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Preface

The US used its biggest explosive “the mother of all bombs” in Achin District of Nangarhar province on 13 April 2017. This bomb was 9 meters long, with one-meter diameter and around 10 tons of weight and it was the first time that it has been used in combat.

The utilization of this bomb in Afghanistan was highly reflected in the media in international levels and was followed by reactions inside and outside the country. The Afghan government welcomed this attack but some other groups and politicians condemned the utilization of such a bomb in Afghanistan. The former Afghan President Hamid Karzai called it a violation of the Afghan sovereignty and said that the US has turned Afghanistan into its experiment lab. Various analyses were made about the environmental and health-related consequences of this bomb; but the questions are whether really this bomb was aimed to target the ISIL sanctuaries or it had other reasons behind it? In this regard you would read in the first part of the Weekly Analysis of the Center for Strategic and Regional Studies (CSRS).

On the other hand, in the continuation of the internal disputes of the National Unity Government (NUG), President Ghani fired his Special Representative for Reforms and Good Governance Ahmad Zia Massaud, but fiercely reacting against President’s this move, Massaud warned the President that the country would go towards instability and civil war if the President did not withdraw his decree. Although the dismissal of Massaud was condemned by some parties but his remarks regarding the country’s instability and civil war was also condemned by some Parliament members and the public. The question is to which directions is the government’s internal disputes headed? And what will be the impacts of sacking Massaud on the process?

The mother of all bombs, the reasons behind its use and its evaluation



The US forces used their biggest non-nuclear bomb in Assadkhail region in Achin District of Nangarhar Province on 13 April 2017. This weapon which is also called “the mother of all bombs” is said to have been used to target ISIL fighters in Afghanistan, but many believe that using “the mother of all bombs” was rather a symbolic move by the US to demonstrate its power.

Although the Presidential Palace, Chief Executive Office, and some other pro-government parties supported the attack, some other groups including the former President Hamid Karzai and the Taliban fiercely reacted against this attack.

Whether what were the main objective behind using this bomb in Afghanistan, what are the benefits and disadvantages of this attack, and why such a bomb was utilized in current circumstances are questions that are analyzed here.

ISIL in Nangerhar

The foundation of ISIL in the Afghan-Pak region was put in Pashtun-residing tribal areas of Pakistan. Some people who were discontented from the Taliban such as Abdul Raouf Khadem, who was the deputy for the Taliban's former chief of the military committee, joined this group. Overall it seems that some members of Pakistan's Tehrik-e-Taliban, former Afghan Taliban, Pakistan and Afghanistan Pashtun Salafis and some other people have joined this group.

At first, the practical activities of ISIL began from Southern Afghanistan, but the assassination of Abdul Raouf in a drone attack in Helmand affected the activities of this group in Afghanistan. Therefore, in the second year, the group started their operations from the eastern provinces of Kunar and Nangarhar. These provinces were important for ISIL because on the one hand some followers of Salafi brand of Islamic thought were living there and on the other hand these provinces linked with the tribal areas of Pakistan. Besides that, the "Zarb-e-Azb" operations also forced some people to pass border towards Afghanistan and thus the ISIL fighters increased in Afghanistan. Most of these fighters were from Urukzai agency, Bajawar, and some other agencies. Another point about Nangarhar was that the ISIL fighters could easily visit their regions from there.

ISIL fighters were more successful in Nangerhar than in Kunar. According to a research, until July 2015, ISIL captured eight districts. However, this group was soon engaged in a war on the three fronts. On the one hand the Afghan Taliban were fighting them, on the other hand the Afghan government conducted operations against them and in the meanwhile, the Americans also carried out airstrikes on them. Therefore, now the areas controlled by ISIL has reduced from eight to four districts.

ISIL and the Mother of All Bombs

In the official statements of the both the US and the Afghan governments, the reason behind the utilization of this bomb is said to be elimination of ISIL fighters, but later these statements were followed by some contradictory remarks by some senior US officials.

In addition, according to some Afghan senior security officials, most of the civilians were evacuated and ISIL had not only mined the area but also had constructed tunnels and caves for themselves, making it hard for the security forces to advance only with the support of drone strikes. Therefore, it was needed to use such a bomb. The Commander of foreign forces in Afghanistan John Nicolson also said that the utilization of MOAB was necessary, because otherwise the fatalities of the Afghan and US forces would have increased. In the meanwhile in order to reduce the concerns about civilian casualties, the spokesperson of Ministry of Defense Dawlat Waziri, the National Army's spokesperson in Nanagarhar and the governor of Achin district separately said that in this massive attack there were no civilian casualties.

Despite all these, there exist some issues that are left vague such as:

First; ISIL is a guerrilla sort of a group and does not remain in a particular place, and it constantly changes its place. In the meanwhile, except for the US and the Afghan governments no other independent third party has proved the assassination of only ISIL fighters in this attack.

Second; if the Assadkhail area of Achin District was a center of ISIL, then it is probable that the group had some prisoners and villagers and some people must have lived in the area, because it had strategic importance for safety of the group.

Third; given the type and the size of the bomb, it is most likely to have caused financial loses and casualties for the civilians who were living in the nearby areas of Assadkhail, because this bomb is ten tons and explodes a little before reaching the land. Therefore, it destroys several kilometers on the surface.

Fourth; the later remarks of the US Secretary of Defense who said that they would not investigate this bombing also raises questions about the achievements of the use of this bomb.

Fifth; according to the experts, given the chemical materials used in the combination of this bomb, it will confront the area with serious environmental and health loses because environmentalists have recorded the TNT chemical substance, used in the combination of this bomb, as carcinogenic.

The MOAB from a regional and international changes prospective

Except for the official remarks regarding the utilization of this bomb, in this regard, there exist some other opinion as well:

First; the reason behind using this bomb was to test a massive explosive. Although some people may say that this bomb was made long time ago and was tested, it was the first time that this bomb was used in combat. In addition, this was the first time that this bomb was used in a mountainous area and shortly after the attack a group of US researchers started investigations on the samples of the area's soil, trees, and bushes.

Second; a demonstration of power to the North Korea and Russia; such a strike while since the past 15 years US's relations with the North Korea and Russia are deteriorating raises questions. The most important issue is the timing of this attack. This attack occurred on the day that Russia was hosting the third conference on Afghanistan. Moscow's this process in the region is being compared to a new anti-US coalition in the region. The US has opposed this process and has accused Russia of supporting the Taliban.

Besides that, the US Vice President Mike Pence's remarks are also in this regard. Pence who is currently on a 10-day trip to the countries around North Korea has said that "the North Korea should not test the strategic silence of the US. In the past two weeks, the world witnessed the power of our President through our attacks in Syria and Afghanistan." Therefore, it seems that the US's this move was to carry a message to the North Korea, Russia and some other countries in the region.

The Afghan government's stance

After the attack, releasing a statement, the Afghan government stated that this attack was carried out in coordination with them. Later the Chief Executive Office also supported the attack.

The Afghan government not only supported the utilization of the mother of all bombs in Nanagarhar but also released statements to change the public

mentality. For instance, despite the opinions of experts who have said that this bomb will have environmental and health-related consequences, soon after the attack, the Afghan Ministry of Public Health released statements in favor of the attack. However, after the attack, the Afghan government officials were not allowed to either visit or conduct investigation in the area nor had the Afghan government the results of any other survey in this regard.

It was for the same reason that one day after the attack the former Afghan President Hamid Karzai accused the National Unity Government of National treason and said that this government represented neither him nor his hopes. He said that the utilization of this bomb was the clear violation of the countries national sovereignty.

Apart from the stances in favor or against this attack, the complicated situation of war in Afghanistan and the past experiences show that, the war is not going to end through such attacks or using such bombs and neither this attack nor the remarks of the officials show the commitment to end war.

The NUG and the alarms of political instability



Issuing a decree, the Afghan President Ashraf Ghani dismissed his Special Representative for Reforms and Good Governance Ahmad Zia Massoud on 17th April 2017. After the issuance of the President's decree Dawa Khan Mina Pal, the Deputy Spokesperson of President Ghani, said that the reason behind discharging Massoud was his weak performance. One day after being sacked from his job, Massoud said during a press conference that by undertaking this move, President Ghani was paving the way for political instability and civil war.

President Ghani is dismissing a senior government authority at a time that in its recent report, the International Crisis Group (ICG) has said that still the Afghan government was faced with internal political differences, incoordination, and resumption of the activities of its armed oppositions.

The internal disputes of National Unity Government (NUG), some concerns of ICG about the situation in Afghanistan, and the consequences of firing Massoud are issues that are analyzed here.

The challenges ahead

The ICG on the one hand has expressed satisfaction from the developments and economic stability in Afghanistan during the NUG's tenure saying that the financial reforms and restricted control over the collection of taxes has resulted in increasing of the government's Revenue but on the other hand it has added that after two and a half years since its formation the future of the NUG and in the country's political stability continues to be fragile.

The ICG report writes that NUG confronts internal disputes and lack of coordination and the reason behind all these challenges are the differences between the President and Chief Executive. The institution further states that if the existing tensions were not declined there exists the risks of civil war and increased insecurity in Afghanistan.

ICG, which is established in 1995 to conduct on the ground researches about great international conflicts, had warned in a statement that with the establishment of the NUG, instability and intra-groups tensions are probable.

The NUG's internal differences

The over contested 2014 Presidential Election resulted in the formation of a government which was victim of many internal disputes. Even from the beginning, the 50-50 power sharing between the two electoral teams confronted the country with many challenges, which continued up until now.

Whether how the NUG political agreement be implemented was the main reason behind internal disputes. The major challenge that the NUG has faced since ever the beginning is the legitimacy crisis. The very foundation of the NUG was put in violation of the constitution and the Chief Executive Post was created while it was not anticipated in the constitution. Based on the political agreement the government must have called for Loya Jirga two years after its formation and decide about the Chief Executive Post, but it did not occur and after John Kerry's trip to Kabul, this post was, somehow, extended until fifth year of the NUG.

During two and half year of its tenure, the NUG faced with the deepened internal differences, which resulted in contradictory stances of its leaders in some cases. For instance, about the Afghan refugees in Europe, the Yemen and Saudi Arabia war in foreign policy and fight against corruption. These differences, in some occasions, was followed with the fierce criticism of the Chief Executive from the President.

The disagreement between the President and the Vice President was the second wave of internal disputes. One and a half year after the formation of the NUG, criticizing President Ghani, the First Vice President General Abdul Rashid Dustum said that he had not has sufficient share in the government. He even said that until then, he was not even given the powers that a First Vice President had. He also accused the President for nepotism. The differences between them reached to its new heights after Ishchi's case.

Tensions between Dr. Abdullah and the Governor of Balkh Province Ata Mohammad Noor was another part of the internal disputes in the NUG. After starting negotiation with Presidential Palace over Jamiat-e-Islami's share in the government, Atta said that he no longer trusts the political decisions made by Abdullah and, therefore, has entered the negotiations with Presidential Palace.

The existence of all these internal dispute in the government has influenced the situation in the country and has impacted economy, foreign policy, fight against corruption, etc.

The dismissal of Ahmad Zia Massoud

With the dismissal of Ahmad Zia Massoud a new wave of tensions between the leaders of the NUG has begun.

Ahmad Zia Massaud is the current deputy head of Jamiat-e-Islami Party and he was the First Vice President in the first term of Karzai's government between 2004 and 2009. In the first round of 2014 President Elections, he was the First Vice President in Zalmi Rasul's electoral package. However, in the second round of elections, unlike the decisions of Jamiat-e-Islami, he supported Ghani and after

the formation of the NUG, issuing a decree, Ghani appointed him as his Special Representative for Reforms and Good Governance. Even from the beginning, this post was influenced by the 50-50 share of power, which made Massoud discontent.

After about two and a half years, based on the article-64 of the Afghan constitution which enables the President to appoint or fire high-ranking government officials, the Afghan President discharged Massoud from his job. According to the deputy spokesperson of Ghani the reason behind sacking him was his weak performance.

However, in response to this move, Ahmad Zia Massoud said that the NUG was formed on the bases of an agreement between the parties and there exists a written commitment that no group can remove another group from the political structure. Addressing the President, he said, "You do not have the power to dismiss me. I want you to withdraw your decree and tell the Afghans that this decree was paving the way for instability in the country."

The reasons and consequences of Massoud's dismissal

However, the main reason for sacking Massoud is not clear and apparently poor performance is said to be the reason, but since on the one hand the duties of this post was not clear and on the other hand, Massoud was busy with his political activities, one cannot accept it as the main reason for his dismissal.

Massoud was in charge of an institution that its authorities were defined to be as same as a Vice President's. Although he was a government official and benefited from government privileges, he constantly kept criticizing the government and specially the President. In addition, for several times, Massoud traveled to the provinces and tried to besiege the "Mujahidin". In his remarks, Massoud would emphasize that the Mujahidin was a powerful force to seize political power in Afghanistan. It seems that this issue has led the President to decide to remove him.

Massoud's dismissal will not be as serious as he says 'the beginning of the instability and civil war in the country'. In the political scene of the country, Massoud is not in a position that could get people to start a civil war or cause instability in the country because of the bitter experience that people have from the past, they will not support Massaud to that scale. On the other hand, Jamiat-e-Islami Party is also confronted with internal disputes. However, the public may process this the removal of Massaud as a result of ethnical incentives.

In addition, in response to this move Atta Mohammad Noor criticized Dr. Abdullah and said that since Abdullah has entered the government from Jamiat's address, therefore, he must give clarification in this regard. In the meanwhile, the spokesperson of Chief Executive has said that since on behalf of Jamiat-e-Islami Atta was negotiating with Presidential Palace, therefore, the responsibility for clarification lied with him. Hence, internal differences between the members of Jamiat-e-Islami have also increased.

Overall, although this move has triggered a new wave of internal disputes, there exists analysis suggesting that, in order to attract the support of some of Jamiat's members Dr. Abdullah may take this case seriously, however it seems that the President will not withdraw his decision and this case will not be as enlarged as to challenge the instability in the country.

The end

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

