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## Preface

After Trump took office in the U.S., the America-Iran ties became deteriorated. Trump was against the nuclear deal with Iran from the very beginning and had considered it as the "worst agreement" in the U.S. history. Also, the agreement between Iran and P5+1 came on the verge of dissolution after Trump reached Presidency.

Although, only the U.S. withdrew from the agreement and the rest of the countries are still committed to it; however, it is considered as, once again, the failure of one and half a decade of negotiations between Iran and P5+1. You would read the analysis of the Center for Strategic and Regional Studies (CSRS) on the deteriorated ties between this neighbor of Afghanistan and the United States and, especially, the impact of U.S. withdrawal from this agreement on Afghanistan and the region.

In the second part of the Weekly Analysis, you would read about the ongoing war in Afghanistan and the fatwa issued by the religious scholars' meeting in this regards. The trilateral joint meeting of religious scholars in Indonesia convened at time while the ongoing war in the country gets bloodier day by day and casualties of the Afghan forces are on the peak nowadays. We will shine light on what happened at the meeting of religious scholars in Indonesia and what are the impacts of such gatherings and fatwas on the ongoing Afghan war.

## US Withdrawal from Iran's Nuclear Agreement and its Impact on Afghanistan and the Region



By **Hekmatullah Zaland** \ CSRS

For many decades, Iran's nuclear program has been one of the major issues in the region and of international politics, and undoubtedly has had impacts on the situation in the region and Afghanistan, which, given the importance of this case, will have its impacts in the future as well.

The talks between Iran and the six world powers led by the United States succeeded in 2015, and seven nations reached a historic agreement on Iran's nuclear program, but after Donald Trump took office, the possibility of US withdrawal from this agreement escalated.

On May 8, 2018, the US President finally announced his decision to withdraw from Iran's nuclear deal, which was encountered with different international reactions. The French, Russian, British and German states, in opposing this move, insisted on continuing their commitment to the nuclear deal with Iran, and Russia called it an offensive against international rules. But Israel, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain welcomed this decision of Trump, and Israel called it a bold decision.

The impact of US withdrawal from Iran's nuclear deal on the situation in Afghanistan and the region is the issue that, in addition to a look at Iran's nuclear program, is analyzed here.

### **A look at Iran's Nuclear Agreement**

Iran's nuclear program began in 1957 as a result of US-Iran Cooperation Agreement within the framework of the "Atoms for Peace" program, according to which Iran received a few kilograms of enriched uranium for research purposes from the United States. At that time, both countries had close ties and Tehran was considered as a protector of U.S. interests in the region.

With the establishment of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran by Mohammad Reza Shah in 1974 and the foundation of a nuclear power plant in Bushehr, Iran's nuclear program got a more serious shape. During 20 years, about 23,000 megawatts of electricity were to be produced through 22 power plants, but the 1979 Islamic Revolution of Iran halted its nuclear program and the Iran-US relations became tensed. After that, Iran faced economic sanctions from the United States and other countries in the world, rising further since the presidency of President George W. Bush in 2003.

Iran's negotiations with the United States, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, China and Germany (P5 + 1), which had begun in 2003, did not concluded in 2013, but with the arrival of Hassan Rouhani as President of Iran, a six-month agreement between the United States and Iran was agreed upon which Iran would stop uranium enrichment for six months, and the United States was supposed not to impose further sanctions on Iran. Subsequently, Iran and the six major powers reached the initial agreement in Lausanne in after 18 months of talks and eventually reached a comprehensive nuclear agreement on 14 July 2015 in Vienna, Austria. This historic agreement, called the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), was in fact the end of the 12-year-long vicissitudinous negotiations between Iran and the West over Iran's nuclear program.

Based on this agreement, Iran was to limit its nuclear program for a long time in exchange for lift of global sanctions from, which, along with political interests, was to result in a lot of economic benefits for the country. Iran gained access to more than \$130 billion of its frozen capital, and Iranian banks joined the SWIFT network. Iran's oil exports, which had fallen by 50% due to economic sanctions by 2014, rose again. And more importantly, the opportunity to invest in Iran by large global companies was also facilitated.

Although, it was, however, expected that achieving this agreement will have a huge impact on the Iranian economy, but the Iranian people practically suffer from bad economic situation in the country, and the lifting of sanctions against Iran has had no tangible impact on its economy. So, a few months ago, a wave of demonstrations began across Iran, which was rapidly suppressed by the government.

### **Unilateral US Withdrawal from the Iran Nuclear Deal**

Donald Trump was the inflexible critic of Iran and the nuclear deal with this country since the presidential election. After entering the White House, he gained the opportunity to request the Congress of America and the European Allies to amend the agreement and, by setting a deadline, said that if this agreement was not reformed, he would withdraw it. In February 2017, he wrote on Twitter: "Iran was in the middle of a downfall, but it was the United States that provided Iran with \$150 billion in exchange for a nuclear deal".

Trump described the agreement as "catastrophic" with a "terrorist" country, and the main factors behind US withdrawal were Iran's refusal to comply with this agreement, tests of ballistic missiles and Iran's support for radical groups of al-Qaeda, the Taliban, Hamas and Hezbollah. According to him, the deal did not forbid Iran from enriching uranium, but allowed Iran to be on the threshold of acquiring nuclear weapon. The lobby of the Iranian opposition in the region, especially Saudi Arabia, had contributed to the withdrawal from the agreement.

The unilateral withdrawal of the United States from the Iran nuclear agreement has no legal and lawful international foundation, but the political impacts and consequences of this action of Trump, which will be largely resulting in America's heavy sanctions on Iran, are significant for Iran.

Based on the agreement, if one of the parties does not comply with its obligations, the other party may suspend its obligations. So far, Iran has not made its final decision of which one of the probabilities is also the suspension of obligations, which would not be acceptable to other five countries that are members of this agreement, and, as a result, would collapse. Although Iran says it will remain committed to this agreement, if the five other countries remain committed, but overall, this agreement has already been subject to a possible total cancellation.

### **Its Impact on the Region**

On the global level, the unilateral withdrawal of the United States Hurt its international reputation due to breaching a credible international resolution. Exiting this agreement will also partly result in international isolation of US, as the adherence of the three European countries to this agreement means loss of American influence in Europe. In addition, Russia and China will also increase their cooperation with Iran.

**Ian;** this action of the United States has already affected the Iranian economy and the value of the Iranian currency has fallen in global markets. While Iran is also suffering from political and economic instability within the country, the measure of US will definitely prove to be heavier for Iran. As the most important outcome of the US withdrawal from the nuclear deal with Iran is that it will again be subject to heavy economic sanctions by the United States.

**Middle East;** Israel and Saudi Arabia, that are considered to be Iran's main rivals in the region, welcomed this move by the United States. This action of Trump will partly affect the power equation in the Middle East. Saudi Arabia sees this as a victory for its politics in the region. Israel, which called Iran's nuclear deal a "historic mistake", will be more close to the United States than ever when it

comes to restriction on the ballistic missiles of Iran and support of the country from the Lebanese Hezbollah group. On the other hand, Iran's proxy wars against the United States will intensify in various countries, especially in the Middle East.

**South Asia;** India and Pakistan, due to their limited trade and economic ties with Iran, and their regional joint projects, do not consider this action of United States to be beneficial for them. India is one of the most energy-consuming countries in the world, and Iran has the largest sources of oil and gas in the region. In 2009, India was importing nearly 20 percent of its energy from Iran, which was gradually reduced due to sanctions and US pressure on Iran, and retreated from Iran-Pakistan-India gas pipeline as well. In the transit field, the project of the Chabahar Port, which links India to Afghanistan and Central Asia, will be affected. On the other hand, if Afghanistan and India retreat from regional projects with Iran, Iran will be closer to Pakistan and China and may be enter the Pakistani-Chinese economic zone, it something that will worry India to some extent and will affect Iran-India relations.

### **Its Impact on Afghanistan**

Iran as a powerful country in the region and neighbor of Afghanistan has an impact on the situation in Afghanistan; so, the withdrawal of the United States from this agreement will have a variety of impacts on Afghanistan, which can be highlighted in following two points:

**First;** Economic Impacts: On the one hand, US economic sanctions on Iran will affect the Chabahar Port Project and, on the other hand, economic interactions between Iran and Afghanistan will be affected while the past two years, the volume of trade between Afghanistan and Pakistan has fallen unprecedentedly and, on the contrary, has increased with Iran. Meanwhile, Afghanistan's exports will also be affected by Iran, due to the fact that, due to the deteriorating relations with Pakistan, the major part of Afghanistan's transit is taking place through Iran now. Besides that, with the decrease in Iran's oil exports, the oil price will rise in the global market, which has a direct impact on the Afghan economy, as some imports of Afghan oil take place through Iran.

**Second;** Security in Afghanistan: Increasing tensions between Iran and the United States will also have impact on Afghan security. On the one hand, American troops have practical presence in Afghanistan, and Afghanistan is counted as a strategic ally of the United States and on the other hand, Iran is also afraid of expansion of the Khorasan branch of the IS “Islamic State” in Afghanistan, and so these two factors have contributed to Iran's limited cooperation with the Taliban. With US withdrawal from the nuclear deal, Iran's fears of US presence in the region is increasing, and there is a potential for expansion of Iran's cooperation with the Taliban.



## The Afghan War and the Role of Religious Fatwas



By **Zia ul Islam Shirani** \ CSRS

For the sake of ending the ongoing war in Afghanistan, the Afghan government, pursuing its peace efforts, had made a lot of struggle to convene a meeting of religious scholars in Indonesia in order to be helpful in putting an end to the war in Afghanistan and bringing peace here.

Eventually, the said meeting took place in Bogor City of Indonesia on May 11, 2018, where religious scholars from Afghanistan, Indonesia and Pakistan had participated in it. The Afghan government, however, yearned that the gathered religious scholars would give a fatwa that the ongoing war in Afghanistan is Haram; but, the meeting emphasized that the Taliban should make peace with the Afghan government.

The gathering of Afghan scholars in Indonesia took place while the Taliban has responded the peace proposal of Afghan government in second meeting of Kabul Process with its military operation named “Al Khandaq” and increased its attacks in different parts of Afghanistan.

The ongoing war in Afghanistan, the governments’ peace efforts and the trilateral meeting of religious scholars in Indonesia are discussed in this Analysis.

## **The Ongoing War in Afghanistan**

The ongoing war in Afghanistan started after 9/11 incidents in the United States where this country campaigned on Afghanistan to demolish the Taliban regime and eliminate the Al Qaeda network and thus, it put the base of a new government here.

Apparently, the U.S. attack on Afghanistan, however, was to eliminate the Al Qaeda network and its supporters after 9/11; but, later, it became revealed that it was the only aim of America, because if its goal was to eliminate Al Qaeda and Taliban, it was done in the very first years and there was peace maintained in entire Afghanistan at that time.

The ambassador of Taliban regime to Pakistan, Abdul Salam Zaeef said that: “the 9/11 attacks were not coincidental, but, America, from very far times, had got intention to have military presence in Afghanistan in order to maintain its long-term interests in the region. Taliban had, three times, offered America to try Osama Bin Laden for the incidents of 9/11; however, America rejected this offer every time.”<sup>1</sup>

After America’s attack on Afghanistan and temporary failure of Taliban, the war revived once again and it is being deteriorated day by day in the country. According to SIGAR, now, the Afghan government has hardly have control or authority over 50 percent of the country and the war is as severe as many provinces are encountered the danger of collapse.

Emerge of “the Islamic State” alongside the Taliban is another important and new aspect of the ongoing war in Afghanistan where its activities expended to many provinces in a short period of time and who claimed the responsibility for a series of big and bloodier attacks in capital Kabul.

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Bush rejects Taliban offer to hand Bin Laden over, guardian, 14<sup>th</sup> oct 2001, see online: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2001/oct/14/afghanistan.terrorism5>

Considering the deteriorating security situation in the country even after one and a half decade passed of presence of America in Afghanistan, most of researchers and experts have concluded that America does not plan to eliminate “terrorism” and end the war, but it, intentionally, wants to keep the war continued in Afghanistan for the sake of its own interests. America, through its presence in Afghanistan, wants to control China, Russia, Iran and other countries who may create threat for its international hegemony. On the other hand, Afghanistan is very important to America for its location as it is the connecting point between Middle East, South Asia and Central Asia where the last one has tremendous centers of energy in the world. Besides these factors, the natural resources and mines in Afghanistan are something that has made the United States to have presence in Afghanistan.

### **Peace Efforts**

At the first days of America’s campaign on Afghan soil, however, the Taliban became defeated for a short period of time; but it reinitiated the war and made it severe day by day. These circumstances made the Afghan government and International Community to think of peace besides being focused on war, yet these talks were on the level to put an end to the war.

In this regard, various efforts, in recent years, have been made by Afghan government and some independent organizations to have the Taliban to make peace. The High Peace Council (HPC) became established in 2010, then, a lot meetings have been held in different country for reviving the peace talks whose two most important are were those held in China’s Urumqi and Islamabad’s Murree in last three years. Moreover, quadrilateral meetings had been held in Kabul and Islamabad and two meetings of the Kabul Process became connived as well; however, these efforts are yet to be resulted in peace talks and the process is still encountered failure.

This failure has got two reasons:

**First;** Afghan government tries to bring the Taliban to peace table through military and political pressures and particularly through Pakistan instead of focusing on eliminating the main factors of war.

**Second;** While America does not intend to have peace talks with the Taliban; however, the Taliban insist that the Afghan government has not got the authority to make peace and thus, America should, then, sit to peace talks with this group. Therefore, they have never provided positive response to the peace proposal of Afghan government.

### Religious Scholars Meeting in Indonesia

Afghan government had been waited for trilateral meeting of religious scholars in Indonesia since several months and it hoped that the gathering would call the ongoing war of Afghanistan illicit and haram, and it was what had not said explicitly in the meeting.

A 12-clause resolution was issued at the end of the 1-day meeting where, at the beginning, it had invited the entire sides involved in the Afghan war to put an end to the war and make peace. Also, it had stated in clause 9, which included more important and clear points, that: “Violence and Terrorism should NOT be associated with any religion, nation, civilization and ethnicity, because extremism and terrorism is in repugnancy with principles of sacred religion of Islam as they promote violence and suicide attacks against civilians.<sup>2</sup>”

The Afghan High Peace Council (HPC) is, however, optimistic about the declared resolution of religious scholars’ meeting in Indonesia and considers it as an achievement in the peace process, but the spokesman of Meshrano Jirga (the Upper House of Parliament) expressed dissatisfaction regarding the results of the meeting of religious scholars and added that the fatwa on interdict of Afghan war was not issued as its issuance was expected. For that reason, he hoped that the

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<sup>2</sup> The High Peace Council of Afghanistan (HPC), Indonesian meeting declaration in Pashto, May 14, 2018, see online: <http://www.hpc.org.af/dari/index.php/fa/2011-04-08-11-56-57/2018-01-17-16-24-51/1337-2018-05-14-05-41-45>

meeting of religious scholars which is going to be held in Saudi Arabia will issue such a fatwa.<sup>3</sup>

The religious scholars' meeting in Indonesia and the issued resolution is spiritually valuable and the entire recommendations are reasonable; but considering the complexity and situation of Afghan war now, it looks like to be impossible to end the war through meetings and fatwas of religious scholars.

The end

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<sup>3</sup> Azadi Radio, Muslimyar's remarks on Ulema's Indonesia Meeting in Pashto, May 13, 2018, see online <https://pa.azadiradio.com/a/29224045.html>