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Preface

The fifth meeting of Afghan peace negotiations process between the United States and the Taliban extended for many days compared to the previous meetings. As Mulla Haibatullah Akhond, leader of the Taliban, and his deputy Mulla Abdulghani Beradar have participated in this meeting, the hopes for successful talks are hence increased.

Besides the face to face negotiations between the Taliban and the U.S. representatives since a few days in Doha, officials of the region and some other countries have met with Mulla Abdulghani Beradar and Zalmay Khalilzad. Suhail Shaheen, spokesman of the Taliban office in Qatar said regarding the fifth round of negotiations that although the discussions are complicated, talks are moving towards positive direction.

Although both sides speak of progress in the Afghan peace process during the fifth round of meetings, the progress is apparently very slow and agreement on some issues might require more time and discussions. These issues have been discussed in the first part of the CSRS Weekly Analysis.

The second part of the Weekly Analysis talks about the recent snowfalls and their human and financial losses. Although the fear of aridity next year is now low due to heavy snowfalls and rainfalls, the rain and snow have caused deaths and injuries for civilians and have devastated hundreds of houses.

The main topics of the US-Taliban fifth meeting



The fifth round of peace negotiations between representatives of the United States and the Taliban commenced a couple of weeks ago on 25th February, 2019 in Doha. Although there was a two-day break in talks on 28th February and 1st March, the talks resumed again on 2nd March and are still in progress.

Even though there are not enough details shared about this round of negotiations, Robert Palladino, deputy spokesman of the US Department of State said on that after the agreement on peace between the Taliban and Washington, the issues of counterterrorism, the U.S. pullout, negotiations with the Afghan government and ceasefire are being discussed.

The fifth meeting between the Taliban and the U.S. in Doha took longer than any other times, and seemingly profound discussions on various issues are still underway. So what are the main issues on which both sides disagree? We discuss them here.

Presence of the foreign forces

The Taliban consider the presence of foreign forces as the only reason of conflict in Afghanistan and the U.S. pullout is considered to be the central topic of discussion during the talks. The final decision about the pullout is still unknown and apparently both sides strive to enforce their conditions on one another.

Donald Trump emphasized on the U.S. pullout during his yearly speech to the U.S. Congress. However, the opposing view of the U.S. Senate about the pullout, the statements by the U.S. officials saying “if we are planning to pullout of Afghanistan, then we will focus more on our secret services” and other dissimilar opinions have made the issue more complicated.

Additionally, The Taliban have always stressed on the U.S. pullout before discussing any other issue. Although not enough specifics have been proclaimed, according to the media, one of the vital issues being discussed without reaching an agreement is the schedule of U.S. pullout. It is being said that the United States wants three to five years for pullout but the Taliban want the pullout to be completed in less than a year.

Besides, the united States do not want to pullout completely and want to keep some soldiers for intelligence services. The pullout has, therefore, become a complicated issue. The Taliban want the complete U.S. pullout but the United States want to keep some soldiers in Afghanistan, as they did in Iraq.

Counterterrorism

After the peace agreement and the U.S. pullout, counterterrorism and not using the Afghan soil against any other country are conditions that the United States strives to impose on the Taliban.

Regarding this issue, the Taliban are liable to present convincing guarantees through which the United States can persuade their people about the pullout.

However, the question is how can the Taliban guarantee “counterterrorism” considering various militant groups and the ISIS who operates since four years and strive to expand its presence in Afghanistan. On the other hand, disagreements between the two sides over the definition of “terrorism” have brought up more complications.

Ceasefire

Ceasefire is another key issue being discussed during the talks. Although a proclamation of Taliban’s office in Qatar refused any discussion on ceasefire, the U.S. Department of State says that ceasefire and negotiations with the Afghan government are topics of discussion in the current talks.

It is presumed that the Taliban do not want ceasefire to happen before the final agreement on the U.S. pullout. This is because the last three-day ceasefire during Eid, when their combatants returned to the cities, weakened the morale of some Taliban fighters.

Even if the U.S. and Taliban settle for a peace deal and the ceasefire is discussed later, the questions about ceasefire that need time and discussions to answer and agree on are: When will the ceasefire happen? Will the ceasefire be announced after the or during the pullout? Will the ceasefire only be with the foreign troops or with the Afghan forces too? For how long will the ceasefire be?

Intra-Afghan talks

Talks between the Taliban and the Afghan Government is another crucial topic of discussion for the U.S. and international community. Currently, the Afghan Government and the Taliban have contradicting viewpoints about one another. The Taliban do not want to negotiate with the Afghan Government and, on the other hand, the Afghan Government considers any negotiations without their supremacy unacceptable. If the Afghan Government remains unaccompanied and a peace agreement is signed without the presence of Afghan Government, the consequences will not be fortunate for the future of Afghanistan.

The Taliban demand reforms in the constitution and structure of the system. On the other hand, the Afghan Government does not want Afghanistan to become a Taliban-ruled country. These are issues which need plenty of time and discussions. However, to prevent dead end, it will be required to establish a comprehensive national board for peace that should negotiate with the Taliban on behalf of Afghans.

On the other hand, the Afghan war does not have only two sides (i.e. the Taliban and the U.S.) but its third and significant side is the Afghan nation who holds some opposite perspectives about the process. However, if some influential personalities participate in the peace negotiations to represent the Afghan nation and the Taliban also provide answers to people's concerns, a joint stance may be achieved. Thus, the Taliban should strive to make their motive of the independence of Afghanistan, the motive of whole nation and through this put pressure on the U.S.

At the same time, the Afghan nation does not want the failed experience of one sided rule or a government controlled by a single party to be repeated in Afghanistan. In addition, the nation is also worried about the return of economic conditions that once existed in Afghanistan. These concerns can be only answered when the Taliban and other parties guarantee not to repeat the previous experiences and try not to reach power through force and weapons.

The future of current negotiations

An insight to the previous international peace treaties will indicate that the peace talks require patience and time. The peace negotiations between the FARC and Columbian Government, for instance, started in September 2012 and it took four years for the peace treaty to be finally signed in August 2016. Similarly, the peace negotiations between Hezb-e-Islami and the Afghan Government started in 2010 but the treaty was signed during the National Unity Government in 2017 and

Hezb-e-Islami had much more lenient viewpoint about peace compared to the Taliban.

The current peace negotiations process commenced around five months ago and a look at the history of peace treaties in the world and the past 18 years of war in Afghanistan will validate that it is difficult to end a complicated war in such a short period of time.

On the other hand, the Taliban are executing the politics of waiting and it is assumed that the Taliban are in a condition that they do not see any harm in waiting but they see it hurrying. The Taliban understand that the U.S. has the intentions to pullout. If the pullout does not happen this year, it will happen in next few years. In addition, Donald Trump might decide about Afghanistan for his success in upcoming elections. Therefore, the Taliban are confident that the U.S. is deciding about pullout and see advantage in delaying the negotiations.

Another possible cause of delays in peace negotiations process is that both sides strive and discuss to secure their interests. Overall, the level of complication of these negotiations is high enough to require plenty of time and it will be inaccurate to say that all the issues can be resolved in a short period.

Latest snowfalls and its severe damages and harms



Due to floods caused by heavy snowfalls and rainfalls on 1st and 2nd March, 2019, dozens of citizens were killed and injured along with destruction of their houses. Most of the affected people are the citizens of southern provinces.

Although the heavy rainfalls and snowfalls have increased hopes for reduction in aridity in Afghanistan, these heavy snowfalls have harmed people's lives and displaced hundreds of families.

The government is criticized for its inability to reach out to people's problems and absence of precautionary actions that need to be taken against natural disasters. Families in some provinces have not even attained the first aids.

Here, we discuss the latest snowfalls in the country, their damages and losses, and difficulties that people have in such circumstances.

Latest snowfalls

The snowfalls have increased this year while last year, around two million people from 20 provinces lacked food because of aridity and, thus, 350 thousand were displaced from their hometowns.

According to Afghanistan Meteorological Department, very few times such snowfalls have occurred in Afghanistan during last two decades. This year's heavy snowfalls and rainfalls are considered good news as the aridity will be eliminated.

Based on the findings of the Ministry of Energy and Water, the snowfalls have increased by one and a half compared to last year and by 51% compared to last five year. The Ministry anticipates year 1398 to be a good year considering the expected amount of water. In addition, the Ministry says that the increase in snowfalls and rainfalls are beneficial for agriculture and environment.

The amount of snowfalls have also increased in cold regions. According to Salang Pass Protection Department, the snowfalls in Salang region were exceptional compared to last 20 years and thickness of the snow in Northern and Southern Salang has reached up to 12 meters.

Damages and losses caused by recent snowfalls

This year's winter has had plenty of snowfalls and rainfalls. Although the snowfalls have raised hopes for elimination of aridity in the country, these snowfalls bear severe damages and harms for the people, especially the people of Southern provinces.

According to the reports of Office of the State Ministry for Natural Disaster, around 50 people were killed and 140 were injured due to floods caused by snowfalls. In addition, around 926 houses were swept away and around 2000 were damaged during floods.

Among the victims of floods, the people of Kandahar are the ones who suffered a lot compared to others. According to the local officials, around 25 residents of Arghandab, Daman, Speen Boldak and Kandahar City were killed and 20 were injured during floods on 1st and 2nd March, 2019. Moreover, hundreds of houses and thousands of agricultural lands were harmed by floods.

Besides Kandahar, Helmand, Farah, Herat and Nimroz were also affected by heavy snowfalls and floods, which included death and injury of many citizens. In addition, hundreds of houses were damaged by floods. Logar, Ghazni, Paktika, Paktia, Takhar, Baghlan, Laghman, Nangarhar, Bamian, Daikundi, Khost, Nooristan, and Panjshir are also among the provinces that were affected by floods.

According to Salang Pass Protection Department, more than 130 avalanches happened during this winter. Moreover, the Salang pass was closed three times this winter, which caused a lot of problems for people.

Besides Salang pass, the Kabul-Kandahar highway was blocked in Wardak, Ghazni and Zabul, and the passes Haji Gak, Shebar of Bamian and Satu Kandaw of Paktia were also closed due to heavy snowfalls. Additionally, all the routes in Ghazni, Ghor, Bamian and Daikundi between their capitals of and districts were blocked.

During Kandahar-Kabul highway blockage, hundreds of passengers were stuck in a terrible condition without food in a cold desert. Moreover, three people died during roadblock in Ghazni province.

Lack of precautions

Floods and snow avalanches are among the natural disasters that occur every year and in every part of the world and causes harms to people's lives and properties. However, there are procedures and precautions that can be applied in order to reduce the risk of natural disaster.

Due to lack of precautionary actions taken against seasonal snowfalls and floods in Afghanistan, people suffer heavy losses. Although the government struggles

to save people's lives through certain operations during occurrences, basic precautions have not been witnessed to avoid or prepare for such occurrences.

According to Office of State Ministry for Natural Disasters, around 2000 citizens were stuck in recent floods in Kandahar and Farah provinces, who were later rescued by the national security forces. Based on the statement of officials of the Ministry, with support of other ministries, 33 million and 100 thousands of cash and food for 12,491 families and nonfood items for 3,183 families were contributed to the victims of floods in 17 provinces.

Absence of effectiveness in State Ministry for Natural Disasters is one of the causes of inability to reach out to the victims on time. Without a plan and strategy for each year, the Ministry stands in a dreadful condition, as it was not able send first aids to the victims of natural disasters at the beginning of occurrences.

Conclusion

Floods, earthquakes, snow avalanches, land sliding, aridity, and other are disasters that have caused a lot of harms for citizens. Even after the occurrence of disasters, the responsible department for relief takes action slowly, unlike other countries who take precautionary actions before the occurrence of natural disasters.

As Afghanistan stands in problematic political and security and poor economic conditions, the residents face plenty of financial problems. In such conditions, flooding and occurrence of natural disasters affect people's economic condition negatively. The losses of natural disasters have severe impact on economic condition of the citizens.

According to studies performed for reduction of damages of natural disasters, the harms can be reduced in four stages: first, before the occurrence of unexpected incidents; second, at the time when the causes for natural disasters are recognized; third, at the time of occurrence; and fourth, after the occurrence.

In short, it is necessary for Afghan Government to consider the process before the occurrence of natural disaster so that harms can be reduced. In addition, public awareness about precautions for natural disasters can reduce damages.

The End.

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