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Preface

The issue of holding the Wolesi Jirga and District Council Elections, which based on the Afghan constitution, should have been organized in July 2015, is still facing ambiguity.

Recently, concerns are increasing about holding the elections and the capabilities of the Election Commission, formed as a result of electoral reforms on behalf of the NUG. The Election Commission has selected July 7, 2018 as the date of the upcoming elections and it seems that this commission will not be able to hold these elections on this date. On the other hand, the reforms brought by the NUG in the election commissions is said to be insufficient and it there exists concerns that with holding the elections the country would move towards instability. The reasons behind the increasing mistrust towards the electoral commissions and the fate of the upcoming elections are issues that are analyzed in the first part of the Weekly Analysis of the Center for Strategic and Regional Studies (CSRS).

In the second part of the analysis, you would read about the situation of the country in 2017. As the past years, 2017 was also full of challenges and problems for Afghanistan. The most important of these challenges was the internal differences of the government, which also affected the other aspects of the government. What challenges the government faced in areas of governance, peace and security, economy, foreign policy, and some other areas are issues that are analyzed in the second part of the analysis.

The increasing distrust towards holding the upcoming elections



The Parliamentary and District Council elections are to be held six months later on 7 July 2018 while the distrust over the capacity of the Independent Election Commission (IEC) is increasing in national and international levels.

Recently The Diplomat wrote in an article, holding the upcoming elections without the reforms in the electoral system and IEC will increase political instability in Afghanistan. Before this, the special representative of the UN Secretary General for Afghanistan Tadamichi Yamamoto in the Security Council of the UN has said that the preparations and the efforts of the IEC to hold timely and transparent elections were not sufficient.

Transparent Election Foundation of Afghanistan (TEFA) and Wolesi Jirga have also criticized the performance of IEC. Based on the remarks of Members of Parliament (MPs), the capacity of the IEC is not acceptable for them and that is way they do not believe the upcoming elections would be transparent. TEFA has accused the government of intervening in the affairs of IEC and has expressed concern about lack of preparation to hold the elections next year.

What are the factors that have increased doubts on IEC and holding the next elections? Will the coming election be held on its specified date?

Electoral reforms

The second paragraph of Article 83 of the Afghan constitution states: “The work period of Wolesi Jirga shall terminate, after the announcement of the results of the elections, on 1st Saratan [solar month] of the fifth year and the new parliament shall commence its work.” Based on this provision of the constitution, the work period of the current Wolesi Jirga should have ended at the end of Jawza 1394 [solar month and year] and the new Wolesi Jirga should have started its work. Nevertheless, this parliament’s term was extended until the announcement of the results of the next parliamentary elections by issuing a Presidential Decree on 29 Jawza 1394 [19 June 2015].

Despite that, on 18 January 2016, the head of IEC announced that the parliamentary elections would be held on 15 October 2016. This announcement was opposed by some parties in the country. The Afghan Chief Executive was insisting that everything must be done by the new Election Commission and after the reforms were brought to the electoral system.

Although the issue of elections was turned into a stigma for Afghanistan in the first two years of the National Unity Government (NUG), the New Election Commission was formed and started its work and now, after one year of its formation, the capabilities of this elections is widely questioned.

Distrust towards IEC

The mistrust towards IEC and holding the upcoming elections is due to the following factors:

First; IEC, which is formed after long-term controversies, does not have the required capacity and capability to hold the upcoming election. Since ever the beginning, this commission failed to develop an implementable plan that guaranteed the transparency of the elections. For instance, this commission failed to undertake the electronic system of elections, which would have guaranteed 90% of the transparency of the elections. Although sometimes back IEC announced that it started the process of electronic electoral system, it announced

later that it was impossible to do so at the time. Overall, IEC has not had any tangible achievement until now.

Second; the internal difference of the electoral commissions is also another factor that affects the preparations to hold the upcoming elections. The members of the electoral commissions have profound disagreements among themselves. Instead of preparing for the elections, the head and the commissioners of the Electoral Complaints Commission accused each other of corruption, negligence and law breaking and five members of this commission was dismissed by the President. After that, the head of the IEC was also dismissed by the president after such demand was made on behalf of the members of this commission and the new commissioner is yet to be introduced to this commission.

Third; IEC does not have the required independence either, as the electoral monitoring institutions, the members of Wolesi Jirga, and some politicians of the country have repeatedly questioned the independence of this commission. Therefore, there exist analysis suggesting that the government is not willing to hold a fair and transparent election and for this wants to blame IEC. Election and Transparency Watch Organization of Afghanistan (ETWA) stated on 5 November 2017 that after evaluating the performance of the IEC, this institution has arrived to the conclusion that this commission is still not independent.

The fate of the upcoming elections

Besides the mistrust towards IEC, there are other challenges that also increases the credibility of the assumption that the upcoming Parliamentary and District Council elections will not be held.

The security situation is in the worst condition, ever and the Afghan government's control over its territory is in its lowest levels. Based on the recent report of SIGAR, the Afghan government has uncontested control over only 57 percent of its territory as of last November. That is down from 72 percent a year earlier. In SIGAR's report to the US Congress two months ago, the office of John Sapko had sated that only in the past six months the Afghan government has lost the control of its 9 districts and, hence, the armed oppositions of the government

“controlled” and had “influence” over 54 districts of the country. The population under the control of the government is 34% and the population under the influence of the government was 29% of the overall Afghan population. That is why IEC is not able to even specify the electoral centers in more than 30 districts of the country.

On the other hand, the internal divisions of the NUG have also caused the fate of the upcoming elections to be undecided. For instance, the issuing of the electronic identity cards is deemed as a major step towards holding transparent and fair elections in the country, while, the beginning of its issuing has faced challenges due to the disagreements between the two leaders of the NUG. It seems that the reason behind the delay in introducing the new commissioner of the Election Commission is also the differences between the NUG leaders.

Therefore, it seems the NUG is not seriously willing to hold the upcoming elections due to the challenges that it is currently facing and this elections will be postponed, something that will further question the legitimacy of the regime.

The concerns about the instability of the country

Although it seems impossible to hold the 2018 elections, the concerns that are related to the elections and its probable outcomes are that of the political and security instability of the country.

Some monitoring institutions, politicians, and political parties do not seem to be satisfied with the electoral reforms of the NUG and some others even insist on the dissolution of the commission in order for the transparent elections to be held. The Diplomats, a publication based in US, released an article written by Abdullah Elham, and Afghan writer that the weaknesses of the electoral system has increased the concerns and have resulted in political differences.

The fundamental reforms in the electoral system and commissions is one of the musts in order to prevent instability after the elections. The electoral reforms that the NUG has brought did not result in to the improvement of the performance of the electoral commissions. Even in the beginning, due to the internal conflicts in

the government, the Selection Committee was formed in a way that did not have the required capability to select the electoral commissioners. The members of the commission are not selected transparently and no reform is evident in these commissions; therefore, we should not expect the government to hold an election acceptable for all.

Hence, in order to prevent the probable after elections instability in the country, the first step is the firm willingness of the government to reform the electoral system and the elections commissions. And after that, the support of the international community is also much important in this regard, while the international community have kept its meaningful silence in this regard and has done nothing to change the situation.

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A glimpse into the situation of the country in 2017



2017 was a year full of challenges and problems for Afghanistan. The political disagreements were reached its highest levels compared to the past 16 years. The security situation in the country was also deteriorated and this years was the bloodiest compared to the past one and half decade. Based on the recent report of SIGAR, the territory under the control of the Afghan government has decreased to 57%.

Besides these problems, the Afghan government has had some achievements as well. For instance, last year the level of the national incomes of the government also increased and a larger percentage of the national budget was also spent.

The internal differences of the government and the political situation of the country, the challenges the country faced, and the achievements of the government are issues that are analyzed here.

Political Differences

The 50-50 approach of sharing power between Ashraf Ghani and Dr. Abdullah Abdullah resulted in the formation of the National Unity Government (NUG) and it was due to this division of power that the government weakened. In 2017, these internal differences had shadowed the political scene of the country.

The scope of these differences reached the Chief Executive Office and the Presidential Palace as disputes were raised between the President and the Vice President, due to which still the Vice President lives in exile in Turkey. The disagreements between the Chief Executive office and the governor of Balkh Atta Mohammad Noor also raised, even though they were the two outstanding figures of the same political party.

In this year, the types of the political divisions were confusing and mostly the people inside the government were the government's opposition. This situation resulted in the dismissal of the President's Representative in good governance and political reforms Ahmad Zia Massoad. The evident example of this situation was the formation of an anti-government coalition by the government senior officials, in Turkey.

In this year for the first time the strongholds of power against the government had begun to get stronger. For instance, the differences between the Presidential Palace and the governor of Balkh Atta Mohammad Noor over the issue of dismissing him from the position of Balkh's governance, the remarks of Kandahar's Chief of Police General Abdul Razeq, a great anti-government gathering in Kandahar, etc.

Moreover, the differences between the Presidential Palace and the Parliament also existed and some members of the Parliament had stood against the government individually which raised the level of political divisions.

Overall, these divisions negatively affected the performance of the NUG and this government failed in achieving some achievements that could affect the legitimacy of the government such as failing in preparations for holding elections, non-commencement of the electronic ID cards, etc.

Peace and Security

In the past several years, the Afghan government's peace efforts were focused in two parts; one, the peace talks with Hezb-e-Islami and second, the peace talks with the Taliban. Regarding the first part, due to taking a step back in the position of Hezb-e-Islami, the Afghan government succeeded and the leader of this party came to Kabul eight months ago. However, regarding the second part, it should be said that the government failed and the government's overall policy in this regard was to put political and military pressure on the Taliban.

The government's peace efforts in this year were less important in comparison to that of 2014, 2015, and 2016. In 2014, the NUG was seeking peace through its foreign policy; in 2015, the Urumqi and Murree talks were held; in 2016, several meetings of the Quadrilateral Meetings were held; and in 2017, lesser achievements were made compared to previous years.

In the middle of all these, the Afghan government initiative, Kabul process, commenced and its first meeting was held in June 2017. From the remarks of President Ghani in this meeting it was evident that this would be the last chance for the Taliban to join the peace process. However, according to the Taliban, the objective of this meeting was not peace.

Lack of achievements in the area of peace was due to the Afghan government's reliance on Pakistan's cooperation and since the relations with Pakistan was more deteriorated than ever, no improvement was seen in this regard.

After the US's harsh stance towards Pakistan and Pakistan's marginalization, with the suggestion of Pakistan, one another meeting of QCG was held in Oman; however, and this meeting produced no result because the participants of the meeting even failed to state a statement.

On the other hand, some honest peace activists also commenced some activities in areas of peace; nevertheless, these efforts to a great extent were in individual levels. Among them was one the initiative of the Center for Strategic and Regional Studies (CSRS), a survey from the Afghan elites and a peace conference where the peace activists and had participated. In this conference the obstacles in the way of peace as well as opportunities were evaluated and the participants made

specific recommendations to the engaged parties in order for the peace process to succeed.

Failure in areas of peace was coincided with the ever deterioration of the security situation in the country. The airstrikes of the US forces increased as did the civilian casualties, against which the Afghan government had been silent. In this year several major explosions occurred, some of which killed hundreds of people.

Economic Situation

Although the level of unemployment is still high in the country and most of the people are face economic problems, based on the formal statistics, the economic conditions of the country in 2017 was better than the past three years.

In 2017, the development budget of the country was spent 67% while this percentage in the past three years were respectively 44%, 53% and 54%.

In 2015, the economic growth of the country was 1.3% which rose to 2.6% in 2017. These are not only the statistics of the government but also that of the World Bank and other international organizations.

On the other hand, in 2017, the revenue of the country also increased. In this year, the revenue of the country was approximately 170 billion Afghanis, which showed an increase compared to 165 billion Afghanis in 2016. In 2017, the exports of the country also increased in comparison to that of 2015. In 2015 the value of the country's exports was 580 million dollars, which rose to 723 million dollars in 2017.

Foreign Policy

In areas of foreign policy, the Afghan government assumed Donald Trump's decision about the US forces' stay in Afghanistan as a success; however, emphasis on war and neglecting peace were the factors in this strategy that were highly criticized.

In areas of relations with other countries, except for Russia and Pakistan, the Afghan government had good relations with many countries. The US's policy towards South Asia and increasing Pressures on Pakistan were something that the Afghan government wanted since ever the presidency of Hamid Karzai. This situation reached its heights at the end of 2017 and at the beginning of 2018. On the other hand, China stepped in as a mediator between Afghanistan and Pakistan and organized a trilateral meeting to improve relations between the Afghan and Pakistani government.

In the meanwhile, in areas of foreign policy, the Afghan government inaugurated the Lapis Lazuli road, which is the shortest way of connecting Afghanistan with Europe.

Conclusion

Overall, the political disagreements of the government, the issue of peace and war, economic efforts and regional projects were the most important incidents of the country in the past year. However, there were improvements and failures in some other areas as well which were not covered in this article. The important developments in the country are analyzed in our weekly analysis during the year. For instance, the issue of migrants, which Afghanistan was the second country with the largest refugee population, who are displaced due to the ongoing war in the country. The government's policy towards the refugees were also, to a greater part, affected by the government's security policy.

The End

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

