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Preface

The peace deal between Hezb-e-Islami and the Afghan government was signed by Hekmatyar and President Ghani on 29 September 2017. The deal was finalized one week earlier by the representatives of Hezb-e-Islami and this party's delegation under Engineer Amin Kareem and the Afghan National Security Advisor Hanif Atmar.

About six months after the signature of the peace deal with the Afghan government, the leader of Hezb-e-Islami Gulbuddin Hekmatyar appeared in public in Laghman province and met his followers and government officials. Then Hekmatyar went to Nangarhar and from Nangarhar came to Kabul.

The process of the peace talks with Hezb-e-Islami and the impacts of Hekmatyar's coming to Kabul are issues that are analyzed in the first part of the Weekly Analysis of the Center for Strategic and Regional Studies.

In the second part of the analysis, you would read about the efforts to ease tensions between Kabul and Afghanistan. Since the past few days, three Pakistani military and parliamentary delegations came to Kabul and met the Afghan President and other senior officials. The aim of these travels is said to be improving relations and decreasing oppositions between the two countries.

Hekmatyar's entry into national politics and its impacts on the country



After two decades, the head of Hezb-e-Islami Gulbuddin Hekmatyar appeared in a public gathering in Laghman province. Some lawmakers and government officials had also participated in the meeting, and it was the first time Hekmatyar directly and officially met Afghan government officials since 2001.

Hekmatyar give a speech in a gathering of his followers in Laghman, and then went to Nangarhar and delivered his second speech to a relatively large crowd. On the 4th May 2017, Hekmatyar entered Kabul with hundreds of vehicles of his followers, and participated in a welcoming event held in the Presidential Palace by afghan president. In this meeting, the Afghan President, Chief Executive, former Jihadi leaders and other senior government officials were also present, and Hekmatyar delivered a long speech.

However, one can ask why Karzai wasn't able to sign a peace deal with Hezb-e-Islami (Hekmatyar)? Through which phases did Hezb-e-Islami's struggle passes? can the peace with Hezb-e-Islami be a model for peace with the Taliban? And what will be the impacts of Hekmatyar's coming to Kabul? These are the questions that are analyzed here.

Why did Karzai not make a peace deal with Hezb-e-Islami?

Although the exact date of the beginning of the negotiations with Hezb-e-Islami is not clear, according to official statements, these talks were started in 1389.

During the second term of Hamid Karzai's presidency, Hezb-e-Islami's delegation came to Kabul for several times but these dialogues did not have any outcomes, and the Afghan government was not successful to cut a deal with this faction. According to a research, between Hamal 1389 (solar month and year) and Sawr 1392 (solar month and year), Hezb-e-Islami's 17 delegations visited Kabul for negotiations. Even after this date, Hezb-e-Islami's other delegations also came to Kabul, but there are some reasons why the peace talks with Hezb-e-Islami failed. Hezb-e-Islami's harsh stance and conditions in the negotiations, its weak role in the battlefield, presence of some significant figures and fragmented groups of Hezb-e-Islami in Kabul, opposition of some parties and especially some senior officials with Hezb-e-Islami and lack of international and US support were the mean reasons behind the failure of the earlier negotiations with Hezb-e-Islami.

On the other hand, during the two terms of Hamid Karzai's presidency, tens of thousands of US soldiers were fighting in the Afghan battleground, and they were focused on war rather than peace. There exists speculations that during his two terms of presidency, Hamid Karzai was surrounded by some former oppositions of Hekmatyar and they were creating obstacles on the way of peace talks. However according to the Hamid Karzai's Chief of Staff Abdul Karim Khuram, during Karzai's Presidency foreigners especially the US were creating significant obstacles on the way of peace talks with Hezb-e-Islami.

The Transformation of Hezb-e-Islami's Struggle

If one evaluates the last four decades of Hezb-e-Islami's struggle, one will find out that after passing through four phases, this party has also largely changed its formal strategy as well:

The first phase; The 'Dawah' period: Hezb-e-Islami's mother group 'Islamic Movement of Afghanistan' or the 'Muslim Youth of Afghanistan' started its

struggle from '*Dawah*' in the decade of democracy in Afghanistan and faced many challenges from the communist parties, yet in the decade of democracy due to its '*Dawah*' aspect, it was known as one of the important party among the existing groups in the country. At that time due to internal disputes, the Islamic Movement divided into two parts.

The second phase; from the '*Dawah*' to armed uprising: At the end of the democratic decade and with the beginning of Sardar Mohammad Daoud Khan's presidency, the form of Hezb-e-Islami's (or Islamic Movement) struggle changed and this group started an armed uprising against Daoud Khan which 1354 operations. In these operations, the current leader of Hezb-e-Islami Gulbuddin Hekmatyar had played the most important role of all. This behavior alongside the '*Dawah*' struggle continued until the end of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.

The third phase; the period of Jihad: this phase started with the Soviet invasion. At that time compared to other phases, Hezb-e-Islami was more armed and played a leading role in the Jihad. But besides its armed struggle, Hezb-e-Islami had also continued its '*Dawah*'. This phase of Hezb-e-Islami's struggle continued until the party cut a peace deal with the Afghan government. However, after the Taliban's emergence, the military force of the Hezb-e-Islami had faded, and it no longer possessed the armed forces compared to the Jihad era.

Fourth; entering the invitation and political struggle: due to internal disputes, the firm support of some of the countries from other Jihadi groups and the emergence of the Taliban, Hezb-e-Islami's military power weakened. After 2001, although Hezb-e-Islami was present in the war against the US and NATO forces, this presence was limited in comparison with the Taliban. In addition, some circles and members of Hezb-e-Islami joined the government under Hamid Karzai. On the other hand, Hezb-e-Islami was under pressure of the Taliban in the battleground, and international aids with this group were also decreased. These situations and the withdrawal of the most of the foreign troops from the country affected Hezb-e-Islami, and thus this party changed the form of its struggle and instead of armed struggle began invitational and political struggle. That is why, in the Laghman meeting, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar fiercely criticized Taliban's aggressive tactic and called the current war as "in vain" and "illegitimate".

The model of peace with Hezb-e-Islami and the Taliban

Some analysts and senior government officials consider the peace deal with Hezb-e-Islami as a model for peace talks with the Taliban in the future, but the question is whether it is possible or not?

A major particularity of the peace talks with the Hezb-e-Islami was that it was conducted through intra-Afghan talks, but if one evaluates the Taliban's stance, conditions, and their state compared to Hezb-e-Islami, one will find out that peace talks with the Taliban would not be feasible through intra-Afghan consensus and there would be the necessity of the presence of some powerful countries as guarantors of the commitments.

Second, the peace deal between Hezb-e-Islami and the Afghan government was largely a result of Hezb-e-Islami's initiative. Hezb-e-Islami bypassed its basic condition, the withdrawal of foreign forces from the country. It did not gain privileges in exchange for the peace deal with the government. But peace with the Taliban with such conditions, to a greater extent, seems impossible, because compared to Hezb-e-Islami, the Afghan Taliban are powerful on the battlefield. According to SIGAR's report, the Taliban currently hold control of the 40% of the Afghan territory and challenges the national sovereignty of the Afghan government on a daily basis.

The impacts of Hekmatyar's emergence on national politics

Hekmatyar's coming to Kabul would affect the country's national politics, upcoming Parliamentary and Presidential elections and Hezb-e-Islami's relations with the Taliban.

Before Hekmatyar's coming to Kabul, there existed many factions of Hezb-e-Islami, but after his coming to Kabul there seem hopes among inner circles of Hezb-e-Islami that Hekmatyar would bring all the fragments of the party together because according to them Hekmatyar is the most charismatic character in the party and have the ability to do so. But this task is not that simple, and it would be

a significant challenge for Hekmatyar, and if the party becomes united, it would have the following effects:

- **National Politics;** although Hekmatyar was warmly welcomed in the Presidential Palace and the speeches of the representatives of the most of the parties in the Palace was promising and positive, there exists the possibility of confrontation between Hezb-e-Islami and Shiite groups and Jamiat party. Hekmatyar's remarks in Laghman and Nangarhar and Jamiat-e-Islami's status and increasing concern indicates so. But these issues will be deepened as the time passes.
- **Upcoming Parliamentary and Presidential Elections;** Hekmatyar's coming to Kabul will also affect these alignments. Moreover, due to its strong structure, Hezb-e-Islami would also want to participate in the upcoming Parliamentary elections as a party.
- **Hezb-e-Islami's relations with the Taliban;** even from the beginning the Afghan Taliban and Hezb-e-Islami have tenuous relations. In his recent remarks in Laghman and Nangarhar, Hekmatyar also addressed the Taliban. In these remarks, Hekmatyar reiterated on peaceful tactics and criticized Taliban's aggressive tactic. But unlike his two previous speeches, in his comments in the Presidential Palace, Hekmatyar did not fiercely criticize the Taliban.
- **Media;** something in common in the three consecutive speeches of Hekmatyar was criticizing the media, which according to him have had programs contrary to Afghan and Islamic values. Some media outlets have fiercely reacted against these remarks of him. If these criticisms by Hekmatyar continued, on the one hand, there exists the possibility of a confrontation between Hezb-e-Islami and the media and, on the other hand, some people among political figures and the public would raise their voice in favor of Hekmatyar, as in his limited remarks, Karim Khalili backed Hekmatyar's comments in this regard.

Tensions between Kabul and Islamabad and efforts to improve the bilateral relations



While tensions between Afghanistan and Pakistan have escalated, the Director General of Pakistan's Inter-Service Intelligence (ISI) General Naveed Mukhtar traveled to Kabul last week in a bid to talk with Afghan officials and improve relations between the two countries. Days before Mukhtar's visit to Kabul, two high-ranking Pakistani delegation had also arrived Afghanistan to ease tensions between Kabul and Islamabad and met the Afghan President and other senior officials.

The Pakistani military and civilian authorities pay visits to Afghanistan while recently relations between Kabul and Islamabad is intensified more than ever and distrust between the two nations has reached to new heights.

Kabul-Islamabad relations during the National Unity Government (NUG) particularly in the past several months of 2017, the impacts of the recent visits of Pakistani delegation on bilateral relations and the future of Kabul-Islamabad ties are the issues that are analyzed here.

From peace with Pakistan to the escalation of tensions

During more than two years of the NUG's tenure relations between Kabul and Islamabad have passed through two phases (very close ties and then severe tensions and even clashes between the two countries). First, regarding political ties with Pakistan, President Ghani said that the two countries were engaged in an undeclared war against each other and first of all peace must be made with Pakistan. Therefore, the NUG reached out to Pakistan and, giving some privileges to this country, relations between the two nations became unprecedentedly warm.

Using its close relations with Pakistan and other political means, the NUG made efforts to push Pakistan to sincerely cooperate in the peace process particularly in regards to bringing the Taliban to the negotiation table. But after few months, with the intensification of insecurity in the country especially after the deadly suicide attacks in Kabul and the enclosure of the former Taliban leader Mullah Mohammad Omar's death followed by the failure of the Murree negotiation with the Taliban, Kabul's policy and relations with Islamabad experienced a U-turn.

Tensions between the two countries even led to military confrontations between the two sides at the Turkham border which had some casualties as well. In international conferences, the Afghan government also made efforts to marginalize Pakistan. For instance, the Afghan President in the sixth meeting of the Heart of Asia Conference rejected \$500m Pakistan's aid and said that Pakistani government should spend the money to fight terrorism in its own country. In addition, in 2016, due to harassment by the Pakistani police, more than 500 thousand Afghan refugees returned from Pakistan and trade between the two countries declined to \$1bn a year as well.

Kabul-Islamabad ties in 2017

With the beginning of 2017 and following the deadly assaults in both Afghanistan and Pakistan, and Pakistan's rocket attacks on Afghan soil, tensions in Pak-Afghan relations further increased. After the attack on Lal Shahbaz Qalandar shrine in the Sindh province of Pakistan, which left 70 dead and 250 injured, Pakistan closed its

borders with Afghanistan and claimed that the attack was orchestrated by the armed groups inside Afghanistan.

Furthermore, Pakistan summoned the Afghan diplomats and submitted a list of 76 peoples who Pakistan claimed to be in Afghanistan and were acting against Pakistan. Pakistan wanted the Afghan government to arrest and hand over these peoples to Islamabad. The Afghan government, on the other side, provided Pakistan with a list containing the names of the people and centers who were present in Pakistan and acted against the Afghan government.

In the meanwhile, efforts were made to ease tensions between the two countries, and with the mediation of the United Kingdom, the Afghan National Security Advisor Hanif Atmar met his Pakistani counterpart Sartaj Aziz in a trilateral meeting in London on 15 March 2017, but this meeting did not have concrete achievements.

On the other hand, the Dawn, a Pakistani Newspaper, has quoted the diplomatic sources of the US that the Americans have also reiterated on the talks between Afghan and Pakistani officials so that the two countries could build a mechanism to end oppositions with each other.

Pakistan, in its first move to ease tensions, opened the one-month closed border with Kabul and then sent three high-powered Pakistani delegations to Afghanistan to improve relations between the two countries.

The consecutive visits of Pakistani delegations to Kabul

A delegation of Pakistani army headed by Chief of General Staff Lieutenant General Bilal Akbar arrived Kabul on 27 April 2017. The delegation of Pakistani army met the acting Afghan Minister of Defense General Tariq Bahrami and the Afghan Chief of Army Staff General Sharif Yaftali. In these meetings, the two sides described terrorism as shared enemy of both Afghanistan and Pakistan and reiterated that with cooperation between the two countries security and stability would be maintained in both countries. The Pakistani delegation also promised that no group would be allowed to use Pakistani soil against Afghanistan.

Two days after the Pakistani military delegation (on 29 April), a 15-member Pakistani Parliamentary delegation headed by Ayaz Sadiq arrived in Kabul. Heads of some of the Pakistani parties were also present in the combination of this delegation. The delegation met the Afghan President, Chief Executive, the former President Hamid Karzai and the speakers of the Afghan Parliament. The aim of this delegation's travel is also said to be strengthening relations between the two countries. In the meetings between the Pakistani delegation and Afghan officials, Kabul has demanded from Pakistan to fulfill the commitments that this country has made regarding the cooperation in the maintenance of peace and stability in Afghanistan. The Pakistani Parliamentary delegation assured that they would pressurize their respective government to deliver these commitments. In the meanwhile, the Pakistani delegation invited the former Afghan President and the Afghan Chief Executive to visit Pakistan which was accepted by both the former President Hamid Karzai and Dr. Abdullah Abdullah.

General Naveed Mukhtar who is appointed as the head of ISI just five months earlier also visited Kabul on 2 May 2017, and met the Afghan President Ashraf Ghani and other Afghan officials and discussed issues relevant to both countries. Although details about Ghani's meeting with Pakistan's chief of intelligence services are not revealed, quoting some credential government officials, some media outlets have said that Ghani has demanded from General Naveed Mukhtar to take serious actions regarding the documents and proofs that was earlier submitted to Pakistan. It is said that, with a serious tone, Ghani has said to Mukhtar that relations between the two countries will not improve unless solid steps are taken by Pakistani side to meet Afghan demands.

In addition, it is said that Pakistan's spymaster has invited Ghani to visit Pakistan but Ghani has rejected his invitation saying that he "will not travel to Pakistan as long as the war in Afghanistan is not reduced and Kabul is not ensured about Pakistan's goodwill".

The future of Kabul-Islamabad relations

The recent visits of three Pakistani delegations to Kabul show that Islamabad is seeking to strengthen relations with Kabul and is concerned about the escalation of tensions with its neighbor. Due to pressures and harsh stance of the Afghan government and international community regarding Pakistan's cooperation in the Afghan peace process, this country is currently marginalized.

On the other hand, it seems that the new US administration is strengthening its relations with Afghanistan and recently two high-ranking US officials traveled to Kabul. Pakistan is concerned about its relations with the US especially after Donald Trump came to power in the US because Trump has serious opinions regarding Pakistan as a few years earlier Trump had said that "our presence in Afghanistan is also significant to control Pakistan."

Now it seems that the Afghan government will not step back from its preconditions regarding its relations with Pakistan and given the Afghan government's stance, relations between the two countries are linked to Pakistan's sincere cooperation in the peace process. The Afghan government has mentioned the fulfillment of promises made by Pakistan as one of the essential preconditions for improving relations with Islamabad.

The end

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