

# KABUL MORNING BEGINS WITH EXPLOSIONS

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# KABUL MORNING BEGINS WITH EXPLOSIONS



Since the last four months, almost every morning of the capital Kabul begins with one or several bomb blasts or terrorist events. In these explosions, compared to previous times, social leaders, civil activists, and journalists are mostly targeted. Along the series of these blasts, Jamiat-i-Islah leader Dr. Mohammad Atif was killed in an explosion on 2nd February, 2021 in Kabul, so far, no group has claimed the responsibility of this attack. The Afghan government condemned the attack on Dr. Mohammad Atif and blamed Taliban for the blast. However, Taliban's spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid has strongly condemned the killing of Dr. Mohammad Atif and named such blasts an act of a vicious circle. On the contrary, the national security advisor Dr. Hamdullah Mohib went to the central office of Jamiat-i-Islah in order to extend his solidarity with regards to the loss of Dr. Mohammad Atif and he called the attack on Dr. Atif a work of the enemies of the country. He also promised to find the perpetrators of this incident and bring them to justice.

In this context of CSRS, we have analyzed the issue that why such blasts are targeting social activists and other key national personalities.

## **A Glance to the Last Explosions:**

Based on Doha agreement (Feb-29), the intra-afghan peace talks began in September 2020 after months of delay. And since the last four months, the capital city Kabul has been witnessing of one or several explosions almost every morning compared to other provinces. The number of such blasts has tripled in 2020 compared to the previous year (2019) and has been mostly targeting social activists and journalists. In such a critical phase of the intra-afghans talks, the intensification of violence and explosions have made the general public so anxious that the in-

hand opportunity for peace will be lost for the personal interests of particular parties. Further, some of the civil activists and journalists have been forced to leave the country as a result of late insecurities and for the purpose of securing their lives as within the previous several months, six journalists (Yama Seyawash, Elias Dae, Malala Maiwand, Fardin Amini, Rahmatullah Nikzad and Besmillah Qarlaq) have been killed in explosions<sup>1</sup>.

In addition to this, other social personalities who were particularly working for a sustainable and long-lasting peace in the country, have been targeted from unknown groups whose sole aim is to sabotage the ongoing peace process. Rather than Dr. Mohammad Atif, Dr. Abdul Baqi Amin, Wahid Muzhda, and Mohammad Ayaz Niazi are other victims of such blasts that we can name here.

### **Who was Dr. Mohammad Atif?**

Dr. Mohammad Atif was a scientific and academic figure who was born in Bangi region of Takhar province. He did his higher education (master degree in comparative religion) during migration time in Peshawar University and he was lecturing in several universities of the Afghan migrants. He was head of Jamiat-i-Islah for six years and few years back he was a head of Salam University in Kunduz branch. As per the saying of the national personalities of the country, Jamiat-i-Islah has been a very disciplined, organized and committed national movement across the country and Dr. Mohammad Atif was a director of the central council of such a national movement for three years.

Dr. Mohammad Atif was killed while he was striving for reaching the aforementioned wishes and therefore his funeral ceremony was held in such a magnificent way in capital city Kabul where thousands of people participated in a very disciplined and effective manner.

Besides Afghanistan, the world political, academic, religious and other social personalities have called the killing of Dr. Mohammad Atif a great felony and tragedy not merely for Afghanistan for the entire Islamic world.

The large turnout at the funeral of the Dr. Mohammad Atif showed that he was at the forefront of a movement that has deep roots in the Afghan society and which sole purpose is to truly serve

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<sup>1</sup> <https://pasbanan.com/dr/increase-in-targeted-assassinations-and-the-escape-of-influential-figures-from-afghanistan/>

the country. Due to this, the assassination of Dr. Mohammad Atif was widely condemned on social media. Government and national figures stressed that following his footsteps and ideology is essential in order to fulfill his dreams and aspirations .

Dr. Atif's Fateha Ceremony was held for three days at Jamiat Eslah Afghanistan's Head Office which was attended by Dr Abdullah Abdullah the Chairman of the High Council for National Reconciliation, Hamdullah Mohib the National Security Adviser, Fazal Hadi Muslimyar the head of the Meshrano Jirga, former figures of Tehrik-i-Taliban and other political and national figures.

Unfortunately, in this series of targeted killings, a national figure like Dr. Atif was also killed, He was actively involved in peace, education and other charitable activities, the man who was traveling all over the country without any guards or armored vehicles just to fulfill his dream of reconstruction of country, everlasting peace and provision of proper education of the young generation.

### **Targeted Killings as a Tool of Sabotaging Peace Process**

According to the Doha agreement, the Taliban and the Afghan government should proceed with Intra-Afghan talks. However, so far there has been no significant improvement except an agreement on the procedure in December of the last year. On the other hand, after the Doha agreement, the fighting has been intensified targeting only Afghan lives in both sides. The demands for ceasefires and the formation of an interim government were also brought forward in the end of first round of Intra-Afghan peace negotiation, since Taliban representatives have started visits to Russia and other regional countries Afghan government blamed Taliban for not resuming peace talk despite a week of waiting. The urge for ceasefire and an interim government provably are two obstacles that abstains both sides from negotiation table.

It is because that Sher Mohammad Abbas Stanekzai, assistant head of Taliban's Qatar office, told a press conference in Moscow that they were ready to make peace with the government if Ghani resigned but Afghan government still pushing Taliban for ceasefire and considers election as the only legitimate way of power transitions .

Meanwhile, in the wake of the indefinite delay in intra-Afghan negotiation, officials in the new US administration led by Joe Biden has announced a review of Afghan peace deal with the Taliban with the help of the Afghan government.

US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan said that the withdrawal of foreign troops from Afghanistan under the Doha agreement would be decided after the review of Doha agreement and careful examination of conditions. However, in US congress the Afghanistan Study Group recommended to extend the May deadline for the U.S. military troop withdrawal from Afghanistan and suggested that the United States should remain committed to Afghan peace.

According to Afghanistan Study Group, if the troops pull-out now, the situation may worsen. Some other US officials have also stated that the withdrawal of troops based on careful examination of situation will not only help in bring peace to Afghanistan but also help secure US interests in the region .

In such condition where Taliban urge for the removal of President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani from power, Afghan government is pushing Taliban for ceasefire before any improvement in peace talk and the United States is talking about reviewing the Doha agreement, Intra-Afghan peace talk may face serious obstacles .

In such a unique opportunity for peace, targeted killings not only create more mistrust between both sides, but could also rationalize the presence of foreign forces in the country. At the same time, the Taliban have threatened to launch a full-scale war against foreign troop if they refuse to leave which could only lead to the prolongation or collapse of the peace process. Such uncertainties and critical situations raised concerns among public about the future than ever before.

Targeted killings cannot be eradicated by considering as serious crime or condemnation, it is important that social and national figures, civil society activists and political parties unite against targeted killings.

The Afghan government and the Taliban, who condemn the current targeted killings and do not take responsibility of them should take necessary measures to expose those who carry out these targeted killings.

In Dr. Atif's funeral, thousand people urged from both sides to work hard for peace and accused the Afghan government for failure in their responsivity to provide security for nation. People gathered in Dr. Atif's funeral asked for justice for Atif's assassination, end of target and series of high-profile killings and immediate peace in the country.

If targeted killings continues, the prospect of further delays in inter-Afghan talks is inevitable and that will only benefits those who want to sabotage the ongoing peace process.

The Islamic countries and especially the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and the international community must put pressure on all parties involved in war to stop the targeted and series killings and end ongoing crisis in Afghanistan in such that Afghan people start their morning without any explosions.

Center for Strategic and Regional Studies (CSRS)

# WHY THE PARLIAMENT REFUSES TO ACCEPT BUDGET PLAN FOR THE YEAR 2021?



After the clash between the parliament and government over the second draft of 2021 budget, the government sent a third draft on February 6th, 2021. Although it is the second month of the fiscal year, the government and parliament exchange draft after draft and yet, they have not reached an agreement. The parliament has rejected the 2021 budget draft twice beforehand.

## Reasons for Rejection of the Budget

The parliament rejects the budget because of the following 17 reasons<sup>2</sup>:

- Exclusion of the proposed adjustments of the parliament for budget.
- Inclusion of the national food program.
- Removal of some important projects from the budget draft.
- A proposal of 4.3 billion AFN for Operations Unit and other presidential palace controlled entities.
- Transfer of road construction program from the ministry of rural development to the ministry of public interests.
- Removal of some crucial provincial projects.
- Lack of attention to the suspension of budget for entities that are run by acting directors.
- Inconsideration of suggestions of equal payment for government employees and failure to address concerns of the parliament regarding their special rights.
- Rental and daily expenses of the government high ranked employees.
- Inconsideration of the parliament's suggestion for better use of financial resources of the country.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://tolonews.com/fa/business-169515>

- Lack of clarity regarding internal financing.
- Increase of 15 billion AFN in expansionary budget.
- Inclusion of new entities in budget without them being agreed upon.
- Problems in the income part of municipality's budget.
- Reduction of 13000 positions and jobs of government employees.
- Increase in capacity building projects of the government without the parliament's agreement.
- Proposal of a 19.9 billion AFN for the budget deficit from the IMF.
- Addition of 29 controversial projects in the budget.
- Increase of expenses in caution codes.

The parliament rejected the budget draft and have proclaimed that if the ministry of finance does not reform the budget before sending it to the parliament, they will reject it again<sup>3</sup>.

### **Details of Third Budget Draft**

The total budget of Afghanistan for the 2021 fiscal year is forecasted at 473 billion AFN, of which, more than 311 billion AFN allocated as the normal budget and 161 billion AFN is allocated as the expansionary budget. In addition, the national food program (that will cost \$244 million of which \$160 million is spent) has been removed from the third national budget draft. However, implementation of the second part of the program is emphasized in another part of the draft<sup>4</sup>.

In the third budget draft, more than three billion AFN is deducted from the capacity building projects and budget counting entities from code 22. Yet the here is no reduction in total budget. Another part of the draft discusses settlement of new employees' rights, for which, a new code with 16 billion AFN has been created.

The draft mentions that all projects previously ran by the operational unit will be run by other government entities and operational unit will only observe them. The draft does not clarify the income of some municipalities and the precautionary budget is only 19 billion AFN.

Similar to the second draft, the third draft also forecasts a budget deficit of 37 billion AFN and demands a 17 billion AFN debt form the IMF<sup>5</sup>.

### **The Link between the Budget and the Dismissal of the Finance Minister**

On 23rd January 2021, the presidential palace issued a decree dismissing Mr. Abdul Hadi Arghandiwal from the ministry of finance. In another decree, Mr. Mohammad Khalid Payanda was introduced as the acting finance minister. Dismissal of the finance minister in a situation where the 2021 budget is rejected by the parliament twice, and the differences between the

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.google.com/amp/s/avapress.com/fa/amp/21840>

<sup>4</sup> <https://tolonews.com/fa/afghanistan/budget>

<sup>5</sup> <https://tolonews.com/fa/afghanistan/budget-16802>



government and the parliament over the approval of budget are high, is questionable. The presidential palace states that the reason for his dismissal was delay in income collections, lack of cooperation with the joint review committee for illegal appointments and preventing it, weak management, and lack of good governance<sup>6</sup>. However, on 25th January 2021, in a press conference Mr. Arghandiwal rejected these accusations and stated that a circle in presidential palace was interfering in his affairs and when he tried to close their profitable windows, they created problems for him. He said he asked the president to be in touch with him directly, not through people who are seeking their personal interests in Afghanistan and if they have no personal interests, they will leave the country that moment. But he did not mention names in this regard. Mr. Arghandiwal said the other reason for his dismissal was his attendance in national procurement commission where he criticized the contract of 18 types of meat for the chief of staff office and the oil contract in which oil was bought for 41 AFN per liter while the market price is only 36 AFN. The issue of 17 types of meat and a \$17 million vegetables expenses of the chief of staff office became controversial after a parliament member unveiled it<sup>7</sup>.

It seems like there is no link between the dismissals of the finance minister with the 2021 budget. However, looking at the lack of trust between the presidential palace and the ministry of finance over expenses, it is not unlikely that the actions of the finance minister regarding budgeting was not in the favor of the president and the presidential palace.

### **Effect of Delaying Budget Plan on Afghan Economy**

National budget plays a vital role in the economy of every country. It covers yearly expenses of a government. Thus, the government is very considerate when it comes to budget planning and its sources.

At the start of each financial year, operations of the government and its relative bodies also commence. If the government does not have sufficient budget for its operations, it will face various problems and obstacles. The current National budget is an initiative for the development of the country. If relative bodies are not provided with the budget on time, they will face various challenges. However, as the parliament also emphasis, it is vital for the budget to be well-balanced. Otherwise, it will further contribute to instability of the economy of Afghanistan.

Afghanistan is currently in a very complicated situation due to various challenges. Therefore, we cannot predict its future. If the peace process succeeds, it will truly change the situation of Afghanistan. For a change, new and effective sanctions and decision are required. Presently, rejection of the national budget will have negative effect on the economy.

However, if the peace process does not succeed or faces deadlock, the current condition will persist and delay in budget sanction will further contribute to the problems of the government and people. The budget plan should clearly state salaries balance, volume of investments, and

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.google.com/amp/s/www.bbc.com/afghanistan-55779834.amp>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/persian/afghanistan-55799573>

characteristics and purpose of development plans. In addition, the government should consider all parts including, governmental bodies, consumers, producers, operations and other. This is because the whole budget determines the future of economy the country.

Ustad Hamidullah Hanif, representative of the people of Hirat in the Parliament has express and emphasized that the budget should be in accordance with national interests. The budget plan should focus more on infrastructure and should contribute to poverty reduction in upcoming years. In addition, he has talked about his concerns about corruption lack of balance in salaries of government employees. While defending the parliament's stand about the budget, he has said "consideration of balanced salary scales of lower-ranking employees, soldiers and teachers is a key goal of the parliament here, and we will not allow unnecessary expenditures allocated in the budget".

While the stand of the parliament is appreciated, rejection of the budget plan for the third time, emphasize on reforms and disagreement between the parliament and the Presidential palace should not cause obstacles especially for those projects which are directly beneficial for the people. However, it is necessary to know that disapproval of the budget will cause delays in salary payments of government's staff and the authorities has the right to continue its operation according to the budget of previous year. But unfortunately, the government, in order to pressure the parliament, has started to undertake measures, including refusal to pay salaries of staff. We are hopeful that disagreement between the presidential palace and the parliament will end in favor of people, so that the people are sheltered from the effects of absence of the national budget and any fall in the economy is avoided.

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