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Preface

At first, it was thought that the US war in Afghanistan would be a major foreign policy issue for the new US President Donald Trump. However, six months into the new administration, the US policy on the war in Afghanistan is yet to be announced.

Recently, reports have been released that suggested the US is reviewing the plan to send mercenaries to the Afghan battlefield. Trump is a new player in politics, and most of his experience is in areas of trade and economics; therefore, there are speculations that he will try to privatize the war in Afghanistan. What was the role of mercenaries in the Afghan war in the past years? What will be the impacts of the mercenaries' return to the Afghan battlefield? In this regard, you will read in the first part of the Weekly Analysis of the Center for Strategic and Regional Studies.

In the second part of the analysis, we have analyzed the issue of preventing General Dostum's plane from landing in Mazar-e-Sharif airport. The First Vice President's airplane was denied landing in Balkh last week, and this issue was highly reflected in national and international media. But the office of General Dostum and the governor of Balkh Ata Mohammad Noor rejected these reports. What are the facts behind the issue? Why Dostum's plane was not allowed to land? And what is the direction of the current political crisis?

The US in Afghanistan and the Privatization of War



Since the past several weeks, the US media are discussing the privatization of the war in Afghanistan. In an article published in Wall Street Journal (WSJ) as well as in an interview on a radio program “Breitbart News Sunday”, the founder of the private military company Blackwater emphasized on changing the US strategy towards Afghanistan. He said that now the only way to win the war in Afghanistan was to bring the mercenaries in the battlefield. Three weeks ago, the US President Donald Trump’s some advisors and close friends have also undertaken efforts to deploy private army in Afghanistan, instead of US military soldiers.

The issue of the privatization of the war in Afghanistan comes at a time that a recent report of UNAMA shows that the ongoing year was a bloody year for the Afghan civilians and only in its first six months, 1634 airstrikes were carried out in

all over the country.¹ In the meanwhile, the US President Donald Trump met four US military members, who had fought in Afghanistan, and asked them about the security situation in Afghanistan. “I want to know what the purpose of our 16-years war in Afghanistan was and what we have to do [now]. Tell me about what you have seen and what your assessment is?”² Trump asked.

What is the background of mercenaries in our region? How did the US war in Afghanistan go on in the past years and what were the government and private militaries’ role? Will the businessman Trump privatize the war in Afghanistan? If yes, will the private military win the war for the US? These and other related questions are answered here.

Mercenaries in the battleground

The ancient history of using mercenaries in the wars is proven from the fact that some historians and sociologists believe mercenary to be the second old job that the human beings were occupied with.

A mercenary is one who fights for a foreign country or fights for the money and self-interests without being a party of the war at first. Many mercenaries have fought in the armies of empires and great conquerors throughout the history.

An excellent example of mercenaries in the modern history is the East India Company which reigned over India for several centuries.

The US war in Afghanistan; between the private and government militaries

It is not the first time that the US is using the private military to fight the war in Afghanistan, but also before this, the US had hired mercenaries to fight in Afghanistan in the past 17 years. At first, the war in Afghanistan was being carried out by CIA, Special Forces and private contractors who were supported by the US air forces and the local anti-Taliban forces.

¹ Washington Post, >US Air Strikes in Afghanistan are at levels not seen since Obama troop surge<, 17 July 2017, see it online: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/checkpoint/wp/2017/07/17/u-s-airstrikes-in-afghanistan-are-at-levels-not-seen-since-obama-troop-surge/>

² Naray News, «ترمپ په افغانستان کې د امریکا پر پوځي حضور نیوکې کړې» [Trump has criticized the US military presence in Afghanistan], 19 July 2017, read it here: <http://naraynews.com/?p=9077>

The Americans are not the first foreigners who used mercenaries in their war in Afghanistan either, before this, in addition to some famous conquerors; the British army used India mercenaries in their two wars in Afghanistan in the 19th century.

After the collapse of the Taliban regime, the number of US soldiers in Afghanistan increased gradually and finally in 2011 the US had the highest number of forces in Afghanistan. We can say that the US war in Afghanistan in the past 15 years was not carried only by the US government soldiers. Mercenaries were fighting in Afghanistan between the end of 2001 and 2010. During this time, more than 52 to 90 domestic and foreign private security companies were active in Afghanistan which had more than 40 thousand soldiers under their command.

In the second half of 2010, the former Afghan President Hamid Karzai issued a decree and banned the activities of 52 of these private companies including Blackwater.³ After that, Blackwater was active under the name "XE".

Businessman Trump and the privatization of war

Before Presidential elections, Donald Trump would criticize the war in Afghanistan and Obama's strategy in this regard. However, during the presidential campaigns, he made no important comment about the Afghan war. After winning Presidential elections, although he talked with the Afghan President over the telephone for several times and vowed to clarify the US policy towards Afghanistan, six months into the new administration, the US is yet to decide about its strategy in Afghanistan. According to the White House, the delay in announcing the new US strategy towards Afghanistan is due to assessment and comprehensive consultations so that an end could be put to the war in Afghanistan.

Since the past one month, the issue of the privatization of war in Afghanistan is being emphasized upon. This demand, to a greater part, is made by the heads of the private military companies and people who have made such investments. The

³ Duetsche Welle, «حکومت افغانستان: برنامه انحلال هشت شرکت امنیتی موفقانه انجام شد» [The Afghan government: the program to revoke eight security companies accomplished successfully], 3 Oct 2010, read it online: <http://www.dw.com/fa-af/a-6070827>

request for the privatization of war is made by the founder of Blackwater Eric D. Prince and head of Dyne Corps Steve Feinberg who have the support of some advisors and son-in-law of Trump as well.

In his interviews with WSJ and other media outlets, the founder of Blackwater said that the only solution for the war in Afghanistan was its privatization. He believes that the East India Company in the Southern Asia was a successful example in this regard. The East India Company reigned in India for several centuries. Moreover, according to him, the privatization of war in Afghanistan will decrease the expenses of war as well. He said, if the war was privatized and mercenaries were dispatched to Afghanistan, the Afghan war will cost only 10% of its current expenditures. He indicates the first years of the war in Afghanistan to support his argument because he says in these years private military companies played an active role in the Afghan war.⁴

Eric Prince, Stephen Bannon, and Jared Kushner also met the US Secretary of Defense James Mattis to discuss it with him. According to US media, Mattis has heard what they had to say but has not commented in this regard. It seems that James Mattis is against the scheme.

Will mercenaries make the US successful?

The most important question is can just a few thousand mercenaries accomplish what more than 100 thousand soldiers and more than 15 Generals could not fulfill in the past 15 years? It comes at a time that private security companies are defamed in Afghanistan, and they were involved in some of the bloody and irresponsible acts in Afghanistan as well as in Iraq.

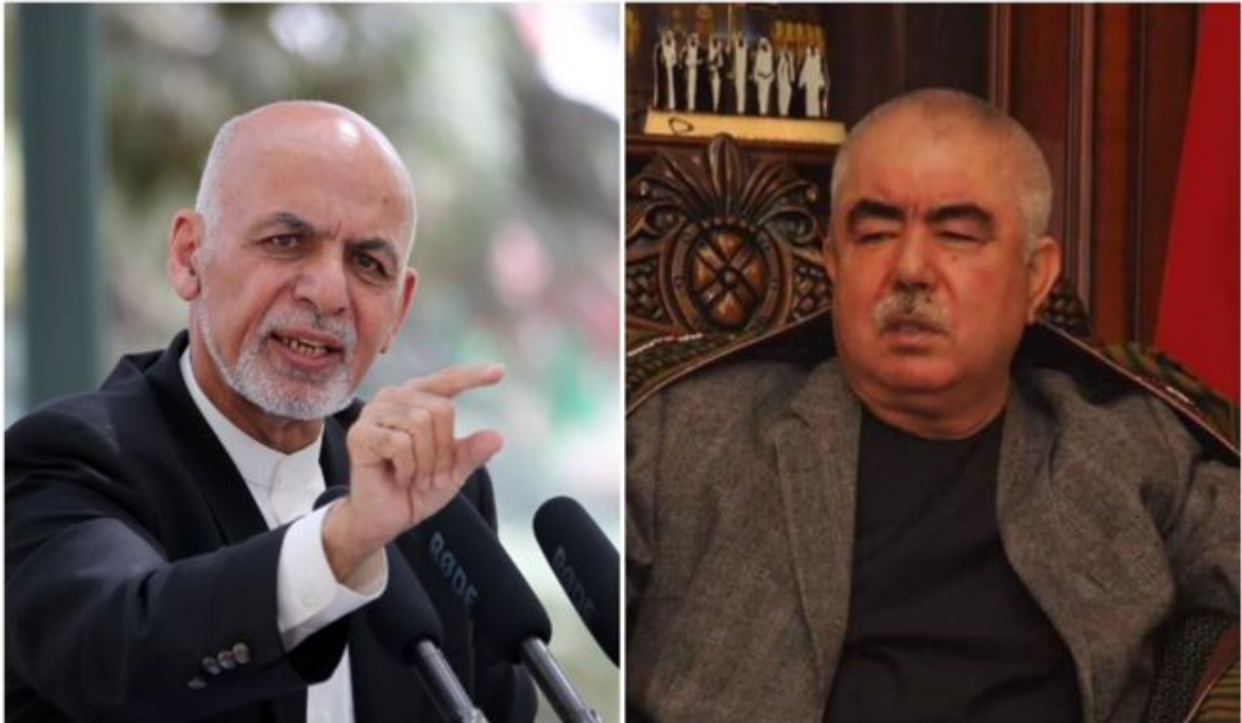
The founder of Blackwater gives the example of East India Company while even this company was not a successful scheme. At that time, the main factors were Indian feudalism and the weak Mogul Kingdom. Due to the deeds of East India Company, Muslims and Hindus in India were forced to demand freedom from the

⁴ Click the following link to read the full text of the founder of Blackwater's interview:
<http://www.breitbart.com/national-security/2017/06/12/blackwater-founder-erik-prince-recommends-cheaper-lighter-afghanistan-approach/>

company. Their war is known as the 1857 liberation war or mutiny. Due to these two factors, British were compelled to bring India under the reign of the Queen and made an end to the company's control over India.

Deploying mercenaries in the battlefield will certainly benefit those who work in private military companies, but it will not make the US's 17-years-old war successful in Afghanistan.

Preventing General Dostum from returning and the prospects of political crisis



Reports were released last week that suggested Dostum's plane was not allowed to land in Balkh's airport and that it was returned to Turkmenistan and then to Turkey. Issuing a statement, however, the office of General Dostum denied these reports and said that Dostum was in Turkey.

It comes at a time that recently political tensions and disputes have reached its new heights, and the ongoing political crisis in the country is intensified. People are concerned about gaps between the high government officials, the formation of new coalitions against the government and the increasing insecurity in the country.

What were the facts in the issue of Dostum's return and the denial of Afghan landing? Which party prevented Dostum's plane from landing and what it meant? Taking these issues into consideration, to which direction is the ongoing political crisis headed?

Preventing Dostum's plane from landing

The internal and international media last Tuesday reported that a plane carrying Dostum from Turkey to the Balkh province was denied landing but Dostum's office rejecting the reports and has said that General Dostum will soon return to Afghanistan and will attend a ceremony to launch the coalition for the salvation of Afghanistan.

The spokesman for the governor of Balkh province Moneer Ahmad Farhad said that the reports about preventing Dostum's plane from landing were not accurate. Nevertheless, he confirmed that on Tuesday night a plane had left Turkey for Balkh province but could not land due to technical problems and, therefore, was returned to Ashgabat, the capital of Turkmenistan.

On his Facebook page, the governor of Balkh Ata Mohammad Noor wrote that the plane carried some officials and engineers of the Turkish Institute TİKA.⁵

On the other hand, New York Time has written in an article that after two months of potential deportation in Turkey and formation of an anti-government coalition, General Dostum tried to return to Afghanistan to continue his opposition against the presidential palace. The report states that while hundreds of the supporter of General Dostum, carrying slogans "welcome dear leader", had gone to the airport to welcome him, his plane was denied landing due to the direction of the central government. New York Times writes that a commander of General Dostum and a source close to Ata Mohammad Noor have confirmed the incident.⁶ Quoting the Afghan officials, foreign policy has written that hundreds of Dostum's supporters were waiting for him at the airport but his plane was not permitted to land.⁷

⁵ Asia News, «چه کسی مانع فرود هواپیمای «دوستم» در شمال شد؟» [Who prevented Dostum's plane from landing in the North?], 28 Saratan 1396 solar year:

<http://www.asianews.af/18445>

⁶ The New York Times, Afghan Vice President's Return Thwarted as Plane Is Turned Back, July 18, 2017, see online:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/18/world/asia/afghanistan-dostum-ghani-plane.html>

And: Plane Believed to Carry Afghan Vice President Diverted From Landing, July 18, 2017, see online:

<https://www.nytimes.com/reuters/2017/07/18/world/asia/18reuters-afghanistan-politics.html>

⁷ foreign Policy, The Afghan Vice President Was Just Denied Entry to Afghanistan, July 18, 2017, see online:

<http://foreignpolicy.com/2017/07/18/the-afghan-vice-president-was-just-denied-entry-to-afghanistan-dostum-ghani/>

While NATO has also confirmed the report about Dostum's plane being returned from Balkh airport, its denial by the governor of Balkh and General Dostum indicates the political pressure on them. Germans in the formation of NATO are responsible for controlling the Mazar-e-Sharif Airport and, therefore, some sources reported that Germans prevented the plane's landing but, confirming the reports about the plane's return, Resolute Support Mission has said foreign troops were involved in neither preventing the plane's landing nor facilitating it. The spokesperson of NATO forces has told reporters that their job was not to intervene in the internal affairs of Afghanistan.⁸ There exist speculations that the plane was denied landing by the President's order.

What does preventing Dostum's return mean?

While being under pressure due to the issue of sexual assault on Ahmad Eshchi, the former governor of Jawzjan province, General Dostum went to Turkey two months ago and apparently his purpose was medical treatment. At the heights of the political crisis, Dostum formed a coalition against the government alongside Ata Mohammad Noor and Mohammad Mohaqiq.

After announcing the formation of the "Coalition for the Salvation of Afghanistan" in Turkey, there were reports that the head of the National Directorate of Security had traveled to Turkey and had demanded from Dostum to leave the coalition and return to the country, but he had rejected the offer. After that, the Afghan government tried to pressurize Dostum by emphasizing on the investigations into the Eshchi's case and the Office of the Afghan Attorney General announced that Eshchi's file was sent to the Supreme Court one month ago.

⁸ BBC Pashto, «ناتو: د دوستم الوتکې ته د ناستې لپاره د مرستې غوښتنه را نه وشوه», [NATO: we were asked for help in landing Dostum's plane], 27 Saratan 1396: <http://www.bbc.com/pashto/afghanistan-40640014>

&, VOA, «ناتو ممانعت از نشست طیاره دوستم را در بلخ تایید کرد», [NATO confirmed preventing Dostum's plane from landing], 27 Saratan 1396:

<https://www.darivoa.com/a/general-dustom-office-rejected-his-returning-to-Mazar-e-Sharif/3948533.html>

Later-on, the European Union and the US Embassy⁹ in Afghanistan also announced that the case of sexual assault on Eshchi was a serious issue and had to be legally investigated.

On the other hand, speaking to a gathering of his supporters after his return to the country, Ata Mohammad Noor said, “the Coalition for the salvation of Afghanistan will be unbreakable. There are despotism and dictatorship in the current regime; ministers do not have any authority, and the country is being governed by three or four specific individuals.”

In an interview with BBC, the second deputy of the Chief Executive also criticized the National Unity Government (NUG) and emphasized that the President must implement the NUG agreement. He also said that they would undertake “next measures” if their demands were not met.¹⁰

Hence, in the absence of General Dostum, the political weight of the new coalition will decrease, and it is said that preventing Dostum from entering the country, on the one hand, is an effort to weaken the alliance, and, on the other hand, it is aimed to pressurize General Dostum.

The future of the current political crisis in the country

If General Dostum returns to the country, since he was antagonized for the issue of preventing his plane from landing in Balkh, he will undertake some dangerous steps which will further deepen the crisis in the country.

On the other hand, days after announcing the formation of the new coalition in Turkey, another circle under the name of ‘national axis’ also voiced their discontent with the government. Most of these coalitions go beyond political oppositions, and they contain government officials in their combinations as well, and these people are partly responsible for the current situation too.

¹⁰ BBC Persian, «محقق: ائتلاف ما برای اصلاح حکومت افغانستان است نه سقوط آن» [Mohaqiq: our coalition intend to reform the government not to collapse it], 19 Saratan 1396 solar year: <http://www.bbc.com/persian/afghanistan-40553274>

Although there are analysts who believe that some steps by the Presidential Palace has caused the discontent of some politically influential figures but that the government will win in the end, it seems that the political crisis in the country is getting complicated day after day and people are concerned in this regard.

The Afghan Independent Election Commission also announced the schedule for the Parliamentary elections and since Hezb-e-Islami is preparing for these elections and most of these oppositions are also rooted in elections as well, the political crisis is unlikely to decrease soon.

Nonetheless, these concerns do not mean that the current political crisis will force the NUG at the verge of collapse. The foreigners' intervene in the case of General Dostum, and Ahmad Eshchi means that the government has their support and the political oppositions of the government will not benefit from further oppositions.

The end

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