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## Preface

Almost half a decade has passed since efforts for putting an end to the on-going Afghan war and maintenance of peace has begun, leading to a stage of optimism in Afghanistan. The United States being the initiator of the war, has now concluded that the Afghan war holds no military solution and needs to be solved through peace talks and negotiations.

Based on these realities, efforts for making peace with the Taliban have been initiated after the appointment of Zalmay Khalilzad, the new special US envoy for Afghan peace. The most recent development in this regard is the release of three senior Taliban officials from detention; among them Mullah Baradar, being the crucial link able to take constructive steps towards putting an end to the on-going war and closing a positive deal in peace talks with the Afghan government and the U.S.

The first part of CSRS Weekly Analysis discusses the latest national and regional-level efforts on initiating peace talks with the Taliban, release of Mullah Baradar from detention in Pakistan and his role in maintaining peace in Afghanistan.

The second part of CSRS Weekly Analysis is allocated for Parliamentary Elections in Afghanistan. After a 3-year delay, the Afghan government has finally been able to hold Parliamentary elections last week, which were accompanied by various challenges and problems. Though the elections were not held in the areas controlled by armed opposition groups (AOG); nevertheless, a massive number of people attended the polling stations and casted their vote. Security concerns, disorder, fraud and the interference of strongmen were the factors that led to the postponement of the process and encountering of problems for the people.

## Release of Mullah Baradar and New Developments on Afghan Peace



Much efforts for initiating peace talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban has been made especially after the National Unity Government (NUG) was established. However, these efforts are yet to bear any results and have always faced a deadlock. This has resulted in the United States stepping up efforts for initiating direct talks with the Taliban.

Accordingly, it is believed that the [release](#) of Mullah Baradar and three other senior Taliban officials, and certain other developments in the country which have grabbed national and international attention, are steps taken for the sake of initiation of direct talks between the U.S and the Taliban. However, the Afghan government has also been making efforts for initiating direct talks with the Taliban.

Despite the fact that previously much has been discussed about the Afghan Peace, certain recent developments have led to new questions and complications. The latest developments and initiated steps toward peace, release of Mullah Baradar from detention, and the fate of the Afghan peace process are discussed here.

## Latest Peace Developments

Following the latest efforts and developments on Afghan peace, it is believed that, despite apparent efforts on making peace with Taliban, some covert endeavors are also taken, especially after the appointment of Zalmay Khalilzad.

Approximately two months ago, the U.S Department of State appointed Zalmay Khalilzad as its special advisor to lead the peace talks between the Afghan government and Taliban. He started his mission gathering support for the Afghan peace through conducting a 10-day visit to five important countries of the region; Afghanistan, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Qatar.

In his visit to Afghanistan, Zalmay Khalilzad met Afghan President and Chief Executive of Afghanistan as well as a number of Afghan politicians, Jihadi leaders, and important figures of Afghan politics weighing their thoughts and opinions regarding the peace talks with Taliban inside Afghanistan.

Despite being a harsh American critic of Pakistan, Khalilzad visited Islamabad during his mission and talked with Pakistani officials regarding Afghan peace. Khalilzad called on Pakistan to co-operate with the Afghan government in the peace process.

He then visited Saudi Arabia, UAE and Qatar. The visits were an attempt to encourage the Taliban to peace talks through cooperation with these countries and to have Pakistan influenced by these countries especially Saudi Arabia, leading to cooperation in the issue of Afghan peace.

In addition, recent peace talks with the Taliban is partly also granting importance to the Qatar Office as there were rumors that President Trump was willing to have the office shut. However, it now seems that in the span of one year the Qatar Office has grabbed a pivotal role in the peace issue. This owes to U.S official visits to Qatar discussing the Afghan peace with Taliban having increased in these times. The recent Khalilzad visit to Qatar, his talks with the Taliban, the confirmation of these talks by the Taliban, and their optimism toward the solution of the Afghan issue are factors which indicate that the U.S is on the way to direct talks with the Taliban and that there remains hope that the outcome will be positive.

## Release of Mullah Baradar

Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, who has just been released from detention in Pakistan, is from Uruzgan province of Afghanistan. He was one of the four persons who initiated the Taliban Movement in 1994. Baradar was Mullah Omar's deputy during the Taliban regime. He was also the Governor of Herat province and the Chief of Army of the regime.

As an important member of Taliban resistance, Mullah Baradar fought against the U.S and Afghan forces after the U.S invaded Afghanistan in 2001, ousting the Taliban from power. He was then arrested by Pakistani intelligence and U.S forces in Karachi city of Pakistan in 2009. It is said that Mullah Baradar was arrested due to his [intentions](#) to initiate talks with Afghan government without the consent of Pakistan.

Though Pakistan published the news on the release of Mullah Baradar in 2013, the news was denied by his family members and Taliban. However, recently the news on the release of Mullah Baradar and three other senior Taliban leaders was published after the U.S started efforts for peace with the Taliban. It is said that Mullah Baradar was released as a result of Pakistan's willingness and through the cooperation of the Qatari Foreign Minister. The Qatari Foreign Ministry had a [visit](#) to Islamabad last week and met Imran Khan there.

The release of Mullah Baradar from a detention in Pakistan would result in trust building and is considered a positive step in this direction. This owes to the fact that his release was the first demand of the Taliban in every talk. On the other hand, he is an experienced politician, influencer, and a pro-peace personality. Many analysts highlight the fact that the reason behind his imprisonment in 2010 was his intention to talk to the Afghan government.

## Secret Deal Allegations

The release of Mullah Baradar and two other Taliban officials from detention in Pakistan is considered a part of development in Afghan peace and a deal for the sake of peace. The same allegations exist in Afghanistan, especially with regards to the latest incidents including the controversial murder case of Kandahar Police Chief, Gen. Abdul Raziq.

Gen. Raziq was killed inside the Kandahar Governor's Office at the end of an important meeting. Since Scott Millier, General Commander of Foreign Forces in Afghanistan and other foreigners were present in the meeting, a large number of Afghans suspect the U.S and Afghan government of being behind Gen. Raziq's death.

Following the incident, a major outcry against the U.S broke out on social media as people suspected the U.S and Afghan government used the death of Gen. Raziq to mitigate the anger of the people. The mourning of Raziq was portrayed heavily on media and a large number of governmental and political officials including the President and the Chief Executive of Afghanistan went to Kandahar to pay their respects. The people remembered him in the province as someone who had been accused of torture and a [UN report](#) had criticized him for his actions. The questionable part was that being a police chief of a province, such incidents were likely to occur and had occurred in the past as well, however, this particular time was exaggerated and given much importance.

Looking at these developments, it seems that the United States is making efforts to do the job itself which the Afghan government has failed to do it in the last decade. Following the peace-related efforts of Afghan government towards Taliban, the U.S decided to carry out the talks directly and after 17 years of war, it has now concluded that the on-going war could be ended through talks only.

Among these efforts, the release of Mullah Baradar and two other senior Taliban officials is a hopeful step. It is said that Mullah Baradar will go to Qatar and join the Taliban group for peace talks. If he does so, it would be very effective and will lead to the talks process being initiated and an atmosphere of trust built.

Besides Pakistan, other regional countries like Iran, Russia and China can also play an effective role in Afghan peace and stability; but as these countries are afraid of U.S presence in Afghanistan and consider the U.S a danger for the region; it is necessary to gain their trust for heartfelt cooperation in the Afghan peace. For the sake of attaining this trust, the U.S should use every possible means to remove the suspicions of these countries regarding its presence. It is crucial that the role of regional countries is not neglected in putting an end to war in Afghanistan. End

## Deficiencies and Challenges of Parliamentary Elections



The Afghan Parliamentary Elections was held on 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> of October where despite countless security challenges, hundreds of thousands of Afghans attending the polling stations in order to cast votes for their favorite candidates in the entire country, except for two provinces.

After the voting process, President Ashraf Ghani praised the process through a message, and thanked the people for their participation saying: “through voting, you have shown the world that you do not want violence with your entire force, you have expressed your will and you have not surrendered to force.”

Despite security threats and direct threats of Taliban, disorder in the commission (IEC) work, interference of strongmen, and different kinds of fraudulent activities polling stations were among the problems for which the people and observer organs in the process complained.

The analysis discusses the holding of Parliamentary Elections and the challenges in the electoral process and voting system.



## Delayed Parliamentary Elections

Holding Parliamentary Elections was one of the promises of the National Unity Government (NUG) which finally was met, overcoming several political disputes and confrontations, followed by a delay of 3 years, and despite feared security problems and challenges.

Around [4 million](#) people have participated in the Parliamentary Elections in entire country, except for Ghazni and Kandahar, where they voted for 2570 candidates of Wolesi Jirga (House of the People in Afghan Parliament), according to Afghan Independent Elections Commission (IEC).

The reasons behind postponement of Parliamentary Elections in Ghazni province were political disputes over division of elections on zones as well as security concerns, and as the IEC said, Parliamentary Elections in the province will be held simultaneously to the Presidential Elections. However, the Parliamentary Elections were postponed in Kandahar province for one week after the Police Chief, Gen. Raziq and head of National Directorate of Security (NDS), Momin Hassankhil was killed as a result of assault in the province.

[Ex-President](#) Hamid Karzai told Voice of America that: “the current Afghan situation was not suitable for holding elections and it would be good if the Parliamentary Elections were held along with or after the upcoming Presidential Elections.” Meanwhile, President Ashraf Ghani has praised holding the elections and called it an important step towards democracy maintenance. Abdullah Abdullah, Chief Executive of Afghanistan has also called holding the Parliamentary Elections a step forward and a great achievement adding that: “the biometric of voters is however, a positive step toward electoral transparency; but there were insufficiencies that the government, electoral commissions, observer organization and the international community are responsible for resolving.”

Two days prior to the Election Day, Taliban released a [statement](#) calling it an American process and conspiracy in an effort to hinder people from participating in the process; however, the people, despite threats and assaults of the Armed Opposition Group (AOG), participated in the process and casted votes for their favored candidates.

Although the Afghan government deployed 66 thousand military personal in order to maintain security for the electoral process; as the Ministry of Interior (MOI) reports, 192 security incidents took place where 36 civilians and military personnel were killed and 120 others wounded. On the other hand, the Taliban claimed they had carried out more than 400 attacks on election days which had resulted in killing and injury of tens of people.

### **Disorder and Fraud in Elections**

Though the Parliamentary Elections were held after a 3-year postponement, fraudulence and disorder remained part of the elections. More than 5000 complaints was registered in the Afghan Independent Electoral Complaints Commission (IECC) during the two days of elections which reflected the widespread corruption and fraud in the process.

The following points are worth mentioning regarding disorder and problems during the election days:

- **Late opening of a number of polling stations:** Although Afghan [President Ghani](#) inaugurated the voting process for Parliamentary Elections at 7am of the Election Day, a number of polling stations were opened in Kabul and some other provinces 4-5 hours later than scheduled. Therefore, the IEC announced that the polling stations that remained closed till 1 pm on the first day of voting process will be kept open for the second consecutive day.
- **Disorder in management of IEC employees:** Poor process managing by IEC employees resulted in transferring of voting lists of one province's polling station to another province's polling station. On the first day of voting, Bamyan's voter's list was transferred to Herat, according the some media reports. Moreover, the voters lists in most of the polling stations did not contain the names of the voters that had previously registered there which caused in deprivation of a large number of voters from casting their votes. Furthermore, poor performance of biometric machines and lack of skills of IEC employees to use these machines were other factors that rendered problems to the process.

- **Interference of Strongmen and Fraud in the Electoral Process:** Strongmen's interference was another challenge in the process. IEC confirms that a number of strongmen interfered in the electoral process with some of the voting boxes being broken by them. Following media reports, it is seen that strongmen and a number of local military commanders had interfered in the process in some polling stations, and had filled the voting boxes for the sake of interests of their favored candidates, especially those that were located in provinces.

## Conclusion

Although there remained opposition to holding Parliamentary Elections due to unsuitable conditions in the country and confrontations of political parties as the elections were coming closer, the widespread national and international criticism on the illegal extension of the term of Wolesi Jirga for 3 years had forced the Afghan government in to holding elections with all of its deficiencies, threats and challenges.

Since insecurity and lack of the government's control over the entire Afghan territory had caused lagging delay in general and inclusive Parliamentary Elections, the people had participated in the elections and voted for their favored candidate despite security problems and threats. From the very beginning of the electoral process and especially on the Election Day, the Taliban attacked several polling stations including those that were located in Capital Kabul which resulted in death and injury of tens of civilians.

Considering the fact that while tens of civilian casualties took place during the electoral process, and people continued going to polling stations accepting the threats of death, requires that transparency and justice be maintained when it comes to dealing with electoral fraud in order for ensuring efficiency and for the people's vote to be respected. Thousands of complaints have been lodged to IECC regarding law-breaking and fraud in the electoral process, and therefore, the IECC is required to take action impartially and realistically.

Thus, if the electoral commission especially the IECC, does not take care of the complaints regarding the fraud, disorder and strongmen's interference in the electoral process and does not separate clean votes from unclean ones, and deals with the issue by discriminating, it would on the one hand bring the legitimacy of the elections into question and other hand would definitely have negative impacts on the trust of Afghan people in the electoral process.

End

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**Contact Us:**

Email: [info@csrskabul.com](mailto:info@csrskabul.com) - [csrskabul@gmail.com](mailto:csrskabul@gmail.com)

Website: [www.csrskabul.com](http://www.csrskabul.com) - [www.csrskabul.net](http://www.csrskabul.net)

Office: **(+93) 202564049 - (+93) 784089590**



Researcher and Editor of Weekly Analysis: **Zia-ul-Islam Shirani**

Researcher and Distributor of Weekly Analysis: **Ahmad Shah Rashed**

Translated into English by **Abdullah Jawed**

Edited by **Aisha Khatibi**