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Preface

On the one hand, the NUG is facing many challenges in areas of politics and security and on the other hand, in both national and international levels trust on the Independent Election Commission (IEC) is fading which has resulted in the escalation of concerns about not holding the upcoming Parliamentary and Presidential elections.

Some reports were release last week suggesting that the NUG is trying to extend its term without holding an election. Although the Presidential Palace has denied these rumors, evidences show that this scheme is under consideration. In this regard you would read in the first part of the Weekly Analysis of the Center for Strategy and Regional Studies.

In the second part of the Analysis, you would read about the second meeting of Kabul process. This process has begun with the initiative and leadership of the Afghan Government and its first meeting was held in Kabul eight month ago. In its first meeting, the Afghan President had, for a last time, called on the Taliban to join the peace process. Now that the Afghan government has boycotted the peace process with the Taliban, what will be the focus of discussions in this meeting? And what will be impacts of this meeting on the peace and stability in the country?

The rumors about extending the NUG's term



Quoting some sources, the media published some reports saying that the US and the leaders of the National Unity Government (NUG) are trying to extend the term of the current government for another five years, without holding the presidential elections, through establishing a council of leaders.

Rumors in this regard increased when President Ghani met some politicians and Jihadi leaders separately. However, rejecting these reports, the acting spokesperson of the Presidential Palace Shah Hussain Murtazawi said that the meetings of the President with politicians and Jihadi leaders were for consulting them about some national and international issues.

The leader of Hezb-i-Islami Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, who has met the president recently, has termed the scheme to establishing a leaders' council instead of holding the elections as a failure in a meeting with the leadership of a private TV. It seems that this issue was raised in the meeting between the President and Hekmatyar. In the meanwhile, the spokesperson of the Council for Protection and Stability of Afghanistan (CPSA) has also commented in this regard. One of the leadership members of this council Abdul Rab Rasul Sayaf has also met the President.

Three years after the formation of the NUG, most of the commitments brought in the agreement that formed this government are yet to be implemented, one of the main reasons behind which is the weak sovereignty of the government.

Here you would read about the past three years of the NUG, the promises made by the NUG's leaders to the nation, and the future of this government.

The promises of the NUG

About the formation of the Leaders' Council, the acting spokesman of the Presidential Palace said: "the President does not intend to remain in power after the completion of his term. We are committed to hold elections in its time." Nevertheless, the question is how much the NUG has respected the promises in the past three years.

The NUG was formed after the longest and most controversial electoral process when the then-US Secretary of States John Kerry brokered a deal between the two leading candidates. There were several important points in this agreement that needed to be implemented:

First; calling for a Loya Jirga to amend the constitution: based on the NUG agreement both sides pledged to organize a Loya Jirga to amend the constitution with the first two years of the NUG so that the post of Chief Executive could be added to the constitution.

Currently, it is three years since the formation of the NUG and neither the Loya Jirga was held nor the constitution was amended nor the date to organize such a Jirga is fixed yet. After the second year of the NUG, once again, John Kerry came and extended the Chief Executive's term for five years.

Second; reforming the electoral system: bringing reforms in the electoral system was one of the most important issues in the NUG agreement that the government failed to fulfil. It was due to this failure that the Parliamentary elections were not held and the working period of the Parliament was extended for two times, once year each time.

Now that the Independent Election Commission (IEC) has announced the 16 Saratan 1397 [solar date] as the day of the Parliamentary elections, many national and international organizations believe that judging from the current performance of this commission, it will not be able to hold the timely and transparent elections.

Third; the distribution of electronic ID cards: another issue brought in the NUG's agreement is the distribution of electronic ID cards. The distribution of these ID cards, which is one of the important steps towards holding a transparent elections, is yet to be started by the NUG. This issue is increasingly taking an ethnical color to itself, which means that this process will be further postponed.

Although the NUG has failed to fulfil many promises, if the promises mentioned above were implemented, the country would have been in lesser problems than it current is.

Failing to fulfil the promises made in the NUG's agreement resulted in the mistrust towards the NUG in both national and international levels and therefore, there exist no expectation that the NUG will fulfill its promises this time.

The three years of the NUG's governance

In war-torn country such as Afghanistan, formation of a collative government under the name the national unity government was laying the foundation of a weak government from the beginning.

If we look at the past three years of the NUG, there existed internal differences since ever its formation; first between the President and the Chief Executive and then among the political camps of each. Three years later, these internal disputes continue, the most recent of which almost caused a crisis and the central power was challenged to a high level.

Besides the internal differences, another thing that the NUG brought itself was the waste insecurity in the country. The war extended from the South to the North of the country and war got intensified in the Northern Afghanistan. Kunduz was the first city that since the collapse of the Taliban regime fell at the hand of the Taliban and not once but twice.

Besides that, the territory under the control of the government reduced, the civilian casualties increased, IS began its activities in the country and spread from the east to the north and other parts of Afghanistan, and the mortality rates of the Afghan security forces also increased.

Peace, which is presumed to be the only way forward in order to come out of the crisis in the country, was also something that neither party of the war took any important step towards it. At first, the NUG tries to achieve peace through its foreign policy. As a result of these efforts, the Urumqi, Murree, quadrilateral, Pugwash, Kabul process meetings and some other public and secret meetings were held, none of which has produced any desirable outcome until now.

On the other hand, the announcement of the US new policy towards Afghanistan and South Asia, which rather focused on war, eliminated any hopes left for peace.

In addition, the NUG's foreign policy was, to a great extent, a reactive and was on the basis of the security situation in the country. The foreign policy was instable and, at some points, unbalanced. Despite all these challenges, most of the NUG's achievements were in the areas of foreign policy. For instance, attracting foreign aids, commencing some regional projects of energy transfer, and agreements with some countries in areas of transit and trade.

The future of the NUG

The increasing insecurity, deepened disagreements between the government officials, political instability, a collapsing economy, and an escalated level of poverty and unemployment are issues that currently the government and the people are faced. Due to such a condition in the past three years, the NUG failed to deliver its promises. However, something that the NUG was successful in was its half survival.

Despite the complaints, threats, and demonstrations of the people, political parties, and other national circles from the NUG in the past three years, the NUG has never paid attention to these unhappiness and it seems that it will do the same against the oppositions in the future as well.

In light of the rumors about forming a Leaders' Council instead of holding an election, it seems that if the Parliamentary elections were not held, this rumor will be pretty much a reality. Nevertheless, given the current political and security situation and the weak government, it seems that the parliamentary elections will not be held.

On the other hand, the US may also believe that the continuation of the current government in Afghanistan until the end of Donald Trump's presidency is a good way to further the US interests.

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The upcoming meeting of the Kabul Process and the fate of the peace talks



The second meeting of Kabul Process is to be held on 28 February 2018 in Kabul with the participation of the representatives of dozens of countries of the region, world, and international organizations.

This process is being managed with the initiative and leadership of the Afghan government, something that differs this process from its preceding processes. Its first meeting was held eight months ago with the participation of the representatives of 23 countries and several international organizations.

After the Taliban's bloody attacks in Kabul, first the US and then the Afghan government boycotted the peace process and after those attacks the Afghan President has repeatedly spoken of vengeance. On the other hand, the airstrikes of the Afghan and foreign forces against the Taliban has also escalated.

Given the current circumstances, what will the upcoming meeting of Kabul Process focus upon? How much the commitments made in its first meeting are fulfilled? These are the questions that are analyzed here.

The objectives of Kabul Process

After the formation of the National Unity Government (NUG), maintaining peace was one of the most important elements of the Afghan foreign policy and since ever the beginning the NUG tried to achieve peace through its foreign policy. When the government's efforts in this regard did not produce tangible outcomes, the Afghan government started Kabul process which mostly pursues the following objectives:

- Supporting an Afghan-led peace process;
- Formation of a regional and international consensus to maintain peace and stability in Afghanistan;
- Attracting the cooperation of the countries in the region and the world to pressurize Pakistan and have their support in military policies in case the Taliban did not join the peace process.

Although in the past one and half decades, many conferences were held regarding the peace in Afghanistan, a particular aspects of the Kabul Process is that it is started led and managed by Afghans. Starting this process, Afghanistan wanted to convince the countries in the region of the joint threat of insecurity in Afghanistan and thus attract their military cooperation.

The first meeting of Kabul Process

We can summarize some of the outcomes of the previous Kabul process in the following points:

First; for a last time in this conference, President Ghani called on the Taliban to join the peace process. He said: "We give an opportunity to peace; however, it must be clear that this opportunity does not last forever." Since the Taliban believe that the Afghan government do not have any authority and that the main party of the negotiations is the US, not only did not accept the Afghan government's strategy for peace but also emphasized on their military approach.

Second; in this meeting the Afghanistan opposed the efforts of some countries regarding the Afghan peace process and said that the objective of such efforts were unclear. Partly, this opposition was against the trilateral meeting between China, Russia, and Pakistan about the Afghan issue without the presence of the representative of Afghanistan. However, these efforts not only have not stop, it is increasing on daily basis and Afghanistan is slowly moving towards changing into the battlefield for the proxy wars of the super powers of the world. That is why in their recent letter addressing the Americans, the Taliban have talked about this issue and have added that some countries were trying to establish relations with this group.

Third; in this meeting, the Afghan government also tries to resolve the issue with Pakistan. “Our first priority is to find a way for negotiations with Pakistan. Although we offered friendship to Pakistan, we were rejected. We undertook the bilateral, trilateral, quadrilateral and even multilateral negotiations but did not reach a desiring outcome. Even if we still wanted to trust Pakistan, we do not know Pakistan’s demands clearly.” President Ghani said in the meeting. Hence, President Ghani tried to convince the participators of the meeting of Pakistan’s lack of cooperation and put Pakistan under more pressure. Nevertheless, Afghanistan has been successful in these efforts, as currently Pakistan is under unprecedented pressures on behalf of the countries in the region and the world.

The upcoming meeting and the future of the peace talks with the Taliban

This conference is being held at a time that the US, NATO, and the NUG have boycotted the peace talks with the Taliban and the Afghan government is trying to increase the military pressures on the Taliban. Therefore, the Afghan government will be expecting the support of the participants about its military approach towards the Taliban, which is achieving peace through war, in this meeting.

As in the past several months, Pakistan is under tremendous regional and international pressures, the Afghan government will use the second meeting for increasing the pressures as well. Besides that, in the next meeting of Kabul Process, talks regarding negotiations seems unlikely and the main agenda of this meeting will be to attract support from the policy of military pressures on the Taliban.

Overall, disappointments regarding the peace process in the country is increasingly on a daily basis because after the announcement of the New US Strategy towards Afghanistan and South Asia, the war in the country has increased. In the past one and half decade, such a strategy has not produced any tangible outcome and the US could not defeat the Taliban and end the war in Afghanistan.

On the other hand, the recent letter of the Taliban to the Americans show that this group do not have any plan to join the peace talks with the Afghan government and they insist on the negotiations with the US, while the US and NATO have no scheme on negotiations with the Taliban. Therefore, concerns about the continuation of the Afghan war and further complication of the Afghan issue is augmenting.

One of the reasons why the Taliban do not joint the peace process with the Afghan Government is that the Afghan Government does not have a specific mechanism for peace yet. Sometimes, the Afghan Government tries to achieve peace through foreign policy and particularly through Pakistan and sometimes, this government tries to bring the Taliban to the negotiation table through war

and fighting this group, strategies that the past have proved them worthless. On the other hand, as long as the strategy of suppression and using the term “peace” in the sense of the Taliban’s surrender is not altered to a real peace strategy, there will be no hope for the success of the peace process in the country. In addition, with the comprehension of the fact, by the Taliban, that the victims of the war are Afghans, as long as the Taliban do not accept the Afghan government as a reality and do not enter the peace talks with this government, peace in the country will not be possible. If the foreigners wanted peace in the country, it would have been maintained years ago.

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

