



## Center for Strategic & Regional Studies

### Kabul

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## Preface

The recent face to face peace talks between the Taliban and the US has increased hopes for lasting peace in Afghanistan. However, the hostile behavior of the Afghan government towards the peace process threatens the peace negotiations process.

After the fourth meeting with the Taliban in Qatar, the special representative of the United States Zalmay Khalilzad said: “there is still no consensus on peace with the Taliban in Afghanistan.” He stated, “One of the points of disagreements in the process is, Taliban’s unwillingness to negotiate with the Afghan government because they reject its legitimacy.”

The First part of CSRS weekly analysis focuses on the main issues discussed in the fourth meeting between the Taliban and the United States in Qatar, the disagreement of Afghan officials with the peace talks, and reasons behind it.

The second part of the analysis explores fire incidents in Afghanistan. Recently, fire incidents have increased in Kabul which harmed people’s lives and properties. Last week two markets burned in an incident which destroyed dozens of shops in it and had financial loss of millions of Afghanis.

## Afghan Peace Process: Six Days of Talks Between the U.S. and Taliban



The third round of Afghan peace talks was held around two months ago in UAE. Negotiations were postponed due to disagreement on the agenda. Although the talks seemed to have reached a dead end, it instigated again recently.

The fourth round of the US-Taliban peace talks happened from 21st to 26th of January 2019. Although the talks were held behind closed doors and there were not enough details disseminated by the officials, hopes for lasting peace through policy have been ignited.

The recent meeting between the Taliban and the United States, the viewpoint of the Afghan government, and the direction towards which the peace talks are headed, are issues that are discussed here.

## **What Happened During Six Days of The Talks?**

Based on various media reports, the main discussed points in the meetings were the US army pullout timetable, prisoners exchange, ceasefire, interim government, facilitation of peace talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban, and stoppage of danger from Afghanistan to others after the US pullout.

Zalmay Khalilzad wrote on his Twitter “After six days in Doha; meetings were more productive than they have been in the past. We made significant progress on vital issues but haven't reached any final agreement”.

Khalilzad falsified all the reports about his discussion with the Taliban regarding the establishment of government and said, “The reports of interim government are false and was not discussed during the talks.”

After six days of talks, the Taliban, in a proclamation said “at this stage of negotiations, progress was made in discussions regarding the US pullout and many other important issues. The clear view of the Taliban was: if the US pullout issue is not resolved, there is a chance of progress in other issues. The reports regarding ceasefire and agreement to negotiate with the Afghan government are absolutely untrue”.

Overall, the extension of talks till the sixth day, their stands after the discussions and various reports of media show that the Taliban and the US Representatives have discussed various issues. As Zalmay Khalilzad has said, the Taliban and the US have reached to agree on a general framework. This includes relative agreement on the US pullout, which was the main agenda of the fourth meeting.

## **The Viewpoint of the Afghan Government**

The Afghan government was unhappy about the US-Taliban peace talks since the commencement of the process because of their omission from the negotiations. Therefore, by creating obstacles for the peace process, the government is trying to find and to have a central role in peace talks. The Afghan officials don't approve any negotiations without their participation.

There were attempts to convince the Taliban to negotiate with the Afghan government during Abdu Dhabi meeting. However, the Taliban refused to negotiate with the government. Although the United States and Afghan government strived to pressurize the Taliban from a different direction to force them to negotiate with the government, the Taliban threatened to withdraw from the negotiations. After the threats and a short delay, the talks between the Taliban and the US initiated again.

The discussions of different media groups about the issue provoked the government officials and other political leaders. The Wall Street Journal, during the peace negotiations, stated: "In the negotiations, it was agreed that the Taliban would not allow Alqaida and ISIS to attack countries from Afghanistan." A few hours after the publication of the report, Ghani in World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, said: "the Taliban have links with the most dangerous criminals, mafia syndicates and Pakistan."

Similarly, after Khalilzad's meeting with Ashraf Ghani, a US embassy newsletter quoted Ghani and stated: "the key to peace is in Kabul." This statement provoked Amrullah Saleh, the vice president of Ghani in upcoming elections and said: "the key to peace is not Kabul, but in Pakistan." He also said, "Just like the 90s, the presidential palace should not be in the center of any changes, but should be in its surroundings and away from decision making".

Ghani's video message about the peace process was also a sort of disagreement with the Afghan peace negotiation process between the Taliban and the US. In his message, he said, "We want peace with deliberation, deliberation is important because we don't want the mistakes of the past to be repeated and Afghanistan doesn't become a field of civil war once again." He also had a bitter message to the Taliban and told them "get out of the sinister plans of the foreigners, show your Afghan identity, say yes to the demands of Afghanistan and begin serious negotiations with the government."

Before this, President Ghani in Geneva conference said "the peace talks should be performed under the leadership of the Afghan government. The Afghan presidential elections in spring are important for the success of peace negotiations".

Such statements indicate that elections are more important for the leaders of Unity government. President Ghani wants to remain president for the next five year, which only means the continuity of war for the next five years.

### **Towards Which Direction the Peace Talks are Headed?**

Every peace process goes through many discussions and ups and downs. In order bring to bring peace through negotiations to a war country like Afghanistan, plenty of time, patience and discussions are needed.

The Afghan peace negotiations should be considered as complicated as the Afghan war itself. There are detrimental involved parties on a regional and international level in Afghan war which, for their good, do not want the war to end. Therefore, the involved sides in negotiations need to be patient and deliberate during the peace process.

Recently, the willingness of the Taliban and the US to reach a political arrangement, its beginning and continuity are issues that have increased hopes for peace.

The six days of talks and the proclamations of both sides were hopeful because both mentioned progress and continuity. Also, the submission of Qatar office's leadership to Mulla Baradar may be useful to the peace process and can persuade the Taliban to be more serious in the talks, since Mulla Baradar is one of the founders of the Taliban movement. He still has an important place as an influential and religious leader among the Taliban.

According to the Taliban, the main reason for the war in Afghanistan is the presence of the US forces. This is the main issue being discussed with the US, and it appears that the US is seriously considering the pullout.

Besides all these, there still obstacles on the way to peace. One of the barriers is the absence of a national consensus regarding peace which needs plenty of discussions for achieving it.



## The Rise of Fire Incidents in Business Centers



In a poor country like Afghanistan, where around 40% of people live below the poverty line, fire incidents are another challenge in their lives, due to which, thousands of people lose their Properties and assets.

As a result of a fire incident in Milaad market at Mandawi of Kabul last week (7/11/1397), around 400 shops burned along with items and properties inside them. The caretaker of the market said that the fire was caused by electrical malfunction.

Because of the late arrival of the fire department to the area of incident and failure to extinguish the fire on time, the Raihan Business center and Dawi Business center which are located beside Milaad market were also harmed. Aazrakhsh Hafizi, a senior member of Afghanistan chamber of commerce and industries, said that the financial loss of the fire is more than 1 billion dollars.

In this part, we discuss the recent fire incidents in Kabul, causes of fire in business centers and ways to prevent them.

## Recent Fire Incidents

The fire incident in Mandawi occurred and had become the main topic of news in a situation when only in Kabul, many markets were burned with losses of millions of dollars recently.

Due to unknown causes on 13th of Jadi, 1397, a fire started in a gas station at Haji Abdul Haqq Crossroads of Kabul. Later, the fire spread to the market near the station; Kabul tower, due to which, three people lost their lives, and 44 were injured. Besides casualties, the fire caused extensive financial losses.

A similar incident occurred at zone 2, along Nadar Pashtun road at Khairkhwa and Zarnegar markets, which were the largest centers of electronics in Afghanistan and had around 800 shops, burned entirely and the flames of the fire turned the investment of people into ashes.

Around a year and a half ago, on 13th of Aqrab 1397, Taimur Shahi market in Kabul was burned in a fire incident. Similarly, Abassin Zadran business center burned a few months ago, in which one person lost his life and had millions of Dollars of financial loss.

Above are samples of fire incidents and based on information published by Afghanistan chamber of commerce and industries, millions of dollars financial losses are endured by people because of it. All in all, such incidents have a serious negative impact on the economy of Afghanistan and its people. Thus, the government should strive to protect the wealth of people.

## Causes of Fire in Business Centers:

Although the reasons for the fire in business centers are still unknown, some evidence indicates the following possible causes:

Usage of electrical and gas appliances: Using heating and freezing appliances, such as heaters and water heaters, and carelessness while using them are causes of the fire.



**Unstandardized Markets:** Most of the Markets in Afghanistan are not built according to international standards. Such markets are built without considering risks and dangers. The presence of uncovered electric wires and unstandardized system of electricity are causes of occurrence of fire incidents in the Markets. As stated by its caretaker, the electrical malfunction at Milad market was one these causes.

**Involvement of Mafia:** There are also views and analysis that consider the involvement of mafia and thieves in these incidents. For instance, thieves are captured by the police, who by taking advantage of the emergency of fire, attempted to steal people's money and properties.

**Neglecting the responsibilities of citizenship:** Such carelessness includes incertitude of electricity while leaving the workplace, dropping cigarettes leftovers and flammable items carelessly are also causes of fire incidents.

**The absence of safety system:** Most of the times, a small fire incident leads to a big incident because of poor or non-existence of fire safety facilities and basic fire extinguishing and firefighting system in business centers.

**Poor urban planning:** There are many places in Kabul which are not built according to the master plan. If you pay attention to the structure of the city, u will find out that the city is unorganized. For instance, u will witness baker's shop, hotel, draper, gas seller, and business offices altogether, and therefore, it can't be expected that fire incidents will not occur.

### **Ways to Prevent Fire:**

To prevent fire incidents from happening, both, government and people have responsibilities and have to pay serious attention to the matters of fire. To prevent fire incidents or to stop the fire from extension in Kabul, the following points should be considered:

**Public awareness:** Lack of awareness of the public about the ways of fire prevention is one of the main causes of fire incidents in Afghanistan. The government is responsible for making the public aware, how to use inflammable equipment and what to do when there is fire and how to use equipment to prevent fire.

**Appointment of necessary equipment:** Installation of fire extinguishers at workplaces, and installing firefighting system in markets which are worth millions.

**Standardizing the fire department:** Although Afghanistan has an independent organ called the fire department, being below standards, lack of facilities, equipment, and professional staff are reasons why a small fire spreads and turns into the dreadful incident. To control fire efficiently and on time, the government has to standardize the department and improve it by providing enough equipment.

**Concentration on the insurance system and standardization:** There are investors who have lost their wealth in fire incidents. Since there is no insurance system in Afghanistan, they are unable to restart their businesses. Therefore, it is necessary to establish an insurance system so that the business centers can be insured and can help them by taking their risk if such incidents occur. Also, the buildings should be built according to International standards and by considering all the essentials.

End

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