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## Preface

On 17 September, the Afghan President traveled to Turkmenistan and one day later headed towards the US. Besides participating and delivering a speech in the General Assembly of the US, President Ghani met President Trump and thanked him for his new policy towards Afghanistan. Ghani pledged that he was prepared to be held accountable for the aids.

The new US policy towards Afghanistan, which extended the US's presence in Afghanistan until an unclear time, means the prolongation of the US war in Afghanistan. However, according to the Afghan President, Trump promised to extend the Afghan government's control over the 80% of the Afghan soil. The direction of the Afghan-American ties and the achievements of the recent trip of President Ghani 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 scheme to form a local force under the Ministry of Defense. Since a while, the Afghan and American experts are working on a plan to arm tens of thousands of people in the remote areas of the country. This scheme was termed as "forming militia forces," and given the experience of the Afghan Local Police, many voices rose against it. However, the Afghan Ministry of Defense says that the scheme is not finalized yet nor is the ministry trying to form militia forces.

## President Ghani's trip to the US and Kabul-Washington ties



After the inauguration of Asian Games, the Afghan President Ashraf Ghani traveled to the US as head of a high-ranking Afghan delegation. In this trip, President Ghani delivered his speech in the UN General Assembly and met the high-ranking representatives of many countries including the US President.

After the formation of the new administration in the US, it is the first trip of the Afghan President to the US as well as his first meeting with the US President Donald Trump.

The important points of the Afghan President's speech in the 72<sup>nd</sup> General Assembly of the UN and the Kabul-Washington ties in the aftermath of Donald Trump's election as the US president and especially after the announcement of the new US strategy towards Afghanistan are issues that are analyzed here.

### **Kabul-Washington ties; before Trump's South Asian policy**

After the formation of the National Unity Government (NUG), relations between the US and Afghanistan were much warmer than that of during Hamid Karzai's government. These relations lasted for two years, and after mid-2016, Presidential elections began in the US. During the electoral campaigns both of the leading candidates did not have many comments on Afghanistan; yet compared to Trump, Hillary Clinton had enough experience and information about Afghanistan.

Unlike the expectations, Trump won the 2016 US elections. He had contradictory comments on Afghanistan, and for the most part, he did not agree with the US policy in Afghanistan in the past 16 years. This affected Trump's Afghan policy and the issue of dealing with Afghanistan remained unclear for nine months. Even during this time, he made inconsistent remarks about Afghanistan.

### **Kabul-Washington ties; after Trump's South Asian policy**

After a long delay, the US president announced the new US policy towards South Asia and Afghanistan last month. The main points of this policy were conditional cooperation with the Afghan government, the unclear future of the US forces in Afghanistan, pressures on Pakistan, and increasing India's role in Afghanistan.

This policy was to a greater point a parallel of Afghanistan and India's policy in the region that is why both Kabul and New Delhi welcomed the strategy while Pakistan opposed it. The Pakistani Ministry of Foreign Affairs rejected the policy, and in this regard, the Pakistani Chief of Army Staff said: "We do not need the US's aids, but we want US's trust."

After the announcement of Trump's strategy towards Afghanistan, the Afghan-American relations are moving from mistrust towards trust. Before the announcement of the US's this strategy, Kabul, to a greater extent, was concerned about it.

## **President Ghani's trip to the US**

Both the signs of hope and disappointment were marked during President Ghani's visit to the US. For instance terming the Taliban as a "terrorist" group by President Trump at the face of President Ghani's emphasizes on reconciliation with the Taliban showed a contradiction between the Afghan and American policies on the Afghan peace process.

The meeting between the Afghan President and Donald Trump on 21 September 2017 was rather a discussion regarding the Afghan underground resources. In this meeting, the two leaders came to an agreement that the US companies should work to extract the natural resources of Afghanistan. They said that it was an effective step towards maintaining the security, strengthening the Afghan economy, and creating employment opportunities for the people of both countries. On the other hand, they said that by extracting its natural resource, Afghanistan would become more self-sufficient and that the burden from the shoulders of the US would decrease.

Besides other factors, informing Trump about the natural resources of Afghanistan was what played a role in changing Trump's stance about the withdrawal of his troops from Afghanistan.

On the other hand, it was the first time that President Ghani delivered a speech in the UN Assembly and there were positive and negative points in his remarks as well. For instance, he termed non-governmental elements and violence as the fifth wave of political violence that as he put it would continually threaten international security for decades. On the other hand, reliance on Pakistan once again was an approach that would not have desirable outcomes this time as well.

Moreover, the Afghan President's hope that Trump's policy would bring 80% of the country under the control of the Afghan government is an extreme assumption that will perpetuate the war in the country.

## **The confrontations of India and Pakistan in Afghanistan**

After the withdrawal of the Soviet troops from Afghanistan, the rivalry between Pakistan and India in Afghanistan augmented. After 2001, due to its financial and military aids, India earned a good reputation in Afghanistan. Pakistan saw this as a threat to themselves that is why the former Pakistani Prime Minister General Parwaiz Musharraf said in an interview, “We support the Taliban to prevent Indian influence in Afghanistan.”

Targeting Indian Consulates, citizens, and projects by the Pakistan-based armed groups such as Lashkar-e-Tayiba and Jaish-e-Mohammad is a testimony of the growing confrontation between the two countries in Afghanistan.

The recently announced strategy of Trump also affected this confrontation. “We oppose India’s economic and trade ties with Afghanistan, and we will never want India’s political and military role in Afghanistan,” said the Pakistani Prime Minister Khaqan Abasi during his visit to the US.

Khaqani’s remarks are, on the one hand, an effort on behalf of Muslim League party to make the Pakistani military happy and, on the other hand, it indicates the “strategic depth” of Pakistan’s colonial policy, which is a direct intervention in the affairs of Afghanistan. Khaqani’s recent remarks also show that Pakistan still pursues its old policy in Afghanistan and sees Afghanistan through its old glasses.

## Creating local army or strengthening militia in the country?!



The Afghan Ministry of Defense has prepared a scheme to form militia forces in the insecure areas of the country. The ministry says that military experts are working on the plan and that it is in its primary phases. This plan will be finalized after the approval of National Council of Security and signature of the President. Although the details about the number of these forces and areas where they will be formed are not clear, it is said that more than 20 thousand people would be recruited in its ranks.

According to the Afghan Ministry of Defense, there is no concern about these militias, and they will play a positive role in securing the insecure areas in the country. However, the Afghan Senate and Human Rights Watch (HRW) have opposed the proposal and have asked the Afghan President to reject it. HRW has termed the formation of this force as “forming militia forces” and has warned of its consequences.

The question is that considering the past experiences, what will be the impacts of using local forces and militias on the security situation in the country?

## The experience of forming militia forces in Afghanistan

Militias, paramilitary or semi-military forces are forces that are formed out of the governmental military's disciplines and organization and are usually formed in rural areas. The main objective behind the creation of such force is to strengthen regular government military and to use them in security and operational plans of the government.

During the reign of Ahmad Shah Baba some Khans and elders of the villages who controlled their areas had militia forces to secure their respective regions. Later during the kingdom of Habibullah Khan, the *Arbaki* forces were created. These forces were armed and guarded their respective regions; however, they had no salary on behalf of the government. During Abdurrahman Khan's rule in Afghanistan, there was a sort of armed forces who were present in the villages and suburb areas and were called the *Dastajat-e-Qabayel* [categories of tribes].

Although during the feudal systems there existed paramilitary forces, after the coup d'état of seven Sawr 1397 [solar year], militia forces came under the supervision of defense and security organs of the country. At that time the objective of creating militia forces was to prevent the opposition groups of the government from penetrating in the suburb areas and villages.<sup>1</sup> However, these militias were not completely committed to the government, and they shifted sides with the change in the regimes. Many of these militia forces were involved in the plundering of people's properties as well as in their persecution and execution.

After the civil war, militia forces still existed in the country. Militias under General Abdul Rashid Dostum's command were accused of killing and crimes against the people in Kabul and Northern provinces. The same militias were also accused of the massacre of war prisoners in 2001-2002.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Habib Ansari, تاریخچهٔ ملیشه‌ها در افغانستان [the history of militias in Afghanistan]: <http://www.afghanqalam.com/?p=625>

<sup>2</sup> The militias of General Dostum: <http://youngdemocrats.blogfa.com/tag/%D8%AC%D9%86%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%84-%D8%AF%D9%88%D8%B3%D8%AA%D9%85-%D8%A8%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%AF-%D9%85%D8%AD%D8%A7%DA%A9%D9%85%D9%87-%D8%B4%D9%88%D8%AF>



About seven years ago, after the intensification and expansion of the war in Afghanistan, David Petraeus came to Afghanistan in 2010 to replace General Mc Crystal as the commander of the international forces in this country. Using the experience in Iraq, Petraeus undertook the program of forming militia forces as a solution to deal with the Taliban issue. The Afghan government approved the scheme under the name of “Afghan Local Police (ALP)”.<sup>3</sup>

Based on a decree issued by Hamid Karzai, these forces were officially created in 2011 under the name of “Afghan Local Police” mostly in the Northern Afghanistan. In 2012, 11 thousand soldiers of these forces were active in 55 districts of the country. Apparently, the main objective of creating these forces was to prevent the armed oppositions of the government from penetrating in the remote areas of the country. Nevertheless, based on the remarks of the human rights activists in the country, these forces were accused of violating human rights. Some experts say that the formation of such forces is the beginning of a tribal and civil war in the country.<sup>4</sup>

The experience of forming local police who are called *Arbaki* in Afghanistan is a bitter experience for Afghans because they were accused of widespread human rights violation as well as persecution of the people.

### **The new scheme of creating local army**

Although the spokesperson of the Afghan Ministry of Defense Dawlat Waziri says that based on the new scheme of “local forces”, these forces are neither local police nor militia, Afghanistan has a disastrous experience with the armed groups and, now, there are concerns that distribution of weapons among civilians would raise new challenges. Based on the new scheme, 20 thousand people will be

<sup>3</sup> The Afghan Independent Commission of Human Rights: research report «از اربکی تا پولیس محلی؛ چالش‌های امروز و نگرانی‌های فردا» [From Arbaki to Local Police; today's challenges and tomorrow's concerns], 1391 solar year:

<sup>4</sup> VOA, [people's reactions against Arbakis and Local Police]: <http://www.darivoa.com/a/afg-arbakies-134499768/1440220.html>

And, Radio Azadi, [Arbakis are involved in human rights violation]:

<http://da.azadiradio.com/a/24326482.html>

armed. Since such a force could increase disorder, plunder, and armed engagements, this proposal sparked various reactions.

Based on the report of the New York Times, the issue was discussed in the capital of India New Delhi among the Afghan and American officials, because India has such military forces as well. The American military believes that the local forces in India have decreased the burden from the shoulders of the Indian military and they say that the local military can play a significant role in their respective regions after the Afghan National Security Forces forced wiped out the oppositions of the Afghan government from these areas.<sup>5</sup>

According to the officials in the Afghan Ministry of Defense, the new forces will be mostly composed of the former members of the Afghan National Army and they will operate under the command of the Afghan National Army and will receive military training and education similar to the soldiers of the Afghan National Army.

As stated by the Afghan military officials, these forces will defend their respective villages and areas as a local army. Nevertheless, the experience of local police was a failed one, and they are accused of violating human rights, murdering, looting, bullying and abusing.

### **The difference between the local army and local police**

One of the arguments in favor of creating local forces is to fill the gap that emerges when after cleansing an area from the armed oppositions of the government, the national army leaves that region. The former commander of NATO forces in Afghanistan, General Petraeus, had created local police for the same reason. It is said that the creation of the local army is also an American scheme but the Afghan Ministry of Defense says that it was raised in this ministry.

Local Police which was formed within the framework of the Ministry of Interior has repeatedly been accused of human rights violation, but the Ministry of

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<sup>5</sup> Radio Azadi, «نیویارک تایمز: روی تشکیل قوای جدید نظامی در افغانستان بحث ادامه دارد.» [New York Times: discussions continues over forming the new military forces in Afghanistan], 24 Sunbola 1396: <https://da.azadiradio.com/a/28737769.html>

Defense says that the 20 thousand soldiers that are about to be employed will all be trained and they will be composed of people who have formerly worked with the Ministry of Defense.

The difference between these forces and the Afghan National Army is that they are deployed to their own villages and regions and do not move from one province to another. It seems that the only difference between these forces and the local police is that the latter operates under the supervision of the Ministry of Defense while the former operated under the Ministry of Interior. There is the probability of violating human rights, persecuting and abuse on behalf of these forces as well.

The formation of the local police or *Arbaki*, however, is an experience that the Afghan government can use to form the new local militias. After the formation of the local police, the Afghan government practically experienced that it is hard to control them.

The formation of the new military forces is a repetition of the experience of local police or *Arbakis*. The question is if the objective is to maintain the security, why the Afghan government does not strengthen and professionalize the Afghan security forces.

## Conclusion

Given the following points, local forces and militias have harmed the process of uniting the nation and securing the country throughout the history and have had an adverse impact on the process of state and nation building in the country:

- These forces have always taken the form of tribal and regional forces and have fought among themselves or have been engaged in tribal and local enmities and have vastly fueled ethnic disputes.
- These militia groups, in remote areas, rather use their facilities and abilities to serve their personal objectives.
- Since they do not receive any particular military training and there is no particular monitoring of their activities, they commit crimes against the

lives, properties, and honor of the people and since the government supports them, it will increase people's hatred from the government.

- Overall, local forces are structures within a structure that is why they have deteriorated the order and security in most of the regions.

The End

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

