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Preface

After 17 years, the Afghan war launched by the U.S and NATO is still ongoing. In this period, U.S forces attempted various military strategies such as raising the number of its troops to more than a hundred thousand in order to achieve success. Despite the employment of advanced weapons and artillery, evidently, the only achievement so far has been the perpetuation of war and frustration of the Afghan population.

With the election to power of Donald Trump, a new strategy comprising increased military pressure and increase in number of troops was implemented; however, a year later it seems as though Trump has understood the failure of this strategy and is now trying to review it and to find a solution for the Afghan war.

The first part of the Weekly Analysis will discuss the published reports on U.S. direct talks with the Taliban, factors behind the failure of the current U.S. military strategy, and the way forward to putting an end to the Afghan war and making peace with the Taliban.

The second part of the Weekly Analysis looks into the return of the First Vice President, Gen. Abdul Rasheed Dostum. General Dostum had left the country and gone to Turkey after being accused of sexual abuse of ex-governor of Jawzjan province of Afghanistan; Ahmad Ishchi, and after entering into conflict with President Ghani. He has, however, returned to the country in a situation where thousands of people have started protests since the last 20 days demanding the release of Nizamuddin Qaisari and return of General Dostum with public ways, commercial ports and some governmental offices being closed down.

Reviewing the Trump Strategy: The Need for Resolving the Afghan Crisis



After 17 years of U.S initiated war in Afghanistan, some U.S. officials, according to media reports, agree that the U.S. has come to terms with its failure in the Afghan war and that it now seeks to [review](#) its strategy for the country.

Notably, the New York Times published a report that revealed Donald Trump ordering diplomats to initiate direct talks with the Taliban. Despite the Taliban showing willingness and interest in the measure, U.S officials [refused](#) the issue and said that the Afghan government and Taliban would remain the main parties to negotiate when it comes to peace talks.

Conversely, Afghanistan announced its [opposition](#) to the direct talks between Taliban and the U.S stating that no country can substitute the Afghan government in the peace talks with the Taliban. The current situation in Afghanistan, the factors behind the failure of the Trump Strategy in Afghanistan, and the changes needed in the U.S. strategy of Afghanistan in order to put an end to the Afghan war and maintain peace in the country are discussed here.

A Picture of the Current Situation

The peace and stability maintenance slogans by the U.S and NATO, after 17 years of their military presence in Afghanistan, have remained mere slogans devoid of action while the country continues to face declining security, political and economic conditions.

Security is at its worst situation in recent years, while the ongoing war is intensifying day by day and claims the lives of countless Afghans. According to recent reports by SIGAR, more than 40 percent of Afghanistan's territory is under the control of armed opposition forces of the Afghan government. Attacks and deadly explosions by armed opposition forces have increased in the capital Kabul and other cities of the country. The recent attack which occurred last week on a convoy of Gen. Dostum near to the entrance of Hamid Karzai International Airport in Kabul killed 14 people and injured 60 others as ISIL burdened the responsibility.

On the other hand, the airstrikes by the US and Afghan forces have risen unprecedentedly after the announcement of the new U.S. strategy for Afghanistan and South Asia. Dozens of civilians, including women and children were killed and wounded as a result of airstrikes by foreign forces and the Afghan army in Kunduz, Paktia, Logar, Wardak and Nangarhar provinces last month only. According to a recent report by [UNAMA](#), 5122 civilians were killed and wounded only in the first six months of 2018.

From the very beginning, the 50-50 share of power between Dr. Abdullah and Mohammad Ashraf Ghani was the initiator of internal disputes and political instability in the country. Moreover, the dispute among the President and First Vice-President (that were apparently resolved with Gen. Dostum returning to Afghanistan after 14 months of exile in Turkey last week and resuming duties), discord among some members of the legislative and executive powers, along with the confrontation between some political parties, the government, and the Elections Commission (IEC) on how to hold Parliamentary and District Council Elections are the factors that have put the country's political situation in a fragile condition overshadowing the lives of the Afghan people.

When it comes to economy, despite the fact that during the era of the National Unity Government, some infrastructure projects were completed and the government's revenues increased in comparison to the previous years (the contributing factors of which was the tax on the credit cards of telecommunication networks), overall, the country's economic situation is in a state of devastation in comparison to a decade and half ago. The value of the Afghani has dropped to its lowest (1 USD was exchanged with 57.76 Afghani in 2015, but now it has reached 72.30) while the unemployment rate is at its peak. The World Bank stated in a recent survey that 1.9 million eligible Afghan workers are unemployed. According to Afghan Central Statistics Organization (CSO), 400 000 new work forces are introduced to the market every year. The country is facing dire situations with more than 40 percent of the population is living beneath the poverty line.

Factors behind the Trump Strategy Failure

The Afghan war is a legacy of the previous U.S. governments up to the Trump administration. Donald Trump, who was opposed to the U.S. presence in Afghanistan before becoming President, agreed to continue the Afghan war after taking office and sent around three thousand additional soldiers to Afghanistan while announcing his new strategy after eight months of delay.

Two factors become evident with regards to the Trump Strategy for Afghanistan which was not as effective in improving the security situation of Afghanistan, given that one year has already passed:

First; focusing more on the battlefield and positioning more soldiers in Afghanistan has been a strategy that failed at achieving U.S success in the Afghan war, despite the fact that more than a hundred thousand troops were deployed. Notwithstanding that airstrikes have multiplied in comparison to the past as a result of the new U.S. strategy; the war has intensified and the tactic has achieved nothing apart from the increase in civilian casualties which have caused the people to take a distance from the Afghan government. Afghans increasingly believe that the new U.S. strategy is not a resolution of the Afghan issue anymore and that it is unable to grant success to the U.S.

Second; the dependence of U.S. military presence in Afghanistan on certain previously set criteria (such as the fight against terror and the elimination of the roots of terrorism), has become cause for the period of U.S military presence in Afghanistan to linger on with no set time-frame. The end of U.S. military presence in Afghanistan is one of the most important conditions of the Taliban in peace talks with the Afghan government. Following the peace proposal of the Afghan government at the second meeting of the Kabul Process, the military presence of foreign troops seemed to be the only obstacle against the positive response of the Taliban to the proposal, and an excuse for continuation of war by the group.

The Need for Change in U.S Strategy

After 17 years of the US-led war in Afghanistan, the country is in a state of deadlock with civilians paying the heaviest price. Apparently, considering the recent international media reports, Washington also seems drained by the continuation of the war in Afghanistan and is trying to review its strategy in Afghanistan to resolve the conflict.

In reviewing the U.S strategy, the following points are worth mentioning:

First of all ; the U.S attacked Afghanistan, eliminated the Taliban regime, and initiated the current war. Most importantly, it was directly involved in the Afghan war during the past 17 years, and hence, as it had played a role in the initiation and continuation of war, it would be in the best interests if it accepted to have direct talks with its opposition in order to end the war and to make an effort to put an end to its longest war.

Secondly; in order for the United States to end its longest war, it needs to talk to the Taliban about their most important demand; that is the scheduling of withdrawal of foreign forces. In order to move forward, the U.S should put the schedule of withdrawal of their troops on the negotiation table.

Thirdly, the U.S should increase its pressure on Pakistan to cooperate honestly in the maintenance of peace and stability in Afghanistan. However, these pressures would be of no use as long as the U.S does not engage in the process of ending the war and as long as they do not enter into talks with the Taliban.

Fourthly; peace with the Taliban and stability maintenance in Afghanistan needs facilitation inside the country as well. Currently, a number of groups and persons try to elongate the war for the sake of their personal interests and thus, create barriers in peace talks with the Taliban. Thus, the U.S. should support the peace efforts made by the Afghan government when it comes to peace with the Taliban while also playing a positive role in maintaining peace inside Afghanistan as well.

Lastly; in recent years, there has been an increasing amount of scholarly analyses into the U.S presence in Afghanistan being linked to its aspirations for containing regional powers from reaching Central Asia; however, apart from provoking the sensitivities of regional powers, the lengthy Afghan war has proven that the U.S has not achieved much in its interests. Therefore, it is in the U.S interests that it grant assurance to regional countries of its withdrawal from Afghanistan and initiate direct talks with the Taliban.

The Taliban should also accept the Afghan government as one of the main parties of the Afghan issue for the sake of ending the destruction of the war and achieving peace in Afghanistan. End

Gen. Dostum: a Prominent Figure for Every Afghan President from Dr. Najeeb to Dr. Ghani



Last week (July 22, 2018), Afghan First Vice-President Gen. Abdul Rasheed Dostum returned to the country after 14 months of exile in Turkey.

The Afghan government; however, states “sickness” the reason behind his stay in Turkey but almost a year and half ago, after he entered into conflict with the government, Gen. Dostum accused both leaders of the National Unity Government (NUG) of sectarianism and monopoly. Following these disputes, Gen. Dostum was accused of sexual abuse of ex-Jawzjan governor; Ahmad Ishchi, and the case eventually caused him to leave the country and go to Turkey.

During the last 14 months; Gen. Dostum, to a large extent continued his disputes with Afghan President and formed the “Coalition for the Rescue of Afghanistan” as an opposition standing against the Afghan government. Last year, a series of reports were published about a private jet carrying Gen. Dostum being denied permission to land at Balkh International Airport of Afghanistan after arriving in the country, on orders of the central government. Thus, his private jet first returned to Turkmenistan, and then to Turkey.

The issues on the role of Gen. Dostum in Afghan politics, his friendship and disputes with President Ghani and what the likely consequences of Gen. Dostum's return to Kabul are discussed here.

The First Vice President Gen. Dostum

Gen. Dostum is a person with little to no education who rose from being a worker to being a military General. He has featured as a prominent figure for every head of state in the Afghan politics, where each head of state has always sought to have him on their side.

Dr. Najeeb was the first Afghan head of state who tried to have Gen. Dostum on his side and thus granted him the rank of General and made him the leader of a number of local armed militias. These militias are called "*Gilim-Jam*" for their brutality, loot and other crimes. People have bitter memories of these militias in the Najeeb Administration, which in many ways opened the door to ethnical disputes.

After the collapse of the Taliban regime and establishment of a new government, Gen. Dostum also remained a notable figure in the ex-President Karzai's eyes as well. He became first vice-president with the formation of National Unity Government (NUG), who, according to law, may substitute the President in his absence and control the overall affairs of the country.

Overall, Gen. Dostum has remained a high official in the political field and has always retained prominence for governmental leaders in every system. The reason for such importance given to him lies in his influence as the founder of "Afghanistan Islamic Movement Party" known as "Junbish" which holds the support of the absolute majority of Uzbeks and Turkmens alongside the support of regional countries with Uzbek and Turkmen roots. Therefore, politicians from Dr. Najeeb to Dr. Ghani have had him on their side in order to reach power through him.

Disputes Between Dostum and Ashraf Ghani

Ashraf Ghani appointed Gen. Dostum as his First Vice-President in the 2014 Presidential Elections. He played a key role for taking President Ghani into the Presidency.

The First Vice-President has civil duty according to law; however, Gen. Dostum led numerous wars against Taliban in the northern provinces after he took the office as First Vice-President, despite it being against his duty calls.

Gen. Dostum's involvement in war has, to a large extent, kept him away from political decisions. Judging from the disputes among both leaders of NUG and conflict of interests present since the beginning, it would seem that the conflict between President Ghani and Gen. Dostum has also been from the get-go.

On October 25, 2015; First Vice-President Gen. Dostum, during a [press conference](#), accused the President and Chief Executive of Afghanistan of sectarianism and monopoly adding that "they have appointed someone in the Defense Ministry that cannot walk properly. Stanekzai is famous with the title of "Talib" and does not know who he gets orders from. He was unable to receive the Confidence Vote from the Parliament and is held responsible for the murder of Rabbani."

After these disputes, Ahmad Ishchi, former Jawzjan governor and Deputy Chair of Dostum's Junbish party accused First Vice-President, Gen. Dostum of keeping him captive in his private prison for five days while torturing and sexually abusing him, and recording the ordeal.

The remarks of Ahmad Ishchi were given wide coverage by domestic and international media and provoked the reaction of the International Community. The Presidential Palace of Afghanistan issued a statement and promised that they will follow up on the issue with seriousness through judicial structures.

Gen. Dostum left the country for Turkey as a result of the case, and apparently publicized his trips purpose as being for medical treatment. As the political disputes rose to a peak, he formed the "Afghanistan Rescue Coalition" along with the Jamiate Islami Party and Wahdate Islami Party of Afghanistan in Turkey.

The Return of Gen. Dostum to Afghanistan

After being accused of sexual abuse of Ex-Jawzjan governor Ahmad Ishchi, Gen. Dostum went to Turkey following his dispute with President Ghani and stayed there for 14 months. However, his case is still undergoing judicial proceedings.

In July 2017, some reports published that the government refused to let Dostum return to the country denying his private jet [permission](#) to land in Afghanistan. However; last week Gen. Dostum returned to the country with a number of senior Afghan officials welcoming him warmly in the Kabul International Airport, and the ceremony of his return being broadcasted from RTA (National) TV live. The question remains how Dostum returned to the country receiving such a warm welcome after 14 months of de facto exile?

The following points are noteworthy in this regard:

Firstly; after the government detained Nizamuddin Qaisari- special representative of Gen. Dostum in Faryab province, thousands of people took to the streets in many parts of the Northern provinces and blocked the highways, shutting down trade centers and government offices. The return of Gen. Dostum to the country and release of Qaisari were two main demands from protestors. At first, the Afghan government tried to control the protests leading to protestors suffering some casualties, however, the protests intensified and continued for 20 days. Thereafter, the Afghan government was compelled to deal with Gen. Dostum and return him to the country for the sake of ending the chaotic situation.

Secondly; securing and holding the upcoming Parliamentary Elections in Northern provinces were important and thus striking a deal with Dostum was crucial. Also, the government's efforts at trying to weaken the opposition "Coalition of the Rescue of Afghanistan" through quelling the situation with Dostum is aimed at avoiding any hurdles he may create during upcoming elections.

Thirdly; due to Dostum's wide influential position and important role in boosting President Ghani's position in the previous Presidential Elections through votes garnered through him, President Ghani tries to once again have Dostum in the upcoming Presidential Elections on his side in order to defeat his political rivals. However, it is yet to be seen whether Gen. Dostum will remain on the side of Ashraf Ghani or not.

Then again, the return of Gen. Dostum ended the hopes that had emerged for Ghani's struggle against strongmen and warlords. Moreover, Gen. Dostum told the media after his return that he would talk to the President about Nizamuddin Qaisari's release, and if refused, he once again would return to Turkey. Considering these remarks, it is very likely that Qaisari; detained on allegations of abusing power and leading illegally armed men, will be released as a result of the pressure placed on government.

On the other hand, Ahmad Ishchi, in an interview with BBC, said that his case will be resolved through the *Jirga* [local gathering of elders], which points to the fact that a case which caused de facto exile of the First Vice-President for 14 months and was still undergoing judicial investigation is ultimately to be resolved through a *Jirga*; which could be considered as a form of disregard for the judiciary. The result could mean a loss of trust and regard for these structures in the eyes of the Afghan population.

End

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