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Preface

The Afghan National Security Advisor Hanif Atmar traveled to India to attend the 19th Asian Security Conference. Atmar visits India at a time when relations between Kabul and Islamabad are more tenuous than ever. Pakistan has closed border crossings between Afghanistan and Pakistan since the past two weeks.

Atmar delivered his blistering speech about the security threats posed to the region and particularly to Afghanistan. Before this, in a joint press conference with the Indian Prime Minister in Delhi in September 2016, President Ghani had also stated that peace and stability in the region were at risk and that the extremist groups had to be fought without being distinguished.

In the first part of the Weekly Analysis of the Center for Strategic and Regional Studies, you would read analysis about Atmar's recent visit to India and the current and future situation of the Kabul-Islamabad-Delhi trilateral relations.

In the second part of the analysis, you would read about the commencement of the second year of the Afghan Parliament's extended tenure. Speaking at the ceremony held in this regard, the Afghan President Ashraf Ghani reassured the transparency of the upcoming parliamentary elections. In the meanwhile, electoral reforms are brought in accordance with the NUG agreement. However, there exist plenty of challenges and obstacles on the way of the upcoming elections.

The Kabul-Islamabad-Delhi triangle and the future



The Afghan National Security Advisor Hanif Atmar went on a three-day trip to India last week and participated in the 19th Asian Security Conference held by the Indian Defensive Researches Institute. In his speech to the conference, Atmar said that 20 out of 98 terrorist groups in the world were active in various regions in Afghanistan. Therefore, the world must equip and arm the Afghan forces to eliminate “terrorism”. “We are not confronted with a single terrorist group now, but a major network of them, which are funded by the the black economy (smuggling narcotics/drugs, precious materials, and human and the resources of some regional intelligence agencies).” Said Atmar. He also added, “If we cannot determine whether which country supports terrorism, at least, we can target those who are backed by a state.”

On the other hand, the Indian Minister of Defense Manohar Parrikar, in his speech to the conference, termed terrorism as the greatest challenge for the security and stability of the world. He said, “We live in such an unstable world, where terrorism is expanding and where four groups are responsible for 75% of all the world’s terrorist incidents. These four groups are Boko Haram, the Taliban,

ISIL, and Lashkar-e-Taiba.” He also added that “almost 7% of the terrorist attacks in Asia are carried out in India.”

The current relations between Kabul, Islamabad, and Delhi, the reasons behind the mistrust between the three countries and the future of the Kabul-Islamabad-Delhi triangle are issues that are analyzed here.

The bloody triangle of Kabul-Islamabad-Delhi

Since ever after the independence of the Indian sub-continent, relations between Kabul, Islamabad, and Delhi were full of tensions, distrust and even sometimes bloody. This situation was apparent during and after the cold war, but in the past one and a half year, relations between these three countries experienced more alternations than ever.

Since the past one year, after the death of the Kashmiri Commander Burhan Wani, tensions between India and Pakistan have exacerbated. In the meanwhile, attacks targeted Indian troops in Indian-administered Kashmir, which Indian troops responded by “surgical attacks” in Pakistani-controlled Kashmir. But, to increase the morale of its forces and to prevent from giving a bad image from its troops, Pakistan rejected such attacks. Pakistan, on the other hand, believes Afghanistan and India to be behind the new wave of insecurities in this country.

In addition, relations between Kabul and Islamabad have also reached to its lowest levels, and Pakistan has closed border crossings between the two countries until an unspecified time. In the meanwhile, since the past several weeks, Pakistan is firing rocket shells on some districts of Kunar and Nangarhar. Furthermore, since the beginning of 2017, 26 Indian soldiers are killed in Indian-administered Kashmir. Hence, once again, Kabul was forced to go towards India in such worst security situations.

Historical distrust and its roots

Suspicious in Kabul-Islamabad-Delhi relations are not a new issue, and it is rooted back in after the independence of the Indian sub-continent. Therefore, we believe that it was after the independence of Pakistan and India that historical distrusts rose in the bilateral relations between the two countries and in the relations of both of them with Afghanistan.

Pakistan's policy in Afghanistan is rather focused on the strategic depth, which aims at the recognition of the Durand-line on the one hand, and confining Indian influence in Afghanistan and limiting this country's relations with India on the other hand. To a greater part, this policy is affected by some historical factors, which is the support of Afghanistan from Baloch and Pashtun separatists at the beginning of the cold war. Pakistan has historical issues with India as well. The Kashmir issue was behind the three out of four confrontations/wars between India and Pakistan, and the two countries are still active against each other in Kashmir.

On the other hand, Indian policy is to isolate Pakistan in the world in general and in Afghanistan in particular, so that, on the one hand, it could pave the way for an Afghanistan less influenced by extremist Jihadi groups (because India is afraid/concerned about its impacts on Kashmir) and on the other hand, respond to Pakistan's policy in Kashmir.

At first, due to border issues with Pakistan, Afghanistan approached to India, using the enmity between India and Pakistan, and supported the Baloch and Pashtun separatists. But the reason behind its recent reproach towards India is its survival and strengthening its security forces. Historical suspicions have also shadowed the Kabul-Islamabad relations. Kabul's perception of the events is that Pakistan backs the pro-Pakistan Jihadi groups in Afghanistan and also wants to confine Indian influence (to be stated in short sentence, it wants strategic depth in Afghanistan), and if Kabul did not do so, Kabul believes, Pakistan would train Kabul's armed oppositions and would support them.

The future of Kabul-Islamabad-Delhi's triangle

There are old suspicions in Kabul-Islamabad-Delhi triangle. Many people want the resolution of these historical issues in order to end these mistrusts. Resolution of the historical issues Pakistan and India are easy because both of them speak from a strong position. During General Parwiz Musharaf's term, when Khurshid Mahmud Kasuri was Pakistan's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Islamabad and Delhi have had improvements in this regard; but the bloody attacks in Bombay in 2008 put an end to these efforts. Talks between India and Pakistan about border issues and Kashmir would be a positive progress in the region, and after Pakistan and India, Afghanistan would be the third country to get the most benefit from it.

But the resolution of the Duran issue, in current situations, would not be in the national interest of Afghanistan. Because, on the one hand, the resolution of the Durand issue does not guarantee that Pakistan will no longer intervene in Afghanistan and on the other hand, at present Afghanistan does not speak from a strong position.

After the termination of mistrust in Kabul-Islamabad-Delhi relations, the second important issue would be to improve state-to-state relations rather than state-to-group relations between these countries. Whenever these improvements become evident, the region would head towards a better future.

The beginning of the seventh legislative year of the Afghan Parliament



The second year of the extended tenure and the seventh legislative year of the Afghan Parliament's 16th term commenced on March 6, 2017. In a meeting held in this regard, the Speaker of Wolesi Jirga (the lower house of the Afghan Parliament) Abdul Rauf Ibrahim demanded from President Ghani to hold fair and transparent parliamentary and district councils elections. Criticizing the continuation acting ministers with their jobs, he said, "The continuation of the work by acting ministers decreases the level of accountability and negatively affects the affairs."

Emphasizing on holding elections, President Ghani pointed out that the preparations for Parliamentary elections were held and most of the obstacles in the way of holding elections were eliminated. The Afghan President, seeking to revive public confidence in the election process, stressed on preventing the

intervention of the government officials in the election process and said, "Neither I intend to intervene in the election nor will I allow anyone else to do so."¹

The extension of the Wolesi Jirga's term, the Jirga's activities in the past year and the existing problems in the way of Parliamentary elections are issues that are analyzed here.

Extension of Wolesi Jirga's term

The second paragraph of the 83rd article of the Afghan constitution states that "The working term of the Wolesi Jirga shall terminate, after the disclosure of the election results, on 1st Saratan (the solar month) of the fifth year and the new Parliament shall commence work." According to this provision of the Afghan constitution, the current Wolesi Jirga must have ended its work at the end of the Jawza of the 1394 (solar month and year). In the third paragraph of the same article, the constitution predicts that "The elections, to elect new members for Wolesi Jirga, shall be held 30 to 60 days prior to the expiration date of its term."²

The 2014 election crisis and later-on differences between the leaders of the National Unity Government (NUG) over the implementation of the NUG political deal, which necessitated the election reforms, alongside with the worst security and financial situations delayed the Parliamentary elections. Therefore, issuing a statement, the Afghan president extended the tenure of the parliament until the announcement of the next elections' results.³

Extension of the Afghan Parliament's tenure sparked some reactions as well. Some of the Parliament members, legal experts, and the speaker of the Meshrano Jirga (the upper house of the Afghan Parliament) termed it illegal. But on the contrary, some other Parliament members welcomed this act saying that with the termination of the Parliaments term, the government would have lost one of the

¹ Presidential Palace, the Afghan President's speech: <http://president.gov.af/fa/news/298550>

² The 83th article of the Afghan constitution.

³ BBC Persian:

http://www.bbc.com/persian/afghanistan/2015/06/150620_k02_afghan_parliament_session

three branches and the continuation of the government's work without the legislation and observation role of the Parliament would have harmed the democratic process. But still, after one year, the Afghan government has not been able to hold the Parliamentary elections and, after the termination of its legal term, the Jirga commenced its second year.

The Presidential Palace has extended the current Parliament's term until the announcement of the results of the next parliamentary elections and since the date of the elections is not announced yet the parliament's working term is extended until an unknown time.

The first year of extended period

1395 was the first year of the Parliament's extended term. According to the Free and Fair Election Forum of Afghanistan (FEFA), in 1395, Wolesi Jirga had held 108 general sessions, 21 summon meeting, 15 hearing sessions, six impeachment sessions, three secret, and 55 regular sessions.

41 legal documents including legislative acts and decrees and 38 international agreements were sent to the parliament in 1395 to be either amended or approved, 37 of which are approved and three are rejected. Moreover, Wolesi Jirga has summoned 22 ministers of the executive branch and has dismissed 7 of them.

FEFA's finding shows that the Afghan parliament had performed a better job, compared to the previous years, in areas of monitoring and legislation but has had little achievements in representing the people.

The Parliamentary elections and Challenges

The former head of the Afghan Independent Election Commission (IEC) announced on 18 January 2016 that the parliamentary election would be held on 15 October 2016. But the announcement sparked some opposition. The Afghan Chief Executive kept insisting that the elections had to be held by the new

commission because the leaders of the NUG had reached an agreement to bring electoral reforms before holding the parliamentary elections.

In addition, releasing a statement, FEFA also criticized the announcement of the election's schedule before the electoral reforms and without the coordination between the government and the sponsors. The Transparent Election Foundation of Afghanistan, on the other hand, also termed the announcement of the date of the elections infeasible and the Afghanistan Protection and Stability Council, in the opposition side of the Afghan government, announced that it would not participate in any elections unless electoral reforms are brought.

Although the exact date of the parliamentary elections is not announced yet, the Presidential Palace has said that the Afghan leaders have reached a consensus over holding the election in 2017. But still, despite some electoral reforms and the creation of the new electoral commissions, there are challenges and obstacles in the way of holding these elections:

Security: the worsened security situation in the country is a major challenge in the way of holding the upcoming parliamentary elections. According to a report of Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR), in 2016, the armed opposition of the Afghan government either controlled or had influence over 33 districts in 16 provinces of the country and war continued in many others.⁴ In the last months of 1395 (solar year), the ISIL has also increased its activities in the country, and it is said that the upcoming solar year would be a challenging year for the Afghan government which would for sure affect holding the parliamentary elections.

Budget: Although the Afghan government has announced that the necessary budget to hold the Parliamentary and district council election is \$120m, only \$30m of which will be provided by the Afghan government and the remaining have to be funded by the international community. In this regard, however, the donor countries have pledged to help, but they stress on the proper expenditure

⁴ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, October 30 2016, see it online: <https://www.sigar.mil/pdf/quarterlyreports/2016-10-30qr.pdf>

of this money. Currently, the financial issue is also a major challenge because still, corruption is a major problem in the Afghan government.

Voting cards and constituencies: another challenge in holding the parliamentary elections is the old voting cards and the mechanism of preparing the list of voters. Although the government has announced to start the distribution of electronic identity card (tazkeras) until the next week, certainly, even until the upcoming several months, the Afghan government will not be able to distribute electronic ID card to all the people. In the meanwhile, according to IEC deputy, they are trying to use the electronic or biometric system in this election. Although, using electronic system would, to a great extent, put a positive impact on the transparency in the elections; but this system, on the one hand, needs more expenditure and, on the other hand, the utilization of such system would be difficult in remote areas of the country.

The way the constituencies and polling centers have to be determined is another issue that can question the transparency of the elections. Security challenges and lack of population survey has also made it hard to determine constituencies and appoint one chair for each constituency.

The end

Contact Us:

Email: info@csrskabul.com - csrskabul@gmail.com

Website: www.csrskabul.com - www.csrskabul.net

Office: (+93) 784089590

Contact with Officials:

Dr. AbdulBaqi Amin, General Director of CSRS: (+93) 789316120 abdulbaqi123@hotmail.com

Hekmatullah Zaland, Senior Manager: (+93) 775454048 hekmat.zaland@gmail.com

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

