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## Preface

The ongoing U.S. War in Afghanistan is considered the longest war of the country. The only achievement of the U.S. in the 17-year war has been its prolongation in which countless Afghans are killed every day.

Exactly one year ago President Trump declared his new strategy for Afghanistan and South Asia; however, a year later, it still seems that the ongoing U.S. War reflects a certain ambiguity. Not only has the U.S. failed in stopping the ongoing war in Afghanistan, but it has been responsible for the deterioration of security and political situation. It has also led to the involvement of Russia, Iran and China in Afghanistan.

Recently, a series of reports was published stating that the U.S. wants to designate Zalmay Khalilzad as its special envoy to Afghanistan. Khalilzad is one of many key figures that the U.S. relies on where Afghanistan matters. As an American politician, he had an important role in the establishment and strengthening of the new Afghan system after 2001, having also contributed to important missions in Afghanistan and Iraq.

In the first part of the Weekly Analysis of the Center for Strategic and Regional Studies (CSRS), the arrival of Zalmay Khalilzad in the present situation of Afghanistan and possible impacts on the Afghan political situation, as well as the upcoming elections are discussed.

The second part of the Weekly Analysis is allocated for the Taliban's brazen assault on the center of the Ghazni Province. In recent years, the Taliban have changed their war strategy and hence, mostly carry combined attacks on big cities. In the last few years, Ghazni, which is a big city after Kunduz and Farah, faced collective attacks from the Taliban. The Taliban seized majority of the areas from the governmental forces and held them for five days. Hundreds of people, including civilians, were killed and injured from both sides, and millions of dollars' worth of losses had been suffered by the public in the war.

## Zalmay Khalilzad and his expected new mission in Afghanistan



Since the last forty years, Zalmay Khalilzad has been a prominent figure in the Afghan-U.S. ties. Last week, [Reuters](#) sourcing two U.S. officials, reported that it was likely the U.S. government would place Zalmay Khalilzad as its special envoy to Afghanistan.

The rumors on Zalmay Khalilzad's appointment as the special U.S. envoy to Afghanistan comes at a time when after the Ghazni War, the Kabul-Islamabad ties, despite many trust-building efforts, are once again facing strained relations. Despite the fact that peace talks are being pursued more than any other time, its fate remains uncertain and a lot of questions have been raised regarding the new U.S. War strategy, considering the current security situation in Afghanistan.

The following topics are discussed here:

1. The journey of Zalmay Khalilzad from Afghanistan to the White House
2. The reasons behind Khalilzad's appointment as the U.S. special Envoy by Donald Trump
3. The impact of Khalilzad's arrival in Afghanistan.

## **Khalilzad: From Afghanistan to White House**

Afghan-born American, Zalmay Khalilzad was born in Balkh province. His father is related to Pashtuns of Laghman province. Khalilzad immigrated to America while he was a young man later receiving citizenship of the country. He received his bachelor's and Master's degree from American University of Beirut in Lebanon and PhD degree from Chicago University of the United States of America.

For the past forty years, Zalmay Khalilzad has performed duties in different governmental positions in the U.S and is known to be an important figure of the inner circle of Republican foreign policy. The Afghan-born American had an important role in the U.S. campaign on Afghanistan after 9/11, and had completely cooperated with President Bush on preparing the attack plan on Afghanistan, whereas the U.S., eventually attacked Afghanistan for the sake of the elimination of Al Qaeda and collapse of the Taliban regime, which was founded on the base of 17 years of bloody war in Afghanistan.

Zalmay Khalilzad had an important role in establishing the new system in Afghanistan after 2001 as he was an impenitent figure in U.S. politics on matters concerning Afghanistan. Khalilzad served as U.S. ambassador to Afghanistan between 2003 and 2005. During that period, he assisted in preparing the draft of the Afghan Constitution and took a remarkable part in strengthening the government headed by President Hamid Karzai. He then served as U.S. ambassador to Iraq between 2005 and 2007 and ambassador to U.N. between 2007 and 2009.

## **New Mission**

The rumors on Zalmay Khalilzad's appointment as the U.S. Special Envoy to Afghanistan comes at a time when the commander of U.S. forces in Afghanistan admits to the [deadlock](#) in the ongoing war in Afghanistan. The U.S. government has understood that it cannot win the Afghan war through military pressure, and thus, has recently chosen to have direct talks with the Taliban.

The U.S war of Afghanistan is a legacy of Bush and Obama for Donald Trump. Trump was initially critical of the U.S. strategy in Afghanistan; however, his stance soon changed once he took office, insisting on the continuation of war.

On August 22 2017, President Trump announced his strategy for Afghanistan and South Asia where he declared a continuation of war with a goal of winning the war through increasing the number of troops; however, a year later, the Afghan security situation has deteriorated more than ever. Based on a recent report by SIGAR, the area captured and controlled by the Taliban has increased in Afghanistan.

On the other hand, not only has the Trump strategy caused an empowerment of anti-war sentiment, but it has also caused an emergence of concerns of a number of countries like China, Russia, Iran, Pakistan and Central Asia and thus, some of them, have increased their diplomatic ties with the Taliban.

Considering the current situation, the U.S is in the process of making efforts to take the Afghan war out of the current deadlock. In this context, Khalilzad being an Afghan-born American politician having adequate information on Afghan culture, social life, and politics and on the other hand having significant experience of advising four U.S. administrations, is why the U.S. might be optimistic to appoint him as special envoy to Afghanistan.

### **Ensuing Scenario:**

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo is expected to tap Zalmay Khalilzad as his special envoy on Afghanistan, according to reports. The following points are worth noting when it comes to the impact of Khalilzad's appointments in current situations:

#### **Afghan-Pak Ties**

Zalmay Khalilzad is a U.S politician that has always criticized Pakistan's policies. Khalilzad believes that the entire number of groups fighting against the Afghan government have ties with Pakistan. Two years ago, the [BBC](#) reported him as saying "Pakistan backs terrorists and thus the United States should stop its

military and financial aid to Pakistan in order to pressurize them to discontinue supporting terrorists”.

With the arrival of Zalmay Khalilzad, efforts to increase the U.S. and other Western countries’ pressure on Pakistan would follow, which would cause the country to put pressure on elements in Afghanistan who are anti-government and to improve its ties with Afghanistan for the sake of decreasing international pressures on itself.

### **Political Coalition**

Zalmay Khalilzad is a person who played a key role in strengthening the central government in Afghanistan after 2001. At that time, he had a role in weakening a number of strongmen and groups who had established power islands in their areas, and were making efforts to gain more power in the central government.

Presently, Afghanistan once again faces political instability while numerous anti-government coalitions are being formed in the last two years. Recently, the coalitions have proved to be a big concern for the Afghan government and have filled the election process with barriers and postponements. They have tried to establish an interim government through inviting a Loya Jirga (Grand Gathering of Afghans) to replace the central government. The arrival of Zalmay Khalilzad at such a time would cause the anti-government coalitions to diffuse and for the central government to take a breath of relaxation.

### **Presidential Elections**

Ever since the Bonn Conference took place, the U.S. has always played a noteworthy role in the electoral process of Afghanistan. Less than a year is left for the termination of term of the National Unity Government (NUG) and the Presidential Elections have been planned to be held on April 20, 2019. With the appointment of Zalmay Khalilzad as its special envoy to Afghanistan, the U.S. will once again try to impact the Presidential Elections; however, the question remains who Zalmay Khalilzad would back in these elections.

Taking a glance at the past few years, Zalmay Khalilzad has always supported the central government in political disputes throughout the term of the National

Unity Government (NUG). During the dispute between President Ghani and former Balkh province Atta Mohammad Noor, Zalmay Khalilzad [warned](#) Atta Mohammad Noor that neither do the Afghan government and its international partners have patience against him nor do they want the continuation of the problem. When Kandahar Police Chief, Gen. Abdul Razeq made anti-government remarks, Khalilzad was quick to say that: “if efforts are made to establish feudalism in Kandahar, the world will not remain impartial and silent”. The signing of the Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA) with the United States and calling the Trump Strategy on Afghanistan and South Asia (with all of its problems and failures) “effective” by President Ghani show the closeness of President Ghani and the U.S. government.

Taking the above mentioned reasons into consideration, there are predictions that the Khalilzad mission will have a great impact on the upcoming elections. For now, political parties and former strongmen have, to some extent, challenged the upcoming Parliamentary Elections. The failure or postponement of these elections will further deepen the legitimacy crisis in Afghanistan on the one hand, while on the other hand, they will definitely have an impact on Presidential Elections as well. Therefore, the cancellation or postponement of the election was accepted neither by the Afghan government nor to the International Community. With the arrival of Khalilzad, efforts will be made to eliminate the existing barriers before the Parliamentary Elections. Besides that, it is predicted that Khalilzad might not support the present political opposition of President Ghani and former strongmen in the upcoming Presidential Elections. End

## The Taliban Attack on Ghazni and Future of Peace in Afghanistan



On August 10, Taliban launched an extensive assault on Ghazni City from four sides. On the first three days, they were able to bring the entire city along with governmental offices under their control, with the exception of the Governor's office and Police headquarters there. On the fifth day of the Ghazni attack, although, the Afghan security forces were able to remove the Taliban and take over the control of the city, the capital of Islamic Civilization was filled with blood and dust.

As Eid Ul Adha was approaching, there were hopes that the Taliban would once again provide positive a response to the ceasefire call of the Afghan government in order for the public to have an Eid shorn of war and deaths; however, the Taliban carried deadly offensive attacks on Ghazni City in return.

The increase in Taliban offensive attacks in the country, the assault on Ghazni city and the consequences of Taliban attack on Ghazni city are the issues that are discussed here.



## **Increase in Taliban Offensive Attacks**

After the fall of Kunduz province into Taliban hands, the group increased its focus on offensive attacks in its war strategy, expanded the domain of its attack to the larger cities of the country and, to a large extent, made efforts to protect the areas under its control on the one hand, while trying to gain control of more areas of Afghanistan as well.

In recent months, the offensive attacks of Taliban on provincial capitals and Afghan security checkpoints have increased more than ever before. Ghazni province, which has 18 districts and is located only 140 KM away from the capital Kabul, witnessed insecurities since several years; however, heavy clashes occurring in a number of Ghazni districts in recent months have led to the insecurity increasing much more as compared to the past.

Simultaneously, the Taliban group attacked a [military base](#) known as the “Chinese Camp” located in Ghormach District of Faryab Province and captured it after two days of heavy clashes. 10 Afghan soldiers were killed and 15 others wounded as a result of the onslaught according to media reports.

Meanwhile, Baghlan province was also witness of Taliban attacks on Afghan security checkpoints as well. In chorus with their offensive on Ghazni, the Taliban attacked an Afghan security checkpoint in the [Central Baghlan](#) areas of Baghlan province which led to 40 Afghan security forces to losing their lives. Furthermore, a few days before the Taliban offensive of Ghazni city, 8 Afghan military personnel were killed and 3 others wounded as a result of the group’s attack in Charbolak District of Balkh province.

## **Offensive on Cultural Capital of Islamic Civilization**

During the last few months, specifically after the initiation of the voters’ registration process for Parliamentary and District Councils’ Elections, Ghazni political figures and elders were involved in political and electoral deals and quarrels; in which case, the Taliban, during the period, carried several offensives and campaigns on districts of Khwaja Omari, Zana Khan, Rasheedan, Jaghatoo and

other areas of Ghazni provinces. They captured the mentioned districts and paved the road for attack on Ghazni City.

On August 10, 2018, hundreds of Taliban fighters from Uruzgan, Maidan Wardak, Zabul and Paktika provinces jointly attacked Ghazni city from different directions and entered the city. Sources speaking to the Center for Strategic and Regional Studies (CSRS) said that most of the Ghazni city security belt checkpoints retreated without resistance to Taliban fighters, and thus the Taliban were able to enter the city easily. On the other hand, as the war in the center of Ghazni started, some police districts were handed over to the Taliban without any resistance, which has cast doubts on the efficiency of security by government officials, the details of Ghazni war and the probability of existence of a deal in the Ghazni war.

While fighting in Ghazni, the Taliban had also ambushed the highway connected to the province and thus were not letting the fresh Afghan security forces enter the Ghazni city. Therefore, the Taliban had the city in their control for up to four days and had seized entire governmental departments except for the Governor's office and the Police headquarters.

A human crisis occurred in the city due to the attacks, according to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA). Since during the few days of war, entire telecommunication networks were down and the no.1 Kabul-Kandahar Highway was blocked, the people in the city faced lack of water and food.

Although accurate information regarding human casualties in the Ghazni attack are yet to be provided; the senior Afghan security [officials](#) said that 100 Afghan security forces and 30 civilians were killed, 194 Taliban militants including their key commanders were killed, and 147 others were injured in the war. On the other hand, a number of media [reports](#) indicated that 340 Afghan security forces, 197 civilians and 720 Taliban militants were killed in the Ghazni attacks. While UNOCHA says that nearly 150 civilians were killed and injured in the attacks.

During the Taliban offensive of Ghazni city, a number of government buildings, people's houses, telecommunication networks, commercial markets and tens of

retail markets and shops were ruined and burned in fire due to Afghan and foreign security force airstrikes and attacks on Taliban militants. Hundreds of families fled their homes and spent the several days of attack in extreme fear and need of humanitarian assistance.

### **Consequences of Taliban attack on Ghazni City**

The Taliban attacked Ghazni city while efforts on the progress of peace talks with the groups have increased recently. Taliban representatives in Qatar had direct talks with U.S. officials on ending the Afghan war and establishment of peace in Afghanistan; however, the severity of Taliban offensive attacks, especially on Ghazni city has brought hopelessness and mistrust when it comes to the peace process.

Generally, the consequences of Taliban attacks on Ghazni city could be concluded in the following three points:

#### **Peace Talks**

Although there is an understanding that the Taliban attacked Ghazni city in order to gain more privileges in the peace talks and to show the opposite side some muscle; the attacks coming at a time when the peace talks are on the peak and causing the loss of lives of civilians including financial losses has all been cause for eliminating the hopes of the Afghan people. The little optimism that had grown during the temporary ceasefire between the Afghan government and the Taliban in previous Eid Ul Fitr has been lost once again.

#### **Parliamentary Elections**

From the very beginning, the process of Parliamentary Elections in Ghazni province faced public objections on the debate to divide or not divide Ghazni into electoral districts. The remonstrance caused closure of local office of the Independent Elections Commission (IEC) in the province and lack of development in the voters' registration process there. Based on this, the IEC announced that the Parliamentary Elections will be held later in Ghazni as compared to other

provinces. However, after the Taliban attack on Ghazni province, the problems the IEC announced that it is impossible to hold elections in Ghazni province.

### **Financial Loses**

Following the Taliban attack of Ghazni city, the people, in addition to human casualties, have also suffered millions of dollars of financial losses. A number of big commercial markets and tens of shops have been burned in the Ghazni war while more than [50 million](#) dollars of financial losses have been suffered by the private sector of the province, according to officials in the Afghan Chamber of Commerce and Industries.

The End

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