



Center for Strategic & Regional Studies

Kabul

Weekly Analysis-Issue Number 199 (March 18-25, 2017)

Weekly Analysis is one of CSRS' publications, which significantly analyses weekly economic and political events in Afghanistan and the region. The prime motive behind this is to provide strategic insights and policy solutions to decision-making institutions and individuals in order to help them to design best policies. Weekly Analysis is published in local languages (Pashto and Dari) and international languages (English and Arabic).

In this issue:

Preface..... 2

Afghanistan in 1395: Achievements and failures

Foreign policy 4

The evaluation of peace-related improvements 6

Economic situation 7

Security situation 8

Internal politics of the Afghan government10

Conclusion13

Preface

After disputes over the 2014 Presidential elections, the National Unity Government was established in Afghanistan with the mediation of the US. By the end of 1395, the NUG completed its two and a half years.

Center for Strategic and Regional Studies have appropriated this issue of the Weekly Analysis to evaluate the general situation of the country.

In the past year, the Afghan government have had achievements in areas of finding multiple transit routes, attracting financial assistance for its security forces and construction efforts, increasing the internal resources of the governmental Revenue and Economic integration, but it has also encountered challenges in areas of security, the peace process, economic situation and domestic politics.

As in regards to the security situation, the country's security situation got worse day after day, civilian casualties increased, the government lost control over some of its territories, and the country's sixth major city collapsed. In areas of foreign policy, the major error of the government was that it wanted peace through its foreign policy and, that was the reason why the quadrilateral talks failed. In its internal politics, on the one hand, there were differences between the two teams of the government and also inside each team and on the other hand, there were confrontations between the legislative and executive branches which impacted the security and economic situation in the country.

Afghanistan in 1395: Achievements and failures



Compared to the past 15 years, 1395 was one of the most challenging years for Afghanistan. In this year, the security situation was worse than ever, the peace process faced a stalemate, foreign policy was, to a greater extent, imbalanced, the country's economic growth was low, and the country was dealing with migration crisis as well.

Afghanistan's foreign policy, the undertaken peace measures and their evaluation, the security situation, the direction of the economic development in the country and the internal politics in the country in 1395 (solar year) are the issues that are analyzed here.

Foreign policy

Since its formation, most of the National Unity Government's achievements were in the areas of foreign policy, but still, it does not mean that it did not have any challenges and difficulties in this area.

In 1395, Afghanistan to a greater extent, pursued a reactive foreign policy which was mostly because of the security situation in this country. The other characteristics of the country's foreign policy were instability and in some cases imbalance.

The NUG's foreign policy in 1395 can be summarized in the following points:

- **Attracting aid for the security forces and the country's reconstruction:** After the formation of the NUG, on the one hand, most of the foreign forces withdrew from Afghanistan which followed a decline in the financial aids of their respective countries while there were only few revenue resources inside the country for the Afghan government, and on the other hand, the security situation worsened in the country. Therefore, the Afghan government demanded assistance from European countries and the US. Hence, in 1395, the Warsaw and Brussels Conference were held to help Afghanistan. In these conferences, the Afghan government succeeded in attracting aids for its security forces and construction efforts. In Warsaw Conference, the leaders of NATO determined to maintain their presence in Afghanistan until the end of 2017 and to give \$4.5bn in aid to Afghanistan until 2020 to support its security forces. In the meanwhile, in Brussels Conference, \$15.2bn in aid was promised for Afghanistan's reconstruction. Furthermore, in the first quarter of 1395, the US President Barack Obama changed its strategy about the presence of the US force in Afghanistan. The new strategy suggested the 8400 US soldiers to remain in Afghanistan until 2017. Before this, the plan was to keep 5500 troops until the end of 2016.
- **The transnational energy projects:** practical work on some transnational projects began in 1395. Progress was marked in CASA-1000 electricity and TAPI gas pipeline projects. At the beginning of 1395, the Afghan President Ashraf Ghani traveled to Tajikistan and began practical work on CASA-1000

project. In addition, agreements about the extension of the TAPI pipeline and demining its route were signed in the country.

- **Transit:** the NUG has had many achievements in finding various transit routes as well. In 1395, Afghanistan, Iran, and India signed the Chabahar transit and trade deal which will allow Afghanistan to extend trade with the world and will enable India to transit its goods to Afghanistan and Central Asian countries. In this year, the Lapis Lazuli route agreement was finalized between Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkey; the construction of the railway between Turkmenistan and Afghanistan as well as the construction of another railway between Afghanistan's Herat and Iran's Khawaf commenced, and trade through railway started between Afghanistan and China. However, still, the Afghan government had some failures in this field as well. The Lapis Lazuli agreement was not signed; trade with China through railway stopped because a transit agreement with Uzbekistan was non-existent.
- **Facing the Taliban in the diplomatic field:** in 1395, both the Afghan government and the Taliban hastened their diplomatic efforts against each other. At first, the Afghan government made attempts to create a regional consensus to fight against terrorism. However, after the emergence of the ISIL and their energized activities when the Afghan government was accused of supporting this group, relations between the Taliban and the countries in the region particularly Russia, China and Iran increased. The Afghan government was concerned about these relationships. Thus, first the Afghan President, in a telephone call to Iranian President Hassan Rohani, said that Afghanistan and Iran had to ensure that relations between the two countries were intra-governmental relations. Second, the Afghan National Security Advisor visited China and Russia and tried to reduce the concerns of these countries and thus sought to prevent them from further contacts with the Taliban.
- **Relations with the neighboring and regional countries;** except for China, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan, the Afghan government did not have stable relations with its other neighbors. Kabul had normal relations with Uzbekistan the only problem was that Uzbekistan did not allow Afghanistan

to trade with China through railway that passed Uzbekistan. In its relations with Iran, although the Chabahar port agreement was signed between them, the construction of the railway between Khawaf and Herat commenced, and Afghanistan's trade and transit through Iran increased but still Iran's relations with the Taliban and Iran's sending Afghans in Syrian war had shadowed the relations between the two countries. Among its neighbors, Kabul's ties with Islamabad were most tenuous and unstable. The Turkham and Chaman ports were closed twice. First, it was closed for a short time, but at the second time, the ports remained closed for one month. In the meanwhile, clashes occurred at the border lines between the two countries and the mistrust between the two countries reached a level that, in the Heart of Asia Conference, the Afghan government rejected the \$500m financial aid of Pakistan.

On the other hand, except for Russia, Afghanistan had better relations with India, Azerbaijan, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia. Relations between Afghanistan and Russia were deteriorated because of the Russia's close relations with the Taliban; Russia, Pakistan and China's trilateral conference on Afghanistan and Russia's creating obstacles in the way of delisting Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's name from the UN black list. However, after the Afghan National Security Advisor's visit to Russia, tensions were somehow reduced between the two countries.

The evaluation of peace-related improvements

The peace process faced many challenges and disappointments in 1395. At the beginning of 1395, the Afghan Taliban denied participating in Pakistani initiative quadrilateral talks regarding the Afghan peace process. Two and a half months after the Taliban's rejection of the quadrilateral talks, the fifth quadrilateral talks between Afghanistan, Pakistan, China, and the US was held, but it had no desiring outcomes either. In the meanwhile, the leader of the Taliban Mullah Mohammad Akhtar Mansour was killed in a US drone attack in Baluchistan, Pakistan. The new Taliban leader Mullah Haibatullah prioritized the strengthening of his group and hence, to a greater extent, postponed the peace process.

After the failure of the quadrilateral peace talks, the Kabul-Islamabad relations further intensified, and mistrust between the two countries reached high levels. However, still, the Afghan government's peace deal with Hezb-e-Islami was a success in the peace process for the Afghan government. Until the end of 1395, the peace deal between the Afghan government and Hezb-e-Islami, to a greater extent, is not implemented nor had this agreement any impact on the current war in Afghanistan.

The Afghan government peace policy in 1395 was also in contradiction with each other. On the one hand, after the failure of the quadrilateral peace talks, the Afghan officials especially the Afghan National Security Advisor Hanif Atmar repeatedly visited Qatar aiming to conduct negotiations with the Taliban. On the other hand, the Afghan President Ashraf Ghani demanded the UN to include the name of the Taliban leader Mullah Haibatullah in its sanction list. In addition, the Afghan government also made some disappointing remarks about the peace process which increased the distrust between the Afghan government and the Taliban and stalled the peace process.

Pugwash also held some meetings about the Afghan peace process which were mostly fruitless. Russia, China, and Pakistan also held a trilateral conference on Afghanistan which sparked Kabul's anger since Afghanistan was not invited to this meeting. Later Russia included India, Iran, and Afghanistan in this conference as well and it is said that four other countries including the Taliban would also be invited to this meeting to be held in April 2017.

Economic situation

Despite the political, security, and economic challenges, the Afghan government succeeded to increase its revenue in the two subsequent years. The total income of the Afghan government in 2015 was 122.35 billion Afghanis which rose to 144.56 billion Afghanis in 2016.

On the other hand, the Afghan government succeeded to find multiple trade and transit routes which we mentioned above, the economic growth of the country was also more than 2015. Based on the statistics of the Asian Development Bank

and World Bank, in 2015, Afghanistan's GDP growth was 0.8% while in 2016 it increased to 1.2%. In this year, Afghanistan also gained the membership of the World Trade Organization. However, despite these achievements of the government, lack of investment in the country, increasing unemployment, depreciation of Afghani, and the closure of the transit route through Pakistan are the shortages of the government in the economic field.

The country's economy is related to the political and security instability and unfortunately political and security instability in the past solar year has been more than ever which in turn has impacted the international aids and the country's economy.

Security situation

1395 was also a challenging year for the security institutions of the Afghan government. In this years, the Taliban-controlled areas, civilian casualties and the fight in urban areas increased, and some districts fell at the hands of the Taliban.

At the beginning of 1395, the Taliban announced their "Omari" operations against the Afghan security forces. Launching this operation, the Taliban intensified their aggressive attacks in all fronts (North, South, East, and West). The Taliban seized control of the vast areas in Helmand, Kunduz, Uruzgan, Farah, Baghlan, and Takhar as in its annual report, the Afghan Ministry of Defense has stated that the Taliban had 23 thousand military movements/[operations] in 1395.¹ In these movements the Taliban have even captured the significant parts of the centers of some provinces (Helmand, Uruzgan, and Kunduz) for a while.

In response to the Taliban's "Omari" operations, the Afghan government conducted the "Shafaq" and "Shafaq 2" operations in all over the country which resulted in massive fights between the two sides.

In addition, the Taliban claimed responsibility for several deadly attacks and explosions in Kabul and other provinces of the country. The deadliest of these

¹ Read more here: <http://jomhornews.com/doc/news/fa/92526/>

attacks were the attack on the 10th department of the Afghan National Directorate of Security in Kabul, the attack on two military centers in the east and west of the Kabul city and the attack on the Afghan Parliament staff in Darul Aman, Kabul.

Besides the Taliban, the activities of ISIL were also challenging for the security institutions of the country. At the beginning of 1395, the Afghan government announced that it would conduct a military operation in the eastern provinces of the country to wipe out the ISIL from these areas and some of the ISIL members were targeted by drone attacks in several occasions. Despite all these, conducting attacks and deadly explosions, ISIL proved its presence in the region.

Compared to the previous years, ISIL had increased its attacks in 1395. In this year, the group attacked the demonstrators of the Enlightenment Movement, targeted the Karta-e-Sakhi shrine in Kabul, attacked the car of the employees of the National Directorate of Security, carried an attack in Jalalabad city, conducted an attack on Baqer-ul-Ulum Madrasa in Kabul, attacked the Supreme Court in Kabul and most recently, attacked the military hospital of Dawoud Khan at the heart of the city.

In the meanwhile, 1395 was the bloodiest year for civilians as well. In this year hundreds of civilians were killed and injured in the attacks of the armed oppositions of the government, the Afghan security forces, and airstrikes of the foreign troops.

In its annual report, released on 6 February 2017, United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) has said that in 2016, civilian casualties has increased 3% compared to 2015 which was unprecedented since the beginning of the documentation of civilian casualties by UNAMA in 2009. The statistics of UNAMA show that the number of civilian casualties in 2016 is 11418 people, 3498 of whom are killed and 7920 others are wounded.²

The intensification of the on ground battle, little regard to civilian lives by the engaged parties, the return of the foreign forces in the battlefield, and airstrikes

² Weekly Analysis-Issue number: 193 <http://csrskabul.com/en/blog/weekly-analysis-issue-number-193-february-4-11-2017/>

on residential houses are the main factors behind the increase of the civilian mortalities in 1395.

Moreover, besides suicide attacks and direct clashes between the government and its armed forces, in some areas of the country (such as Kabul, Herat,...) the increase in the number of assassinations, abduction, and armed robbery had also concerned people in the country in 1395.

Internal politics of the Afghan government

After the 2014 Presidential elections in Afghanistan, the Afghan domestic politics became even more complicated. This complication had many reasons behind it, internal disputes among the high ranking authorities and differences between the legislative and executive branches of the government being among the most important of them.

- **Internal differences:** difference between the Presidential Palace and Executive Office as well as other high-ranking government officials were from the significant challenges of the government in 1395.

Even from the first day of the formation of the NUG, the Afghan President and Chief Executive had differences between them and these differences reached their heights when the Chief Executive publicly criticized the President for his actions in the past two years and for not sticking to the NUG agreement. In a ceremony held to celebrate the youth day in the Chief Executive Office, criticizing the President, Dr. Abdullah Abdullah said that in three months the President had not given his two or three hours to meet him (Abdullah). He also added that the NUG was created as a result of a political agreement and that the President had not acted in accordance with this agreement.

Besides that, tensions between the Afghan President and the first Vice President is also mention-worthy. At the beginning of 1395, General Dostum criticized Ashraf Ghani and said that his share in the government was not sufficient. He also said that even the authorities of the First Vice President were not given to him. Dostum accused Ghani of nepotism as well.

These differences were still in the place when Ahmad Ishchi's issue come forward. Ishchi claimed that General Dostum and his people had sexually assaulted on him and hence Ghani introduced the First Vice President to the Attorney General's Office.

In the meanwhile, another important issue in 1395 was the escalation of tensions between Atta Mohammad Noor and Abdullah Abdullah. Tensions raised when, in an interview with BBC, Noor said that he no longer trusted the political decisions held by Abdullah Abdullah and, therefore, had started direct negotiations with the Presidential Palace. Later-on, tensions between them reached a level that Noor said that after then he had no relations with Chief Executive Office and that He had separated his way from this office.

These internal differences have also had its negative impacts on the security situation, economy, foreign policy, and fight against corruption.

- **Confrontation of the legislative and executive branches:** in Aqrab 1395, Wolesi Jirga (the lower house of the Afghan Parliament) summoned 16 Afghan Ministers for not spending their development budgets and dismissed 7 of them including the Afghan Minister of Foreign Affairs. After that, Wolesi Jirga repeatedly said that the Afghan government must honor the decision of the Afghan Parliament and must introduce new ministers to replace the dismissed ministers. However, the Afghan President sent the issue of dismissal of the ministers to the Supreme Court of Afghanistan and ordered all the ministers to continue with their jobs until the Supreme Court has announced its opinion.
- **Reforming the electoral system:** reforming the electoral system was one of the provisions of the NUG agreement which the Afghan government, to some extent, succeeded to implement in 1395. Although in this year, the government introduced new commissioners to the new electoral commissions, it failed to hold the parliamentary elections, and Wolesi Jirga began the second year of its extended term and the seventh year of its legislative term on 6 March 2017.

- **Electronic IDs:** distribution of the Electronic IDs was another issue that Ghani approved at the end of 1395 after lengthy discussions and arguments in this regard. Although it is said that ten days after the approval, the date to commence the distribution of these identities would be announced, still there is no news about when it would start.
- **The situation of the migrants and displaced people:** repatriation of 100 thousands of refugees and the internally displaced people was another challenge of the Afghan government in 1395. According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance, more than 515800 people are displaced in 2016 due to war in the country.

In addition to these internally displaced people, hundreds of thousands of refugees have returned from the neighboring countries. 600 thousand Afghans from Pakistan and 200 thousand others from Iran have returned to their homeland. Besides Pakistan and Iran Hundreds of people have returned from other countries of the world as well

The repatriation of hundred thousands of refugees to Afghanistan in such situations was also challenging for the Afghan government because all the returnees needed shelter and other primary assistance which the Afghan government could not provide on its own.

- **Corruption:** at first the NUG undertook some anti-corruption measures, and consequently Afghanistan went from the second most corrupt country to the fourth most corrupt country in the world in the corruption perception index of the Transparency International, but anti-corruption struggle did not continue with the same rapidity and seriousness later-on, and therefore, once again Afghanistan fell in the ranks and became the third most corrupt country in the world.

In 1395, the Afghan government undertook some anti-corruption measures including the opening of the Judicial Center to fight against corruption and establishment of the National Procurement Commission to evaluate all the government contracts. These steps rose Afghanistan's rank to the eighth most corrupt country in the world which was a significant achievement for the NUG.

Conclusion

Behind most of the challenges and problems in Afghanistan lay lack of peace and political and security instability. Although in 1395, the NUG has succeeded in areas of transit, economic integration, and transnational projects, and also have attracted the European countries and the US's aids, but has done little in areas of peace with the Taliban nor has it taken steps to increase trust between the Taliban and the government to bring the Taliban to the peace process.

GDP growth, economic development, and the success of transnational projects and struggle against some other challenges require security and peace in the country. Peace without the success of the peace talks with the Taliban is impossible. Therefore, it is necessary for the NUG to approach the Taliban as at first accepting a political threat it approached Pakistan.

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.

