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## Preface

With the formation of National Unity Government, the public opinion in Afghanistan expected that the newly-formed government will take some solid measures for reconciliation with Taliban. Mostly, people's expectation was that Pakistan will cooperate in this regard.

Last week Pugwash institute convened a conference in Qatar where it gathered Afghan factions in an unofficial conference. High ranking Taliban members sat with Afghan government members. The exact agreements of the conference were not shared with media. The question is what really happened in the conference, and what the barriers of peace in participants' views were?

From the other side, the insecurity is expanding towards northern Afghanistan which turns the hopes of peace into disappointments.

What can be the factors of the recent insecurities in northern Afghanistan which at the same time not only expanded the ecology of war, but intensified it too.

The aforesaid topics are analyzed by experts in CSRS desk.

## The Peace Barriers at Qatar Conference



Pugwash is an international institution working for world peace. The institution convened a peace dialogue regarding Afghanistan for the first time in September 2012 where a number of Afghan experts participated. At the end of the conference a conclusion of the views regarding how to end Afghan war was published.

In first it was decided that the institution (Pugwash) would continue to set unofficial meetings between Afghans with few non-Afghan participants. It was also decided that the meetings shall be continued in the near future too. The views being discussed in the meetings will include Afghan government, political parties, Taliban movement and some Taliban-inclined figures. The participants present their views in the meetings should be based on their personal capabilities, and the views must be close to their leading side.

It was also decided that the participants from neighboring and regional countries will also be invited in the next meetings to attain their guarantee regarding peace and stability; and refraining the foreign intervention.

## **The Pugwash Conference in Qatar**

Initially, the conference was to be held in Istanbul, Turkey, but since Taliban were interested to dispatch more members of the political office to the conference and their names are on the black list of UN and US, they could not pay visits. Therefore, the decision was changed to Qatar. Talks with Qatar regarding its host ship for the conference also prolonged the process. Qatar-based Taliban assisted Pugwash in this regard too.

Delegations of Hizb-e-Islamic (Hekmatyar), High Peace Council, independent persons from and outside Afghanistan, “UNAMA” representatives and diplomats of some foreign countries participated in the conference.

Rumors are circulating regarding the presence of Pakistan’s intelligence service “ISI” in the conference too. The US financed media agencies tried to show the conference as arranged by Pakistan. But later, all the rumors were proved baseless.

The question over ability of Pugwash Conference to be the beginning of direct peace talks between Afghan government and Taliban can be answered from Taliban’s statement in this regard.

## **Taliban Statement**

Taliban statement said that their movement came into existence to stop civil war between/among Mujahidin factions and to protect the goals of Afghan *Jihad*, and therefore, people supported them. They have also confessed on one reality that due to inexperience they had committed some mistakes.

The statement maintains that the peace is a common responsibility, and a way to pass the rights to those who really deserve although they have divided the barriers of peace as internal and external.

## Peace Barriers from Taliban Perspective

Taliban pointed some instances, where peace talks are not possible if they are not achieved:

1. Foreign occupation is the mother of all calamities and peace talks will not bear any fruit until it is in place;
2. Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA) has been considered a big barrier in the way of peace;
3. Instead of talking to Islamic Emirate, it has been asked from neighboring countries to bring peace in Afghanistan;
4. The closing of Qatar office snatched the assumed address for Taliban and it paved the way for circulation of one-sided rumors;
5. Presence of Taliban elder's names in UN black list is another barrier in the way of peace. From Taliban's view, peace process and black list are in paradox. For the continuation of talks, it is essential to remove the list, so that all parties of the talks will negotiate in an equal condition;
6. Absence of a peace strategy with Americans and Kabul government is another obstacle. The reason is also very explicit, that there is no honesty in peace process and their stance is in changing mode;
7. Mediators should believe in peace and may not exploit peace as a tactic.

## Constitution

Taliban said that the draft of constitution should be prepared by Afghan scholars and later on be presented to the nation for the approval. Current constitution is not acceptable because it has been copied from the west and has been written under the shadow of B52 aircrafts. Its provisions are contradictory to each other too.

## Conclusion

All participants of the conference considered talks as a solution of the present crisis in Afghanistan, but due to deep disagreements among them, instead of a resolution at the end, a list of 15 points of recommendations has been published. One side stressed on fruitful peace process before complete pull out of foreign troops from Afghanistan, ISIS type of rule is not acceptable in Afghanistan, next political system and constitution for Afghanistan require detailed negotiations to prevent monopoly in governance, but all agreed on Islamic type of system. Unofficial talks shall continue among the Afghans. Removal of Taliban elder's names from black list may have positive impacts on peace process.

It has been agreed upon to reopen Taliban office in Qatar to have an address for further peace talks but details of reopening are not clear yet. Especially, when national security advisor, Hanif Atmar said there was not official representative of Afghan government in the conference, so no decision is binding. Foreign ministry of Afghanistan expressed its disagreement with reopening of Taliban office.

Though high peace council secretary, Masoom Stanekzai has expressed hope regarding the conference and considered it hopeful step towards direct and open talks between the two sides.

## Recent Instabilities in Afghanistan: Factors & Conspiracies



Since the formation of National Unity Government (NUG) and especially with the beginning of spring season insecurities have been increased in the country. The recent wave of instabilities encompasses northern Afghanistan from the insecure south.

Experts believe that the internal and external policies of NUG, conspiracies of regional and international players are the main reasons behind the insecurity in the North.

### Internal Policy

Since the formation of NUG, some decisions have been taken that have affected stability and security of the country. Signing of BSA (Bilateral Security Agreement), expansion of military operation, internal disagreements, failure in the formation of cabinet are the prominent.

- **“Bilateral Security Agreement” with US**

President Ashraf Ghani promised during his election campaign that he would postpone BSA. One of these personalities who met Taliban in Qatar weeks before told CSRS with the condition of anonymity that President Ghani has promised the same with Taliban in

Qatar. But contrary to the promises, hours after taking over, the controversial BSA was signed with the US and another hurdle was added in the way of peace. It gave another incentive for Taliban to fight.

With the start of Taliban spring season operations which they call Azm (resolve) have been able to face some northern provinces with the threat of falling to Taliban control. Taliban said in the announcement of the operation that they would target foreign military, intelligence and diplomatic institutions and Afghan officials, military and army because the US have not ended their military operations in Afghanistan as it has been said.

Taliban said in their statement: “the occupation forces have declared end of their military mission, though they have control over the land and air of Afghanistan. Their presence is same as military occupation era; they are present in political, propaganda, cultural and educational sectors under the title of BSA. Their night raids and drone attacks against civilians are still going on”.

In Pugwash conference too, Taliban considered signing BSA as barrier of peace: “Unfortunately, whenever the Islamic Emirate has taken any step towards peace, in response, it has been halted by signing agreements like BSA and strategic partnership”. Since Taliban are considered the sole factor of insecurity, therefore, signing BSA is considered continuation of war instead of peace.

- **Military Operations**

Defense ministry of Afghanistan announced anti-Taliban operations in Helmand, Ghazni, Wardak and Logar provinces, before Taliban announced their spring operations. As a result of government operations many people have been arrested.

The operations have affected the expanding insecurities in the country: it provoked the reaction of Taliban from one side and it brought clashes to the north of the country from the other side. Pakistani troops had started intense military operation against Uzbek, Chechnyan and rest of the groups, as a result these groups along Afghan Taliban moved to northern Afghanistan.



## Foreign Policy

Though Ashraf Ghani still tries to have a balanced foreign policy, his close relations with Pakistan, especially asking Pakistan for peace is considered another reason behind the recent insecurities. Taliban have been trying for several years to be free from Pakistan leverage. Therefore, in 2007 a key Taliban figure, Mullah Obaidullah was detained by Pakistan and was killed in 2010. Later on, Pakistan arrested the brothers of Taliban's political office Chief, Taib Agha to exert pressures on the group. Collectively, around 22 key Taliban have been killed in Pakistani jails.

Taliban are not happy with the foreign policy pursued by Ashraf Ghani, because it has created a mentality among Afghans that Pakistan will force surrender Taliban to Kabul and peace will be attained. Taliban, therefore, began their spring operations in full intensity to show that they are not under Pakistan control.

## International Factors

When Karachi airport was attacked by Pakistani Taliban and Uzbekistan's Islamic Movement on June 8, 2014, Pakistan Army started military operations on June 15, 2014 in Waziristan and rest of the tribal areas.

As a result of the operations many Chechnyans, Uzbek, Uyghur and Tajik fighters were forced to move in to northern Afghanistan.

- **ISIS**

The Presence of ISIS in Afghanistan is still a dilemma although many Afghan officials including President Ghani expressed their views on ISIS presence. Many members of National Assembly think that ISIS is a project of regional intelligence agencies to insecure Central Asia. National security advisor, Hanif Atmar agreed with this notion.

Until now, it is only clear that ISIS appointed its local Amir for Khurasan. Even though there is nothing more than a few videos regarding their activities. Initially, Jalalabad's recently deadly attack was linked to ISIS, but later on it was rejected by ISIS itself.

ISIS has no clear activity in Afghanistan; still the group is considered a factor of insecurities. Afghan officials also have statements about it, but the war in the country is being fought by Taliban and Hizb-e-Islami.

Afghan officials give such statements due to the following reasons:

1. To attract foreign aids under the name of fight against ISIS and to extend the period of foreign troops in Afghanistan;
2. To exploit ISIS as a pressure against Taliban.

Regarding ISIS presence in Afghanistan, analysts are of the view that the country is once again victim of international conspiracy where the US wants to suppress its rivals around the region.

Besides, Russia sometimes expresses its concerns regarding ISIS in Afghanistan. When Chechnyan and Uzbek fighters moving towards the north, it looks like Russia is paying the price of Ukraine.

The End

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