



Center for Strategic & Regional Studies

Kabul

Weekly Analysis-Issue Number 183 (November 26-December 3, 2016)

Weekly Analysis is one of CSRS' publications, which significantly analyses weekly economic and political events in Afghanistan and the region. The prime motive behind this is to provide strategic insights and policy solutions to decision-making institutions and individuals in order to help them to design best policies. Weekly Analysis is published in local languages (Pashto and Dari) and international languages (English and Arabic).

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Preface

When the tenure of Pakistani Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General Raheel Sharif's neared to end, Lieutenant General Qamar Javed Bajwa was appointed as the new Pakistani COAS. It is the first time in the past two decades that a Pakistani COAS retires after its specified term.

Pakistani military command changes at a time that besides tenuous relations with India, Pakistan's relations with Afghanistan is also deteriorated after fires were exchanged between Afghan and Pakistani forces at Torkham. In the first part of the analysis, you would read about the impact of change of military command in Pakistan over this country's internal and foreign policies.

In the second part of the analysis, you would read about President Ghani's visit to Turkmenistan and inauguration of the railway between Afghanistan and Turkmenistan. In general, the NUG has valued its relations with Turkmenistan and has signed various agreements with this country in various fields. The Afghan President traveled to Turkmenistan last week in order to participate in the "Global Conference on Sustainable Transport". In the three-day trip, President Ghani and the Turkmen President officially inaugurated the railway between the two countries, which is a landmark step towards regional economic integration.

In this issue of the Weekly Analysis of the Center for Strategic and Regional Studies, you would read analysis about the above two issues.

Efforts to improve Kabul-Islamabad relations



The Afghan President Ashraf Ghani met Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif at the sidelines of the Global Conference on Sustainable Transport in Turkmenistan and in the meanwhile, the former Pakistani Chief of Army Staff Raheel Sharif, before the end of his tenure, made a phone call to the Afghan Chief Executive Dr. Abdullah Abdullah.

After Raheel Sharif's tenure nearer to its end, Nawaz Sharif appointed Lieutenant General Qamar Bajwa as the new Pakistani Chief of Army Staff (COAS). The new COAS would deal with issues such as "terrorism", the Kashmir issue, future relation with Afghanistan and India and Trump's triumph in the US presidential election.

The Pak-Afghan relations after the Torkham incident, efforts to improve bilateral relations between the two countries, change of military command in Pakistan and its future challenges and the impacts of this change in command over the Pakistani foreign policy are the issues that are analyzed here.

Pak-Afghan relations after Torkham incident

The Torkham incident deeply affected the bilateral relations between the people of the two countries as well as their governments and after this incident tension between the Afghan National Unity Government (NUG) and Pakistan reached new heights. Since then, no meeting, telephone calls nor did any visit occur between the senior officials of the two countries. In the contrary, both sides accused each other of using one's soil against the other. For instance, after the bloody explosions and attacks in Quetta, without conducting any investigation, Pakistani officials said that, "Assailants came from Afghanistan."¹ On the other hand, Kabul also said that the attack on American University of Afghanistan was planned inside Pakistan². Likewise, besides four other countries-Bhutan, Nepal, Sri-Lanka and India, Afghanistan boycotted the 19th SAARC summit in Islamabad and in addition, Ghani sharply criticized Pakistan while addressing the NATO summit in Warsaw.

Relations between the people of the two countries were also deteriorated; conditions were toughened on Afghan refugees in Pakistan, which resulted in quickened repatriation of Afghan refugees from Pakistan. According to United Nation's statistics since the beginning of 2016, approximately 236724 undocumented Afghan refugees were deported from Pakistan³. Moreover, after the Torkham incident, the deportation of registered Afghan refugees increased as well. According to a UN official in Pakistan, from January to October 2016, the number of Afghan registered refugees deported to Afghanistan has crossed 200 thousand people.⁴

Bilateral relations between the two countries were also weakened in economic fields. According to the Afghan Chamber of Commerce and Industries (ACCI),

¹ DAWN, Assailants came from Afghanistan, PM told, Oct 26 2016, see it online:

<http://www.dawn.com/news/1292349>

² BBC-Pashto, "د افغانستان دولت: کابل کې پر امریکایي پوهنتون برید پاکستان کې پلان شوی و", Aug 23 2016:

http://www.bbc.com/pashto/afghanistan/2016/08/160825_mns_auf attacked plan in pakistan

³ IOM, Return of Undocumented Afghans (Weekly Situation Report 20-26 November 2016), see it online:

https://afghanistan.iom.int/sites/default/files/Reports/iom_return_of_undocumented_afghans_weekly_situation_report_20-26_november_2016.pdf

⁴ Ayaz Gul, UNHCR: More than 100000 Afghan refugees repatriated in 5 Weeks, Voice of America, 4 Oct 2016, see it online: <http://www.voanews.com/a/unhcr-says-more-than-100000-afghan-refugees-repatriated-in-five-weeks/3536705.html>

imports from Pakistan is decreased to half; in 2010-2011, the value of bilateral trade between the two countries was \$2.5bn, but now it is declined to \$1.5bn. Moreover, importation of flour from Pakistan was also affected and customs duties on Pakistani goods were also augmented.

Efforts to rebuild relations after Torkham incident

Even though, after the Torkham incident, the Afghan and Pakistani forces had exchanged fire in Spinboldak-Chaman area and Pakistan also introduce a unilateral flag lowering ceremony at Chaman border, which the Afghan government termed as “provoking and against commitments between the two sides.”⁵ Nevertheless, in the aftermath of exchanged firing in Torkham, Pakistanis also took some initiatives to regain Kabul’s trust; but it seems as if all these efforts were in vain.

One week after the Turkham incident, the Afghan Deputy Foreign Minister for Political Affairs traveled to Pakistan and talked to Pakistani officials regarding the incident. Then the Afghan Minister of Foreign Affairs Salahuddin Rabbani met Pakistani Prime Minister’s Foreign Policy Advisor Sartaj Aziz at the sidelines of Shanghai Cooperation Organization’s summit in Uzbekistan and both sides agreed to respect each other’s territorial integrity and to avoid intervention in each other’s internal affairs. In addition, at the sidelines of this summit, the Afghan President Ashraf Ghani met Pakistani President Mamnoon Hussain and discussed bilateral relations between the two countries.

After these two meetings, Islamabad welcomed the peace accord between the Afghan government and Hezb-e-Islami and said, “We want peace in Afghanistan and we support the Afghan-led peace process.”

A while ago, the Pugwash International Organization organized a conference in Islamabad. Assad Durani, Rustamshah Mohmand, Rahimullah Usefzai, Aziz Khan, Mohammad Sadeq, Sherry Rahaman, Assadullah Khan, Anwarul Haq Ahadi, Safir

⁵ News Release of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan on the Recent Actions Taken by Pakistan along the Durand Imaginary Line, read here: <http://www.mfa.gov.af/en/news/ministry-of-foreign-affairs-press-release-regarding-pakistan-last-actions-regarding-durand-line>

Sediqi, Rauof Hassan, Dr. Ghairat Baheer, Ziaulhaq Amarkhil, Haji Ruhullah Wakil, Hekmat Safi, Fraidon Mohmand, Juma Khan Sufi and Jafar Mahdawi had participated in this conference and overall, they stressed that the two countries do not have other way but to talk.

Besides that, the former Pakistani COAS General Raheel Sharif, made a phone call to the Afghan Chief Executive, and talked about improving bilateral relations between the two countries.

On the other hand, in the Afghan and Pakistani Presidents' meeting at the sidelines of the Global Conference on Sustainable Transport, the Pakistani side stressed on political relations, security cooperation, trade and transit, economic solidarity, and strengthening relations between the people of the two countries and demanded the resumption of Quadrilateral Peace Talks, in addition, the Pakistani side emphasized on cooperation between the intelligence, security and anti-terrorism administrations of both countries in order to tackle "terrorism". This meeting occurred at a time while Pakistan's military command changed and General Bajwa took the Powerful General Raheel Sharif's position as Pakistan's COAS.

Pakistan Army's change of command and the future challenges

The new Pakistani COAS Qamar Jaweed Bajwa has most recently been the Inspector General of Training and Evaluation of the Army and has also commanded a UN peacekeeping mission in Congo.

Pakistan's change of military command comes at a time when on the one hand, the Kashmir issue and relations with India and Afghanistan are in critical conditions and on the other hand, inside the country, Pakistani military has to confront challenges such as deteriorated security situation (in Baluchistan, tribal areas, Southern Punjab and Karachi), anti-terrorism struggle, and securing China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

In 2013, when Nawaz Sharif became Pakistan's Prime Minister, Pakistan's Muslim League (Nawaz) tried to take control of Pakistan's foreign policy particularly affairs related to Afghanistan and India; but later, due to demonstrations of Imran

Khan's Tehreek-e-Insaf party in 2014 and 2015, Pakistani Army appointed Naser Janjua as National Security Advisor to replace Sartaj Aziz. In the meanwhile it brought the Afghanistan and India's issues under its own control. In the meanwhile, recently, due to a revealing report of a Pakistani newspaper (Dawn), differences between Pakistan's military and civilian government is increased. Future events may show how the new Pakistani COAS deals with these challenges.

Change in Pakistan's military command and its impacts

We have analyzed the impacts of Pakistan's military change of command in the following lines:

Fight against terrorism: generally, the fight against terrorism in Pakistan began by General Pervez Musharaf, it was continued by General Kayani in his two pillar policy (war and peace); then General Raheel Sharif began to conduct some tough operations such as Zarb-e-Azb against the militants (particularly Anti-Pakistani), which increased respect for Raheel inside Pakistan. The new Pakistani COAS will also follow in the footsteps of Raheel Sharif and would not bring considerable change in Pakistan's anti-terrorism fight. Therefore, according to Pakistani Minister of Defense Khawaja Mohammad Asif, not many changes will occur in Pakistan's policies with the change of its military command.

India: although Sharif's prestige increased due to his fight against terrorism; but because of Indian Army's "surgical strikes", his prestige was somehow damaged. That is why in his recent speech, he sharply criticized India. The new Pakistani COAS is vastly experienced in Kashmir and Pakistan's common border with India. Besides that, Pakistan is also under India's propaganda war when it comes to international terrorism and Kashmir issue. The new COAS will try to break down India's this propaganda war and decrease tensions at Pakistan-India border.

Afghanistan: Even though, Pakistani Army would still pursue those lines of policy towards Afghanistan that were defined by Raheel Sharif; but since Pakistan's new COAS is not a political figure, there is less probability that he would pursue Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's policies towards Afghanistan and India.

The end

The Kabul-Ashgabat relations and the significance of the Atamura-Akina railway line



The Afghan president participated and delivered a speech in “Global Conference on Sustainable Transport” in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan. The conference was held under the chairmanship of Ban Ki-moon where leaders of various countries had also participated in it.

After the formation of the National Unity Government (NUG) in Afghanistan, the government has focused on economic relations with regional countries, including Turkmenistan. Last year (13 December 2015), the TAPI pipeline project was inaugurated which would transfer 30bn cubic meters Turkmen gas through Afghanistan to Pakistan and India. Now in the recent Afghan President’s visit to Turkmenistan, besides attending in conferences and meetings, the Atamura-Akina railway was also inaugurated.

Here you would read about the bilateral relation between Afghanistan and Turkmenistan particularly after the formation of the NUG and also about the significance of Atamura-Akina Railway.

The Background of bilateral relations

After Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan is the second largest country in the region (480 km²vast) with a population of 5.23 million and is the least populated country among the Central Asian countries. But, there are vast natural reserves (particularly oil and gas reserves) in its deserts.

Although, Turkmenistan shares 750 km border, a common culture and historical ties with Afghanistan, but under Soviet Union, it had very limited relations with Afghanistan. Turkmenistan established diplomatic relations with its Southern neighbor-Afghanistan one year after its declaration of independence from Soviet Union in 1991 and Afghanistan was also the first country that recognized Turkmen independence.

Compared to other neighbors of Afghanistan, Turkmenistan had little intervened in Afghan internal conflicts. This country had also had warm relations with the Taliban regime and during the Taliban regime; the scheme of constructing TAPI gas pipeline (TAPI) was also discussed with this country.

After the overthrow of the Taliban regime, the Kabul-Ashgabat relations entered a new stage of bilateral relations, with economic aspect. In this phase, besides several official visits to Turkmenistan by Hamid Karzai, some agreements were also signed between the two countries, the most important of which was the TAPI-pipeline project-signed between the leaders of four countries (Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, Pakistan and India) in 2010.

However, despite historical relations between Afghanistan and Turkmenistan, the two countries did not have sign strategic agreements and collaborations and this vacuum was always felt in bilateral relations. Afghanistan has also valued its relations with Pakistan, Iran, China and other countries in the region more than the relations with its Northern neighbors.

The NUG and relations with Ashgabat

After the formation of the NUG, Afghanistan's relation with Turkmenistan increased more than any time in the past. In the past two years, bilateral exchanges have increased and both have signed important agreements as well.

Heading a high-ranking delegation, President Ghani for the first time visited Turkmenistan in January 2015. In the two-day visit, both countries signed five collaboration agreements in areas of politics, economy, energy and sport.⁶ Later on 27 August 2015, the Turkmen President traveled to Afghanistan and signed the documents of bilateral cooperation in Kabul. Ghani's second visit to Turkmenistan was to inaugurate TAPI-pipeline project⁷.

In his recent visit to Turkmenistan, Ghani first participated and delivered his speech in "Global Conference on Sustainable Transport" and then met his Turkmen counterpart and talked about strengthening bilateral relations between the two countries⁸. In another meeting, President Ghani received an honorary doctorate degree from Berdimuhamedov and in the third day of the trip, they inaugurated the railway between the two countries.

Speaking in the inauguration ceremony of the railway in Akina port, Ashraf Ghani said that with the inauguration of this route, oil prices would considerably decrease; he added, "Linking Akina port with the international railway network is a big step in the Afghan-Turkmen relations but it is also a major step toward trans-continental economy of Asia." The Turkmen President also spoke about increasing the exportation of electricity to Afghanistan and said that the exportation of electricity would increase from the current 100 thousand megawatts to 150 thousand megawatts in the next year and to 300 thousand megawatts in 2018.

⁶ For details read this press release of the Afghan Presidential Palace, 1393-11-3.

<http://president.gov.af/fa/trips/turkmenistan>

and: <http://www.farda.af/internal-news2/7037>

⁷ Tolo News, TAPI pipeline project inaugurated, 1394-9-22:

<http://www.tolonews.com/fa/business/22788-tapi-pipeline-project-inaugurated>

⁸ Presidential Palace, President Ghani met the Turkmen President, read online:

<http://president.gov.af/fa/news/288255>

Significance of relations with this country is evident from its economic and transit position in the region. After Russia, Iran and Qatar, Turkmenistan has the fourth largest gas reserves in the world and produces 70 to 80 billion cubic meters (70bn-80bn m³) of gas annually. This has led the country to have a better position and play a better role in regional cases and international energy issues. Therefore, since most of the imported gas in Afghanistan is from Turkmenistan and this country is also an exporter of electricity to Afghanistan, the NUG has put more focus on relations with this country.

Significance of Turkmenistan-Afghanistan railway

The Atamurad-Akina railway, contract of which was signed in 2013, inaugurated on 28 November 2016 in Imamnazar area of Turkmenistan by the Presidents of Afghanistan and Turkmenistan and thus the practical work on the third railroad at the borders of the country started⁹. This railway which is 635km long, 300 km of which passes through Afghanistan, connects Imamnazar area of Turkmenistan to Faryab province of Afghanistan through Atamurad and Akina ports. The Atamurad-Akina railway is supposed to extend through Andkhoy, Sheberghan, Mazar-e-Sharif, Khulm and Kunduz to Shirkhan port and connect this port to the Tajikistan's railway network. Thus, this route is part of Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Tajikistan railway project.

Since Afghanistan is a landlocked country, inauguration of this railway has created hopes that after this, Afghanistan's reliance on Pakistani ports will end and opportunities to extend economic relations with regional and European countries will be provided. In the past one and half decades, Pakistan has repeatedly stopped Afghan goods in its ports in order to pressurize Afghanistan. Therefore, trade is used as a political tool to pressurize Afghanistan.

Now although Afghanistan has limited its trade with Pakistan and imports part of its goods through Central Asian countries, but in Hayratan port, due to customs

⁹ The Afghan Presidential Palace, the Atamurad-Akina railway inaugurated, 28 Nov 2016: <http://president.gov.af/fa/news/288261>

duties by Uzbek government, oil prices has risen in the country. Therefore, the construction of this railway is very important for Afghanistan.

On the other hand, the Atamurad-Akina railway is a part of the Lapis Lazuli Corridor, which is a historical transit road and as part of Silk Road, it has special historical significance for Afghanistan. If this project was completed, the way to connect the developing countries with the developed countries (Central Asia and Europe) would be paved and since Afghanistan is also included in this project, it provides a major economic opportunity to Afghanistan.

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