



## Center for Strategic & Regional Studies Kabul

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## Preface

After taking office as President, like his two predecessors, Donald Trump insisted on the continuation of war in Afghanistan. Trump tried to win the war through military pressure by declaring a new military strategy for Afghanistan; however, a year later the effort seems to be a repetition of past failed experiences. The continuation of war in Afghanistan has brought little apart from the deaths of countless Afghans on a daily basis.

Erik Prince, founder of Blackwater, a private security company pushed for privatization of the US war in Afghanistan before the declaration of Donald Trump's new strategy for Afghanistan, though his proposal was not accepted.

Recently however, Erik Prince, once again, proposed the plan for privatization of the US war in Afghanistan saying that if the war was outsourced to private contractors of Blackwater Company, the situation in Afghanistan would soon change.

In the first part of the Weekly Analysis of Center for Strategic and Regional Studies (CSRS), we will examine the role of Blackwater and other private contractor companies in past years and the impact of private contractors in the Afghan war, if they are to be sent for a second time.

The second part of CSRS Weekly Analysis is allocated for security threats against the Parliamentary Elections in Afghanistan. Despite some other challenges against the elections, the poor security situation is also considered a big threat that challenges the process. The Parliamentary Elections are to be held at a time when the security situation in Afghanistan is worse than ever, voting centers are closed in most parts of the country, and people are not willing to participate in the elections due to security threats.

## Plan for Privatization of Afghan War and its Consequences



A few days ago, Erik Prince, founder of Blackwater- a private security company, in his interview with Tolo News private TV channel in Kabul, said that if the Afghan war was outsourced to contractors of [Blackwater](#), there would be a very different situation on the ground within six months.

Since a long time, and especially after Trump became President, Mr. Prince has made huge efforts to convince the US government for privatization of war in Afghanistan; however, despite persistent attempts, his proposal is yet to be accepted.

Although a decision is yet to be made regarding the privatization of the Afghan war, the reactions of leaders of the Afghan government, members of Parliament (MPs) and the Human Rights Watch against the latest proposal of Erik Prince indicate that privatization of war in Afghanistan is an issue that the US government is mulling over for the sake of managing the Afghan war.

The analysis focuses on topics related to history of Blackwater and its mercenaries in the world, reactions towards the recent proposal of Erik Prince for outsourcing the Afghan war to the mercenaries and the possible consequences.

## **Blackwater Mercenaries**

The employing of mercenaries in wars has a long history in the world. Mercenaries are individuals hired to fight in armed conflict and do not represent any regular military or governmental force. They belong to neither of the parties, and thus, their sole purpose is to earn money and remuneration.

History indicates that for centuries the armies of great empires had always relied on foreign fighters in their ranks fighting for attaining money and wealth. In modern history, East Indian Company of India can be named as an example of mercenaries that governed the country for several centuries.

In today's world, owning private security companies and mercenaries has turned into a lucrative business in the world and billions of dollars are attained through it; however, mercenaries have committed various crimes against humanity in every country they have set foot on. Contrary to all principles of war, they have killed civilians, women and children.

Nowadays, Blackwater is one of the greatest US private security companies in the world. The company was founded by Erik Prince, a former US Navy SEAL Officer in 1997. At first, the small company of Blackwater was providing services to US military and police in the state of Carolina; however, the occurrence of 9/11 provided the small security company with the ground to expand.

Blackwater Company started its activities in Afghanistan through providing security and logistics services after the US campaign on Afghanistan in 2001. Blackwater was one of the biggest contractors of the United States of America in Afghanistan and Iraq and its duty was to protect American diplomats and politicians in Afghanistan and Iraq. The company changed its name to XE in 2009.

## **Reactions against Privatization of the Afghan War**

Mercenaries took part in the Afghan war after the United States attacked Afghanistan and eliminated the Taliban regime, specifically from late 2001 and early 2002 to 2010. During the period, 52-90 private domestic and foreign security companies had activities in Afghanistan whose fighters' number was exceeding 40,000 persons.

In 2010, ex-president Karzai banned the activities of 52 securities companies through issuing a decree in which Blackwater was also included. Then company, then, proceeded with its activities under the name of XE.

Since the private security companies have a dark history due to the last 17 years of war in Afghanistan and having committed crimes against humanity; therefore, the recent proposal of Blackwater founder Erik Prince was followed by harsh reactions regarding the privatization of Afghan war.

In reaction to the proposal, President Ghani expressed his [objection](#) to the privatization of Afghan war and emphasized that “I will not allow any foreign mercenary to get involved in the Afghan war; because no foreign mercenary could do what the Afghans themselves are capable of”. Moreover, Afghan Officer of National Security [Council](#) (NSC) has said through a published statement: “the view of privatization of Afghan war trespasses the principle that Afghans are free to choose their own destiny. Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) are responsible and have the authority, in accordance with the law, to defend the Islamic values, national sovereignty, Independence and territorial integrity of our beloved country and people.”

The office of [Chief Executive](#) of Afghanistan, Dr. Abdullah Abdullah has also called the proposal of Erik Prince on Afghan war as unapplicable and impractical. Ex-President Hamid Karzai also called the privatization of Afghan war as trespassing the sovereignty and Constitution of Afghanistan. Besides senior officials, the Afghan National Assembly have also made serious [objections](#) against the privatization of the Afghan war and has called the proposal of privatization of the war as “dangerous”.

Furthermore, [Human Rights Watch](#) warned in a recent report that privatization of war in Afghanistan would further expose the lives of civilians in the country to danger. The report calls on American and Afghan government to prevent any kind of proposals that increases the encroaching on civilian rights.

## **Consequences of Privatization of Afghan War**

The war that began in 2001 as result of the US attack on Afghanistan and the collapse of the Taliban regime still continues in severity 17 years later. The number of foreign troops including mercenaries have been on the increase since the start of the war and have reached more than hundred thousand after one decade. Yet little has been achieved apart from enflaming the war.

Currently there is talk about privatization of the Afghan war and increase in number of foreign troops in Afghanistan. Yet there is little hope for this strategy to bear any fruit as was witnessed with past experiences of failure. Many question the idea of a private company being able to bring change when many great powers such as the US, NATO and their allies have failed.

On the other hand, private security companies, specifically the Blackwater mercenaries have an infamous and bloody background in Afghanistan. Reports and documents indicate that these fighters have been engaged in moral corruption and the killing of innocent civilians amounting to crimes against humanity.

The proposal on the privatization of the Afghan war is, however, profitable for those who hold shares in the business; but the proposal will not have any positive results for Afghans other than adding to the severity of war, spreading of terror and killing of civilians. It will never result in putting an end to the ongoing war in Afghanistan.

While civilian casualties have been largely attributed to air strikes of foreign forces, in the event of the mission being outsourced to a private company like Blackwater, many fear the situation is bound to become bloodier. Therefore, instead of such proposals, what is needed of the international community, especially the United States as an initiator of the war, is that efforts for resolving the Afghan crisis through realistic peace talks in understanding with regional countries be made. Firstly, considering the experience of the last 17 years, the war is not solvable through military pressure and secondly, the Afghan war is neither a benefit to the Afghan people, the regional countries nor the United States. End

## Deteriorating Security Situation and Parliamentary Elections in Afghanistan



Holding Parliamentary Elections after bringing about electoral reforms were one of the most important and greatest promises of the National Unity Government (NUG); however, the NUG took 4 years before implementing the process.

The practical process of holding the Parliamentary Elections has been initiated at a time when the security situation in the country, in comparison to the past, is deteriorating rapidly and the war claims the lives of countless Afghans on a daily basis. Considering the situation, despite several other problems toward the elections, the deteriorating security situation is considered a great challenge that threatens the electoral process, voters and the candidates of the Parliament.

The Analysis looks into Parliamentary Elections, the country's security situation, security threats toward the elections and the transparency of the Parliamentary Elections.

## **Parliamentary Elections**

Based on article 83, paragraph 2 of the Afghan Constitution, the working period of the House of People (Parliament) shall terminate on June 22, 2015. The article of the Constitution states: “the work period of the House of People shall terminate, after the disclosure of the results of the elections, on June 22, 2015 of the fifth year and the new parliament shall commence work”.

Following the provision of the Constitution, the present parliament should have terminated its work till June 21, 2015 and the new parliament should have commenced work instead; however, the NUG was not able to hold elections at the given time due to internal disputes and thus extended the work period of the parliament till holding the elections.

After three years, the NUG eventually was able to announce the October 20, 2018 as the Election Day for the Parliamentary Elections and to start practical work for holding the elections. But, despite everything, disputes among the Afghan Independent Elections Commission (IEC), skepticism regarding transparency in elections, and severe challenges are the factors threatening the upcoming elections.

## **Insecurity: a great challenge facing the elections**

Deteriorating security situation and the expanding war in the country are considered the main challenges facing the Parliamentary Elections. Based on reports of international organizations, almost half of the Afghan territory is controlled by the armed opposition of the Afghan government. Meanwhile, more than 40 thousand civilians have been killed/injured during the last four years only, according to UN.

Although the Afghan security forces assure the people about security on the Election Day and claim to have deployed 54 thousand Afghan [troops](#) in order to ensure security be maintained on the Election Day; the people and electoral watch institutions are still concerned about security. This was the result of



security threats targeting employees of IEC, the candidates, and the public after the registration process for Parliamentary Elections began, which in turn amounted in less people turning up for registration in many parts of the country.

According to IEC, the Afghan security institutions were assigned the task of maintaining security of 7,384 voting centers , however, they were able to maintain security for 5,100 centers only. This means that almost 2,000 voting centers will remain closed on the Election Day due to security issues.

Simultaneously, attacks were carried out on voters' registration centers in different cities of the country. 23 voters' registration centers came under assault from the beginning of the process till May 2018 in which 271 people were killed and injured, according to [UNAMA](#). The bloodiest of these attacks was in Dasht-e Barchi locality of Kabul in which casualties reached almost 200.

Moreover, the Parliamentary candidates also faced security threats. Eight parliamentary candidates were killed in different parts of the country since the announcement of the primary list of candidates till now, according to reports. Meanwhile, an attack was launched on the meeting of a parliamentary candidate in Nangarhar province after the electoral campaigns officially started. Tens of civilians were killed and injured in that attack.

### **Whether the elections will be general and transparent?**

The Parliament counts as the House of People in the democratic system that represents the entire nation. The nation elects their favored candidates directly through casting vote in order to represent them honestly in the future.

After the new system was established in Afghanistan in 2001, the first Parliamentary Elections were held during the Karzai term. However, as corruption and fraud was rampant at the time, the Parliament witnessed a number of persons that entered politics neither representing the people nor accountable to them. Whatever they were doing was for the sole purpose of their personal interests.

The upcoming Parliamentary Elections are held in a time where, on the one hand the deteriorating security situation has prevented the generality of the elections and, on the other hand, because of broad corruption in the country, there are concerns that the upcoming elections will also be tainted with corruption and fraud for the second time. General and transparent elections are directly linked to full sovereignty of the government on its nation and territory; however, the Afghan government has not attained full sovereignty over the entire Afghan territory due to war and poor security situation. The lack of trust of the people in transparency of elections is on the peak due to existing corruption and fraud in the electoral process. These are the issues that have brought the legitimacy of the Parliamentary Elections under question.

Likewise, the people in the areas that are relatively secure should try to cast votes for capable and academic personalities for the transparency of elections to be assured, in order for them to represent the nation well and honestly struggle for the ideas, values, and interests of the beloved nation.

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