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Preface

It is the tenth month after the fifth QCG meeting regarding the Afghan peace process, but still, there is no mechanism for peace underhand nor had the Afghan government reviewed its peace policy, and the Afghan government has not undertaken any reasonable efforts except for some empty words.

Therefore, the Afghan peace process and security situation have faced a stalemate. In order to break this deadlock, the Commander of US forces in Afghanistan General Nicolson demands more troops in Afghanistan; and Russia, China, and Pakistan, on the other hand, have started Moscow meetings regarding Afghanistan.

Since the formation of the National Unity Government (NUG) in Afghanistan, how is the Afghan peace process proceeding? What is the US policy towards the Afghan peace process? And what will be the impacts of the 12 countries' upcoming meeting in Moscow on the Afghan peace process? These are the questions that are analyzed in the first part of the Weekly Analysis of the Center for Strategic and Regional Studies.

In the second part of the analysis, you would read about the Afghan President's visit to Australia. In this trip besides meeting senior Australian official, the Afghan side also signed a \$320m cooperation agreement with Australia. Since 2001, Australia has donated \$900m in aid, in various fields, to Afghanistan.

Initiation of foreign efforts regarding the Afghan peace process



Since the past several years, regional and international powers have initiated efforts for the Afghan peace process. The upcoming conference on Afghanistan in Moscow and its subsequent developments is an example of these efforts.

In the meanwhile, at the recent meeting of NATO ministers of foreign affairs, the US Secretary of States Rex Tillerson said that the US is committed to peace between the Afghan government and the Taliban. However, some senior US military officials have called for the deployment of additional troops to Afghanistan. On the other hand, the Pakistani Ambassador in the US Aizaz Ahmad has also announced his five-points formula regarding the Afghan peace process before the announcement of the Trump's policy.

How did the peace efforts extended from internal to the international initiative? What is the US policy towards peace? What are the impacts of the Moscow Conference and what are the coordination and non-coordination between the superpowers regarding the Afghan peace process. These are the questions that are analyzed in this part of the analysis.

Evaluation of the peace efforts in NUG's tenure

After the formation of the National Unity Government (NUG) in Afghanistan, once again, the Afghan peace process started, but this time, it was, on the one hand, highly reflected in the media and, on the other hand, started somehow different than the efforts undertaken previously. This time, in its peace policy, the Afghan government, to a greater extent, relied on China and Pakistan. Hence, the Murree talks with the Taliban were held. However, after the Murree talks, the second phase of the negotiations was not held.

The Quadrilateral Coordination Group (QCG) regarding the Afghan peace process and talks with the Taliban was established to guarantee the commitments made between Pakistan and Afghanistan. Besides Afghanistan and Pakistan, China and the US were also included in this group. QCG held five meetings regarding the peace process but failed to achieve any desirable outcomes regarding the talks with the Taliban.

Given the past two and half years, the NUG's this policy, which sought to bring the Taliban to the negotiation table through regional countries, has failed to a greater part. During this time, the only achievement of the Afghan government in the peace process was, after an intra-Afghan talk, the peace deal with Hezb-e-Islami. However, this peace agreement was a result of Hezb-e-Islami's tendency rather than an initiative on behalf of the Afghan government.

The current deadlock of the peace process

Although the Taliban could not reject the Murree talks, in a responsive move, this group increased the authorities of the Taliban's Political Office in Qatar and announced this office as the only address of the negotiations with the Taliban. Later-on, the group refused to participate in the then newly started quadrilateral talks' process regarding the Afghan peace process.

It is now about one year since the Taliban's announcement, but during this time tensions between Afghanistan and Pakistan have increased. Distrust between the Afghan government and the Taliban has augmented as well, and the Taliban

continued their fight. Besides that, another leading player in Afghanistan, the US, was also focused on elections in the US. Therefore, this situation faced the peace process with an impasse and during this time, except for some small events, no significant decision, stance or measure was held regarding the peace in Afghanistan.

The unclear US policy towards the Afghan peace process

During the last two years of Obama's presidency, the US has played the role of observer or somehow mediator in the Afghan peace process, in Murree talks for instance. However, after the installation of the new administration in the US, the US's policy, to a greater part, is unclear towards not only Afghanistan but also the entire South Asia.

It became five months since the transfer of power to the new US President, but the US's policy towards South Asia, in general, and Afghanistan and Pakistan, in particular, is unclear. In the South Asian region, only the US's policy towards India is somehow clear. The new US President Donald Trump has talked with Narendra Modi through telephone, and the National Security Advisors of the two countries have also met. Hence, in such unclear situation, there seems to be some coordination between the two nations. On the other hand, Trump's policy towards Pakistan and Afghanistan appears to be unclear, and since November 2016, Trump has made no statement regarding these two countries, except for the phone calls with the Pakistani Prime Minister Mohammad Nawaz Sharif and the Afghan President Ashraf Ghani.

The main reason behind the US's uncertain policy towards Afghanistan and Pakistan is a lack of policy making regarding this region. According to the former US Ambassador to Afghanistan Zalmay Khalilzad, the US may announce its policy regarding Afghanistan and Pakistan at the end of April or at the beginning of May 2017.

It must be noted that policy regarding the Afghan peace process is part of the US policy in the South Asian region. Therefore, the US policy in Afghanistan, to a greater extent, will be influenced by the US policy in South Asia and whenever the

US policy towards South Asia is announced, its policy towards the Afghan peace process will also be cleared.

Although the US has not announced its policy regarding South Asia and the Afghan peace process, some US generals and recently the US Secretary of States have made statements regarding the Afghan peace process. These statements were, to a greater part, in contradiction to each other. For instance, last week, the US Secretary of States Rex Tillerson said that “the NATO coalition is committed to peace in Afghanistan, and want to reach a settlement among them at the end. The coalition’s interests will be insured, and Afghanistan will not become a sanctuary for terrorism.” Before this, in his speech in the US Senate, the Commander of Foreign forces in Afghanistan General Nicolson had said that to break through the stalemate in Afghanistan it is needed to send more troops to this country.

The Moscow Conference on peace: is the peace process going to change?

From 2009 to 2016, the countries in the region had a consensus that peace in Afghanistan is necessary. In the meanwhile, these countries had not started any peace efforts without first informing Afghanistan and the US. However, at the end of 2016, the Moscow Conference on Afghanistan between Russia, China, and Pakistan was the first effort by the countries in the region without the involvement of the Afghan and US governments. Emergence and expansion of ISIL in the region, the confrontation between Russia and the US in the international politics and existence of the idea that the US does not want the resolution of the Afghan case were the main reasons behind the convention of Moscow meeting.

After the beginning of the Moscow meeting, the Afghan government harshly reacted. Therefore, the Afghan government was invited to the Second Moscow Conference. Six countries had participated in this conference. The third Moscow meeting is expected to be held on April 14 where 12 countries will be participating. Moscow has invited Washington and the Taliban as well, but reports say that the US has rejected to take part in this conference. Washington believes

that Russia and Iran are supporting the Taliban and, therefore, the two countries cannot play a role in the peace process.

The Moscow Conference on Afghanistan can play an active role in the Afghan case and equally can further complicate the situation in Afghanistan. However, the outcomes rather rely on Russia, the US, the Afghan government and the Taliban. Because, if the purpose of this meeting is to push the US out of the region or to exclude it from the peace talks, the Afghan government and the US will oppose it, the Taliban's relations with the countries in the regions would expand, and the peace process will remain in its current status. Nevertheless, if the objective of the Moscow meeting was to save the Central Asia from violence, somehow peace between the Afghan government and the Taliban, and the withdrawal of the US troops based on a schedule, this meeting would have positive effects.

Afghan-Australia Relations (2001-2017)



The Afghan President Ashraf Ghani, heading a high-ranking Afghan delegation, visited Australia on 2 April 2017. In this visit, the Afghan President met the senior Australian official and the Afghan residents of Australia.

In this visit, an agreement between Afghanistan and Australia in constructive areas with a value of \$320m was signed, and it is said that Australia would give this money to Afghanistan within four years. In additions, the two sides agreed to cooperate with each other in areas of infrastructure, education, irrigation and agriculture, education of civilians and fight against corruption.

Here you would read about the background of the Afghanistan-Australia relations, Australian military presence in Afghanistan and the relations between the two countries after the formation of the National Unity Government (NUG).

The Afghan-Australian ties

Based on the information in hand, for the first time in 1860, three Afghans, with 24 camels loaded with goods, arrived in the Melbourne city of Australia, but it is said that before that, in 1838, some Afghans had come to rural areas of Australia and had played a part in spreading Islam in Australia and also in building the first mosque in this country.

Australia, which is the smallest continent of the world, is located far from Afghanistan. Before its military presence in Afghanistan (before 2001), Australia did not play an active role in Afghanistan. After 2001, Australia, within the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), cooperated with Afghanistan in various fields.

Australia sent about 2000 soldiers to Afghanistan who were based in Uruzgan province. At the end of NATO's mission in Afghanistan in December 2014, a larger part of these troops withdrew from Afghanistan, and currently, 270 soldiers remain in Afghanistan. According to reports, since 2001, 42 Australian soldiers are killed in Afghanistan, and hundreds of others are injured, and Australia's military expenditures in Afghanistan exceeds millions of dollars.

In addition to sending its troops to Afghanistan, Australia has also assisted Afghanistan in the fields of construction and economy. Afghanistan and Australia signed the agreement of strategic cooperation on 20th May 2012. In this agreement, Australia pledged to support Afghanistan to gain the membership of the World Trade Organization. The agreement could be beneficial for Afghanistan in extending bilateral economic cooperation through private and public sectors, exempting Afghan goods from custom duty and importing Afghan goods without a limited share, providing technical support to standardize Afghan products to be able to be sold in Australian markets and it can also help in providing a safe environment for investment in Afghanistan and the exchange of trade delegations between the two countries.

Besides that, the two countries established the Afghanistan-Australia trade council on 29th May 2013. The council is formed to increase coordination between

trading and social community, give information about the country's economic situation in order to attract both Australian traders and Afghan traders resident in Australia, boost and hasten the trade relations between the Afghan traders and the traders of other countries, exchange of fresh information between the Afghan Chamber of Commerce and Industries and the council and creation of a connecting bridge between the privates sectors of the two countries.¹

Since 2001 until the formation of the NUG, Australia has contributed more than \$700m in aid to Afghanistan and the greatest aid of this country to Afghanistan was \$200m in 2008 in Paris Conference. Australia is also a country where thousands of Afghans are resident, and thousands of others are seeking refuge in this country.

The NUG, Kabul-Canberra relations

Australia is one of the significant donors for the Afghanistan development programs particularly agricultural programs and only in the past two years, this country has donated \$130m in aid to Afghanistan. After the establishment of the NUG in Afghanistan, Australian Prime Minister visited Kabul and vowed to assist Afghanistan in various fields. In the Warsaw Conference, held on 7 July 2016, Australia announced to donate \$300m in aid to Afghanistan to strengthen Afghan security forces until 2020². In addition, in the Brussels's Meeting, Australia pledged to give \$80m annually to Afghanistan until 2020 and also promised to help in repairing damaged helicopters and equipping the Afghan forces with the anti-mine equipment.³

¹ The Afghan Chamber of Commerce and Industries, <http://www.acci.org.af/da/home/38-news/536-n.html>

² BBC-Persian, http://www.bbc.com/persian/afghanistan/2016/07/160708_k05_nato_summit_warsaw_afghanistan

³ The Afghan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "the detailed report of Brussels Conference on Afghanistan"

Ghani's first formal visit to Australia

The Afghan President Ashraf Ghani's recent trip to Australia was his first visit to this country and Ghani is the first Afghan President ever to travel to this country.⁴

In this voyage, Ghani met the Australian Prime Minister, Governor-General, Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Defense, head of Australian Intelligence Agency, Australian scientists/researchers and also the Afghan experts and elders in that country and discussed the relevant issues with them.

In his meeting with Ghani, the Australian Prime Minister reiterated the continual of his respected country's aid to Afghanistan and said that Australia would remain beside Afghanistan as its international partner. In accordance with the Brussels promises, the Afghan Minister of Economy and the Australian Minister of Foreign Affairs signed the development cooperation agreement for four years (with a value of \$320m). The technical and scientific cooperation agreement was also signed between the two countries.⁵

Conclusion.

The Afghan President's visit to Australia is a sign of Afghanistan's extended relations with important and developed countries of the world. Although after the end of NATO's mission in Afghanistan Western and other nations have limited ties with Afghanistan, Ghani's this trip shows that Afghanistan's foreign policy is expanding and that President Ghani wants to attract aids and attention of the world towards Afghanistan.

Australia is a developed country with a trade and agriculture-based economy. This country has vast experiences in fields of agriculture, livestock, and mining and can

⁴ The Afghan Presidential Palace, <http://president.gov.af/fa/2017/04/03/%D8%B1%D8%A6%DB%8C%D8%B3-%D8%AC%D9%85%D9%87%D9%88%D8%B1-%D8%BA%D9%86%DB%8C-%D8%A8%D8%A7-%DA%AF%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%86%D8%B1-%D8%AC%D9%86%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%84-%D8%A2%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%84%DB%8C/>

⁵ آرگ ریاست جمهوری،

<http://president.gov.af/fa/2017/04/04/%D8%B1%D8%A6%DB%8C%D8%B3%E2%80%8C%D8%AC%D9%85%D9%87%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%BA%D9%86%DB%8C-%D8%A8%D8%A7-%D8%B5%D8%AF%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B9%D8%B8%D9%85-%D8%A2%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%84%DB%8C%D8%A7-%D8%AF%DB%8C/>

share these experiences with Afghanistan. The Afghan officials also discussed water management with Australian experts. Since Afghanistan has vast water resources, Australia's cooperation in this field could be helpful for Afghanistan. Besides participation in constructing water dams, Australia is also interested in working in the mining field in Afghanistan, and if Australia plays a direct role in mining in Afghanistan, it will be fruitful for the economic development of the country.

The end

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Note: Please let us know your feedback and suggestions for the improvement of Weekly analysis.

