



## Center for Strategic & Regional Studies

Kabul

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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

Indonesia is the most populated Islamic country that has 63 years of political relations with Afghanistan. Since the past one year, the National Unity Government (NUG) has undertaken some efforts to attract Indonesia's support in the Afghan Peace process. Last week, the Indonesian President visited Kabul, where he promised cooperation in the Afghan peace process.

Indonesia is a country that was not involved in Afghanistan in the past several decades but now this country is also showing interest in resolving the Afghan issue. From which phases have the ties between the two countries passed? What is the role of this country in the Afghan peace process? These are the questions that 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 recent political and security instability in the country. Although the NUG faced internal disputes even from the beginning, in the past one and a half month, the political disagreements over the governance of Balkh have raised concerns. In the meanwhile, the security situation in Kabul is also deteriorated and fear is spread among people after several attacks and explosions in this city. To which direction is the security situation in the country headed is a question analyzed in the second part of the analysis.

## A review of the bilateral ties between Afghanistan and Indonesia



The Indonesian President Joko Widodo, along with a high ranking Indonesian officials visited Kabul last week. In his meetings with the Afghan officials, the Indonesian President discussed about expanding and strengthening the relations between the two countries. In a joint conference with the Afghan President, President Widodo said that in addition to the peace process, Indonesia was ready to cooperate with Afghanistan in other areas as well.

This trip is part of President Widodo's trips to the Asian countries. A few days earlier, he had visited Pakistan, where he met his Pakistani counterpart Mamnoon Hussain and proposed the formation of a joint committee of Afghan, Pakistani, and Indonesian Ulama so that peace could be maintained in Afghanistan.

All these come at a time that the insecurities in Afghanistan are escalating and only in the past two weeks, three bloody attacks were carried out in Kabul city, which left more than 400 killed and injured.

Here you would read about the bilateral relations between Afghanistan and Indonesia, the recent trip of the Indonesian President to Kabul, and this country's role in the Afghan peace process.

## **The Kabul-Jakarta bilateral relations**

Relations between Afghanistan and Indonesia dates back to about half a century ago. Afghanistan was one of the first countries that recognized Indonesia in 1949, after the end of the Indonesian revolution. The diplomatic relations between the two countries officially started in 1954. In this year, the Afghan Embassy in Jakarta was opened and one year later a Friendship Agreement was signed between the two countries on 24 April 1955. Sukarno was the first Indonesian President to visit Afghanistan (1961).

During the Cold War, the two countries continued to have good relations, the main reason behind which was the beginning of the Non-Alignment movement, in which both Afghanistan and Indonesia were members. When Afghanistan was occupied by the Soviet Union (1979-1989), as a reaction, Indonesia did not participate in 1980 Olympic Games, held in Russia. In addition, the Indonesian Muslims provided many contributions to the Afghan Mujahedin. Nonetheless, After the Afghan Jihad and during the civil war in the country, relations between Kabul and Jakarta began to deteriorate.

After the collapse of the Taliban regime, the ties between the two countries improved once again, and this country supported the Afghan government and people in various areas. During his second term as the Afghan President, Hamid Karzai traveled to Indonesia in November 2012. In this trip, in addition to participating in the fifth Bali Democracy Forum (BDF), the Afghan President also signed two agreements with the Indonesian officials, one of which paved the way for the political, trade, and cultural cooperation between the two countries and the other approved visa free travels for those who had political passports as well as bilateral services and consultations.

After the formation of the National Unity Government (NUG), these relations improved even more. On 5 April 2017, the Afghan President Ashraf Ghani visited Jakarta, where he was warmly welcomed by his Indonesian counterpart. In this trip, six agreements of cooperation in areas of education, agriculture, statistics, reforms and civil services, science, and technology was signed. During his meeting with the Afghan President, the Indonesian President showed preparedness for

any kind of cooperation in the Afghan peace process and announced 100 educational scholarships for Afghan students. After this trip of President Ghani, the Indonesian Minister of Foreign Affairs came to Kabul and met the Afghan officials. However, despite all these, trade between these two countries have not expanded and still the value of trade between Kabul and Jakarta is only \$16m a year.

### **The recent trip of Widodo to Kabul and Islamabad**

Widodo visits Kabul and Islamabad at a time that on the one hand, tensions between Pakistan and Afghanistan have escalated and, on the other hand, the Afghan peace process is in a deadlock, due to these tenuous relations.

One week ago (26 January 2018), President Widodo visited Pakistan and in his meeting with the Pakistani officials discussed the regional issues, the situation in Afghanistan, and ending the war in Afghanistan. During this trip, the Pakistani officials accepted Indonesia's proposal about establishing a joint committee of the Ulema of the three countries. However, while the Afghan High Peace Council (HPC) welcomed this proposal, the Afghan government is yet to comment about it.

During his visit to Kabul, the Indonesian President reiterated on the cooperation of his respective country in the Afghan peace process. Another importance of Widodo's visit to Afghanistan is also because it is the second time since 1961 that an Indonesian President visits Afghanistan.

In the meeting between the Afghan and Indonesian Presidents, President Ghani called Indonesia as the most populated and the largest Islamic country and said that this country was one of the important Asian economic powers and that its role among the Islamic countries was unique.

## Indonesia's role in the Afghan Peace Process

The NUG's peace strategy is rather foreign policy centered. Many travels were done and meetings were held in this regard. However, none of these efforts have entailed any desiring and tangible outcomes.

Among the five circles of the Afghan President's foreign policy, Indonesia is located in the second (the Islamic countries). During the NUG, the Kabul-Jakarta ties improved more than ever and the NUG seeks to attract Indonesia's support in the Afghan peace process. That is why, two months ago, after President Ghani's travel to Indonesia, Head of HPC Mohammad Karim Khalili and some members of this council visited Jakarta and during this trip, the Indonesian President Joko Widodo assured the Afghan delegation that his respective country will take part in the efforts towards maintaining peace in Afghanistan.

Although Indonesia have a similar experience of the war and instability as Afghanistan and, therefore, can help Afghanistan in areas of peace and stability, due to the following reasons, this country's cooperation in the peace process will not have a major impact in the Afghan peace process:

**First;** the current war in Afghanistan was started by the US and NATO in 2001 apparently to suppress the Al-Qaeda Network and the Taliban. Nevertheless, the US was pursuing its long-term goals in the region. According to the analysis of the some analysts, the US's goal in the region is to encircle its rivals, Russia and China. Therefore, the Afghan war has foreign factors behind it and it will continue as long as foreigners are present in Afghanistan.

**Second;** after dozens of years of war in Indonesia, this country achieved peace through negotiations and political agreement and not through war and military force. Therefore, the only way to end the war in Afghanistan is also the intra-Afghan reconciliation; whereas, the US and Afghan strategy in Afghanistan is based on war and military option, as recently the peace talks were boycotted first by the US and then by the Afghan government.

**Third;** Afghanistan's effort to attract Indonesia's support in the Afghan peace process, pressure on Pakistan, and holding a meeting of the Ulemas of the three countries to issue a Fatwa against the war in Afghanistan are at a time that on the one hand, the Indonesian Ulema do not have an influence over the Afghan government's armed opposition and on the other hand, it does not seem likely through such Fatwas and condemnations the Afghan war will end. Moreover, the Afghan government is not engaged only with the Taliban; as based on the remarks of the Afghan President, many groups fight in Afghanistan, which indicates the complication of the war in Afghanistan.

## To which direction is the country's political and security situation headed?



The political tensions over the governance of Balkh Province and the recent consecutive security incidents in the country have increased concerns about the security and political instability in the country.

Even though due to the issue of the governance in Balkh no security incident has occurred yet, such issues increase concern about the security and stability as first the US Ambassador and then the White House commented on this issue.

It is at a time that the deterioration of the security situation in the country has increased the concerns of the Afghan public, as only in the past two weeks the capital of the country witnessed several attacks and explosions, leaving hundreds killed and injured.

To which direction is the security and political situation in the country headed? What are the factors behind the current situation? Will the National Unity Government (NUG) be able to control the situation? These are the questions that are answered here.



## The current political tensions

In the past one and half decade and particularly in the past three years of the NUG's term, the country's political scene was tenuous and full of disagreements; however, these disagreement have taken a new color and it seems that the government is weakening against some power circles.

When the Presidential Palace assigned a new governor for Balkh province and the former governor of Balkh province Atta Mohammad Noor resisted against this decision, for the first time, a local official was challenging the central government. Atta organized several gatherings of his supporters and threatened the government. Nevertheless, the Presidential Palace is yet to respond to the remarks of Atta.

After the prolongation of these disputes, the US Vice President Mike Pence talked with President Ghani through a phone call, later the US Ambassador to Afghanistan commented in this regard and then the White House also cleared its stance through issuing a statement. Moreover, the former US envoy to the UN, Afghanistan, and Iraq and a man close the US president Zalmay Khalilzad also made remarks against Noor during an interview, something that apparently shows the US support from the NUG against Mr. Noor. Nevertheless, in this regard, there exist two analysis:

**First;** as the international community and particularly the US is concerned about the power circles out of the government in Afghanistan because other international players are getting more and more engaged in the Afghan issues, the US's long-term interests in the region are threatened.

**Second;** as same as the 2014 electoral crisis followed with the formation of the NUG, the current situation is a new scenario. Thus, the Afghan crisis find new aspects and the international players are seeking their interests in deepening this crisis.

## Security instability

Besides the political instabilities, the security situation in the country is also worsening on a daily basis. The bloody incidents in Kabul in the past two weeks have resulted in shifting people's attention from the political disagreements to the insecurity in the country. The attack on the Intercontinental Hotel and then the bloody explosion on the Sadarat Road killed approximately 150 and injured more than 250. These attacks inflicted heavy casualties to the Afghan civilians.

Although apparently the Taliban's recent attacks put a major impact on the peace process and first the US and then the Afghan government boycotted the peace talks with the Taliban, from the US's policy towards Afghanistan before the attack it was clear that the war strategy was undertaken and there existed concerns that 2018 would be bloody for Afghans.

After the bloody attacks in Kabul, a statement released by the Taliban show that this group was neglected in the political scene and particularly in the areas of the reconciliation and through making remarks about the presence of other military groups in Afghanistan, the Afghan government was trying to undermine the Taliban's military threat and that was why the Taliban wanted to put pressures through these attacks. However, the recent attacks in Kabul had very negative effects on the Taliban.

Overall, the basic problem is undertaking the war strategy instead of peace that has led to all these troubles. Even until now, in the peace process, the Afghan government have spent all its energy on pressurizing Pakistan so that this country should bring the Taliban to the negotiation table; however, it seems that Pakistan neither wants nor can do it.

The US's war-centered strategy have also resulted to the concern and fear of the regional powers from the US's presence in Afghanistan and, hence, to their support of the government's oppositions, something that further reduces the probability of peace and reconciliation in the future.

## Conclusion

Currently, it seems that the government will continue to ignore political disagreements; however, it will end the problem raised on the governance of the Balkh province. Still the settlement of tensions between the government and the Balkh's governor will be a major issue for the NUG.

Overall, it seems less likely that the issue of Balkh province will result to violence. However, concerns exist about prolongation of the issue and the prolongation of the issue will increase the probability of the analysis about international players' involvement in the issue.

The country's security situation is, to a large extent, relevant to the US and the Afghan government's peace and war strategy against the Taliban. Currently, it seems that all parties, including the US, the Afghan government, and the Taliban will focus on war, which will further intensify the situation. The increase in the security instabilities will pave the way for the political opponents to increase pressures over the government and will directly result in increasing political differences.

The End

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

