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Preface

The two-sided 3-day ceasefire between the Afghan government and the Taliban during Eid ul-Fitr have brought hope for the success of Afghan Peace Process and it was thought that perhaps peace talks will be going on behind curtains and thus the ceasefire, to a large extent, is a fruit of such efforts. After the ceasefire, the Taliban, however, denied every kind of hidden or obvious talks with the Afghan government for many times and hence, they, once again, stressed on direct talks with America.

On the other hand, it seems that the position of America and the Afghan government has become softened against the demands of the Taliban in regards with including America into the negotiations and it is for the first time that the fate of America forces is going to be discussed in the peace talks. Although, the government and America still insist on inter-Afghan dialogue, and it is something that the Taliban have always repudiated. The question regarding where the deadlock on inter-Afghan dialogue will take the peace process to is analyzed in the first part of the Weekly Analysis here.

You would read about the clash between local militias and the government in the second part of the Analysis. Last week, a militia commander of Gen. Dostum in Faryab province became detained after a fire exchange between the militia and the security forces and a few casualties. This action of government became considered as an incident of decisive measures of Afghan government against local power islands that became supported by a number of people and became opposed by some others. This part of the Analysis has tried to answer the questions on why and how the armed militia became formed and what is the position of the Afghan government on this matter now.

Afghan Peace Process and Inter-Afghan Dialogue Deadlock



Last week, Alice Wells, US Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asia, during her visit to Kabul, told journalists that no justification is left for the Taliban to reject peace talks with the Afghan government as the United States announced its readiness to join the peace talks and discuss about the future of foreign forces in Afghanistan.

President Ghani, during a press conference on peace and end of unilateral ceasefire with the Taliban, once again, called on the Taliban to accept the call of peace of the government and the Afghan people and said that considering the national and international consensus on Afghan peace, no one will be provided with the “Veto” right when it comes to peace.

After the recent pressures for initiating peace talks with the Afghan government, the Taliban group, through publishing several statements, rejected this demand of the Afghan government and the Afghan people for inter-Afghan dialogue and even called the peace movements in different provinces of the country as an American Project.

What would be the destiny of peace process if we consider the recent positions of the involved sides regarding peace, cumulative efforts and pressures on Taliban for beginning inter-Afghan dialogue and Taliban's unforgiving position against them?

Increasing Pressures on Taliban

Innumerable pressures on national and international levels on the Taliban in order to make them ready for peace talks comprise the main part of President Ghani's peace policy. For this reason, the first job for President Ghani was to persuade Pakistan and put pressure on it in order to exert pressure on the Taliban but this mission failed; yet, he revived the efforts in the recent months; however, they are yet to be succeeded.

Besides political pressures, the National Unity Government (NUG), simultaneously, focused on putting military pressure on the Taliban as well. In past three years, not only it ordered wide offensive operations for suppression of Taliban in different parts of the country, it also supported the US military strategy and airstrikes in Afghanistan as well. Due to this, President Ghani in his last week's press conference said that: "the objective behind the use of force in the US Strategy for Afghanistan and South Asia is peace".¹

Religious and social pressures on the Taliban are other aspects of these pressures. Besides supporting social peace movements, President Ghani, for several times, criticized the ongoing Taliban war from the perspective of Islam and relied on fatwas issued against the war at home and abroad. Ulema meeting in Indonesia, Religious Scholars meeting in Kabul and the upcoming Islamic scholars meetings in Saudi Arabia are considered as the most important efforts.

The main aims of these pressures are to make the Taliban to initiate peace talks with the Afghan government and enter the inter-Afghan dialogue. Because of this, President Ghani considers the Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process as the only solution way for peace and present the peace with Hizb-I Islamic as an example of this claim.

¹ See online: <https://president.gov.af/ps/6/30/18>

As the casualties of foreign forces reached its lowest level since 2014 and thus most of the victims of the war in both sides are Afghans, the number of people's peace movements and the social pressures are increased on the Taliban.

Recent pressures have also been a source of concern for the Taliban and thus they have launched widespread propaganda against it and have taken unadorned positions against them. In their announcement regarding latest fatwas, the Taliban consider these pressures as a part of the John Nicholson remarks presented in last March regarding putting religious pressure on the group. The remarks made by a US general at the Pentagon on stating Taliban and Daesh as "takfiri" and Afghan and Americans forces "Mujahideen" groups was another case that the Taliban used to their advantage.

Taliban and Inter-Afghan Dialogue

Taliban, as the main factor of war against the Afghan government and the foreign forces, have never accepted officially the peace talks with Afghan government; however, they have had talks with representatives of the Afghan government behind curtains.

Taliban's rejections of inter-Afghan peace talks have the following reasons:

Frist; the biggest threat to this group in the battlefield is the air strikes of foreign forces, and therefore they do not call the current war in the country as inter-Afghan, and so they call the US military strategy and the presence of foreign troops and their continued operation against the Taliban as continuation of "occupation" of Afghanistan by the United States.

Second; Taliban considered the Afghan government as ineligible and has consistently emphasized that the Afghan government cannot decide on the main factor in the war - the presence of foreign troops in the country. Along with this, the Taliban are afraid of opposition due to the internal disputes between the National Unity Government (NUG) and hardliners of the Taliban inside the system if they start talks with the government. Therefore, the President, last week, also pointed out to internal barriers towards peace and said that peace is the want of the Afghan nation and thus he does not allow anyone to reject it.

Third; with the initiation of peace talks with the Afghan government, the Taliban claim on “occupation” of the country will become weak and therefore, the group is afraid of their fighters to lose their morale against fighting the government. Hence, the Taliban have multiplied their efforts for rejecting the claim that the ongoing war is an inter-Afghan war after the recent ceasefire and after they witnessed the soft-handedness of some Taliban members with government forces.

U.S. Role in Peace Talks

The U.S., after facing the severe opposition from Karzai for initiating talks between America and the Taliban in Qatar, it has always insisted on Taliban talks with the Afghan government. Nonetheless, Taliban’s rejection of talks with the government and their insistence on peace talks with America has faced the peace process with a deadlock. Thus, President Ghani talked about the future role of foreign forces in the country for the first time during the 3-day ceasefire of Taliban in previous Eid; then, the U.S. Department of State also said that the United States is ready to participate in the peace talks with the Taliban and discuss about the future of the American forces in Afghanistan.

The American position on Afghan peace was, however, focused on supporting peace talks between the Afghan government and Taliban in last few years; but the recent position of American officials is considered as a change in U.S. strategy regarding the Afghan peace.

The Taliban seems to have been suspicious of recent remarks by US officials, and have therefore not shown any reaction to the comments made by US officials. While the U.S. willingness to talk with the Taliban is the main concern of the group with regard to the Afghan political solution, the Taliban's silence on recent statements by US officials means continuing their call for direct talks with the group.

But the United States and the Afghan government have their own excuses and it does not seem that the wish of Taliban will be fulfilled that easily. For now, America does not want to put the Afghan government aside, which has been

established as a result of 17 years of efforts and expenditures of the international community, and enter into direct talks with the Taliban. On the other hand, the Afghan government does not want to be marginalized in the peace talks as an ineffective side either; and therefore, it stresses on Afghan-lead and Afghan-owned peace talks. Besides that, the Afghan government is not in the position to put pressure on U.S. either.

Conclusion

Efforts on ending the 17-year Afghan war through inter-Afghan dialogue have been made for several years, especially after the withdrawal of a large portion of foreign forces from the country, but, practically, it has failed to initiate peace talks with the Taliban so far.

With having a clear proposal and insistence on “Ownership of Afghans”, NUG wants to have talks with Taliban, and this was also announced in the second meeting of the Kabul Process with greater clarity from the President, but the problem with this plan was silence about the main factor behind the Taliban's war in the country.

After the recent ceasefire, reports of backstage talks with the Taliban were published, and the Afghan High Peace Council (HPC) officials also talked about the beginning of direct talks with the Taliban in the next few days. But given the Taliban's recent position and the rejection of any talks with the Afghan government, there are two possibilities; first, these talks will take place under pressure with some Taliban members, and will be stopped soon like that of Murree's; second, talks will be held with some former Taliban members and the armed Taliban group will not recognize it as it did with the Urumqi Talks.

For now, as one of the main sides of the war in Afghanistan, there is a need for active role of the United States in the Afghan peace process. For this reason, as long as the United States does not schedule the withdrawal of its troops from Afghanistan on the negotiating table, ongoing efforts to revive peace talks will not succeed. End

Pro-Government Armed Militias against the Government



Apparently, local armed forces are militias that have been formed by America and the Afghan government for the purpose of maintaining security. From one hand, these armed militias, however, defended their areas against the government's armed opposition in short-term, but from the other hand, they are turned into power islands after a while and, in return, are caused threat and challenge to the government.

Among these armed militias, pro-Junbish Party commander of local armed militants and special envoy of Gen. Dostum in Faryab province, Nizamuddin Qaisari is one who used the weapons bought by government's money against the government and even directly threatened high military officials with death in a meeting.

Nizamuddin Qaisari, who is detained by the government, emphasizes that he will answer the entire allegations; however, his fans in Jawzjan, Faryab and Sari-Pul provinces embarked violent protests and asked for his immediate release.

You would read the Analysis on the phenomenon and activities of local armed militias in Afghanistan, their role in the creation of Power Islands and eventually their clash with the government here.

Local Armed Militias

Local armed militias have been used in order for security to become maintained in the country and this trend has got long history in Afghanistan; however, after the coup of 7 Saur of 1357, the militias took the ethnic color during the communist regime in the country, and after that often have created barriers against Afghan governments, itself, or have caused ethnic and tribal conflicts as well.

After America's campaign on Afghanistan and collapse of the Taliban regime, the Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) program and then the Disbandment of Illegal Armed Groups (DIAG) program became launched in the very first years for the purpose of disarmament of illegal armed men and strongmen; however, after some years passed and the war flared up, the forces that had spent millions of dollars on eliminating militias, begun to reestablish the local armed militias.

After Gen. Petraeus became appointed as general commander of international forces in Afghanistan in 2010; he presented the proposal of establishing local militias based on his experience in Iraq. The Afghan government also ratified the proposal under the name of Afghan Local Police (ALP) in entered into force after President Hamid Karzai signed it in 2011. Now, there are about 30,000 ALP forces in the country.

For the very beginning, most of the militias groups were created grounded on tribal considerations instead of national motive and, in most cases, their commanders were either strongmen or former militants who had got a background in criminal activities which caused them to become widely accused of illegal and anti-human activities.

Illegal and Anti-Human Activities

Establishment of local militias by America was encountering Afghans with the threats from which they had got too bad experiences. The international community neglected these experiences and paved the way for strongmen and former militant commanders to create armed militias under the banner of "Local Police".

Unlike the recruitment mechanism and process of government, illiterate persons who had a criminal background and were not committed to order and laws have been recruited there due to the insinuation of foreign forces, local strongmen, and commanders. It is why they have conducted illegal activities in most of the areas in Afghanistan and have established small islands of power where they are often accused of illegal and anti-human activities.

Murdering and torturing innocent people, thefts, rapes and ten of others are among the crimes that are committed by local armed militias, according to the reports of international and national human rights institutions.²

According to the 1391 report of Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC), “Local Police” have worked for insecurity and have caused an increase in violence in different parts of the country. The report also indicates that the “Local Police” does not obey the order of the central government at all, and most of its members are those who previously were active in illegal armed groups.

On the other hand, a 2011 report of the Human section of UN had said that under-age small children are recruited in the ranks of the Afghan Local Police in some areas of the country and are used for sexual purposes.

Clash between the Government and Local Armed Men

Nizamuddin Qaisari is the police chief of Qaisar District of Faryab province and is commander of hundreds of pro-Junbish Part militias there, who, apparently, is fighting on the side of government against Taliban and Daesh (ISIS); however, his power and authority caused him to make harsh remarks against Afghan military authorities and to threaten them during a security meeting in 209 Shaheen Corps of the Afghan Military on July 2, 2018.

According to the statement released by 209 Shaheen Corps, Qaisari called the participants “traitors” and told them that “I am going to kill you, give fire to the governmental institutions and abolish the governmental system in Maimana”.

² See online, a report of VOA in Dari: <http://www.darivoa.com/a/afg-arbakies-134499768/1440220.html>
And a report of Azadi Radio in Dari: <http://da.azadiradio.com/a/24326482.html>

The statement added that he took his weapon after these remarks and armed conflict came to the ground, and eventually, Afghan security forces arrested him and, then, transferred him to Kabul.

It is the latest incident that shows the possible conflicts between the government and local armed persons and stringent. The most important reasons behind clashes between the armed militias and the government are as follows:

First; the ethnic nature of local armed militia in Afghanistan is a fundamental problem due to which several clashes have occurred between these militias. These militias have always taken supported their own ethnic and stood against government's positions.

Second; local armed militias are most active in areas where other government forces have less presence. Thus, they are not only able to get use of the power and facilities, but they are also able to easily resist against the government in case of pressure being put on them by people and government.

Third; local armed militias are not given militating guidance and training. Meanwhile, the government does not observe the affairs and activities either. Therefore, a large number of them freely torture the people, do thefts and even assault on people's wealth and honor and this issue have increased the distance between the people and the government.

Government's Position against Power Islands

A large portion of the money and international assistance arrived in Afghanistan in last 17 years for the purpose of maintenance of rule of law and formation of local forces have been given to persons who built their own islands of power with these privileges and creased barriers against political and security stability of the central government.

After formation of National Unity Government (NUG), actions taken against the autonomous activities of first vice-president, Gen. Dostum point out to decisive measures of the government against eliminating the power of local armed militias, especially in the north of the country.

The political settlement with Balkh's provincial governor, Atta Mohammad Noor was also a struggle for weakening the strong island of power in the North; however, the Afghan government is still faced local powerful strongmen in different parts of the country which we could name the Kandahar Police Chief's rebellion as an example.

A few days ago, President Ghani in his speech in 201 Selaab Corps said that irresponsible armed men are not acceptable to him anymore and he is decisive to hand over the irresponsible armed men to the judiciary. For that reason, the government arrested Nader Shah in Badakhshan, and Rahimullah the former intelligence chief of Uruzgan province in Kabul, besides Nizamuddin Qaisari in last one week only. The government says that numerous accusations of breaking law and misusing power are filed against them.

Despite all these things, it would be said that ethnical politics and local armed militias in Afghanistan have always threatened the country's political and security stability and have caused in disunity among brother tribes of and civil war in Afghanistan. Hence, preventing the creation and empowering of local armed militias is needed before every other thing. The government's recent measures against local armed militias, however, cause some circles and politicians to put pressure on the government in response; but the government should note that if it eliminates the power islands, it should be ready to stand against these pressure at first place.

End

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