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Preface

Since the past few years, the U.S. and Russia confront each other in international issues and another Cold War alike the era of Cold War is being played on regional and international level. Therefore, rivalry between world's greatest powers is being continued in our region and so Afghanistan has been directly impacted from this situation.

For many times, the special envoy of Russia in Afghanistan has had harshly criticized the U.S. policy in Afghanistan since last two years; and following this trend, he, once again, expressed a different and new viewpoint, in compare to past, on Afghan issue last week. The first part of the Weekly Analysis of the Center for Strategic and Regional Studies will be focused on the type of present Cold War between U.S. and Russia and the position and role of Afghanistan in this matter.

The second part of the Analysis is allocated for the Afghan Parliament role and involvement in corruption and its related cases. Last week, UNAMA released its annual report on corruption in Afghanistan in which it had barely criticized the Afghan Parliament for its role in struggle against corruption. You would read analysis about the corruption cases of Afghan Parliaments, especially the Lower House (*Wolesi Jirga*) and other related topics in this part of the Analysis.

US-Russia Cold War and its Impacts on the Afghan Issue



By **Hekmatullah Zaland** \ CSRS

After 2014, the international issues like the Ukraine's became considered as incidents of New Cold War between Russian and the West and it became unblemished in recent years that there is "New Cold War" going on between Washington and Moscow which has directly impacted Afghanistan as well.

With beginning of this Cold War, Russians have increased their attention toward Afghanistan and thus, Russian officials, through expressing their remarks on Afghan issue time by time, have tried to intensify its engagement in Afghanistan. Last week, the special Russian envoy to Afghanistan, Zamir Kabulov expressed his new position on the Afghan peace and war that were different from the previous ones. America should share the negotiation table with the Taliban; otherwise, it would prepare from an endless war, he said.

In recent months, disputes on Afghan war have been exaggerated between Russians and American and NATO troops deployed in Afghanistan. The issue of Russia's military assistance to the Taliban is particularly being discussed on international level nowadays.

How the New Cold War between U.S. and Russia revived and extended to Afghanistan? What are the reasons behind recent change in Russia's position on Afghan issue? And what are the impacts of this Cold War on the situation of Afghanistan? We have tried to answer these questions and other related concerns here.

Washington-Moscow New Cold War

After WWII, and particularly after 1947, "first" Cold War became started between the Soviet Union and the West where strict rivalry was going on between the East Bloc and the West Bloc (Communism and Capitalism). In 1949, the Cold War paved the way for establishment of world's greatest military treaty (NATO) by America and Europe. Eventually, two years after its defeat in and withdrawal from Afghanistan, the Soviet Union became collapsed and thus the international Cold War became ended.

In the beginning of 21st century, disparities between Russia and the West, once again, start to rise up in some East European and Central Asian countries. Pro-West government became formed as a result of the 2003 Elections in Georgia which reasoned in attack of Russian on this country in 2008 where Abkhazia became separated from Georgia as an end result. The reason behind holding four controversial elections between 2004 and 2014 in Ukraine were also a result of disparities between Russia and the West which eventually paved the way for Russia's campaign on Ukraine which resulted in annexation of the Crimean peninsula to Russia through a referendum. It was in these years that the disparities of U.S. and Russia were named "New Cold War". The Cold War between them, then, entered the most serious phase in the Syrian bloody issue where Russia backs Iran against America and provides military support to pro-Iran regime in Syria as well.

This Cold War also became extended to Afghanistan due to international conflict between America and Russia as well as the developments inside Afghanistan. Russia, however, was supporting interventions of America and NATO and was cooperating with them in Afghanistan in accordance with the decisions of UN

Security Council in 2001; but Russia closed NATO transport corridor to Afghanistan for the first time in May 2015¹ and thus the Cold War of the two rivals extended to Afghanistan.

With emerge and expansion of the Khurasan Branch of Islamic State (ISIS-K) in 2015, Russia's fear became increased and so it accused Americans of being behind the group for many times. Hence, it started to establish ties with the Taliban and, eventually, held a trilateral meeting with China and Pakistan on Afghanistan in late 2016. Henceforth, Russia uses "its ties with Taliban" as a pressure tool in the New Cold War.

What Does New Position of Russian Mean?

A part of the Cold War between America and Russia is Russia's ties with the Taliban which seems unnatural considering the past enmity between Taliban and Russia; however, the both parties established these ties in view of their own needs and have accepted them.² Taliban translate their ties with Russia as their recognition by important regional and world countries; however, Russia justifies its ties with Taliban somehow different. Russia has justified its relations with Taliban in the following three points:

- Fear from expansion of the Islamic State group in Afghanistan;
- Safety of Russian diplomats in Afghanistan;
- And, assisting with Afghan government in preparing the Taliban to peace talks.

Evident change has been seen in the Russia's position on its last justification in the latest remarks of Zamir Kabulov where Russia has backed the Taliban's still positive and want. One day before the second meeting of the Kabul Process, the Afghan Taliban, in its letter³, had called on US Congress and people to start face to

¹ The Moscow times, Russia Closes NATO's Transport Corridor to Afghanistan, May 18 2015, see online:

<https://themoscowtimes.com/articles/russia-closes-natos-transport-corridor-to-afghanistan-46633>

² Thalil Journal of CSRS, Close ties between Russia, Iran and the Taliban, by Dr. Misbahullah, Sep 2017, Page 35.

³ The Guardian, Taliban publish letter calling on US to start Afghan peace talks, 14 Feb 2018, see online:

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/feb/14/taliban-publish-letter-calling-us-start-afghan-peace-talks>

face talks; it was what America had accepted with the group in 2013, and therefore, a political office was opened for Taliban in Qatar.

If latest remarks of Zamir Kabulov are deliberated, they show Russia's pressure on America and increase of its engagement in Afghanistan as he had said to America, as well, to learn from Russia and confess its defeat; but for the other hand, his remarks point out some facts as well.

Russia fears from the situation in Afghanistan nowadays. From one hand, insecurity in north of Afghanistan and activities of the Islamic State group has been expanded; from the other hand, the latest report of the Afghan government and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) revealed that cultivation and production of narcotics is in its highest level in the country. The opium cultivation increased by 63 percent and the opium production increased by 87 percent in 2017 in compare to previous year of 2016.⁴ In the case, America does not pay for removal of opium cultivation this year, according to Afghan officials.⁵ Increase in production and smuggle of narcotics is an issue that Russians consider it as Opium War against them, and in 2011, it is why Americans had let Russians to participate in counter-narcotics operations in Nanagarhar in order to mitigate Russians' concerns in this regard.

Looking at Russians' increasing fear, perhaps, Russia may concluded that, for the purpose of making the peace process successful and maintaining stability and security in Afghanistan, Americans have to talk with the Taliban and bring the timetable of withdrawing from Afghanistan into the negotiation table. Because the past 17 years of war, the latest positions of Taliban and lack of provision of response to the Peace Proposal of Afghan government have proved that obscurity on the future of the presence of foreign troops in Afghanistan is the main reason behind failure of the peace process. Therefore, the unclearness of American troops' presence and withdrawal timetable in accordance with new strategy of Trump may elongate this ongoing war which the Afghan government cannot make decision on it.

⁴ UNODC, The Afghanistan Opium Survey Release, 21 May 2018, see online:

<http://www.unodc.org/afghanistan/en/frontpage/2015/the-afghanistan-opium-survey-was-released.html>

⁵ BBC Pashto, see online: <http://www.bbc.com/pashto/afghanistan-44109330>

Its Impacts on the Afghan War

Since Afghanistan is in a very deteriorated political and security situation and as the Afghan President Ghani said, the government cannot survive without the military and financial assistance of America and the West; therefore, the Afghan government, at this time, keep the American side against Russia. For that reason, President Ghani as the most senior official of the Afghan government accused Russians of supplying weapons to Taliban after a bloody attack on Paktika province in late 2017.

Now, for the one hand, Russia has chosen the position which is not in favor of the Afghan government as it wants to bring Taliban into inter-Afghan talks; and from the other hand, its match with the United States is seems to be fortified. Russia and Taliban, however, have not confirmed the accusation of military cooperation; but this position illustrates that if America does not take any action to put an end to the war, Russians, then, would prepare to further harden this war for Americans. A few months ago, Russia had threatened that if America and the Afghan government failed to eradicate the “Islamic State” group, it will make move action in Afghanistan. A type of Russian military action may be considered as provision of military assistance to Taliban; for the reason that the Taliban are practically engaged with conflict with the group.

On one hand, the new position of Russia is counted as the pressure being put on America in order to make honest efforts in the Afghan peace process; on the other hand, it also means the confrontation and match between two superpowers, which definitely carries representation of making the Afghan war bloodier and elongated. It is in the favor of Afghan government to stay neutral in disputes among America and Russian and other regional powers and, instead of being a battleground for proxy wars, to manage these disputes in the way to get benefited from the situation and coordinate everyone’s interests here. END

The Afghan Parliament and the Corruption Issue in Afghanistan



By Zia ul Islam Shirani \ CSRS

The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) has strongly criticized the Afghan National Assembly in its recent report, "Afghanistan's Fight against Corruption: From Strategies to Implementation (May 2018)". The report, which was published a few days ago, assessed the issue of fighting corruption in Afghanistan over the past year (from January 2017 to April 2018).

The report states that "corruption in Afghanistan is massive, inhumane, and brazen. The citizens of Afghanistan are required to pay bribes in nearly every aspect of their daily life, and they suffer from inequities in economic and employment opportunities as a result of widespread nepotism and patronage". This situation has undermined public confidence in government institutions, which has in turn hindered the pursuit of wider objectives, such as domestic political stability, electoral preparations, and a credible peace process with the armed opposition, the report added.

In this report, UNAMA has welcomed some interventions of the government, the judiciary and civil society in fight against corruption; however, on the other hand, it wrote that Afghanistan's legislature (National Assembly) is part of the corruption problems and has for the most part avoided trying to be part of the solution.⁶

The position of the National Assembly and its authorities, the cases of corruption in the National Assembly, the role of this institution in the spread of corruption and the factors of the existence of corruption there, are the issues that have been studied in this Analysis.

The Parliament and its Authorities

The National Assembly or Legislature of Afghanistan is consisted of two houses (Wolesi Jirga (House of People) and Meshrani Jirga (House of Elders)) that is the highest legislative organ and manifests the will of the people as well as represents the entire nation.

Under the Afghan Constitution, National Assembly have the following duties; ratification, modification or abrogation of laws of legislative decrees, approval of social, cultural, economic as well as technological development programs, approval of the state budget as well as permission to obtain or grant loans and ratification of international treaties and agreements. The Constitution has also granted special authorities to Wolesi Jirga that include decision about approval or rejection of appointments as well as about elucidation session from each Minister.

The National Assembly, along with its responsibility to oversee the functions of the government and all of its authorities, bears, along with other organs of the Afghan government, a vast responsibility of fighting corruption, but "Corruption" is a word that, have been continuously suffixed with the name of the National Assembly in recent years

⁶ UNAMA: "Afghanistan's Fight against Corruption: From Strategies to Implementation (May 2018)": https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/afghanistans_fight_against_corruption_from_strategies_to_implementation-14_may_2018.pdf

In the current situation, given the deteriorating security situation, the increase in poverty and unemployment, the existence of widespread corruption, the escape of youth from the country, political instability, ethnic and religious disputes, and dozens of other cases that have shadowed the daily life of Afghans; the National Assembly, as the nation's home and its rights' advocate, it is responsible to address all these challenges, but based on statements by some government officials and investigative reports of national and international institutions, the Afghan National Assembly, itself, is involved in corruption.

A recent UN report is a new acknowledgment of the existence of widespread corruption in the Afghan National Assembly, in which the National Assembly has been criticized and said that instead of being committed to implementation of reforms and fight against corruption, and to strengthen internal accountability and transparency, it has done nothing.

The Parliament Role in Corruption Expansion

Corruption, along with other problems and challenges, is one of the most important problems in Afghanistan. Over the past few years, despite the repeated commitments of the Afghan government for a serious fight against corruption, Afghanistan still remains one of the most corrupt countries in the world. According to a recent report by the International Transparency, Afghanistan is ranked among the most corrupt countries from a total of 180 countries in the world. With having 15 points, Afghanistan is the fourth corrupt country in the world coming after Somalia, Sudan and Syria.⁷

Besides other organs of the Afghan government, the National Assembly, particularly Wolesi Jirga, is one of the bodies that have been involved in the spread of corruption. Providing a vote of confidence to the cabinet ministers in exchange for various privileges, law-breakings, non-alignment with Public Order, etc. are among the cases that the members of the National Assembly are accused of.

⁷ See it online: https://www.transparency.org/news/feature/corruption_perceptions_index_2017

For example, Wolesi Jirga decided about elucidation session from, Omar Zakhilwal, former Minister of Finance on 23rd of Sawr 1392 [solar year] on the status of the Ministry of Finance and the financial problems existing in that ministry. Although Wolesi Jirga had elucidated the Minister of Finance for alleged corruption; the Minister of Finance, on the contrary, uncovered cases of corruption in Wolesi Jirga. Zakhilwal, through the stage of Wolesi Jirga said that "According to an investigation by the Ministry of Finance, Lalai Hamidizai is accused of smuggling alcoholic beverages and vehicles, Samiullah Samim is accused of smuggling oil and alcoholic beverages, Zahir Qadir is accused of smuggling flour and receiving money illegally, Arif Rahmani is accused of request for receiving contract and money, Mahmoud Khan Sulaimankhil is accused of smuggling goods and exerting pressure and Mohammad Azim Mohseni is accused of applying for illegal housing"⁸

Abdul Bari Jihani, former Minister of Information and Culture, is another member of the Cabinet of the Government of Afghanistan who, in a letter, had accused members of Wolesi Jirga of taking money from the ministerial nominees. In his letter, Jihani had said that "two years ago, in the month of February 2015, Zahir Qadir, in a party, told him and other ministerial nominees that in order to receive a vote of confidence from Wolesi Jirga, each member should be paid from five to ten thousand dollars."⁹

In the wake of the disclosure of hidden cases of corruption at the National Assembly, reports were issued in late September of 1396 that revealed the embezzlement of millions of Afghanis in the Wolesi Jirga budget and the existence of more than two hundred imaginary employees. A total of 370 staff members of Wolesi Jirga, 217 of them, were fictitious and about 4 million Afghanis were being eaten through this mean monthly, according to the report. Meanwhile, the speaker of Wolesi Jirga, Abdul Rauf Ibrahimy, was accused of using more than 5 million Afghanis from the budget of National Assembly for the reconstruction of his private house.¹⁰

⁸ See online: <http://www.dw.com/fa-af/a-16808934>

⁹ See online: <http://csrskabul.com/pa/?p=3659>

¹⁰ See online: <https://da.azadiradio.com/a/28752692.html>

In addition to cases of corruption, some members of the National Assembly have been accused of law-breakings and distressing public order, pressure on public service organs for personal use, the use of unregistered vehicles and without plate numbers among other things. Alongside this, some members of the National Assembly, using their position and authority, are also involved in land usurpation. Sometimes, even news of shocking cases of honor “*Namosi*” is published in relation to the members of the National Assembly. For example, a few months ago, findings of Pajhwok Afghan News show that the Second Deputy Speaker of the Senate had tried to marry a married woman.¹¹

Why the Parliament is a Part of Corruption?

Commitment to the national interests of the country, awareness of its policies and principles, independence of thought and opinion, full recognition of its people and society, adequate education and literacy, dare to criticize and be honest and trustworthy are the qualifications that members of the National Assembly as representatives of the people are supposed to have; while some members of the present National Assembly do not have such qualification, and for this reason, the National Assembly of Afghanistan is recognized as a corrupt organ.

The absence of members of the Wolesi Jirga is one of the criticisms on this institution. Most of the time, members of this House are not attending general meetings because of their personal busyness, and according to some reports, there are also a number of representatives who have not been participated in dozens of general meetings or are permanent absents.¹²

On the other hand, during the winter and summer holidays, the National Assembly members are supposed to spend more time on traveling to their respective provinces and to listen to their clients' problems; instead of that, most parliamentarians, however, spend their holidays with their families abroad.

¹¹ See online: <http://csrskabul.com/pa/?p=4164>

¹² See online: <https://8am.af/x8am/1395/11/02/lawyers-absence-parliament/>

The extension of the work period of the current National Assembly to the eighth legislative and third concessive-illegal year not only has brought the legitimacy of the Wolesi Jirga under question, but some members of the organ did not continue to perform their duties in the right way, and thus, they used these years as an opportunity to work for the sake of their personal interests.

The confrontation of members of the Wolesi Jirga with the government and the existence of groups within the parliament that take positions against national interests and still get use of the immunity of the National Assembly is a problem that paved the way for corruption for some members of the Parliament.

END

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