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In this issue:

Preface..... 2

Peace and the New Emerging Aspects of the Afghan War

Direct Talks between the U.S. and Taliban 4

The “Local Army” Plan 5

The Afghan War Peace Prospects 5

Political Coalitions and their Organizational Foundations in Afghanistan

Opposition and Anti-Government Coalitions 8

Political Coalitions in Afghanistan 9

“Great National Coalition of Afghanistan” 9

Preface

In recent years, more than ever, efforts for the sake of peace with the Taliban have been under way; however, these efforts are yet to have any positive results. When it comes to peace, the Taliban have always stressed on direct talks with the United States. Recently, it seems that the demand of the Taliban is being met, as some media reports indicate that Taliban and American officials had face-to-face talks in Qatar, and hence, are trying to solve the Afghan issue through talks.

On the other hand that, the Pakistani “Ummat” Newspaper, quoting the Taliban officials, wrote that the Taliban have asked for 13 provinces from the United States. Also, there are reports that the U.S has ordered the Afghan government to take its troops out of remote and less-populated areas. The Afghan government, however, denies that it was ordered by the U.S. to do so; at the same time accepting that according to a new plan, National Army Forces in less-populated areas will be moved to cities, and replaced with Local Army which would be comprised of local armed people.

Currently, on the one hand, the U.S. peace talks with the Taliban are reason for optimism, but on the other hand, withdrawing the Afghan Security Forces from the areas under their control and creating local militias are concerning. This issue is discussed in the first part of the Weekly Analysis of the Center for Strategic and Regional Studies (CSRS).

The second part of this issue is allocated for the analysis of the formation of the “Great National Coalition of Afghanistan” by a number of political parties and well-known figures. The coalition was established a few days after the first Vice-President, Gen. Dostum returned to the country. The members of the new coalition, however, harshly criticized the work of the government and have threatened to initiate civil movements, should their demands not be met.

Peace and the New Emerging Aspects of the Afghan War



Following the instigation of rumors on direct talks between the U.S. and the Taliban, last week, the Wall Street Journal [published](#) a report in which it pointed out that the Taliban and U.S officials had direct talks in Doha of Qatar. Although the Taliban are yet to release any official statements, a number of media reports claim that these talks are confirmed by sources close to the Taliban.

Meanwhile, [Reuters](#) News Agency reported that the Taliban officials said that these talks took place as result of the consent of the Taliban Leadership Council, and that both sides had discussions about proposals which allow the Taliban to move freely in two provinces of Afghanistan, without the threat of coming under attack.

The plan has already been rejected by Afghan President Ghani; however, reports on a new plan of the Afghan government and the U.S have emerged, on the basis of which, the withdrawal of the National Armed Forces from less-populated areas and substitution of them with “[Local Army](#)” consisting of locals, to be used in maintaining the security of their own communities, is under way.

The direct talks between Afghan Taliban and U.S officials, rumors of providing the Taliban with privileges, withdrawal of the Armed Forces from less-populated areas, and arming of the locals with the purpose of maintaining security of their localities are discussed here.

Direct Talks between the U.S. and Taliban

Donald Trump, prior to ascending to Presidency, was strongly against the ongoing U.S. war in Afghanistan. However, shortly after becoming President, he followed the path of former U.S. Presidents and emphasized on the continuation of the Afghan War. Yet, due to the U.S war strategy having failed for last 17 years, soon Trump also understood it's ineffectiveness, and chose the approach of beginning talks with the Taliban.

The National Unity Government (NUG) have made significant national, regional, and global efforts for making peace with the Taliban; however, the Taliban have always rejected talks with the Afghan government, demanding direct talks with the United States only. Although, the U.S had not seemed to show an interest in meeting this demand of the Taliban till last month; last week, the Wall Street Journal reported that a high-level U.S. delegation headed by U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Ellis Welys, had direct talks with Taliban representatives in Doha, the capital of Qatar. Nevertheless, the Taliban are yet to release any official statement in this regard, but two senior Taliban officials have told BBC that they had a meeting with American officials in Doha.

The agenda of the meeting between Taliban representatives and U.S. officials and the issues discussed are yet to be understood, however, Reuters reported, based on quotes from a Taliban official, that the meeting took place in a welcoming atmosphere that had positive messages, where both sides promised that for the sake of solving the current issue through negotiations, they would again continue the direct talks in Qatar, Turkey or Saudi Arabia next month.

Overall, the direct peace talks between Taliban and the U.S on putting an end to the Afghan War are reason for hope; however, the honesty of the U.S and fulfillment of its promises is an important point in these talks.

The “Local Army” Plan

In the previous days, media reports have been circulating, that the U.S ordered the Afghan government to remove its security forces from less-populated areas. The Afghan Defense Ministry, however, claims it to be the Afghan government’s own plan of which the U.S. President happens to approve. The Defense Ministry added that they plan to withdraw the National Armed forces from areas with few inhabitants, and substitute them with a locals who would form a "Local Army".

The Local Army, according to the officials of the Ministry, will differ from Local Police or *Arbaki* forces and would comprise mainly of ex-soldiers and military officers of the Defense Ministry, operating under the command of the National Army.

The plan of the Local Army, however, emerged alongside reports on direct talks between the U.S and Taliban, yet according to a report by [Reuters](#) in September of 2017, such plans have been discussed between the U.S and Afghan officials in New Delhi, as India has used such local forces that burdens less responsibility in comparison to national security forces. This points to the likelihood of the plan being a Trump Strategy.

The plan for local militia in Afghanistan is not considered a wise option. Creating a new local force by the Afghan government and U.S is the repetition of the experience of Local Police. It would be better to empower, train and equip the national armed forces with modern weapons, instead of forming local armed militia.

The Afghan War Peace Prospects

Peace: Peace talks with the Taliban are now warmer than ever before; however, the presence of foreign forces in Afghanistan and the Taliban emphasis on direct talks with the United States is will be major determining factors to the outcome of such talks.

Although the U.S has made numerous efforts to defeat the Taliban through every possible means, and to make them sit at the negotiation table with the Afghan government, these efforts inversely paved the way for the Taliban to build ties

with regional rivals of the U.S, and to free themselves of the monopoly of one country.

Despite the elongation of the war, Taliban's ties with Russia, Iran and China were the factors that compelled the U.S to consider direct peace talks with the Taliban. Although the U.S claims to want to bring the Taliban into peace talks through every possible means, and to schedule the withdrawal of its forces, in reality, the United States interest in an unstable and fragile political and security situation in Afghanistan seems manifest. With instability in Afghanistan, the U.S perceive their continued presence in Afghanistan as justified.

War: The withdrawal of Afghan security forces from remote areas and focusing on cities only, is a new change in the Afghan war strategy. The locals, who live in areas under the control of the Afghan National Army, will be equipped with weapons for the sake of maintaining the security of their own localities.

The following points on the strategy are worth discussing:

- Most of Afghan cities are not involved in face-to-face war that would require deployment of Afghan Armed forces there, however, the bloody attacks and explosions occurring in the cities are solely due to intelligence weaknesses. A powerful intelligence plan and action is needed to prevent such attacks.
- The deployment of the National Army in cities might be helpful in decreasing criminal incidents; however, it also may be the cause of the armed opposition increasing its focus on cities and carrying out assaults there. Meanwhile, the Taliban, while fighting with Local Army, would face air bombardment from the U.S and Afghan forces, and as always, civilians would pay the highest price in casualties.
- The creation of the new force titled “Local Army”, is no more than the creation of additional militia and repetition of past experiences. Consequently, as militia gain more power, they will cause ethnic and tribal conflicts among the people. It is also very likely that these militia turn into Mafia circles creating greater disruption for the Afghan government. End

Political Coalitions and their Organizational Foundations in Afghanistan



In recent years, the Afghan political arena has been witness to confrontations and conflicts between the government, and a number of political parties and politicians in the country. Last week (26 July, 2018), a number of political parties and movements, came together in a ceremony in Kabul, and announced the formation of the “Great National Coalition of Afghanistan” there.

The Executive Head of Jamiat-e Islami Party, [Atta Mohammad](#) Noor, during the ceremony held for announcing the formation of the coalition, accused the National Unity Government (NUG) of lack of program/policy, and mismanagement. He added that suppressing well-known persons and releasing criminals under the banner of a peace process will lead the country into precipice, and that it has brought the rule of law under question.

The press release by the [Presidential Palace](#), however, welcomed the formation of the political coalitions and added that the President of Afghanistan will meet its members in the near future, hoping to have discussions with them on national issues. It also emphasized however, that patience, breadth and positive competitiveness is required for political development.

Opposition and anti-government coalitions, the factors behind formation of anti-government coalitions in Afghanistan, and the foundation of “Great National Coalition of Afghanistan” are the topics that are discussed in this Analysis.

Opposition and Anti-Government Coalitions

The term “opposition” means antagonism, resistance and confrontation, and in its broader meaning, opposition is the efforts made by parties and political streams to achieve the goals that are in contrary with the objectives of those having political power in a state.

Opposition and formation of political coalitions is a principle of governance in democratic societies. The opposition and collations observe the government’s performance and policies closely, keeping check on proper functioning through criticism of the government in power. Apart from the Western democratic principle, In Islam; observing the performance of the governing system and criticizing it, is considered the best form of struggle, and is an ethical responsibility of every individual in the society. For this reason, the role of the opposition is welcomed in all democratic societies, in order to push government leading to improved functioning and efficiency.

Based on the Constitution, all governments with Parliamentary System have officially permitted opposition parties in the country. In such countries, a group is formed in the Parliament that does not support the government, while still respecting and remaining committed to the constitution. In these countries, the opposition can participate in the law-making discussions of the Parliament, as prescribed in the law, in order to observe the government’s performance directly and inform the public opinion on developments at national and international level.

Political Coalitions in Afghanistan

In underdeveloped countries like Afghanistan, the opposition is often referred to as opponents who seek to overthrow the governmental system of that society. These groups are often supported by hegemonic powers of the world using politics, propaganda and financial means.

In the last one and a half decade, Afghanistan has witnessed several political coalitions and opposition groups that, to a large extent, were being formed at the time close to Parliamentary or Presidential Elections. These coalitions were opposing the government politically and were criticizing its work.

Although, after 2001 and the establishment of a new system in Afghanistan, it was hoped that Afghanistan's political leaders and elites, after all the years of mistakes and slip-ups, would finally have attained political maturity and growth, and would see the forming of coalition with others in their interest; however, these coalitions, frequently or after each election runoff, collapse from the inside, with many of its members leaving the coalition seeking seats in the government.

Politicians also took such measures during the National Unity Government (NUG); for example, to name a few, "Protection and Stability Council of Afghanistan", "Coalition for the Rescue of Afghanistan", a new coalition under the banner of "Great National Coalition of Afghanistan", and some other small coalitions.

Generally, the coalitions that have been formed against the Afghan government in the past one and a half decade have always criticized the government policies and proposed alternatives without having serious or continuous attention to it. They have tried to change the overall system, without taking the public good into consideration, and without having any practical and alternative proposal.

"Great National Coalition of Afghanistan"

First Vice-President- Abdul Rasheed Dostum, Foreign Affairs' Minister- Salahuddin Rabbani, Former Balkh Governor- Atta Mohammad Noor, Second Deputy Chief Executive- Mohammad Mohaqqiq, a number of renowned political figures, and some Parliamentarians comprise the prominent members of "Great National Coalition of Afghanistan".

Members of the coalition harshly criticized the government (NUG) work during the announcement of their existence. A member of the coalition, Atta Mohammad Noor said that “the current situation in the country is concerning, ethnic separation; attempts to eliminate others and domineering have brought Afghanistan closer to the precipice of collapse”.

On the other hand, Mohammad Mohaqqiq, another member of the coalition, in his speech, asked the government to accept the electoral proposal of the political parties in which it proposes to change the system of non-transferable united voting system to a transferable unit voting system - and warned that "if not complied, it [the government] should expect the pressure of civil movements of the parties”.

Nevertheless, considering the form of establishment of the coalition and interactions between the individuals related to different parties and temporary coalitions, it seems that the “Great National Coalition of Afghanistan” will once again, not be able to hold on to its unity and solidarity, and thus, will have a short life. The possibilities of the collapse of the “Great National Coalition of Afghanistan” are discussed in the following four points:

Firstly; the parties and political movements that are active in Afghan politics have not had significant achievements in the last seventeen years. When it comes to on the one hand empowering its own internal solidarity, and on the other hand, providing proper responses to the political interactions and issues in the country, as a political party and in accordance with political principles of the party, these movements have failed. For example, Mohammad Mohaqqiq of the Hizbe Wahdate Islami Party stood on the side of Dr. Abdullah Abdullah of Jamiate Islami Party during the 2014 Presidential Elections; however, Ismail Khan from Jamiate Islami Party, instead of standing on the side of a member of his party, stood on the side of Abdul Rab Rasool Sayyaf of the Dawate Islami Party. Therefore, when a party is not able to achieve solidarity among its own members, how could it be possible for a multi-party coalition to have solidarity and unity?

Secondly; the presence of some government officials in the coalition without them tendering their resignation from their governmental positions is

problematic. Often people or politicians who gather under the umbrella of opposition or an anti-government coalitions are expected to resign from their current governmental positions and then join the anti-government political coalition; but the members of the anti-government coalitions announce their formation while remaining in office. If the relations of such persons with government improves one day due to some interactions, they would be able to overlook their past disputes, withdraw from the coalition and then join the government.

Thirdly; similar to previous coalitions, there are some individuals in the coalition that have joined it just as they have lost their positions in the country and thus, want to enter the power game with a new figure. These individuals are committed to the coalition till the day they once again attain a seat or position in the government, after which they would immediately leave the coalition.

Fourthly; the individuals from Mafia groups that see their business and future at risk also try to join the political coalitions. They, through this means, try to put pressure on the government in order to decrease the governmental pressure on them in return. Such people stay in the coalitions until they achieve their objectives, after which they leave.

Also, considering the condition of coalitions in the past years and the timing in which they form being dates usually close to the Presidential Elections, it seems that such coalitions are often based on personal interests of politicians and/or attaining power and position in the political field, and not for the sake of national interests, rule of law, and reforms in the system.

End

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