demands of peace talks with parties other than the Afghan government by the Taliban would also be in vain and would rather complicate and prolong the war and would face the peace process with new challenges. Therefore, unless the Afghan government and the Taliban sit around a table, the success of the peace process seems impossible.

## The Munich Security Conference; its impacts and achievements for Afghanistan



The fifty third Munich Security Conference was held on 17 Feb 2017 in Munich, Germany to examine political and security challenges of the world. 30 Heads of states, 80 foreign and defense ministers and more than 100 Parliament members of various countries had taken part in this conference.

The Afghan President, headed a high ranking Afghan delegation, also participated and delivered his speech in this conference. Underscoring the security threats and the activities of 20 “terrorist” groups, Ghani said that war in Afghanistan was a war fought for the security of the world. At the sidelines of the conference, he also met some senior officials of various countries.

Here you would read about the background and impacts (especially on Afghanistan) of Munich Conference and Afghanistan’s achievements in this conference.



## **The Munich Security Conference in a glance**

Munich Security Conference is a gathering of more than 450 senior decision-makers held in every February since 1963 in Munich, Germany. The conference is a major global forum for the discussion of security policy, where the leaders of more than 70 countries participate annually.

The participants of this conference usually are heads of states, ministers, parliament members, the high ranking representatives of armed forces, leading personalities of international organizations, representatives of the civil society, and the representatives of industrial sectors and media.<sup>5</sup>

Generally, the conference is not an official conference but rather a private gathering of the individuals involved in global politics and economy. Therefore, in this conference, the countries do not sign any agreements neither do they make any specific and guaranteed decisions about any specific issue. The leaders of the world, in this conference, consult and exchange opinions about global security challenges.

## **The 2017 Munich Security Conference**

This year, the Munich Conference give importance to the global political and security tensions and crisis, especially the Trump government's views about the political and security issues of the world.

In this conference, the attendants discussed the world security and particularly the security of the Eastern Europe, encountering religious extremism in the world, the US-Russia relations, the US-NATO relations, the migrants and refugee crisis and some other significant issues. In this conference the US, on the one hand, expressed its support from NATO and, on the other hand, threatened to shrink its part in NATO if the European countries did not rise their military budget up to two percent of their GDPs. In the meanwhile, Russia accused NATO of pursuing politics of cold war era.

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<sup>5</sup> For further information: <https://www.securityconference.de/en/about/about-the-msc/>

On the other hand, it is Trump's government that encounters the political and security issues of the world with ambiguity and concerns. In the first day of the conference the German Chancellor, pointedly addressing the new US administration, said that Germany opposed tarnishing western values and human dignity. In this regard, she pointed out tortures and stressed that fight against "terrorism" should not alter to fight against Islam and Muslims.

Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs, in this conference, raised finger toward Iran and said that, promoting "sectarianism", this country had weakened stability in many countries in the region including Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and gulf coastal countries. He said that, "Iran is trying to change Iraq and Syria into two Shiite countries, which is a dangerous move." Apart from Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs, Israel, the US and Saudi Arabia also criticized the role played by Iran in the region.<sup>6</sup> the war in Syria was also among the discussed issues in this conference.

### **Afghanistan's achievements in Munich Conference**

Hoping that the Munich Conference would further increase international community's support from the country, Afghanistan had taken part in this conference. In this regard, a few points are noteworthy:

- Participating in this conference, President Ghani got the opportunity to meeting and talking with the world leaders and decision-makers and, at the sidelines of the Conference, he met officials of various countries and international organizations (German Chancellor, the US Vice President, the President of Azerbaijan, the Croatian President, the Norwegian Prime Minister, the Georgian Prime Minister, the Secretary General of the UN, the US senators and the Foreign Ministers of Russia, Germany, Saudi Arabia, China, Iran and Qatar,...). In these meetings, the Afghan President tried to improve relations with world countries and organizations.
- The Afghan President said, in this conference, that the war in Afghanistan was not a civil war and that it was a drug and terrorism war and an undeclared state-to-state war. Ghani apparently was pointing out Pakistan.

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<sup>6</sup> Read more in this report of BBC: <http://www.bbc.com/persian/iran-39032611>

Participating in this conference, Ghani got the opportunity to persuade countries and international organizations to pressurize Pakistan.

- At the sidelines of the conference, the Afghan government also signed a cooperation agreement on partnership and development with the European Union. The agreement officially defines EU cooperation with Afghanistan. The agreement “will smooth the way for bilateral cooperation on rule of law, health, rural development, education, science and technology, counter corruption, money laundering, preventing terrorism sponsorship, organized crimes and narcotics.”<sup>7</sup>

### **The impacts of MSC on peace and security in Afghanistan**

Although, no specific decisions are made in this conference, but it is a place where most important political consultations and meetings occur, which influence the policies of the countries. Therefore, the 2017 MSC impacts, in some aspects, the situation in Afghanistan as well:

- **Security:** speaking at the conference, the Afghan President said that there cannot be a distinction between good and bad “terrorist” and that it was a defining challenge of our time and that it required a generational commitment to overcome. He said that the fight against extremist groups was not a fight for Afghanistan’s liberty, but a fight for the security of the world.

At the sidelines of the conference, Ghani met the Secretary of Defenses of the US and the UK as well as the Vice President of the United States and discussed especially the security issues. Overall, in this conference, the Afghan government tried to attract international community’s attention towards Afghanistan and most likely succeeded to this end.

- **Peace:** in a meeting with the Qatari Minister of Foreign Affairs, President Ghani said that if until the spring and summer next year the Taliban’s behavior did not change and they continued war, sanctions, including the

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<sup>7</sup> President Ghani arrives home from Munich Security Conference, Presidential Place:  
<http://president.gov.af/en/news/298506>

closure of the Taliban's Qatar Office, must be imposed on them.<sup>8</sup> Such a demand on behalf of the NUG means that the NUG now want to tighten the circle around the Taliban and thus force them to join the peace process-a move which some people considers a roll-back in this process.

- **Relations:** besides the leaders of other countries, the Afghan delegation also met officials of the new US government. Meetings held at the sidelines of this conference would positively affect the relations between the Afghan government and other countries. But, in this conference, the Afghan government indirectly mentioned Pakistan as the supporter of "terrorism" and said that the Afghan war had foreign dimensions. However, not only in this conference but also in other such events, the Afghan government has criticized Pakistan, which has fueled tensions in relations between the two countries.

The end

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



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<sup>8</sup> Read more here : <http://president.gov.af/fa/news/298504>