



## Center for Strategic & Regional Studies

Kabul

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## Preface

The representatives of Afghanistan, Pakistan, the United States of America and China had gathered together in Islamabad on Monday, to find a way to start the Afghan peace process. The second meeting of these negotiations will be held in Kabul on 18<sup>th</sup> January. Although, the main objective of these negotiations is to start face-to-face negotiation with the Taliban, in the first and the second meetings the Taliban are not invited.

Earlier, two meetings had been held in Urumqi and Murree with the mediation of Pakistan in order for the negotiations to take place between the Afghan government and the Taliban; however, the main difference between them and the quadrilateral meetings is the participation of the United States of America and China as the two powerful sides, that is why these negotiations are more promising to the Afghan government. However, the first meeting of the quadrilateral talks ended without specific outcomes; but can the next meetings bring the Taliban to the negotiation table? What would be Taliban's response in this regard? And what will be the future of these negotiations?

In the second part of the Analysis, you will read about the tensions between Iran and the Saudi Arabia in the Middle East and Kabul's position in this regard. After the execution of Shiite scholar Shiekh Al Nimr by the government of the Saudi Arabia and putting fire in the embassy of the Saudi Arabia by the angry protestors, the relations between the two countries deteriorated more than ever, and the region divided into two blocks. After the deterioration of the relations between the two countries the Executive Officer of Afghanistan also visited Iran and met senior officials of Iran. The question is what will be the impacts of the tensions between Iran and Saudi Arabia in the region and Afghanistan? And what is the position of Kabul about it?

In this issue of the Weekly Analysis, you will read the analysis and researches of the Center for Strategic and Regional Studies on the above two subjects.

## Quadrilateral Negotiations and the Future of Peace Talks



The quadrilateral meeting regarding Afghan peace process was held in Islamabad on Monday, 11 January 2016. At the meeting, the representatives of four countries Afghanistan, Pakistan, the United States of America and China gathered to discuss "The Road Map" to peace process; at the end of the meeting, they all agreed to continue the negotiations in this area on a regular basis.

The next meeting of the negotiations is scheduled to be held on 18<sup>th</sup> January in Kabul which will be attended by the representatives of Afghanistan, Pakistan, the United States of America and China. It is said that after the second meeting in Kabul, the face to face talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban will begin.

The main objective of the quadrilateral meeting is to start direct negotiations between the Afghan government and the Taliban. The question is whether these meetings will really entail face to face negotiations between the Afghan government and the Taliban?

## From bilateral talks to quadrilateral negotiations

After the establishment of the National Unity Government (NUG), Ghani came with a policy to approach Pakistan in order to achieve peace in his country. The mediation of Pakistan in peace talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban during the last one year has passed through the following stages:

**The Urumqi Talks:** After the NUG provided Pakistan with a lot of privileges in order to bring the Taliban to the negotiation table, Pakistan paved the ground to the meeting of the representatives of the Afghan government and the Taliban in the Urumqi City of China in which some representatives of The Taliban with little influence had also participated, but the Taliban officially denied their participation in these talks.

**The Murree Talks:** The second meeting of the negotiations with the mediation of Pakistan was held in Murree close to Islamabad in which the official representatives of The Taliban had participated for the first time. Although, the Taliban did not officially confirm their participation in the meeting but in their statement, which was released then, they also did not deny it.<sup>1</sup>

Briefly, after the disclosure of the death of Mullah Mohammad Omar the talks become stalled. After the failure of the peace negotiations with the Taliban and happening of the several bloody explosions in Kabul, once again tensions appeared in the relations between the two countries.

**Regional diplomacy:** After the halt of the peace process, Pakistan came under pressure. That is why Pakistan's Chief of Army Staff, Prime Minister, and the National Security Advisor of Pakistan were forced to talk about the efforts of their country about the revival of peace process. At the same time, regional diplomacy also began moving to resume the Afghan peace process and the special envoys of the United States of America, China and the United Nations for Afghanistan and

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<sup>1</sup> See online: <http://csrskabul.com/en/blog/whether-the-direct-peaceful-talks-have-get-off-the-ground/>

Pakistan in their visits to Pakistan also emphasized on the revival of the peace talks.<sup>2</sup>

**Pakistani efforts for the revival of peace talks:** Pakistan used the “language” diplomacy to improve relations between the two countries and facilitate the resumption of peace talks. In this regard, Pakistani Pashtun nationalist parties’ leaders on their visit to Kabul on 25<sup>th</sup> November 2015 brought Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's message to Ashraf Ghani to meet him on the sidelines of the Paris Conference on Climate Change in France.<sup>3</sup>

Nawaz Sharif met Ashraf Ghani on the sidelines of Paris Conference and invited him to Islamabad to participate in the Heart of Asia Conference. The Heart of Asia Conference and the participation of Ashraf Ghani in this Conference were considered to represent a new impetus to relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan. The quadrilateral peace talks among Afghanistan, Pakistan, the United States of America and China was planned on the sidelines of the conference in order to find a way to initiate the Afghan peace negotiations and Pakistan’s purpose from this plan was to gain the trust of the Afghan government back.

### **Initiation of the Quadrilateral Talks**

This time in the peace talks of Afghanistan, the United States of America and China, as two powerful countries that have important role in the region, are participating in the negotiations and without any doubt can have a fundamental role to encourage the involved parties to take effective steps.

One of the objectives of the Afghan government in this negotiation is that the promises of Pakistan to Afghanistan about peace should be guaranteed on behalf of a third country (China). China has recently expressed its preparation to cooperate in peace talks of Afghanistan and due to its influence and relations with Pakistan and the Taliban the country has been able to pave the way to the meeting of negotiating representatives.

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<sup>2</sup> See online: <http://csrskabul.com/en/blog/weekly-analysis-issue-number-142-november-14-21-2015/>

<sup>3</sup> See online: <http://csrskabul.com/en/blog/weekly-analysis-issue-number-144-nov-28-dec-5-2015/>

After the improvement of the relations of Kabul-Islamabad the quadrilateral negotiations of peace in Afghanistan started and the first meeting of these negotiations was held in Islamabad with the participation of the representatives of the four countries.

Hekmat Khalil Karzai, the Afghan Political Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Azaz Ahmad Chaudhari, the Pakistani Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Richard Olson, the special envoy of the United States of America for Afghanistan and Pakistan, Ding Xijun, the special envoy of China for Afghanistan led the meeting.

According to the statement released at the end of the meeting, these negotiations will be followed with a meeting on 18<sup>th</sup> January in Kabul. In this statement, they have emphasized on the need to start direct talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban.

These negotiations have three stages: The first stage is planning before initiating the talks with the Taliban; the second stage is face-to-face talks with the Taliban; and the third stage is implementing the outcomes of negotiations.

### **The outcomes of the first Quadrilateral Meeting**

The fact that the meeting of Islamabad had no other outcome except the agreement about the holding such meetings on regular basis and setting the date of next round of negotiations, has caused the later concerns to overcome the initial hopes about the process.

After the first quadrilateral meeting two types of disputes appeared, which are yet in its initial stage. First, disputes about those who will not participate in the peace process and the second, the disputes and contradictions within the Afghan government.

**Afghanistan-Pakistan disputes:** the change in the positions and expressions of Afghan and Pakistani officials indicates the lack of agreement and harmony between them. Afghan government says that it is trying to separate those who

are willing to participate in the peace negotiations from those who are not willing to participate. However, Pakistan considers such expressions as obstacles on the way of peace and emphasizes on the need to “build trust” in order Taliban joins the peace process.

Afghan government says that those who do not come to the negotiation table will be suppressed. But Pakistan in order to build trust between the Taliban and Afghan government considers such statements as hinder to start the negotiations. Since the first session of these negotiations began with contradictory statements, disappointments about the outcomes of the next meetings are increased.

**Internal disputes of the NUG:** before holding the quadrilateral meeting in Islamabad the spokesman of Executive Office had said that Pakistan will provide Afghanistan with the list of those who will participate in the peace talks and those who are not willing to participate. While such a list was not handed over to Afghanistan and Hekmat Khalil Karzai after returning from Islamabad in his press conference said that they did not expect such a list from Pakistani side.

### **Taliban’s response**

Earlier, rumors were heard that Pakistan will once again bring people like Mullah Hassan Rahmani, Mullah Abdul Razaq, and Mullah Jalil who do not have any influence in the ranks of the Taliban to the negotiations table in the ongoing quadrilateral negotiations.

Pakistan’s Express Tribune newspaper which mostly publishes news about the Taliban, in one of its reports has said that Mullah Abdul Razaq and Mullah Hassan Rahmani who have refused to pledge its allegiance to Mullah Akhtar Mohammad Mansour after the announcement of the death of Mullah Mohammad Omar are expelled from the Taliban's leadership council. These two were part of the delegation who visited the representatives of the Afghan High peace Council (HPC) in Urumqi in China. Taliban had also inducted three non-Pashtuns from the other ethnic groups of Afghanistan in their leadership council. Mullah Abdul



Rahman, from the Uzbek tribe, Sheikh Sharif from Tajik and one person from the Turkmen ethnic group has been recently inducted in to Taliban's leadership council. Expelling these people from the leadership council of Taliban shows that such people do not represent the group.

Although Reuters quoted<sup>4</sup> the Assistant of Sirajudin Haqani (Assistant of Mullah Akhtar Mohammad Mansoor) that Taliban will participate in the negotiations under the leadership of Mullah Akhtar Mansoor and has even said that Sirajudin Haqani is personally interested to participate in the negotiations, but official spokesmen of the Taliban has not yet said anything in this regard.

Taliban has not issued a statement about the negotiations, neither they have rejected the probability of participation of the Taliban representatives in the negotiations, but from the political notes on the official website of the Taliban it seems that due to Afghan government's policy of fight for peace and the lack of willingness for peace such negotiations will not have a conclusion.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, it seems that the real sides of the Taliban will not participate in these negotiations.

On the other hand Taliban has recently been divided into two groups, if one of the groups showed willingness to participate in the negotiations; the other group will never do that.

### **The future of the peace negotiations**

The success of quadrilateral peace talks of Afghanistan is mostly related to two issues:

**First:** if the Taliban did not participate in the peace negotiations, how will they be treated?

The participants of these negotiations have not yet concluded that if the Taliban was not participated the direct negotiations, how they should be dealt with? Afghan government insist on fighting and use of force, as the acting minister of

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<sup>4</sup> See online: <http://da.azadiradio.org/content/article/27474922.html>

<sup>5</sup> See online: <http://alemara1.org/?p=38737>



Defense said that, the group of armed opposition of Afghanistan who are irreconcilable and do not join the peace process, will be suppressed by the Afghan Security Forces and Hekmat Khalil Karzai, deputy of Ministry of Foreign Affairs, returning from Islamabad has also said that the government will deal with those who are not willing to join the peace process, based on a common understanding with Pakistan, America, and China. But Pakistan opposes this opinion and yet there are differences between the opinions of Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Sartaj Aziz, senior advisor to the Pakistani Prime Minister on the opening of the meeting of Islamabad emphasized on trust building and said that the preconditions should be removed and that the threat to attack the irreconcilable groups will not impose peace talks on all groups.

**Second:** Which group of the Taliban will participate in the peace negotiations?

If the government of Pakistan, as a result of pressure on the Taliban, became able to bring the members of Taliban's political office in Qatar, or members of the Taliban leadership council led by Mullah Akhtar Mohammad Mansour, or members of the Haqqani Network to the peace process; this process will be successful and the results of the negotiations will be promising. But if some other people participated in the peace process as representatives of the Taliban, the outcome of these negotiations will be the same as HPC's and without any achievement.

If we look at the recent position of the Taliban, it seems that the Taliban are sensitive to the peace talks under the pressure of Pakistan that is the reason why they have expelled those who have already represented them in such negotiations from its leadership council.

On the other hand, the Taliban are divided into two groups in recent months and the split among the group has casted a shadow over the upcoming talks which is making the actual peace negotiations more difficult. So, if the Afghan government faces the people as representatives of the Taliban, who are not affiliated with the Taliban, such negotiations will have no achievement for Afghanistan.

## Conclusion

Further efforts to resume the Peace Talks starts at a time the violence in Afghanistan is increasing and the last year after the departure of a large part of the foreign forces in late 2014, was one of the bloodiest years in Afghanistan.

On the eve of the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan, the quadrilateral conference was organized in Geneva in order to secure peace in Afghanistan, among the United States of America, Pakistan, the government of Kabul and the Soviet Union was and marked an ominous future for Afghanistan. At that quadrilateral meeting, no representative of the Mujahedeen had participated, in fact, Pakistan represented them. And now once again, these four countries, are supposed to decide about peace talks of the Afghan government with armed oppositions in the absence of the Taliban and approve solutions for peace in Afghanistan.

However, one of the objectives of these quadrilateral negotiations is to begin direct negotiations between the Afghan government and the Taliban and the current quadrilateral negotiation is starting with a difference with the Geneva Conference that there is also a small probability of face to face talks after two or three meetings; but, if it did not happen and the meetings went on without the presence of the Taliban, these meetings will also have no achievement as same as the Geneva Conference, and the case of war and peace will become even more complex.

Generally, these negotiations will be accompanied with hopes but until the real will for peace parties is not yet created, these efforts will not come to a conclusion except wasting the opportunity.

## The Saudi-Iran tussle and its impacts on Afghanistan and the region



Before the beginning of 2016 it was predicted that in the new year the Saudi-Iran relations will improve, and they will come to an agreement regarding the crisis in Syria; because they have been prepared to come to the negotiation table in relation to the Syrian crises, but the first week of 2016 annihilated these hopes.

On the 2<sup>nd</sup> January 2016, the government of the Saudi Arabia Executed 47 people accused of terroristic activities including members of Al Qaeda, Sunnite extremists and Shiite scholar Shiekh Nemri. In response the Saudi embassy in Iran was burned, and due to this reason the Saudi Arabia broke its diplomatic relations with Iran. Following Saudi Arabia the other Saudi allies also broke its diplomatic relations with Iran and as a result the crisis expanded even more.

In the middle of the crisis in the Middle East the Executive Officer of Afghanistan Dr. Abdullah Abdullah went on his three day visit to Iran and later the Afghan government released a statement in which Kabul's position was rather impartial.

What is the direction of the crisis and cold war in the Middle East? What will be its impacts on the region and Afghanistan? And what will be the impacts of the visit of Afghan CEO to Iran on bilateral relations? We will analyze it in this weekly analysis.

## **The cold war in the Middle East**

In the last years of the cold war when the Islamic revolution was succeeded in Iran, beside the ideological competition in the region, the religious competition also started. From there on, Iran was involved into a long war with Iraq.

The Islamic revolution in Iran effected the division of power in the region and divided the region into two regional blocks, in which the allies of Iran were the Hezbollah of Lebanon and Hafez ul Asad of Syria, but the list of the allies of the Saudi Arabia was longer than that of Iran's, in which Egypt, the Gulf countries and other Arabic countries included.

Saudi Arabia which was a US ally during the cold war, learning from the experience of the US and following the example of "Truman doctrine" tried to present its own special doctrine against Iran and thus surrounded Iran in its neighborhood and make it obedient. In this purpose the Saudi Arabia supported its strategic ally Pakistan and from there it supported Afghan Mujahedeen whose success was tied with the Saudi assistance.

Therefore the cold war affected internal conflicts in Afghanistan and then Taliban came to power who were against Iran from the beginning; that is the reason Saudi recognized the Taliban regime. Thus the game of the cold war was brought into Afghanistan and had its deep impacts on the situation in Afghanistan.

## **Middle East: the place of crises**

If we look to the last one century, we will notice that the Middle East is the place of crises. At the beginning of the last century the Ottoman Caliphate collapsed and the new states were formed instead; in the Second World War the Middle East became part of the war as same as the First World War.

At the beginning of the cold war the state of Israel was formed and went to three major wars with Arabic nations in 1948, 1956 and 1973. During the Arab-Israeli war of 1973, the oil prices increased by Arabs and as a result the inflation

occurred in the world, which is still known as “1973 economic crisis”. In addition the barbaric behavior of Israel in Palestine also opens the way to the crisis in some occasions.

At the end of the cold war the Gulf war began in the Middle East, and then in 2003 the US attacked Iraq reasoning that the country possessed biological and chemical weapons and then indirectly provided the way to the emergence of ISIS in the country.

In the ongoing decade, Arabic spring emerged, and started from Tunis soon reached to all Arab regions. The spring overthrow the tyrant governments in Tunis, Libya and Egypt but then in Libya it was superseded by civil war and in Egypt the first democratic government was collapsed by the Army with the help of some regional countries.

In 2011, in Saudi Arabia some Shiites were also upraised in the south of the country under the name of Arab Spring in which Sheikh Nemir also took part, Saudi considered the Iranian hand behind the uprising of Nemir and became afraid of the Arabic spring and considered it as a threat to Saudi regime. That is why Saudi Arabia played an important role in the collapse of Morsi's government in Egypt.

However after the start of the Arab spring, the Iran-Saudi relations were not very good but the relations were not so much deteriorated as it is in the first week of 2016.

### **Why the Saudi-Iran relations became fraught with tensions?**

In general, since 1979 the Saudi-Iran relations were fraught with tensions. The major reasons of the conflict between Saudi and Iran are regional competitions and the religious difference of Sunnite and Shiite. Both sides have supported the enemies of each other against each other.

Nowadays the Saudi-Iran relations are mostly about regional competitions and the issue of Sunnite and Shiite. Iran's interests mostly lies in a Syria under the

domination of Bashar al Asad and with the Houthis in Yemen. On the other hand Saudi is widely helping the oppositions of Bashar al Asad and airstrikes on Houthis were also due to the same concerns so that from one hand it should not come under Iranian containment and on the other hand the way of uprisings in the south of Saudi should not get a chance.

The Saudi-Iran relations also deteriorated after the incident that occurred during the Haj and senior officials of Iran seriously criticized this incident.

On 2<sup>nd</sup> January 2016 Saudi Arabia executed 47 people in twelve different places which most of them were members of Al Qaeda network and Sunnites and a little sum of them were Shiites, among them there was a prominent Shia scholar as well. At the same day in Iran the protestors first burned the consulate of the Saudi Arabia in Mashhad and then the Saudi embassy in Tehran.

Saudi in response to burning its embassy in Tehran broke its relations with Iran, and ordered the Iranian ambassador in Saudi Arabia to leave the country and cut off its trade and aerial relations and thus after the Iran-Iraq war it is the first time that Saudi-Iran relations become such fraught with tensions.

### **Kabul's position in tensions between Iran and Saudi**

After the crisis in Yemen, Afghanistan has held an impartial position in tensions between Iran and the Saudi Arabia and has considered the cutting off ties between the two countries as having bad impacts on Islamic countries, this is a very good decision because Afghanistan needs to be impartial due to its internal and external interests.

Millions of Afghan immigrants live in Iran, and Iran's Chabahar port will free our transit from political pressure and being at the hands of one country. And also thousands of Afghans are working in Saudi Arabia and send a great amount of money to Afghanistan every year.

### **The impacts of Saudi-Iran tensioned relations on the region and Afghanistan:**

**The Middle East is divided into two blocks:** however even before the growth of tensions between Saudi and Iran, due to the situations in Syria and Yemen the region was divided into two blocks and each block had its own international supporters. But the recent break in Saudi-Iran diplomatic relations deepened the conflict further. Bahrain, Kuwait, Sudan and Somalia followed the Saudi Arabia footsteps and cut their diplomatic relations with Iran, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) due to its commercial ties with Iran did not cut its relations, but lessened it to its low levels.

**The crisis in Syria will last even longer:** Before the current conflict and tensions in Saudi-Iran relations both had almost agreed to set around the negotiation table regarding Syrian conflict. The armed oppositions of Basharul Asad in Saudi had also showed readiness to solve the Syrian crisis through negotiations; but due to tensions between Saudi and Iran it looks like that its first victim will be Syrian crisis. That is the reason why the representative of the United Nations wants to visit Saudi and Iran so that their conflict does not over shadow Syria.

**Its impacts on the price of oil:** Middle East is the world's richest region of oil reserves and produces the greatest amount of oil in the world. Iran and Saudi are the founders of OPEC (Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries) and the competitions between the two countries affect the price of oil. These affects are two ways:

**First: the prices of oil increases:** Conflicts or war in the Middle East effects oil supply and thus the price of oil increases. In 1973 during the war between Saudi Arabia and Israel the oil prices had increased and after that in most of the crisis which were not under the influence of the Saudi-Iran conflicts the oil price increased.

**Second: the oil prices decreases:** Most of the times in the Middle East when the Saudi-Iran relations become fraught with tensions, the Saudi Arabia which has great oil reserves uses it as a weapon and increases its



daily oil supplies and thus the increased oil supply decreases the oil prices. The Saudi motive behind this is to hurt Iran economically. Since 2004 it is the first time that oil prices has decreased so much, the price of one barrel of oil is currently 34.65 US dollars.

**Increasing the sectarian wars:** in the countries where both Sunnites and Shiites live, the deep Saudi-Iran conflicts will also influence them.

The End

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

