



Center for Strategic & Regional Studies Kabul

Weekly Analysis-Issue Number 223 (September 23-30, 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).

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Preface

After the announcement of the new US strategy towards South Asia and Afghanistan in which the role of India has been emphasized upon, debates about US-India partnership and its impacts on the region have raised.

The US Secretary of Defense went to India on 25 September 2017 on a three-day trip, and in the meanwhile, the Afghan Chief Executive also arrived in New Delhi on 28 September for a three-day trip. The impacts of the closing Indian-American ties are analyzed in the first part of the Weekly Analysis of the Center for Strategic and Regional Studies (CSRS).

In the second part of the analysis, you would read about the three-year journey of the NUG. Although within this period the NUG have had some achievements, it has also encountered plenty of challenges. The security, political and economic situations in the country in the past three years are analyzed in the second part of the analysis.

At the last part of the analysis, you would read the report about the academic debate of CSRS under “Trump’s new strategy towards South Asia and Afghanistan; its impacts on peace and the war.”

The US-India partnership and its impacts on the region



The Afghan Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah along with 200 Afghan traders, civil activists, journalists and government officials traveled to India and met the Indian Prime Minister and other high-ranking Indian officials.

The Afghan Chief Executive signed the agreement of training the Afghan police with the Indian officials. Moreover, the two sides also signed an agreement of cooperation in areas of technical and improved training of the Afghan forces.

In the new US strategy towards South Asia and Afghanistan, there is a significant role for India in Afghanistan, and Washington has asked India to increase its investments in Afghanistan that is why India pledged to start 116 projects in 31 provinces of the country.

In the meanwhile, the US Secretary of Defense James Mattis also traveled to India last week and then along with the Secretary-General of NATO came to

Afghanistan on an unexpected trip. After the announcement of the new US strategy, Mattis is the first American senior official that travels to India. During this voyage, the Indian Minister of Defense rejected the rumors about sending Indian troops to Afghanistan and said, “No Indian soldier will step on the Afghan soil.”

Here you would read about the impacts of the close American-India ties and interests.

The Indo-American interests in the region

Since 2000, the US is extending its relations with India in order to prevent the rise of China in South Asia. These relations expanded during the Presidency of Barrack Obama in the US.

India, on the other hand, wants to put aside its traditional policy and join the US bloc because India sees China as a bigger threat than Pakistan.

India and the US, to a greater extent, share many interests in South Asia and particularly in Afghanistan; however, there exist areas where the interests of the two countries stand against each other. The common points are the fighting against extremism, strengthening the Afghan government, and preventing the rise of China. The points of opposition are the Chabahar agreement with Iran, peace talks with the Taliban and their inclusion in the Afghan government.

The Trump administration realizes India’s role in the region and, to a greater extent, believes the strategy and interests of India to be in coordination with that of the US that is why Washington wants to increase India’s role in Afghanistan without considering Pakistan’s concerns.

On the other hand, Pakistan is concerned about Trump's strategy that is why the Pakistani Prime Minister said in the US that India could have economic and trade ties with Afghanistan, but they would never allow India to play political and security role in this country.

Although, after the Congress government in India, the government of Narendra Modi does not care about Pakistan’s sensibility in the affairs of Afghanistan, the

fact that India does not want to deploy troops in Afghanistan means that India takes Pakistan's sensibilities into consideration, and it also means that the US has once again failed to convince India to have military presence in Afghanistan.

The US-India ties

In 2014, the former US President Barrack Obama announced to rebalance Asia. Some Chinese believes this policy to be an effort to encircle China because they say that balancing Asia means to raise India, Japan, and some other countries against China. Due to this policy, the trade and defense ties between India and the US are increasing day after day.

On the other hand, after Narendra Modi came to power in India, the US-India relations have entered a new phase. Since 2014, Modi has visited the US for four times (twice to attend international conferences and twice to officially visit the US). Moreover, in 2016 Obama was invited to India's Republic Day Parade and Obama was the first US President to attend this ceremony in the history. During his tenure, Obama had traveled to India twice.

One new phase of regional politics started at the time when the Indian Minister of Defense Manohar Parrikar visited the US and met his American counterpart, Ashton Carter. It was the second trip of Indian Minister of Defense to the US and his sixth meeting with the US Secretary of Defense in 2016. In the recent meeting, the two sides signed the controversial military-logistic agreement which faced opposition within India. Based on this agreement, the two countries would use each other's soil, water, and air in case it was needed, yet to calm voices raised in India, the US Secretary of Defense said in a press conference, "The agreement does not mean that we would have military bases on each other's soils."

Relations between the two countries have further expanded in Trump's Presidency. In fact, the ties between Washington and New Delhi are now taking the form of a coalition which would mainly threaten China and Pakistan.

The situation in Afghanistan in the past three years of the NUG



Three years ago after a controversial election, the Then-US Secretary of State John Kerry came to Afghanistan and brokered a deal between the two leading candidates according to which the two sides agreed to split power by 50-50 among themselves and Ashraf Ghani was announced as the Afghan President and Dr. Abdullah Abdullah as the Chief Executive. Hence, the National Unity Government (NUG) was formed, and the post-election crisis ended.

Here we have briefly evaluated the security, economic and political situation in the country in the past three years.

The Security Situation

After the formation of the NUG, besides deterioration of the security situation in the country, the geography of war also shifted from the South of the country to the North, and unlike the past, the war in Northern provinces began to intensify. Besides the collapse of several districts in the Northern provinces of the country, Kunduz city also fell into the hands of the Taliban.

In 2015, from 398 districts in the country, 31 were under the control of the Taliban, in 36 other districts the Taliban controlled the suburbs and the government controlled only the centers of the districts, according to the report of the “Long War Journal” released in October 2015. According to SIGAR’s report, in 2016, 33 districts in 16 provinces of the country were under the control or influence of the Taliban, and in many others, the war continued. The report also added that only about 63.4% of the Afghan territory was under the control of the Afghan government. Hence, in 2016 the armed opposition of the government-controlled almost one-third of the country.

On the other hand, the increase in the civilian casualties was concerning as well. UNAMA had reported that between 1 January and 30 December 2015, there were 11002 civilian casualties in Afghanistan which showed an increase compared to 2009 and 2014. Moreover, based on the report of UNAMA, in the first six months of the current year (2017), 1662 Afghan civilians were killed in the armed engagements between the various parties of the war and explosions and 3581 civilians were injured while within the same period in 2016, 1601 civilians were killed, and 3565 others were wounded.

Besides the high number of civilian casualties, the casualties of the Afghan security forces are also on the rise after the formation of the NUG. According to the report of SIGAR, 5000 Afghan soldiers are killed, and 15 thousand others are injured in the war against the government’s armed opposition in 2015. However, the statistics of 2016 by the same organization shows that between 1 January and 12 November 2016, 6785 Afghan soldiers are killed, and 11777 others are injured. However, the death toll of the Afghan forces in the current year is on the rise. The recent report of SIGAR writes that only from the 1 January to 8 May 2017, 2531 Afghan soldiers are killed, and 4238 others are wounded.

The deadly airstrikes of the foreign forces have also cost the lives of Afghan civilians and sometimes even the lives of the Afghan forces while the Afghan government remained silent against these attacks.

On the other hand, within this period, the activities of the ISIL in the Eastern Afghanistan was another challenge that the Afghan security forces had to deal

with. ISIL had started a war on two fronts against both the Afghan government and the Taliban. Despite efforts by the Taliban and the Afghan government, ISIL not only was not suppressed but extended its influence in the other provinces of the country and carried out several bloody attacks and explosions in the country. Although the Khurasan branch of ISIL, which operates in Afghanistan, was weakened to some extent, the attacks carried out by this group in 2016 showed that it is a group to be reckoned with in Afghanistan. The bloodiest attack by this group was the explosion that hit the demonstrators of the “Enlightenment Movement” in Dehmazang area of Kabul which killed and injured about 400 people. The ISIL fighters continued their fight during 2017. The most deadly attack by this group in 2017 was the explosion in the parking of the Supreme Court of Afghanistan on 7 February which left 21 killed and 41 wounded.

Peace Talks

In its first days of formation, the NUG activated its foreign policy in order to secure peace in the country. The Afghan President Ashraf Ghani went to Saudi Arabia, China, and Pakistan aiming to start peace talks with the armed oppositions of the Afghan government. As a result of these efforts, a meeting on the Afghan peace process was held in Urumqi in China, but this meeting did not result in specific outcomes. Later in Murree a touristic area near Islamabad, the first face to face talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban took place.

The Murree talks came to a halt after the disclosure of the death of Mullah Muhammad Omar, and after that, the Afghan-Pak relations were deteriorated for the first time after the formation of NUG. After months of tensions in the Kabul-Islamabad relations; due to the joint efforts of the regional countries and the United Nations once again the relations between the two countries improved and as a result, the Quadrilateral Peace talks between the US, China, Pakistan and Afghanistan began. However, these talks did not produce any desirable outcomes either.

The peace efforts reached a stalemate when the Afghan government undertook vast operations to push back the Taliban and used threatening rhetoric against

them instead of an efficient peace strategy. Nevertheless, in this regard, the peace deal with Hizb-e-Islami was an achievement for the Afghan government.

Currently, there is not much hope to reach peace in the country and in the new US strategy towards Afghanistan more focus is on the fight against the Taliban, a policy that has been a failure in the past one and half decade.

Internal divisions

The 50-50 division of power raised oppositions between the two leaders of the country since ever the beginning, and these oppositions reached its heights when the Afghan Chief Executive publicly criticized the President about his deeds after two years of the formation of the NUG, and when he claimed that the NUG agreement was not implemented properly.

On the other hand, tensions between the President and the First Vice President were another wave of internal disputes. At the beginning of 1395, General Dostum fiercely criticized President Ghani saying that Ghani has not given him his proper share in the government. He also accused the president of nepotism.

While internal disputes were continuing, the case of Ahmad Ishchi came forward and made these disputes even deeper. General Dostum who was now accused of sexual assault on Ishchi formed the coalition for the Salvation of Afghanistan along with Jamiat-e-Islami and Hezb-e-Wahdat in Ankara city of Turkey.

In the meanwhile, General Dostum's airplane was prevented from landing in Mazar-e-Sharif airport which in turn fueled the internal disputes. Currently, it seems that the Coalition for the Salvation of Afghanistan is about to get dismantled because Abdullah Abdullah had traveled to Mazar-e-Sharif and it is said that he aims to settle the disputes between Atta Mohammad Noor and the Central Government.

Overall, disputes among the leaders of the NUG consistently existed which was being settled after a while with the mediation of either individuals from within the country or some foreigners.

Foreign Policy

During the three years of the NUG, Foreign Policy was one of the areas in which the NUG had some achievements. The NUG succeeded to attract international aid through its foreign policy. The Afghan government presented its scheme for reforms in London Conference 2014, which were warmly welcomed by the international community and 59 countries pledged to support Afghanistan. The Afghan government attracted the support of NATO and European countries as well.

Moreover, the NUG have had achievements in areas of regional integration as well. The TAPI project, CASA-1000 and the agreement that give Afghanistan a part in “one belt, one road” were the most important achievements in this regard.

The Afghan government also signed trade and transit agreements such as the agreement of Chabahar port between Afghanistan, Iran, and India in Jawza 1395 [solar month and year]. Moreover, using railway, trade between China and Afghanistan through Tajikistan and Kazakhstan also commenced.

Also, NUG made some efforts to attract military aids from China, India, and Russia and in this regard, China and India even extended some contributions as well.

Economic Situation

During the NUG’s tenure, some infrastructural projects were completed and inaugurated. One of these projects was the Salma Dam which was built by India in Herat Province. Moreover, the agreement to expand the Kajaki Dam and the installation of four additional turbines in this dam, the agreement to build the Bakhshabad Dam in Farah Province, the Kamal Khan Dam and agreements to construct many small and big dams were other achievements of the NUG.

On the other hand, the increase in the revenues of the NUG is also noteworthy, which was due to some steps by the Afghan government. For instance, taxing the communication networks’ credit played a role in increasing the incomes of the government and last year the Afghan government for the first time in the past several years collected more revenues than it had estimated.

Despite all these developments and activities, the Afghan economy is deteriorating compared to the past one and half decade. The value of Afghani is fallen, unemployment has increased, the country is facing the capital flee, and the country's economic growth is dropping. That is why hundred thousands of Afghans took dangerous paths towards Europe. In addition, corruption was not eradicated which besides the people it also encountered the NUG with many challenges.

Academic debate: Trump's policy for Afghanistan and South Asia; its impacts on peace and the war



The US President Donald Trump announced the US policy towards Afghanistan and the South Asia after an eight-month delay on August 22. Many proposals were offered during this eight-month including the proposal of complete withdrawal from Afghanistan and the privatization of the war.

In its new policy, the US decided to continue the war and dispatch new soldiers in Afghanistan. At the regional level, in this policy, Trump utilized harsh rhetoric against Pakistan and emphasized on increasing the role of India in Afghanistan.

Since the long-term presence of the US in Afghanistan and the US strategy in this country have a significant impact on the current and future situation in Afghanistan, the Center for Strategic and Regional Studies (CSRS), in the follow-up of its series of academic debates, discussed this issue on 26 September 2017. The meeting was held in the central office of CSRS where dozens of academic personalities had participated.

Head of the Peaceful Revolution of Afghanistan and politician Dr. Faruq Azam, member of the Parliament and head of the Khatam-u-Nabiyeen University and lecturer of political science Dr. Abdul Qayum Sajadi, lecturer in Kabul University

Asadullah Wahidi and the General Director of the CSRS Dr. Abdul Baqi Amin delivered their speeches regarding the various aspects of the issue.

The first speaker Dr. Faroq Azam delivered his speech about the impacts of the new US strategy for peace and the war in Afghanistan. Mr. Azam said, “Trump has inherited this war from his predecessor Barack Obama. When in 2009 the situation got intense, Obama consulted his administration, and they advised him that since the Taliban were part of the Afghan nation, it could not be eliminated but could be weakened. Therefore, Obama sent 30 thousand new soldiers in Afghanistan, raising the total number of NATO and US forces in Afghanistan to 150 thousand troops. Obama had told his generals that if the fate of the war was not decided within three years, he would withdraw from Afghanistan. When Obama decided to pull out his forces from Afghanistan, he forgot about the political reconciliation. Hence, Obama handed over the responsibility of the war in a vague status to President Trump.”

According to Mr. Azam, since Trump is a businessman, he has always opposed the Afghan war and has termed this war as a senseless war and has always criticized the US expenditures in Afghanistan. Finally, two months earlier on July 19, Trump discussed the issue of Afghanistan in details, and at the end, he decided to remain in Afghanistan which he announced in the framework of his new strategy on August 22, 2017.

Mr. Azam says that the US believes that it cannot defeat the Taliban but can weaken them and that therefore, it should be discussed whether how much could they be weakened. Therefore, based on the new strategy, the US will deploy some troops in order to enhance the morale of the Afghan armed forces.

Mr. Azam said that the Americans had a consensus to remain in Afghanistan, but they wanted such a government in this country that did not oppose their plans and policies.

Azam said, “The Americans would point their fingers towards Pakistan before this as well, but Trump only revealed it. Another element that was not raised before was India, and Trump said that now they would not observe Pakistan’s sensibility towards India.”

“Although Pakistan needs the US, it could also put pressure on this country. If the US wanted to implement the ISIL project in Afghanistan or if it wanted to extend its influence in the Central Asia and as long as it has a military presence in Afghanistan, the US needs Pakistan. All the military supplies of the US soldiers in Afghanistan is through Pakistan. On the other hand, Pakistan can form a threatening coalition with Russia, China, Iran and some other countries and has the opportunity to maneuver,” said Mr. Azam.

In regards to the peace talks, if the Afghan government sincerely wants to resolve the crisis, there is a relative opportunity because for the first time an American President (Trump) reiterated on the necessity of peace and security in the region. However, the most important issue is that how can we use this point for our benefit.

“The Afghan government can talk to the Taliban directly. If the Afghan government says that the Taliban are divided among themselves and that they are puppets, I say it is not a solution because the Taliban would also say that the Afghan government is a puppet. On the other hand, I believe that the Taliban are the most orderly group in the history of guerrilla wars; therefore, it is possible to launch direct talks with them. Nevertheless, the issue is how to resolve the situation. Otherwise, everyone knows who supports who,” added Mr. Azam.

The second speaker of the meeting Dr. Abdul Qayum Sajadi spoke about the internal and regional impacts of Trump’s strategy. He said, “The main axis of the new US strategy is its national interests. The first point in this regard is to maintain the US supremacy in the world. The second is US’s control over the economic wealth of the world. The third is making trouble for its international rivals. The fourth is the safety of the Americans. Moreover, it has other aspects such as defending democracy and human rights, which are the nicest parts but never their priorities.”

He said that Trump’s strategy could be described in a triangle in which the first side is the international interests of the US, the second side is its regional interests, and the third side is the interests of the US in Afghanistan.

Making trouble for China, Russia, Iran and some other countries that could threaten the US interests internationally is one of the main interests of the US so that the US could control these countries. In US's regional interest, its control over Afghanistan is very important because Afghanistan is the crossroad between the Middle East, South Asia, and Central Asia, the key energy-rich region in the world. It was for the same reason that even during the Taliban regime, international companies of energy such as Unocal and Bidas was active here.

The US's interests in Afghanistan, however, is what they call achievements which are the Afghan constitution, reconstruction, education, etc. They do not want these achievements to be threatened so that they could convince the American tax-payers; however, they mainly work for their major goals and interests.

"In the new US strategy, one noteworthy point is that the date of the withdrawal of the US troops from Afghanistan is not specified. Trump said that the US would determine based on the analyzing of the situation and not based on a specified date. That is why, I think as long as we do not struggle for ourselves and as long as there is not a political consensus among us, we cannot get out of the current crisis," he said.

The third speaker Assadullah Wahidi delivered his speech about the differences between the old and the new US strategy in Afghanistan. "We can better analyze a strategy only when we know the objectives of that particular strategy. The thought that the US is here to fight "terrorism" is now ridiculed by everyone because now it is clear that the US would have come to this region even if the 9/11 incident had not occurred," he said.

Mr. Wahidi said that since 2001 all the focus had been on the war and genuine peace had been ignored and that Afghans were just amused with the surficial peace. In the meanwhile, in this period the circumstances were kept in a way that led to a weak government in Afghanistan that could not make deals on its own.

According to Mr. Wahidi, several points have been stressed upon in the new US Trump. First was nation-building in Afghanistan which Trump explicitly said he would not address it because the Americans believe that if the Afghan

government was strong enough, it could end the war which is not in the interest of the US. On the other hand, nation building requires time and expenditures.

Second, comes the issue of control. Until 2012, the US did not see the Taliban as a threat. However, when Russia got involved in Afghanistan and threatened them, Trump said that the Taliban were the US's enemy and that they would eliminate them. That is why Mullah Akhtar Mohammad Mansor was targeted. Akhtar was coming from Iran, and by killing him, the US tried to cut the relations between the Taliban and Iran and Russia. Therefore, the Americans want the continuation of the war, but they want to have it under control.

The third was the issue of the military bases in Afghanistan which they wanted for controlling the war in this country. Fourth is the issue of India. Emphasizing on India in his speeches, Trump was not trying to urge Pakistan to help the process of peace and stability in Afghanistan, but rather it was to deal with China.

"Overall, no fundamental change is brought in the new strategy. It has only entered a new phase. The main policy of the US is the war and game of intelligence. That is why recently violence is accelerated. For instance, sometimes the Americans bomb wedding ceremonies, sometimes they carry out airstrikes on death ceremonies, and sometimes they explode some other gatherings of civilians," Wahidi said.

The fourth speaker of the meeting the General Director of CSRS Dr. Abdul Baqi Amin spoke about what Afghans should do in the current circumstances. Mr. Amin said that the Afghans must consider the following three points in order to serve their interests. First, struggle to end the war. Second, efforts to become self-sufficient because when a government does not have financial independence, it cannot have its own complete free will. The third is the need to a coordinated and stable government in Afghanistan.

He said that the US, to a greater part, had trade agendas in Afghanistan which the government did not know about and that the wealth of Afghanistan was being looted. He said that it was the obligation of the government to control the properties of the US in Afghanistan.

Moreover, Amin says that Afghanistan must keep the balance in its relations with neighboring countries and that that is why he thinks the current approaching to India is not in the best interests of the country.

“The Afghan public also bears a responsibility in the current critical situation in the country, and they must hold some steps to save themselves and their countries because now is a time that even the Afghan Parliament is involved in the activities of the mafia as well as in corruption. If Afghans are waiting for foreigners to end the war, they are making a mistake because the war will not stop as long as the parties of the war are not pressurized,” he said, “we still need a strong and sincere mediator to mediate among the different parties of the war.”

At the end of the meeting, the participants asked their questions from the members of the panel.

The End

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

