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Preface

Presence of the United States in Afghanistan is an apprehension for the countries in region. In order to enable countries to truly support the peace negotiation process and eliminate the concerns, it is crucial to represent a clear picture regarding the presence of international forces in Afghanistan.

The recent four-sided meeting between Russia, China, European Union representatives and U.S. officials regarding US-Taliban peace negotiation process was a key step towards success which can have positive role in enabling trust for both sides.

The first part of CSRS Weekly analysis discusses the latest meeting between the United States, Russia, China and European Union regarding the Afghan peace, role of countries in the peace process and the interest of region in a peaceful Afghanistan.

The second part of weekly analysis deliberates the commencement of new academic year and the condition of education in Afghanistan. The new school year began in a time when many schools in various areas are still closed due to war. Alike prior times, president Ghani under the slogan (better education, better future) once again made new promises for the betterment of education. However, an insight to the past will indicate that it is unknown that how many of these promises will be implemented.

Afghan Peace; Need for Harmony between the U.S. Afghan Government and the Region



The U.S. officials had a two-day discussion with Russia, China and representatives of the European Union a few days ago. Regarding the meeting, Zalmi Khalilzad in his twitter said “We respect the independence of Afghanistan. We want peace for Afghans and want Afghanistan to become country which never turns into a threat for us.”

The U.S. Department of State in a proclamation about the meeting said that their representatives have met with the officials of China, Russia and the European Union about peace, prosperity and security of Afghanistan. The proclamation states “We have absolute respect for independence of Afghanistan and the country will decide about their politics, security and economy”.

Meanwhile, Zamir Kabulov, Russian Presidential envoy to Afghanistan consequent to the two-day meeting said that after foreign forces pullout and ceasefire, war will not return to Afghanistan.

Here, we discuss the significance of regional countries in Afghan peace process, their interests, and the need for coordination between the United States, Afghan government and the countries in region.

Afghan Peace and Regional Interests

An insight to the location of Afghanistan will indicate that peace and security in the country has influence on the security and safety of the region. The prior four decades and current war has shown that insecurity in Afghanistan is not in favor of the region. Therefore, almost all countries of the region officially considers peace in Afghanistan in their best interest.

Although the interests of regional countries differs and challenges for Afghanistan have thus increased, but countries altogether still agree for peace in Afghanistan.

Russia and China for instance do not want U.S. presence for long or medium term in Afghanistan and therefore supports the US-Taliban talks. However, quick U.S. pullout also threatens their interests since it will cause absence of authority in Afghanistan and concerns are that Afghanistan will face crisis like 90s.

In addition, Pakistan does not like friendly relations between Afghanistan and India and does want their links to remain friendly. Reduction in India's influence according to Pakistan can happen when Taliban reaches power.

Similar to Russia and China, Iran is also worried about the presence of U.S. in region. Moreover, all three countries have concerns that the U.S. might be supporting ISIS. Consequently, they were forced to build connections with the Taliban so that they can pressure the United States.

Significance of Regional Support for the Afghan Peace

Although the current US-Taliban negotiations for Afghan peace become hopeful day by day, but the significance of regional countries in the process cannot be neglected. A look at the complication of ongoing war in Afghanistan will confirm that the support of strong regional countries is vital for peace and security in the country and obtaining their support can help the peace process.

The initiation of negotiations with the Taliban and the travels of Zalmi Khalilzad indicate that the United States admits the importance of regional countries. United States strives to reduce the concerns of regional countries and obtain their support for peace in Afghanistan.

In addition, assumptions are that if the U.S. and the Taliban reaches an agreement, strong countries in the region will get involved to guarantee its implementation. Regarding this issue, Zamir Kabulov, Russian presidential envoy for Afghanistan after Khalilzad's meeting with Chinese, Russian and EU officials told news reporters that the Taliban strives to ensure that Russia and some other countries will guarantee the possible agreement with the United States.

Besides, the Taliban also need regional countries who can guarantee them for the international community.

Conclusion

The greatest challenge for peace in Afghanistan is fitting all the interests of the Afghan government, the United States and regional countries inside a single frame for the success of the process. Khalilzad's numerous travels to the countries in region, meetings with the Afghan government officials and politicians and discussions with the Taliban were for the same cause.

Khalilzad's recent meeting with Chinese, Russian and EU officials were also a key step for the success of US-Taliban peace talks. These efforts were to eliminate incredulousness and reach a new stage of peace negotiations.

It appears that with the coordination of regional countries, the Taliban and the U.S. will reach an agreement over troop's pullout, Taliban's abscission with terrorist groups and not using Afghan soil against the U.S. and Internationals. However, the intra-Afghan talks (not between the Taliban and political parties, but between the Taliban and the Afghan government) and ceasefire are still the main challenges and may require time.

Since the strategies of the Taliban and the Afghan government regarding peace differs, apprehensions have thus raised. The Taliban want to reach an agreement with the U.S. about the pullout and not using Afghan soil against the U.S. and international community. They want intra-Afghan talks with political and Jihadi parties instead of Afghan government. Moreover, ceasefire is another complicated factor which might be negotiated after intra-Afghan talks.

On the other hand, the Afghan government is displeased about US-Taliban talks and incredulousness has appeared in Kabul-Washington relations. If the Afghan government is unable to attain the leadership of peace process, Ashraf Ghani might utterly confront the peace process which will not be in favor of the country and nation. The end

Beginning of New Educational Year and the Condition of Education in Afghanistan



President Ashraf Ghani inaugurated the new school year of 1398 by ringing school bell and with the motto of “better education, better future” at a period when the prior undertakings of the government for the enhancement of the sector have not been executed and still faces plenty of obstacles.

During the ceremony of ringing the new school year bell last year, president Ghani promised to construct 6000 new schools and allocate 200 million U.S. dollars for building new schools. During the ceremony of 1398 However, He said “Provision of budget and facilities for 6000 schools is not easy, but vital steps have been taken and the stage of substantiation has come.”

President Ghani addressed the unexpected issues of coordination as the cause of inability in execution of the promises made for the sector and said “Construction of 1200 schools is in progress and budget for 2700 schools has been allocated in current year’s budget”

Here, we discuss the condition of education in Afghanistan, government's promises and the existing problems and challenges in the sector.

Current Condition of Education in Afghanistan

An insight to 17-year history of education indicates that the focus was on quantity. Due to absence of attention, quality has become biggest challenge that the sector is currently facing and has created numerous obstacles.

On the other hand, only 55% of land is under government's control according to SIGAR's report published on 30th January, 2019. The remaining land is under militant's control. Although Taliban has banned girls' schools in their regions, but overall allows educational operations. Therefore, the authority of the government and the Taliban over educations institutions has created a lot of challenges and the clash of decisions has disordered the progress of education.

In addition, around 7.3 million children eligible children are deprived from education and school according to the statistics of ministry of education. Moreover, the education sector is facing many problems and challenges which mainly are: war, insecurity and corruption. Absence of professional teachers, specialized staff, buildings, lack of books and other materials, unstandardized exams, limited and imaginary number of schools, glitches in curriculum and feeble administrations are other difficulties that the sector is currently facing.

Government's Undertakings for Education Sector

With the establishment of unity government, president Ghani stated that the current condition of education is unacceptable for him. He promised that he will strive to work on quality improvement of education, unpoliticalizing sector's progression, enhancement of teachers' condition, and participation of women in strategic field of education. After one and a half year in 1395 however, he apologized for his inability to complete his promises and stressed on their achievement.

A year later in 1396, besides prior problems such as insecurity, corruption, lack of facilities, absence of professional teacher and others, the sector faced new difficulties which were mostly in regions which were under Militant's control and the number of closed schools also increased in insecure areas. Afghanistan human rights commission at the beginning of 1396 announced that only 7 out of 318 schools in Arozgan province are active and the remaining 311 schools are closed due to insecurity. In addition, Ghazni, Kunduz, Zabul, Paktia, Helmand, Nimroz, Farah, Badghis and Nangrahar are among the provinces where 1000 doors of schools are closed, according to the officials of ministry of education.

The active schools also have serious problems such as lack of professional teachers, study materials, buildings and presence of corruption. Most of the time it is reported that Islamic scholars teach science subjects and the students lack materials such as books, library, laboratory and other.

During 1396 academic year ceremony, Sarwar Danish, second vice president said that despite spending millions of dollars, 50% of schools in Afghanistan do not have standard buildings which is a shame for Afghanistan in this era.

After two years of unity government during ringing school bell ceremony in 1397, Ashraf Ghani announced the year as the year of support from education and ordered all ministries to comprehensively support education and keep education at the top of plans. He also emphasized to provide internet services for schools in the capital and provinces. In addition, he stressed on promises made regarding the salaries of teachers and underlined its implication until 27th Asad, 1397.

Promises made in 1397 by the president were also not completely implemented. President Ghani emphasize on their implementation in the beginning of new academic year of 1398. For instance, President Ghani in 1394 said that he will resolve residence problem of teachers within six months. However, he once again recently said that final decision will be made regarding their residence within three months. Additionally, he said that assessment of teachers' salaries is also in his working plans.

Furthermore, educating 100 thousand teachers till bachelor degree, 57 thousand till 14th grade, recruitment of 11 thousand new teachers, improving quality of teaching, provision and distribution of books to all students, provision internet and fiber Noori services to around 1300 schools and eliminating violence from schools are undertakings that president Ghani promised to execute.

Beside the challenges and problems, Mirwais Balkhi, minister of education spoke about the achievements of the sector. He addressed that unpoliticalizing education, commencement of biometric system for 270 thousand employees, attraction of 3.7 million deprived children to education and literacy for thousands of people are the achievements of ministry of education and emphasized that around one million more new children will be absorbed during the year.

Current Problems in Education Sector

Besides constant promises and undertakings of the government for improvement of education, the sector still faces plenty of challenges which threatens the progress. The following are some of the challenges:

Insecurity: War and insecurity are challenges that the education and other sectors are facing. According to UNAMA, 2018 was the bloodiest year for the people of Afghanistan in which 10 thousand people got killed and wounded. Moreover, based on information ministry of education, around 400 schools have been closed due to insecurity.

Corruption: Corruption is another obstacle for education in Afghanistan. The anti-corruption joint independent committee at the beginning of new school year announced that there are still many glitches in education sector. It will have severe effects if actions are not taken. The committee in Aqrab, 1396 warned that the widespread corruption in education is alarming. The report published by the committee stated that the issues of corruption in teacher hiring process, selling school books in market and problems in salary distribution of teachers have had negative effects on the education of the country.

Poor quality: After insecurity and corruption, quality and poor standards of education in another key challenge facing the sector. According to the statistics of ministry of education, 27% of 70000 teacher, minimum requirement for hiring a teacher is baccalaureate certificate which along with other reasons is a cause of poor quality. In addition, the sector lacks around 90 million books and 70 thousand teachers, based on reports of ministry of education.

Weak management: Absence of executive capabilities in the capital and provinces is another obstacle for the sector. Due to lack of potential and experts, recruitment of unprofessional individuals and presence of corruption, the sector faces the challenge of administration. Therefore, the sector firstly needs reformation in management system and secondly requires a comprehensive, systematized and national strategy to resolve the current problems of the sector.

The end

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