



## Center for Strategic & Regional Studies

### Kabul

### **Weekly Analysis**-Issue Number 256 (June 16-23, 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

The Kabul-Islamabad ties have been so instable and full of mistrusts in last more than one and a half decade; however, these mistrusts between the two countries reached its peak after formation of the National Unity Government (NUG). The tension of NUG's ties with Islamabad was due to failure of Pakistan in fulfillment of its promises that it had repeatedly made with Afghan side.

In recent months, efforts on trust-buildings have been made in the made while the mistrusts were on the peak and thus, the talks and agreement on Afghanistan-Pakistan Action Plan for Peace and Solidarity (APAPPS) eased the tensions and the relations are to be improved once again. Therefore, exchange of visits between Afghan and Pakistani officials has been increased in last three months. The first part of the Weekly Analysis of the Center for Strategic and Regional Studies (CSRS) has focused on situation of ties between the two countries and impacts of recent efforts in reconstruction of these relations.

In the second part of the Analysis, you would read about the recent short-term ceasefire between the Afghan government and the Taliban. In last week of the month of Ramadan, firstly, Afghan President declared an 8-day ceasefire with the Taliban and then, the Taliban announced a 3-day ceasefire with the Afghan forces for the sake of celebrating the Eid days. It was for the first time since Taliban begun fighting against Afghan government and foreign troops that a bilateral ceasefire was announced and observed. The second part of the Analysis has written about the consequences of the ceasefire for both sides as well as its impacts on peace.

## Afghan-Pak Ties; New Efforts of Trust-Building



The ties between Afghanistan and Pakistan are, once again, on verge of trust-building and improvement after mistrustfulness and ups and downs during the term of the National Unity Government (NUG).

In recent months, the foreign ministries of both countries have initiated a joint program under the banner of “Afghanistan-Pakistan Action Plan for Peace and Solidarity (APAPPS)” which has paved the way for some political advisory meetings and goes and comes between governmental officials of both countries.

Following the trend, a senior Afghan delegation visited Islamabad on June 19, 2018 where, according to Afghan officials, the agenda of the delegation to Pakistan was to talk with Pakistani officials on the issue of peace and ceasefire with the Afghan Taliban.

The following issues are discussed in the Analysis: Afghan-Pak ties during the NUG; new efforts of trust-building in a mistrustful atmosphere; and new challenges and opportunities toward the peace process.

## **Afghan-Pak Ties**

Kabul-Islamabad ties are always burst of mistrust. Both sides have always doubted on each other's positions; however, the interesting point is that Kabul, besides the mistrustfulness and doubts, has tried to, first, reconstruct its ties with Pakistan and, then, to take Afghanistan toward peace and stability through relying on these ties. This position has resulted in improvement of ties for short-term; but this policy is yet to have a [positive] consequence in long-term.

Following the formation of the National Unity Government (NUG), Afghan President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani maintained good ties with Islamabad in compare to past administration and provided Pakistan with unprecedented privileges. On the other side, visits of senior Pakistani political and military officials increased to Kabul at that time which was carrying new promises of peace with Afghan government; nonetheless, Pakistan has always failed to fulfill its promises.

After escalation of bloody explosions in Kabul, the policy of President Ghani toward Pakistan became harshly criticized by media, some members of the Afghan Parliament and former governmental officials. Thus, failure of Pakistan in fulfilling its promises and deterioration of security situation in Afghanistan day by day caused in corrosion of Afghan-Pak ties where, even, President Ghani refused Pakistan's assistance in international conferences and started serious efforts in isolating Pakistan on international level.

Since recent months, efforts on reconstruction of Kabul-Islamabad ties revived after these ups and downs and announcement of new American policy for Afghanistan and South Asia; the senior officials of both sides visits each other's country; there is flexibility seen in the policy of Afghan government with regards to Pakistan, and apparently, Pakistan also wants its ties to become improved with the Afghan government.

The main reason behind repeated resort of Afghan government toward Pakistan for the purpose of peace and stability is that the armed opposition does not want to have any kind of talks with the Afghan government which has caused in limitation of choices of the Afghan government; thus, Afghan officials recourse to Pakistan wishing it, this time, would honestly help in the Afghan peace process and initiation of direct peace talks between the Taliban and the Afghan government.

### **Trust-Building Efforts in Mistrustful Atmosphere**

While the mistrust was on the peak, bilateral political advisory meetings started between two countries after the arrival of Pakistani delegation led by Deputy Foreign Secretary Tehmina Janjua in Kabul on Asad, 1396 (Solar Year).

Pakistani delegation talked with Afghan delegation led by Hekmat Khalil Karzai, Political Deputy Foreign Minister of the Afghan government regarding trust-building between the two countries, intensification of political, trade and transit ties, maintenance of security along the Durand Line and the Afghan peace process. Meanwhile, both sides considering various mechanisms agreed to make efforts with aim to build mutual trust between both sides.

These political advisory meetings took place many times between appointed delegations of both countries in Kabul and Islamabad and eventually, Pakistani premier Shahid Khaqan Abbasi arrived in Kabul on April 6, 2018. He met Afghan President Ashraf Ghani and made agreement on some principles for the purpose of implementing the Afghanistan-Pakistan Action Plan for Peace and Solidarity (APAPPS).

The two leaders agreed to the following;

- Pakistan to support the Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace and reconciliation;
- The two countries to undertake effective action against fugitives and irreconcilable elements posing security threats to either of the two countries;

- Both countries commit to deny use of their respective territories by any country, network, group or individuals for anti-state activities against either country;
- To put in place a joint supervision, coordination and confirmation mechanism through Liaison Officers (LOs) for the realization of the agreed actions;
- The two countries commit to avoid territorial and aerial violations of each other's territory;
- The two countries to avoid public blame games and instead use APAPPS cooperation mechanisms to respond to mutual issues of contention and concerns; and
- Establish Working Groups and necessary cooperation mechanisms as per APAPPS for full implementation of the APAPPS and the above, mutually reinforcing principles.

Efforts on reconstruction of Kabul-Islamabad ties and realization of the agreed actions between the two sides speeded up after the arrival of Shahid Khaqan Abbasi in Kabul. On May 28, 2018, Afghan National Security Advisor, Hanif Atmar, Director-General of the National Directorate of Security (NDS) and Interior Minister, Wais Ahmad Barmak arrived in Pakistan and talked on Peace and Solidarity Action Plan with Pakistani officials.

On June 12, 2018, Pakistani Chief of Army Staff, Javed Bajwa also arrived in Kabul and met Afghan officials. On June 19, 2018, Afghan National Security Advisor, Hanif Atmar, Director-General of the National Directorate of Security (NDS) and Interior Minister, Wais Ahmad Barmak arrived in Pakistan for the second time after Taliban ended its 3-day ceasefire from one hand, and from the other hand, leader of Pakistani Taliban, Mullah Fazlullah became killed as a result of airstrike of Afghan and American forces in Kunar province of Afghanistan.

## **The Peace Process; News Challenges and New Opportunities**

Latest developments in Afghan Peace has emerged new challenges and new opportunities in our region and country. The new challenges are increasing role of Russia and Iran and their deteriorated ties with America. Due to this, it is thought that the expanding relations of these countries with Afghan Taliban have complicated the way and conditions of the Afghan Peace.

On the other hand, 3-day ceasefire between the Afghan government and the Taliban which was successfully realized by both sides has revived hopes on peace and became considered as an opportunity. Moreover, new emerging peace-related wave of people inside the country and a little bit change in America's position toward the Afghan Peace are also counted as new opportunities for peace.

The above-mentioned points are of those kinds which require immediate and new actions of both sides involved in the issue of peace. The peace policy of Afghan government is, however, still relied on honest efforts of Pakistan and thus, the efforts on reconstructing the ties of both sides are going on. Nowadays, there is lack of hope in regards with new developments of Afghan-Pak ties because recent efforts of Pakistan are the result of international pressures and it is thought that Pakistan made these efforts just in order to ease these pressures. End

## A Look at the Temporary Ceasefire and its Impact on the Peace Process



The Taliban declared a three-day ceasefire against government forces for the first time since 2001 and beginning of war against the Afghan government and foreign forces in the country.

The three-day Taliban ceasefire in the three days of Eid was a response to the eight-day ceasefire of the Afghan government from the 27th month of Ramadan to the 5th of Eid al-Fitr; although, the Taliban said in their statement of ending the ceasefire that their action was not in line with the government's action for the temporary ceasefire, and they had also carried out a three-day ceasefire without prior announcement in the last Eid as well.

The ceasefire of the Taliban and the Afghan government was widely welcomed at home and abroad, which was why the Afghan government extended it for another 10 days, but the Taliban, once again, resuscitated their attacks on government forces after three days.

The bilateral ceasefire between the government and the Taliban, the effects and consequences of the ceasefire and its impact on the peace process are analyzed here.



## **A Diverse Ceasefire**

The ceasefire of Afghans during the three days of Eid was different from the usual ceasefire in other countries, because on one hand, it was unexpected and without the mediation of foreigners, and was fully observed in all parts of the country by both sides, and on the other hand, the Taliban and the Afghan forces honored Eid's celebrations in the vast majority of regions, and even Afghan officials met Taliban militants, embraced each other and took memorial photos and selfies.

The state of affairs in these three days was not only astonishing Afghans, but also the world, which brought hopes for extension of the ceasefire inside and outside the country and so it became encouraged by countries and organizations, including the United States and NATO as they also asked the Taliban to extend their three-day ceasefire.

During the three days of the Eid, widespread voices were raised for support and extension of ceasefire and peace demands in all parts of the country, which was why the Afghan government extended its ceasefire in order to encourage the Taliban to have its ceasefire extended. But the Taliban did not extend their ceasefire due to the situation that governed these three days, because the anti-war spirit was heightened in those Taliban members who had meetings and talks with governmental forces.

## **Impacts and Consequences of the Bilateral Ceasefire**

The interim ceasefire between the Afghan government and the Taliban has had implications for both sides, as mentioned below:

- By announcing a ceasefire and receiving a positive response from the Taliban for even three days, The Afghan government has proven to have taken effective and practical steps for peace in the recent years.
- The announcement of a ceasefire and then its extension by the government increased the confidence and support of Afghans from the peaceful efforts of President Ghani.

- Government action for a ceasefire showed that the Afghan government could take effective steps to bring peace to the country with initiatives such as the announcement of the latest ceasefire.
- The ceasefire showed that the continuation of the war in the country still has external factors, and Afghans can reconcile if there are no interventions and foreigners in the country.
- The ceasefire showed that the claims of existence of 20 armed groups in Afghanistan are not in line with the ground facts, and that the ceasefire was observed in all parts of the country, except for the two explosions in Nangarhar whom the ISIS took responsibility for. On the other hand, the only Nangarhar incident in these three days has shown that the concentration of ISIS activities is in the eastern regions, especially in Nangarhar province, and that this group has not been active in other parts of the country as powerful as implicated.
- The ceasefire showed that some of Taliban's internal disputes during the past three years have not affected the ranks of the group's fighters, and that the group still has unity and strength.
- The ceasefire showed that Afghans on both sides of the war have been tired of the ongoing war in the country, and the determination of the absolute majority of Afghans for peace has been prepared.
- Although, lack of extension of ceasefire by the Taliban made the people dissatisfied, but overall, these three days brought hope for a peaceful and non-violent life in the country among Afghans, and these three days proved that public support, especially the impact of social media in such processes and their successfulness is vital.

## **The Ceasefire and the Peace Talks**

The ceasefire, apparently, without mediation of foreigners, further strengthened the hopes of peace and reconciliation of Afghans and furthered the hope that Afghans are closer to inter-Afghan understanding than ever before.

Compliance of bilateral ceasefire and arrival of Taliban and governmental forces in areas under control of each other during the three days of Eid has been a major development in creating an atmosphere of trust between the two sides of war, which is considered an important and effective step towards the beginning of an inter-Afghan understanding and dialogue between the parties. Meanwhile, High Peace Council (HPC) said that contacts have been made with Taliban officials in these days.

Despite broad support of Afghans for the interim government and Taliban ceasefire, there was opposition to the ceasefire between the government and the Taliban, indicating domestic obstacles toward peace. Therefore, fight against these obstacles is also considered as one of the most important steps towards maintaining peace in the country.

On the other hand, though secret talks are taken place with the Taliban, the Taliban apparently do not have the will to talk with the Afghan government, and the group emphasizes on peace talks with the United States. For this reason, the Taliban statement of ending ceasefire rejected any kind of conspicuous or secret talks with the Afghan government.

On the one hand, the Afghan president, for the first time, talked about the presence and role of foreign troops in Afghanistan, and on the other hand, the US Department of State also informed its participation in peace talks with Taliban. Former ambassador to Afghanistan, James Conangham, also said in an interview that the United States plays a clear role in Afghanistan, which is why it needs to talk to the Taliban.

However, the parties involved in the Afghan conflict, including the Taliban, have come to the conclusion that insisting on military solutions will not win any party, which is why the Taliban, in their recent announcements, urges the United States to become engage in peace talks with the group. But, in spite of the fact that

presently the casualties of foreign troops in the Afghan war are at their lowest level and the ongoing war takes Afghan victims only on both sides of war; the Taliban, through persistence of fighting against the Afghan government, wants the United States to become engaged in peace talks with the group, and thus, it has not got any program for the sake of inter-Afghan understanding yet.

Therefore, although developments have been made to succeed the Afghan peace process due to the recent ceasefire, the peace process will not succeed as long as there is no realistic approach from all engaged parties with the process.

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