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Preface

After several successive deadly incidents in Kabul, the Afghan government hosted the “Kabul Process” International Conference on ‘Peace and Security Cooperation’ on Tuesday, while tensions between Jamiat-e-Islami and the government have risen and, therefore; the acting Minister of Foreign Affairs did not attend the meeting.

Representatives of 27 countries and international organizations had participated in this conference which is said to be aimed at bringing peace and security to the country. In this conference, President Ghani delivered a speech and give ultimatum to the Taliban to join the peace process. Ghani also talked about the Kabul-Islamabad relations. The question is how effective will this conference be in the peace process? In this regard, you would read in the first part of the Weekly Analysis of the Center for Strategic and Regional Studies.

In the second part of the analysis, you will read about the intense political and security situation in the country. After the bloody explosions in Kabul last week, anti-government protests started which turned violent later on, in which some people including the son of the deputy speaker of the Mishranu Jirga (the Upper House of the Afghan Parliament) Mohammad Alam Izidyar were killed. Three explosions in the funeral of the Salem Izidyar further widened the gap between Jamiat party and the government and, hence, the Jamiat party made some demands from the Presidential Palace. This conflict continues; whether to which direction is the situation headed after the recent incidents is a question analyzed in the second part of the Weekly analysis.

Can the “Kabul Process” pave the way for peace?



Despite the bloody security incidents and deep internal political divisions, the “Kabul Process” was held in Kabul last week. The representatives of several international entities and more than 23 countries including Pakistan, Iran, the US, and the UK had participated in this conference.

The responsibility for the management and implementation of the decisions made in the Afghan Government’s initiative “Kabul Process” lies with the Afghan government, a point which differentiates this process from the other similar processes. Speaking at the conference, the Afghan President Ashraf Ghani said, “Today, we have gathered here, to unite against terrorism and to show that we want peace; we have the capacity to bring peace and that we are honest about peace... If there is agreement to develop a peace roadmap acceptable to both sides, the Afghan government would allow the Taliban to open a representative office.”¹

¹ President office, President Ghani’s Remarks At The Kabul Process Conference, June 06, 2017, see it online:

<http://president.gov.af/en/SOKP>

What was the primary objective of the Kabul Process? What role will it play in reinitiating the peace process? With this process launched, has the government's peace policy changed? What is the evaluation of the National Unity Government's (NUG) peace strategy before Kabul Process? These are the questions that are analyzed here.

The NUG and its peace policy

Since the formation of the NUG, ending the Afghan war, strengthening the Afghan forces, and the peace process was the main elements of the Afghan foreign policy. Seeking to undertake measures for the peace process, the Afghan President started a series of foreign trips from China, and Saudi Arabia, to Pakistan and in order to have Pakistan's assistance in the peace process, he gave Pakistan many privileges. Hence, Kabul's peace strategy largely relied on Pakistan.

Moreover, the trilateral efforts of Afghanistan, Pakistan, and China were another initiative launched regarding the Afghan peace process; the Urumqi talks are projection of this initiative. Efforts were also made to include the Taliban in these discussions because before that in the Urumqi talks the Afghan Taliban were not represented.

The only achievement that the Afghan government had from the whole trend was the Murree talks. However, these talks were also stalled after the enclosure of the death of Mullah Mohammad Omar. Later, the Pakistan, China, Afghanistan, and the US quadrilateral peace talks started. Nonetheless, this process did not have any practical achievement either, and the Afghan Taliban refused to take part in it. Hence, the way for direct talks was not paved. The main reason for the failure of this process was the fact that, instead of giving the Taliban a proper representation, the Afghan government invited them through Pakistan and threatened to take steps against them in case they did not come to the negotiation table. Although Pakistan accepted the responsibility of bringing the Taliban to the talks and made promises in this regard, however, it did nothing later. Thus, the bilateral relations between Kabul and Islamabad become more tenuous than ever.

The primary objectives of the Kabul Process

The main aims of the NUG for launching the Kabul process are as follows:

- **An Afghan led, Afghan own peace process;** although regarding the Afghan peace and security, many conferences were organized both before and after the formation of the NUG, but one particularity that differentiates the Kabul Process from other conferences is that it is initiated, led and managed by Afghans.
- **The “last” offer of peace for the Taliban;** in this conference, first the Afghan President alluded to its sincerity in the peace process and then stated, “We have already said that we aim for peace, but we cannot make peace if the Taliban are not prepared to do the same. If there is an agreement to develop a peace roadmap acceptable to both sides, we will allow the Taliban groups to open a representative office. We are offering a chance for peace, but we must also be clear that this is not an open-ended opportunity.”
- **Closing other regional processes;** the first conference of the Kabul Process was held five months after the Moscow trilateral process. The Moscow process regarding the Afghan peace process began after some geopolitical changes occurred in the region. However, the Afghan government criticized this process because this process was launched without Afghanistan’s representative taking part in it. Indicating to the point, the Afghan President said in the conference that, “The dialogue around peace is badly fragmented. There are many players running parallel tracks with too little clarity on who they are and what they represent. It is a recipe for misunderstanding and confusion when what is most needed right now is focus... But in return, we also ask that you respect the integrity of an Afghan owned and led consolidated process and not set up separate tracks of your own. Separate channels are not effective, we will succeed only if we work together.”
- **Resumption of relations with Pakistan;** since the past several months, relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan was in the most deteriorated state ever, and regarding the Afghan peace process, the Afghan government had become very suspicious on Pakistan. The Afghan government rejected the \$500m aid offer of Pakistan in the Heart of Asia Conference. Nevertheless,

during the Kabul Process, the Afghan President said that the top priority for the Afghan government was to find an effective way for negotiations with Pakistan. “Although we offered friendship to Pakistan, we were rejected. We have tried bilateral, trilateral, quadrilateral, and even multilateral negotiations to bring an end to conflict and terror. But we have made little progress. Still, we want to be able to trust Pakistan. Our problem, our challenge, is that we cannot figure out what is it that Pakistan wants. What will it take to convince Pakistan that a stable Afghanistan helps them and helps our region?”, Ghani said.

In addition, delivering his speech to the conference, the Afghan President called on Pakistan to clarify its demands and present its agenda and mechanism for the Afghan government, so that peace and stability can return to the region.

- **Cooperation with Kabul in areas of security;** in the post-2001 years, the regional consensus was created regarding the Afghan issue, but after 2011, this consensus was affected and after the formation of the NUG, it is challenged more than ever. The Moscow Conference on Afghanistan and the remarks of the senior officials of Russia and some other countries are evidence of the fact. Speaking at the conference, Ashraf Ghani said that Afghanistan was the frontline state to fight terrorism and drug trafficking and that the Afghan government fought other countries’ war. Therefore, Ghani called on regional countries to increase security cooperation with Afghanistan because he said this way the Taliban would be defeated. He also reiterated on creating security coalitions between the regional countries to eliminate the common threat of “terrorism”.

Has the new trend of peace begun?

Although the scheme presented by President Ghani in the Kabul Process was not much different from his previous policies, it had some new and important points in it. A projection of the Afghan government’s honesty, emphasizing on negotiations with Pakistan and the Taliban, the Afghan government’s stance about undertaking measures against those who would not accept negotiations,

and creating a regional consensus to strengthen the Afghan forces were elements of the past strategies in the Kabul Process.

Creating security coalitions to eliminate the common threat (terrorism), implementation of the UN Counter-terrorism convention, and undertaking academic discussions under this process were new elements in the Kabul process.

Although to a larger extent, the Kabul process was what pointed out above and the Afghan Taliban have not issued any official statement in this regard, however they have published an article on their official web page, give negative reactions to the process. The article wrote that although Ghani called on Taliban to join the peace process, he was addressing Pakistan. The article adds that now they [Pakistan] have to come forward and present a mechanism for the Afghan government. The article also criticizes Ashraf Ghani's rhetoric statements against Taliban, and finally concluded that the process will not bring peace².

² Read the piece published on the Taliban's official webpage here:

<https://shahamat.info/?p=86735>

The recent political and security tensions: concerns and outcomes



The latest bloody incidents in Kabul have paved the way for political tensions in the country, and following the series of political mistrusts, disagreements between Jamiat-e-Islami and the government has increased.

The deadly incident in the green zone in Kabul last week killed more than 90 people and injured around 461 others³. This incident and past political differences invoked a demonstration with anti-government slogans. The protest turned violent, and five people including the son of the first deputy speaker of Mishrano Jirga (the Upper House of the Parliament) Mohammad Alam Izidiyar was killed, and 11 others were wounded. In the funeral of the son of Mohammad Alam Izidiyar, three explosions occurred which in turn killed 18 and injured about 100 people.

The successive bloody incidents escalated differences within the National Unity Government. The acting Afghan Minister of Foreign Affairs and head of Jamiat-e-

³ BBC Persian, «در انفجار مرگبار کابل ۹۰ نفر کشته شدند», [90 people were dead in the bloody explosion in Kabul], 11 Jawza 1396:

<http://www.bbc.com/persian/afghanistan-40103092>

Islami Salahuddin Rabban demanded the resignation of the National Security Advisor Hanif Atmar and heads of the security sectors in the country. However, releasing a statement, the Afghan government rejected these demands of Jamiat party and, hence, the political tussle between the government and Jamiat party continues.

Here we have analyzed the recent security incidents, escalation of political tensions and the demands of the protestors from the government.

The nature of recent security incidents in Kabul

The country witnessed incidents and attacks during the last month which have complicated the security situations. One of these incidents was the attack on the Sardar Mohammad Daud Khan Hospital in Kabul.

The recent massive explosion in Kabul, which is apparently said to be a Truck bomb, was so huge that has dug a big hole in the ground and besides death tolls has caused millions of dollars of financial losses⁴. The incident was followed by massive reactions and condemnations inside and outside the country, but no one claimed responsibility for it. After the incident, releasing a statement, the Taliban announced that this group condemns any attack and explosions which kill civilians⁵.

The Afghan National Directorate of Security, however, announced that the assault was orchestrated by Haqqani Network with the help and instruction of Pakistan's Inter-Service Intelligence (ISI)⁶. Also, in response to this attack, President Ghani approved the execution of 11 prisoners which included members of Haqqani

⁴ Radio Azadi, «خسارات مالی حمله خونین روز چهارشنبه در منطقه وزیر اکبرخان شهر کابل» [The financial losses of the bloody attack in Wazir Akbar Khan region of Kabul city], 11 Jawza 1396:

<https://da.azadiradio.com/a/28522848.html>

⁵ BBC Persian, «واکنش‌های داخلی و خارجی به حمله خونین کابل» [domestic and international reactions against the deadly attack in Kabul], 10 Jawza 1396:

<http://www.bbc.com/persian/afghanistan-40105625>

⁶ Radio Azadi, «ریاست امنیت ملی: در عقب حمله موتریم کابل شبکه حقانی و آی اس آی قرار دارند» [National Directorate of Security: Haqqani Network and ISI are behind the Truck explosion in Kabul], 10 Jawza 1396:

<https://da.azadiradio.com/a/28519900.html>

Network and the Taliban⁷. Nevertheless, the Taliban responded to this move by the government by warning the adverse consequences of these executions and released dozens of prisoners including members of the police and national army⁸.

Overall, such a massive explosion shows the strength of the perpetrators of the attack and the weakness of the Afghan intelligence and security forces. Given the place and timing of the bomb, it seems that the objective of the attack was to create fear and demonstrate the fragile security situation in Afghanistan to the people. After the assault, many questions are raised in the minds of the citizens about how this truck reached the heart of Kabul?

Although President Ghani ordered the security organs to assess the incident and share the outcomes with the nation, some people launched protests in Kabul two days after the attack which turned violent by some people for political objectives. The protestors demanded the resignation of the President and Chief Executive and tried to enter the Presidential Palace. When the protesters were trying to pass in the Presidential Palace, police opened fire and killed five and injured 10 of them⁹. Three consecutive blasts, a day later, during the death ceremony of one of the protestors also left 18 dead and more than 100 injured¹⁰. No one claimed the responsibility of these attacks either, and after that, a number of demonstrators gathered under tents in Kabul and demanded the implementation of their demands.

⁷ Ava press, «گزارش امضای حکم اعدام ۱۱ عضو برجسته شبکه حقانی» [The report of signing the execution of 11 senior members of Haqani network], 11 Jawza 1396:

<http://avapress.com/vdcgyw9qwak9ty4.rpra.html>

⁸ For more information read the report of Daily Weesa, 17 Jawza 1396:

<http://www.dailyweesa.com/?p=14486>

⁹ 8 am, «پنج کشته و بیش از ده زخمی در تظاهرات کابل» [five dead and ten injured in protests in Kabul], 13 Jawza, 1396:

<http://8am.af/1396/03/13/five-were-killed-and-more-than-ten-injured-in-protests-in-kabul>

¹⁰ TOLO news, «سه انفجار در مراسم خاک سپاری یکی از معترضان جان ۱۸ تن را گرفت» [Three blasts in the funeral of one of the protestors left 18 dead], 13 Jawza 1396:

<http://www.tolonews.com/fa/afghanistan/%D8%B3%D9%87-%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%81%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D9%85%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B3%D9%85-%D8%AE%D8%A7%DA%A9-%D8%B3%D9%BE%D8%A7%D8%B1%DB%8C-%DB%8C%DA%A9%DB%8C-%D8%A7%D8%B2-%D9%85%D8%B9%D8%AA%D8%B1%D8%B6%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%AC%D8%A7%D9%86-%DB%B1%DB%B8-%D8%AA%D9%86-%D8%B1%D8%A7-%DA%AF%D8%B1%D9%81%D8%AA>

The expansion of political crisis

Coincide with the intensification of the security situation in Kabul, government's internal disputes and political opposition of Jamiat party with the Presidential palace augmented. The President sacked a member of Jamiat's leadership council and the former representative of the President for reforms and good governance Ahmad Zia Massoud and just after that, he was warning of political instability, civil war, and was chanting slogans of changing the regime. He also participated in the last week's demonstrations and was shouting the slogans of the resignation of the President and Chief Executive. Therefore, some of the protestors accuse him and Head of National Congress Abdul Latif Pedram of taking political advantage from the demonstration and turning it to violence¹¹.

After the explosions in the funeral of the son of Mohammad Alam Izidiyar, where most of the senior members of Jamiat-e-Islami were gathered, disputes between the government and this party has reached new heights. During a press conference, the acting Minister of Foreign Affairs and Head of Jamiat party said that these explosions were a conspiracy to eliminate the leadership members of his party and, therefore, he demanded the government to fire heads of security organs as well as National Security Advisor Hanif Atmar¹².

In response to these demands of Jamiat-e-Islami, the Afghan government said, "The National Security Advisor does not have executive powers in security sectors, and he carries on his duty with sincerity to his homeland."¹³ It seems that tensions between the Presidential Palace and Jamiat party are increasing over the issue of firing Hanif Atmar. On the one hand, based on the decision of the leadership council of his respective party, the acting Minister of Foreign Affairs did not participate in the "Kabul Process" conference and, on the other hand, the

¹¹ Radio Azadi, «روفی و سعیدی: پدram و مسعود خواستند از تظاهرات منفعت سیاسی ببرند» [Raufi and Saiedi: Pedram and Masaud tried to take political advantage from the protests], 13 Jawza 1396:

<https://da.azadiradio.com/a/28526194.html>

¹² Etilaatroz, «حزب جمعیت خواستار برکناری حنیف اتمر و رهبران نهادهای امنیتی شد» [Jamiat party demanded the dismissal of Hanif Atmar and heads of security sectors], 15 Jawza 1396:

<http://www.etilaatroz.com/48468>

¹³ Presidential Palace, Press Release, 15 Jawza 1396

<http://president.gov.af/fa/2017/06/05/-9>

Executive Chief of Jamiat party, as well as governor of Balkh province Atta Mohammad Noor has warned not paying attention to the demands of Jamiat party, will have enormous consequences for the government. Noor has said, “We remember that in foreign trips headed by Mr. Atmar, agreements are signed which are then executed; signature of the security agreement and an agreement with Hekmatyar’s brother show that he has executive powers.”¹⁴

The future scenario and the demands of the protestors

At the top of the demands of Jamiat-e-Islami and the protestors in Kabul is the dismissal of Hanif Atmar and heads of the security organs. As the presidential palace announced, it seems that some reforms will occur in the security forces, but it appears that Hanif Atmar will not be sacked. Therefore, it appears that the protestors’ emphasize on sacking Hanif Atmar will probably cause more violence. In the meanwhile, given various reasons including the presence of the foreign forces in the country, civil war or any serious security instability seems unlikely to occur.

However, in the recent political conflicts and in Kabul’s protests, the resignation of the President and Chief Executive and even dissolving the current government and the formation of an interim government was very much emphasized on. It means that the leaders of the NUG must resign so that the interim government can be established and the elections can be held.

In this regard, a few points are noteworthy:

First, if we assume that the President resigned, according to the Afghan constitution, until the elections are held, and the new President is elected, his powers go to the First Vice President. If President Ghani resigns and General Dustem takes his place, will the situation become better and will all the Afghan Nation accept this decision?

¹⁴ Jomhor News, «تاوان بی تفاوت گذشتن از خواسته‌های حزب جمعیت بسیار بزرگ خواهد بود» [The compensation of bypassing Jamiat’s demands will be huge], 16 Jawza 1396:

<http://www.jomhomnews.com/doc/news/fa/95206/>

Second, the establishment of the interim government; those who have protested and demanded the dissolve of the government are of one or two parties. Therefore, how will they establish an interim government? Who will be the head of this government? Will the Afghan nation accept it?

Third, if we assume that the interim government was established and all the people accepted it, how long will this government continue? Given the current security and economic situation will it be able to hold the elections? Despite many efforts, the current government has failed to hold the Parliamentary elections in the country during the past two years, how is it possible for the interim government to hold elections then?

Fourth, Currently, the security situation is deteriorating in the provinces and even in the capital, and dozens of security forces and civilians die in the attacks and blasts on a daily basis. Is there any guarantee that with the formation of the interim government, the situation in the country will improve?

The end

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

