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In this issue:

Preface..... 2

Confrontation of Political Parties with Government and Fate of Parliamentary Elections

2018 Parliamentary Elections 4

Role of Afghan political parties in Elections 5

Recent Confrontation of Government with Political Parties 6

Election Outcomes..... 7

Role of NATO Organization in Afghan War and Peace

NATO and Afghan War 10

NATO: Insistence on War instead of Peace 11

Recent NATO Meeting in Brussels..... 12

Preface

Bringing reforms to the electoral system and holding Parliamentary Elections were two main promises of the National Unity Government (NUG) alongside other promises which often came under criticism by political parties and politicians due to putting off of their implementation; however, NUG, after passing three years, was eventually able to decide on the final date of elections and start practical work on the process through forming new commissions.

Nearly four months have passed from the beginning of the voters registration process for elections, yet recently some political parties in Afghanistan expressed dissatisfaction over the registration process, and asked for cancellation of the process in addition to bringing comprehensive amendment in the electoral system. They warned that were their demands not to be accepted, they would employ all in their power to thwart the electoral process.

The Afghan President showed a tough reaction against the demands of the political parties and said that the political parties had no right to challenge the process. Meanwhile, the Independent Elections Commission (IEC) also said that no one had the right to make off beam remarks about the electoral process without providing precise documents.

The first part of the Weekly Analysis of Center for Strategic and Regional Studies (CSRS) has discussed about the upcoming Parliamentary Elections in Afghanistan and the opposition of political parties towards them.

The second part of the Analysis is allocated for the recent meeting of NATO member countries in Brussels. It is now 17 years that the ongoing U.S. war on Afghanistan is continuing as a result of strong support of the NATO member countries and is financially and militarily backed by the [NATO] Organization. More than two billion US Dollars were promised to finance the Afghan war in the recent NATO meeting and it was insisted on that the foreign troops will not withdraw from Afghanistan.

In the second part of the Analysis, we discuss the NATO involvement in Afghan War, financing of war instead of peace and the capabilities of NATO in putting an end to the Afghan War.

Confrontation of Political Parties with Government and Fate of Parliamentary Elections



On the basis of the Afghan Constitution, the working term of the present parliament was completed at the June 2015. However, the government has thus far failed to hold Parliamentary Elections due to certain political hurdles.

Adjournment in holding Parliamentary Elections allowed the working term of the Parliament to last three years longer than its normal time until the Afghan government eventually announced on March 22, 2018 that the Parliamentary and District Council Elections will be held on October 20, 2018. From the very first days of the announcement of the date of Parliamentary Elections, its work started. And it has so far faced many problems and challenges, such as security threats, the use of fake Afghan ID Cards and illegal buying and selling of stickers installed on the back of these ID cards.

In recent days, some Afghan political parties have come together in a meeting and warned that the Independent Elections Commission (IEC) should halt the ongoing election process and provide citizens with biometrics which would assist in holding transparent elections; however President Ghani's response to the demands of these political parties was that Political parties should understand their responsibilities and "not create obstacles in the process".

This paper will examine the 2018 Parliamentary Elections and its challenges, the role of political parties in the electoral process of Afghanistan, recent confrontation of political parties with government and the fate of upcoming Parliamentary Elections.

2018 Parliamentary Elections

The second clause of Article 83 of the Afghan constitution explicitly states that the working period of the House of People shall terminate after the disclosure of the election result on the 1st of Saratan of the fifth year and the new parliament shall commence work thereafter. The Afghan government however, was not able to hold the Parliamentary Elections on the expected time and thus the working term of the House of People or "Wolesi Jirga" extended till the announcement of the results of the elections based on a presidential statement released on June 19, 2015.

The political conflict in the country, the opposition of the Chief Executive towards the work of previous election commissions and his emphasis on creating new commissions and reforming the electoral system apparently seem to be major factors in the three-year postponement of the Parliamentary Election.

With the resolution of the case of electoral reforms and the formation of new commissions on June 22, 2017, the date of the Parliamentary Election was announced and specified as July 7, 2018. However the date was not finalized until the election commission, in the first days of March 2018, announced October 20, 2018 as the final date for holding the Parliamentary Elections, and thus the practical work started on the process after the announcement.

Insecurity, lack of people's trust in the transparency of the Parliamentary Elections and the electoral mechanism as a whole (where identification on paper is considered as the only valid document for voting) are among the important challenges that have affected the Parliamentary Elections process from the very beginning to date.

On the other hand, delay in holding the Parliamentary Elections and extension of the working term of Wolesi Jirga to the eighth legislative and the third consecutive year not only provoked legitimacy of the Wolesi Jirga, but also caused some of its members to discontinue their work and thus further caused lagging and slowdown of the whole process. used them as an opportunity for pursuing their personal interests.

Role of Afghan political parties in Elections

Legitimate battle in the political ground, formation of coalitions, introduction of candidates in elections, codification of public policies, observation of government's performance, political education of people and acting as mediator between people and government are among important roles of political parties in a country. Though the presence of political parties within Afghanistan is no new phenomenon, political parties became increasingly active after 2001 and the formation of a new political system in Afghanistan. The Law of Political Parties containing 5 chapters and 25 articles was approved in 2001 where the governmental system of Afghanistan is considered as a Democratic, multi-party system. Numerous political parties were officially registered with the Ministry of Justice and started their political activities.

Based on the [Law](#) of Political Parties, performing independent political activities, forming temporary or long-term political unions or coalitions with other parties and introducing candidates in the entire elections are the rights of all of the political parties registered with the Afghan government. However, considering the previous and present elections and the interactions of persons related to different parties and temporary collations, it seems that Afghan political parties are yet to be shaped as solidified, effective and committed to national interests and yet to attract the trust of the people.

As was the case of previous years, political parties became divided during elections and often do not act as a whole. For example, in the 2014 Presidential Elections, Mohammad Mohaqiq from Wahdat-e Milli Islami Party stood alongside Dr. Abdullah from Jamiat-e Islami Party, while on the other hand Ismail Khan, unlike his partisan, backed Abdul Rab Rassol Sayyaf from Dawat-e Islamic Party. There are plenty of such examples that implicate lack of unity among members of political parties.

Thus it becomes clear that Afghan political parties are yet to contest as a party in the political field. There is always a possibility of coalition between members of different parties; as there is also a strong possibility for the coalition to collapse.

When looking at factors behind the lack of good performance of Afghan political parties in politics and governance and why a party that would be comprehensive and trusted by everyone is yet to be formed, it becomes evident that the groups that are active under the banner of political parties in Afghanistan now mostly lack a working strategy; a large portion of them have ethnic agendas and the political structures are often based on ethnic and sectarian reports. In most of the cases, personal and ethnic interests over national interests and international principles of a political party in politics are preferred.

When a member of a political party in Afghanistan is detained on accusations of crime and corruption, they stand against Government and interact with the backing of party and sect. Taking such positions has caused them to be trusted by none but a few.

Recent Confrontation of Government with Political Parties

Though the Parliamentary Elections process resumed after three years of postponement (and approximately four months have passed from the initiation of the voters' and candidates' registration process, and most members of political parties have participated in and get registered for the elections) recently, some of the parties and politicians expressed their opposition to the ongoing process of Parliamentary Elections and asked for a halt and cancellation of the process.

Last week (July 14, 2018), Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, Mohammad Mohaqiq, Yunous Qanoni, Anwar-ul Haq Ahadi, Said Hamid Gailani, Batur Dostum, Zarar Ahmad Moqbil, Salahuddin Rabbani and Asadullah Saadati came together and asked for the cancellation of the ongoing elections process. Through releasing a [statement](#), they asked for changes in the electoral system, termination of voters' registration process, using of biometrics methods for voters' registration and also stopping the division of Ghazni province into three constituencies for Parliamentary Elections.

Although participants of the meeting warned that if the Afghan government did not respond to their demands within a week and did not stop the electoral process, they would use all their means and facilities to prevent the ongoing electoral process, President Ghani responded by saying "who are these politicians that speak on behalf of the people? Who has elected them? How many votes have they received? And when did the nation provide them with authority to represent them? I am the President of the Afghan nation. I sit at the position as a result of the people's votes; I neither have the power nor the money... but I am here for my own talent and capability. Let's enter the electoral campaign ... more than eight million people have registered in the elections and the elections will be held in accordance with the law and the will of the people ... how the people who have got armed forces can call themselves political parties?".

Election Outcomes

All-round and transparent elections in a country, more than anything else, is dependent on the sovereignty of government on the entire geography and nation of the country.. A strong and dominant system of governance is a prerequisite to free and fair elections, yet the current system in Afghanistan is lacking sovereignty and strong governance which causes hurdles in the way of a smooth electoral process.

Therefore, the following points warrant necessary consideration as the challenges facing 2018 Parliamentary Election that could affect its legitimacy:

Firstly confrontation of Taliban with the Electoral Process is a major threat and challenge . According to SIGAR currently 40% of Afghan soil is under control of the armed opposition of the government, that question the legitimacy of elections in these areas.

Secondly; local militias and their commanders are another challenge for the ongoing electoral process. The case of imprisonment of Qaisari is a good example of it. Currently, as the government has detained Nizamuddin Qaisari, his supporters have closed the doors of IEC offices in [four](#) Northern provinces.

Thirdly; political parties and politicians opposition to the process of Parliamentary Elections is another challenge towards holding elections. President Ghani provided a decisive negative response to the demands of the parties and expressed that politicians do not have the right to challenge the electoral process; and if the political parties really boycotted the elections, undoubtedly, the elections will lose its legitimacy and will be the cause of a new crisis in Afghanistan. END

Role of NATO Organization in Afghan War and Peace



Last week (11-12 July, 2018), Belgium's Capital Brussels City hosted a 2-day [meeting](#) of NATO member countries. Afghan President Ghani and CEO Dr. Abdullah alongside the heads of states of NATO-member countries, representatives of other NATO friendly countries, UN and the World Bank had participated in the meeting.

On the second day of the meeting, Afghanistan and NATO's mission in this country were important points on the agenda where as a consequence, NATO declared its support for Afghan security forces till 2024 and meanwhile, praised the Peace Proposal of President Ghani to the Taliban.

Moreover, some NATO member countries also spoke about the increase of their troops in Afghanistan. NATO Secretary General, Jens Stoltenberg emphasized that long-term presence in Afghanistan was desired

NATO presence and involvement, role of the organization in peace and war, the latest Brussels meeting and the future of the Afghan War in the light of decisions made in the meeting are discussed here.

NATO and Afghan War

NATO is a political and military organization which was [established](#) after World War II (WWII) by West Europe and the United States in order to prevent the potential threats by East Europe and the Soviet Union under the banner of “North Atlantic Treaty Organization” on April 4, 1949.

After the United States attacked Afghanistan on 7 October 2001 and brought the Taliban regime down as a result of the 9/11 incidents in America, the duty of security maintenance was delegated to ISAF forces and thus legitimized the U.S. campaign on Afghanistan after receiving authorization from the United Nations where the leadership of Afghan War was surrogated from ISAF to NATO in 2003.

Besides the military mission, International Forces along with U.S. support and NATO leadership performed some reconstruction activities under the program of Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT); however, these activities were not much related to infrastructure.

Apparently, the 2001 U.S. attack on Afghanistan, apart from the case of Osama Bin Laden, claimed to be aimed at bringing peace and stability to Afghanistan through eliminating the Taliban regime, developing the Afghan forces and establishing a democratic system, while the international community and NATO member countries also stood as supporters of this U.S. vision. However,, U.S. geo-strategic goals in the region were pursued at the cost of peace and stability and thus tens of thousands of Afghans have suffered casualties in the ongoing war and instability that has caused innumerable suffering. -

Though the number of NATO and U.S. troops in Afghanistan has declined to 16000 from 100000 , the war has intensified in comparison to the past. A new challenge is the “Islamic State” or ISIS group that has expanded its activities in the country and is considered as a big threat to Afghanistan.

NATO: Insistence on War instead of Peace

The war that the U.S had begun with more than 100 thousand troops to form a new governance system and maintain security in Afghanistan continued till 2014. However little has changed for the better. . The ever expanding presence of Taliban and the growing insecurity and instability all point to the failure of the U.S war in Afghanistan. After 2014, tens of thousands of foreign troops left the hot and deadly battleground for Afghan forces. Yet presently there still remains thousands of foreign troops from 39 countries having presence in Afghanistan.

After President Trump took office, a new U.S. strategy became declared on the Afghan War. Following the strategy, foreign troops once again entered the Afghan battleground. The war intensified and aerial bombardment increased where as a result, massive civilian casualties took place. According to the recent [UNAMA](#) report, 5122 Afghan civilians have been killed or injured in the first six months of 2018.

It is more than a decade and half that NATO and U.S. are following the strategy of war in Afghanistan; however, they are yet to succeed in changing Afghanistan for the better.. NATO itself has said that the Afghan War _does not have a military solution and yet billion of dollars and troops (under the banner of training Afghan forces) are sent to fund the war.

Evidently NATO and the international community have proven that their policy towards the Afghan War resides on double standards. .Apparently, they always invite the Taliban to make peace with the Afghan government and proclaim that the Afghan war requires a political solution as opposed to amilitary one, yet at the same time they are yet to take any practical steps toward paving the way for a political solution. Their efforts remain limited to military endeavors.

Putting an end to the Afghan war and maintenance of peace, to a large extent, is dependent on the decisions of the international community and the U.S for now. Instead of thinking over scheduling its withdrawal, NATO tries to send more troops to Afghanistan and fund the war, killing any hopes for peace. In case, considering the past experiences, increase in number of troops is a fruitless effort.

Recent NATO Meeting in Brussels

The second day of the NATO meeting in Brussels, to a large extent, was allocated for discussion on Afghanistan focusing on the Afghan War and Peace efforts.

At present, NATO assistance and support to Afghan security forces may increase the moral of Afghan forces and bring Taliban under pressure; however, considering the experiences of previous years, it does not seem possible to defeat the Taliban in the battlefield. If Taliban came under pressure in face-to-face combat, they would be most likely to increase their suicide and guerilla attacks in cities which would cause the elongation of war, the increase in civilian casualties and the loss of all hope for peace. .

War: Focus on war in Afghanistan was the central topic of NATO member countries in their recent meeting in Brussels. The opposition of Afghan government was explicitly told: “You cannot win the war; NATO decides to [remain](#) in Afghanistan”. Furthermore, NATO members jointly agreed that they will continue to finance the Afghan security forces till 2024.

Peace: The recent NATO summit supported and praised the Afghan government’s peace proposal to the Taliban. Meanwhile, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg called on the armed opposition of Afghan government saying that they cannot win the war and that there should be a peaceful solution carved out of the crisis through political settlement owned by Afghans; this being what Taliban has always rejected.

The Afghan government, especially after the formation of National Unity Government (NUG), has made remarkable national -, regional and international-level efforts for making peace with Taliban. Besides political and military pressures, the National Unity Government (NUG) has put religious pressures on the Taliban as well. Afghan government was able to make the ongoing war declared as “[Haram](#)” or prohibited as a result of “fatwas” or religious rulings issued by Afghan scholars, the Imam of Ka’aba and a large number of religious scholars from the Islamic World. Nonetheless, the [Taliban](#) are yet to make peace.

The Peace process has faced deadlock in Afghanistan since the last few years and the main reasons, among other reasons, is that the Taliban want direct talks with the United States. while the U.S. does not agree to this . Though, the international [media](#) published reports that it is likely that the U.S tries to initiate direct talks with the Taliban, the Afghan government has [responded by saying](#) that no country could substitute the Afghan government in talks with the Taliban.

These reports have brought hopes to many; however fears remain that should the U.S. intend to have direct talks with the Taliban and the Afghan government oppose it, the peace talks will then face deadlock once again.

Nonetheless, we can say that the Eid-ul Fitr ceasefire between the Afghan government and Taliban has proved that Afghans are tired of war and they want peace more than anything. However, the presence of foreign troops is a major reason behind the continuation of war. For now, it is crucial that the international community and NATO try to solve the major reason behind Afghan War. By encouraging the U.S to have direct talks with the Taliban and to play its role in solving the Afghan War, the road to peace can be paved. Meanwhile, the Taliban should also accept the legitimacy of the Afghan government and understand that the war is going on between three sides (U.S, Afghan government and Taliban), , and together these three entities should find a solution and put an end to the war.

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