

THE SECOND ROUND OF INTRA-AFGHAN DIALOGUE AND THE FUTURE OF THE AFGHAN PEACE

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Although the intra-Afghan dialogue did not commence according to the expected schedule, but even with its late instigation, so far, the Taliban and the Afghan government have only been able to work on the agenda of the dialogue. The talks were later affected by the results of US elections which were won by the democrats and Joe Biden was elected as the president of the United States. Both sides were waiting for the new government's foreign policy about the Afghan peace process. The United States government proclaimed that the Doha agreement will be reviewed and reevaluated. This proclamation apparently indicated that the agreement may face challenges. As a result, the Taliban regressed from the talks visited some countries while the delegation of the Afghan government was still in Qatar.

Policies of the New US Government About the Doha Agreement

Apparently, there is no dramatic change in the policies of the United States about the Doha agreement and Afghanistan. Some points of the agreement such as, the US pullout in May 2021 might be reconsidered. The US officials have also expressed that the withdrawal schedule of the US forces will be reevaluated, since implementation of the pre-agreed

schedule will lead to various challenges in Afghanistan. The foreign forces will probably stay for the duration of one year or less and the Taliban will also have to accept the new timeline.

On the other hand, NATO member states also did not take a solid stand about Afghanistan and depended their decision on the future circumstances. The US has also assured its allies that they will be consulted before a decision is made. Therefore, decision of the NATO member countries is linked to the US and they will together decide about the future of Afghanistan. US secretary of State has declared that they are committed to peacefully and diplomatically resolve the issue of Afghanistan.

Although it has been a while since the result of US elections, but the peace process has not progressed as expected. The Taliban and the Afghan government are seemingly passing time and the process is nothing but a drama.

Latest of the President With Prominent Figures

President Ashraf Ghani had several meetings with prominent political figure in the presidential Palace recently. Rumors are that soon there will be a gathering of well-known politicians of the country which will accelerate efforts to establish an alliance under the leadership of the Afghan government.

Peace Requires Sacrifice

To end the prolonged calamity of Afghanistan, both sides need to make sacrifices. If the Taliban are waiting for a change in circumstances and strive to attain bigger portion in power without considering other aspects of the war, any beneficial outcome, therefore, cannot be expected. Similarly, if the Afghan government persist to make excuses to reach an agreement until the government completes its duration of power, the people will not witness a peaceful resolution. Therefore, both sides should sacrifice some of their demands and desires and should feel for their war-torn nation. They should unstiffen their standpoints and put an end

to the pain and sorrow of their people. In order to do so, national sides and parties should not be disregarded and demeaned, as doing so can lead to anarchy and civil war.

War Is in No One's Interest

The bloodstained war of Afghanistan takes the lives of dozens of people every day. Many academic figures, scholars, civil activists, and journalists are being killed in the rising number of targeted killings and assassinations. Afghans have lost their patience and stagnation in the peace process has led to further anguish and distress. Although every Afghan sees peace negotiations as the only solution to war, but converse to people's hopes and expectations, the Afghan government strives to remain in power and the Taliban have increased their efforts to have a bigger portion in the upcoming government of Afghanistan. The current peace process is nothing else but to deceive the people.

Since the first day of intra-Afghan dialogue, it was expected that the talks will not have fruitful results and the negotiations will be affected by political pressures of the international community. And as expected, the talks seem to have no convincing results. Apparently, a conference similar to the well-known Bonn conference is expected to be conducted to decide the fate of Afghanistan.

Even if it is decided to conduct another Bonn conference or a similar event, the main focus should be to avoid extension of war and facilitate a political concord. The war is in one's interest. None of the sides can reach their objectives through bloodshed, neither they can resolve the problem through eliminating their opposition. In addition, the current opportunity of peace and negotiations should not be wasted, as it is probably impossible to find a similar opportunity in the future.

FIRE DEVASTATION AT ISLAM QALA PORT; CAUSES AND EFFECTS



On 13th February, 2021, a fuel tanker exploded in Islam Qala port near Iran-Afghanistan border which converted into a massive fire catastrophe. The fire burned down around 500 fuel vehicles, causing millions dollar losses. The fire persisted for several hours and elicited physical and financial losses to the people. According to officials, 17 people were injured during the fire incident. In order to extinguish fire, the neighboring country Iran also extended its support via air and land. The local authorities of Herat province during the first stages of fire proclaimed that they did not have sufficient facilities within the province to extinguish the fire. Islam Qala port is located 120 KM away in west of Herat city and is considered as the main transit way between Iran and Afghanistan.

Magnitude of the Incident

According the Afghanistan's Chamber of Commerce, losses to merchants are far higher than it was reported at the first stages. Khan Jan Alokozai, member of the chamber has expressed that hundreds of million worth properties of traders, including 1000 vehicles have been destroyed during the Islam Qala port incident. During a press conference on 18th February 2021, Mr. Alokozai stated that the fire incident has caused 25% rise in prices of combustible goods all over the country. In addition, private sector has faced unconceivable losses due to the incident.

Local authorities during the first stages of the fire expressed that they do not have enough facilities to extinguish the fire, therefore, requested Iran for Help.

Younus Qazi Zada, Director of Afghanistan Chamber of Commerce and Investment has stated that the incident of Herat can be called as a “Tsunami” for traders. He has claimed that the government does not take the issue serious and will know about its devastating effects in the next few months. He also expressed that people who lost their properties and vehicles in the fire have struggled for years to attain that wealth.

Under the leadership of deputy minister of Revenue and customs, the president has appointed a delegation consisting Deputy minister of industry and trade, deputy of the attorney general’s office, Director of Chamber of Commerce and investment, Representative of National Security Council, Representative of NDS, Representative of the ministry of interiors, Director of the Chamber of Industries, General Director of Customs, President of the transport union and the governor of Herat to investigate and evaluate the incident and submit their report to the president.

Causes of the Fire

Directorate of Chamber of Commerce and investment has declared via a report that the following were the main causes of the incident:

- 1 - Absence of different lines for fuel, gas, other goods and passengers.
- 2 - Strike of drivers due to request for taxes within the Islam Qala custom
- 3 - Technical problems of the digital trap
- 4 - Absence of sufficient firefighting facilities and fire prevention measures.
- 5 - Although delegates visit the port monthly or weekly but there has not been any effect on its affairs.

6 - Sluggish process and absence of professional staff in TCRC, due to which, a tanker is forced to wait for 20 days in the custom to complete its relative processes.

7 - Lack of capacity and facilities in Islam Qala custom.

Younus Qazi Zada, Director of Chamber of Commerce and investment says “the main problem was ministry of transport’s new procedure, due to which, tankers or trucks are forced to wait in the custom for two weeks.

Damages Caused by the Fire

According to the spokesman of the directorate of Public health of Herat province, 17 people have been wounded due to the incident. Officials of the chamber of commerce and industries and the Islam Qala port have declared that around 500 tankers of fuel and gas have been grisly devastated. Preliminary investigations have indicated the incident caused 500 million USD worth loss to traders. Among the destroyed tankers, 90 tankers have completely vanished due to intensity of the explosion. Also, 435 vehicles, have partially been damaged. Comprehensive information about the losses requires further investigation.

In addition to the destruction cause by the fire, some properties and goods of merchants were looted within the Islam Qala custom and on the way towards Herat city by unknown individuals. Some vehicles have disappeared along with their goods and the unknown individuals who have stolen the vehicles request money from traders in exchange for their vehicles and goods.

In brief, we can say that around 500 vehicles were destroyed by the incident and hundreds of others were affected by different causes.

During his visit from the area of incident, Abdul Wahid Qatali, Governor of Herat expressed his grief and said “Heavy losses have been caused to the private sector and governmental establishments. Among the recovered vehicles, 1500 were transited to the neighboring

country, 500 were secured near border and 400 were moved to Heart city”.

The blaze led to heavy costs to the private sector, public sector, the people and the market. Due to the fire incident of Herat and strike of transport agencies all over the country, prices of combustible goods have dramatically increased all over the country.



(An image of destruction caused by the fire incident in Islam Qala port)

On 16th February, 2021, the Associated Press Agency shared some satellite images of the incident, showing hundreds of burned tankers of fuel and gas which has turned the land dark.

As usual, hundreds of fuel-carrying vehicles were in a queue to complete their relative affairs in the custom. At that day, 2500 vehicles were parked in the area, while the custom has parking capability of only 700 tankers.

Representatives of the private sector have proclaimed their requests from relative ministries and claimed for restitution for their losses.

Investigation Delegate of the Parliament

Members of the delegation appointed by the parliament and chamber of commerce have travelled to Herat province in order to find the truth behind the incident. During a press conference, they have expressed it is not far from possible that the incident was premeditated. The incident is still being investigated. Lately, reports say that 9 employees of

the Islam Qala custom have been arrested for the incident.

Recommendations to Avoid Similar Incidents

Considering the Isam Qala fire incident, other customs clearly need to take preventive measure in order to avoid similar incidents. The latest incident has occurred due to lack of firefighting facilities and inconsideration of sufficient space between fuel tankers, which resulted in heavy costs to the Afghan and Iranian traders.

All customs including Islam Qala port lack facilities for disembarkation, loading, custom processing, clearance and infrastructure for customs.

Hopefully, the relative establishments will learn from the catastrophic event that affected the economy and investor by providing more attention to deliver better services at customs. This is due to the fact that trade and investment are the key factors for the economic development of the country. Private sector which can be considered as the main dynamic element of the economy was severely affected due to the incident. It is nearly impossible for the investors and traders to recover from the incident all by themselves. Therefore, after a precise evaluation of the losses, relative traders should be compensated. This will enable private sector to pursue their business operations in the country and keep them attached to the economy of their country.

In addition, a risk evaluation committee should be appointed in order to investigate and evaluate the current condition of customs. They should report back to the president so that effective measures are taken for reforms.

The horrific fire incident of Islam Qala will truly have negative impact on business people, unemployment, and the economy of people. However, as it is well-known fact that extensive corruption in governmental bodies has not only lead to sluggish performance, but has led to occurrences like the incident of Islam Qala.

Therefore, in order to prevent similar incidents, corruption should be eliminated and people should be appointed according to qualification and talent.

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