



## Center for Strategic & Regional Studies

Kabul

### **Weekly Analysis**-Issue Number 242 (Feb 24-March 3, 2018)

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

In the second meeting of Kabul Process, the Afghan government made unprecedented recommendations for the Taliban to start the peace talks, which, once again, revived hopes for the success of the peace process.

In this meeting; where the representatives of the US, Russia, China, United Kingdom, Germany, India, Pakistan, Iran, Indonesia and some other countries and international organizations had participated; President Ghani called on the international community to support the Afghan government's stance. The Afghan government's this stance was highly reflected in both national and international media and all Afghans highly welcomed it. However, the Taliban are yet to announce their stance in this regard. Overall, an evaluation of Kabul Process and the hopes and concerns about the beginning of the peace process are brought in the first part of the Weekly Analysis.

In the second part of the analysis, you would read about Afghanistan's ranking among the most corrupt countries in the world. In its 2017 report, the Transparency International has ranked Afghanistan as the fourth most corrupt country in the world and has termed the ongoing fight against corruption in this country as a failure. Corruption is one of the major challenges for Afghanistan, which the NUG has started a serious fight against it at first. The NUG's anti-corruption policy and its three years of performance in this regard and possible solutions are issues that are analyzed in the second part of the Weekly Analysis of the Center for Strategic and Regional Studies.

## Kabul Process; will the face to face talks start?



The second meeting of the Kabul Process was held on 28 February 2018 in Kabul, where the representatives of 25 countries and 3 international organizations had participated. Making several specific recommendations to the Taliban, President Ghani announced the new peace policy of the government, which was highly reflected in the national and international media.

The new recommendation of the government enlightens the peace strategy of the government to the Taliban and most importantly, the government is ready to conduct peace talks with the Taliban without any preconditions. Before this, the Afghan government's call on the Taliban to join the peace process was always like demanding their surrender; however, the current stance of the President is unprecedented comparing to the past 17 years even though his new stance is not clear about the presence of the foreign forces in the country.

The second meeting of Kabul Process and such an unprecedented recommendation by the Afghan President in this meeting is at a time that several days ago, the Taliban had demanded from Washington, for a second time, to settle the issue of Afghanistan through peace talks with this group.

The difference between the first and second meetings of Kabul Process, the Afghan government's recommendations to start peace negotiations with the Taliban, the change in the government's peace strategy and the Taliban's probable stance regarding the new strategy of the government are issues that will be analyzed here.

### **The difference between the first and second meetings of Kabul Process**

The first meeting of Kabul Process was held at a time that on the one hand the Quadrilateral Talks had failed and on the other hand a trilateral meeting regarding Afghanistan was held in Moscow without the invitation of the Afghan government, which provoked the Afghan government's concern and harsh reaction. That is why the Afghan government started the Kabul Process and thus took the initiative and management of the peace talks.

In the first meeting, efforts were made to reach a regional and international consensus over an Afghan-led peace process as well as some peace recommendations were made, something which was different in the second meeting. In the second meeting, as a last chance for peace to the Taliban, the Afghan government, to a great extent, softened its position and suggested peace talks with the Taliban without any preconditions.

This time the High Peace Council (HPC) had also undertaken some efforts to prepare the mentality of public for the second meeting of Kabul process. Last month when after the bloody explosions in Kabul city, Washington and Kabul boycotted the peace process, head of HPC Mohammad Karim Khalili criticized the government's stance and insisted that all Afghans had a consensus regarding making peace and that some circles were sabotaging this process, misusing the situation.

## **The change in the peace policy of the government**

Between 2001 and 2013, the Afghan government's peace process, to a larger extent, was to disarm the armed groups or to join the government in the peace process and there existed no efficient and constructive plan in this regard.

After the formation of the National Unity Government (NUG), peace became one of the most important elements of the Afghan foreign policy and efforts were made through this window; however, in the first three years, the peace initiatives were not at the hands of the Afghan government. Besides that, the Afghan government was conducting peace talks with those groups of the Taliban who laid down their arms.

With the beginning of the Kabul Process, the NUG took the initiative of the peace talks in its own hand and in its first meeting, it focused on forming a regional and international consensus over the Afghan peace process. The second meeting of Kabul process made it clear that the Afghan government is undertaking all possible efforts to encourage the Taliban to bring change in their stance and prepare them for conducting peace talks with the Afghan government without the mediations of the other countries.

In this meeting, such a softness in areas of the peace talks with the Taliban was shown on behalf of the government that was unprecedented since 2001. For the first time, President Ghani made clear and specific recommendations to the Taliban.

## **The government's recommendations to the Taliban**

In the second meeting of Kabul Process, President Ghani presented the Taliban with seven recommendations as a plan for peace talks, which he said will be presented through negotiations, approval, and implementation:

**First;** a political framework must be developed for peace: there must be a ceasefire, the Taliban must be recognized as a political party, efforts must be made to build trust, and the way must be paved for just and free elections;

**Second;** a legal framework must be developed for peace: if demanded, the constitution must be amended through the legal process predicted in the constitution and legal ways must be sought to release prisoners and delist the Taliban from the various sanction lists;

**Third;** the Afghan government must be recognized, the rule of law must be respected, the way must be paved for reforms, and steps must be held for balanced development and the return of the Afghan refugees to the country;

**Fourth;** plans must be developed for the security of all Afghans, particularly the security of the Taliban;

**Fifth;** programs must be executed for economic and social developments and a place must be considered for former fighters and migrants in the national programs;

**Sixth;** the support and cooperation of the international community must be attracted for peace, particularly in areas of deciding the fate of foreign fighters and removing the names of those who have joined the peace process;

**Seventh;** through a comprehensive and implementable framework, short-term and long-term conditions and goals must be set and an effective mechanism must be formed to monitor and evaluate development in all these areas.

According to the President, in all the areas mentioned above, the Taliban's opinions and recommendations will be considered and they will agree on an agreeable agenda for negotiations, which will be the first phase, the negotiations phase.

"The NUG agrees with opening the office of the Taliban, issuing passports and free travel for them, contributing in removing the sanctions, paving the way for them to have access to the media, and the resettling their families," President Ghani said.

The Afghan President said that on the one hand, Afghans supported the peace process and were tired of war and on the other hand, the international community also insisted on peace and that, currently, a regional consensus was formed about the Afghan peace process.

In the meanwhile, the President also tried to remove some obstacles. About the women rights, which is always raised by some circles as an obstacle, the President said in the meeting that the women would actively take part in this process and their rights will not be breached.

### **The Taliban's reaction**

Until these lines are being written, the Taliban have not announced their formal stance regarding the recent position of President Ghani. However, from a political piece published on their webpage, one can conclude their indirect stance. In this article, although the recent remarks of President Ghani is praised and his tune is presumed peaceful, the government's silence about the presence of the foreign forces in the country is said to be a shortcoming of the new peace policy because, it has added, the Taliban fight to end the foreigners' presence in the country, not for political positions.

Besides that, in response to an open letter of an American Diplomat Barrent Robin, the Taliban had said that the government wanted the Taliban's surrender from this group. Nevertheless, this is not the Taliban's formal response and the Taliban may soon announce their stance regarding the recent scheme of President Ghani.

The precondition of the full withdrawal of the foreign forces for starting the peace talks and the issue of American and NATO forces' pulling out without any agreement can have similar consequence as the withdrawal of the Soviets from Afghanistan and, on the other hand, it was hard for the government to make any public remarks about the presence of the foreign forces in the country at present time. Therefore, the Taliban may realize the situation and at least the Taliban's stance will not be negative, as was always the case in the past. Nevertheless, if the Taliban showed a complete negative response, it will completely kill any hopes left for peace.

On the one hand, the Taliban have suggested direct talks with the US and have called the Afghan government to be without any real authority; on the other hand, while presenting the new peace policy, President Ghani said that the new

policy must not be presumed as the weakness of the government and begging for peace but rather the nation's demand. Thus, both parties want to enter the peace process from a position of strength, something that has faced the process with obstacles this far.

It seems that ignoring the Afghan government in the peace process, the Taliban will be making the same mistake that was made during the 2001 Bonn Conference because the Afghan government cannot be expelled from these negotiations. Therefore, it will be very good for all parties, if the Taliban accept the government's recommendations. Nonetheless, these negotiations must become quadrilateral and the US and one powerful guarantor must also be added to the negotiating parties. But if the US, once again, avoided entering this process, it will fail the peace process to a great extent.



## Evaluation of the NUG's struggle against corruption



In its annual report, released last week, Transparency International has once again announced Afghanistan among the most corrupt countries in the world. Based on the report, gaining 15 scores, Afghanistan is the fourth most corrupt country among 180 countries after Somalia, South Sudan, and Syria. The report shows that compared to 2016, Afghanistan has performed less in areas of fighting corruption because Afghanistan was the eight most corrupt country in 2016.

In response to this report, the Integrity Watch Afghanistan (IWA) has said that it meant that the National Unity Government is not willing to fight corruption.

What is the NUG's strategy to fight corruption? How was the past three years of NUG in areas of eradicating corruption? What was the condition of the fight against corruption in 2017? What is necessary to be done to eliminate this phenomenon? These and other similar questions are answered here.

## **NUG's policy**

Both of the NUG's leaders were saying during their electoral campaigns that fighting against corruption were from their most important priorities. President Ghani even has a particular discussion in this regard in his electoral charter.

The NUG's anti-corruption policy mostly circles around establishing organizations, developing strategies and making laws. The NUG has established the following administration this far to fight against corruption or to work in areas of transparency:

- The Anti-corruption Justice and Judicial Center (ACJC);
- The High Council of Rule of Law and Fight Against Corruption;
- The Special Commission of National Procurement.

These institutions were established at a time that there already existed other similar organizations such as the General Administration of Overseer, and the General Administration of Overseeing the Implementation of anti-corruption Strategy, but no step was held toward the practical reforms and change and still this problem remains the same. The NUG has also failed to try powerful and corrupt senior officials in courts and serve justice.

## **The past three years of fight against corruption**

The NUG started its tenure with taking quick steps in areas of fighting corruption. For instance, the government re-opened the Kabul Bank case, established the National Procurement Commission and banned foreign travels for some of the people accused of corruption and introduced them to prosecutor's office. At that time, due to taking these steps, Afghanistan was placed fourth (before that it was ranking second) in the ranking index of corrupt countries.

In 2015, the NUG's anti-corruption policy was not coordinated that is why it only gained 1.1 score out of 10 and once again it became the second corrupt country in the world. In this year, some portions of Kabul Banks debts were paid by the borrowers; however, the release of one of the most important culprits of Kabul Bank case Khalilullah Ferozi and signing the contract of building a small city with him was what brought the NUG's anti-corruption efforts under question.

However, due to some efforts on behalf of the NUG in 2016, the country fell in the ranks of the corrupt countries to eight country.<sup>1</sup> These efforts included recording the wealth of government officials, opening ACJC, firing 600 judges (including the judges of all provinces), 20 prosecutors and 25% of the custom staff, confiscating the passports of more than 100 senior officials, prevention of the embezzlement of \$330m in 1250 contracts, etc.

Overall, efforts against corruption was hastening when an international conference was about to be held. For instance in 2014 before the convention of London Conference, the Kabul Bank case was re-opened, before the Warsaw Conference in 2016, the process of recording the wealth of government officials started and before the Brussels Conference (2016), ACJC was established.<sup>2</sup>

### **The fourth corruption country in 2017**

Overall, 2017 was a year full of problems and challenges for Afghanistan. In this year, the security and stability situation of the country was worse than any year in the past 16 years and this situation also affected the government's fight against corruption.

Transparency International, based in Berlin-Germany, has once again evaluated the efforts of the countries in the world in areas of fighting against corruption. The 2017 report of this organization shows that once again Afghanistan has gained fewer scores in areas of fighting against corruption.<sup>3</sup>

This report adds that in 2017, the Afghan government has failed to fight against corruption. However, the Attorney General's Office talks about achievements in this area and says that since the beginning of 1396 [solar year], they have investigated 1526 cases including the cases of senior government officials.

According to the spokesperson of Attorney General's Office, due to investigating these cases 54 civil and military officials are banned from traveling to foreign countries and 15 are suspended from their jobs. He said that ACJC had sentenced to punishment 118 people including senior government officials and Military Generals.

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<sup>1</sup> See online: [https://www.transparency.org/news/feature/corruption\\_perceptions\\_index\\_2016](https://www.transparency.org/news/feature/corruption_perceptions_index_2016)

<sup>2</sup> Read more in this report: <http://pa.azadiradio.com/a/27832045.html>

<sup>3</sup> See it online: [https://www.transparency.org/news/feature/corruption\\_perceptions\\_index\\_2017](https://www.transparency.org/news/feature/corruption_perceptions_index_2017)

IWA has named the government internal differences and political interventions as the main reasons behind the failure of the government in fighting corruption in the past year. Head of IWA Sayed Ikram Afzali has expressed concern over the condition of the fight against corruption and has called upon the government not to intervene in the affairs of the anti-corruption organizations.

On the other hand, several months ago (8 June 2017), President Ghani participated in the third annual Anti-corruption conference of European Union, where he called the Afghan Ministry of Interior as the center of corruption and that the achievements made in areas of fighting corruption in 2017 was not acceptable for him. He insisted that eradicating corruption was one of his important priorities but he said that the complete eradication of corruption needed 10 to 20 years of time.

In 2017, the NUG opened dozens corruption-related cases and also punished some people. Nevertheless, the government is always criticized that it does not investigate high profile corruption cases and that only the small cases of corruption and some unimportant people are being punished and even that is only to show to the world that the government is doing something against corruption.

Overall, the political and security instability in the country, the existence of several anti-corruption institutions, lack of coordination among the various administrations of the NUG, the collative form of the NUG are the most important factors behind corruption in Afghanistan.

### **Recommendations**

Considering the following points will help the government in succeeding in its anti-corruption struggle:

**First;** this struggle needs a strong will more than anything else;

**Second;** the government must have a coordinated strategy to tackle corruption;

**Third;** the existence of several anti-corruption organizations is not efficient, it is necessary to establish a single independent, authoritative, and efficient administration instead;

**Fourth;** in order to mitigate the issue of corruption in the government administrations, the responsible officials of these administrations should not be assigned on the basis of tribal, ethnic, political and other considerations in the first place. People with no history of corruption must be assigned in the government administrations considering their competence;

**Fifth;** the rule of the media and religious scholars must not be ignored and a law must be developed to grantee the safety of the vessel blowers of corruption;

**Sixth;** progress in this area is also connected to the security and political situation. Therefore, in order to end the current political and security turmoil, the government must undertake realistic efforts.

The End

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

