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Preface

Besides the parties involved, civilians have also suffered heavy casualties in the war going on since last 17 years in Afghanistan. Nonetheless, the Afghan and foreign forces' air assaults, night raids, the explosions and attacks of the armed opposition of the government, are the factors which have caused in death and injury of tens of thousands of Afghans in last one and a half decade.

During last few months, the Afghan and foreign forces have increased their airstrikes more than every other time; however, they, often, have made the innocent civilians, mostly women and children, to suffer casualties down to their blind bombardments which, to a large extent, target the local houses; but, any intervention to prevent this business is yet to be made neither by the Afghan government nor by the international community.

First part of the CSRS Weekly Analysis has discussed on civilian casualties in Afghanistan, upsurge in air bombardment, the long-term impacts of this situation as well as the lingering silence of Afghan government on the matter.

Second part of the Analysis is allocated for the upcoming presidential elections. A few days ago, the Afghan Independent Election Commission (IEC) announced the schedule for the upcoming presidential elections, and the Afghan government has also emphasized on holding the elections on time as well. The schedule for upcoming presidential elections is announced while the IEC is yet to announce the results of the previous parliamentary elections; in the case, one a half month has been passing from the Election Day. The question on whether the upcoming presidential elections will be held on time or not along other such questions is tried to be answered in the second part of the Analysis.

Airstrikes on Civilians; Goals and Consequences



The US Air Forces (USAF) have dropped approximately six thousand bombs on Afghan soil this year, which is considered to be the highest number in the last ten years, according to USAF.

Along with rise in airstrikes since last few months, the civilian casualties have been unprecedentedly increased because of Afghan and foreign forces airstrikes and night raids. Since last two weeks only, tens of civilians have suffered casualties due to airstrikes and night raids by Afghan and foreign forces in Helmand, Logar and Paktia provinces of Afghanistan.

The murdering incidents of civilians have raised the harsh reactions of National Assembly and ordinary Afghanis; but there is, unfortunately, no ear to listen to them. Members of Parliament (MPs) say that the carelessness of Afghan government towards killings of Afghan civilians has hit the peak and deadly air and land strikes against Afghan civilians by Afghan and foreign security forces have been continuing.

Nevertheless, the peace talks have been reached a hopeful stage in last few months for the first time in past one and a half decade; and it seems that for the purpose of increasing pressure on the Taliban, civilians are being sacrificed to a great extent.

Intensification in air bombardments, inattentiveness towards the lives of civilians and the consequences of the on-going situation are discussed here.

Civilian Casualties

Since last 17 years, the lives of civilians in the on-going Afghan war have not been taken care of by the parties involved in the war, and thus, in addition to the parties involved in the war, thousands of civilians have also been suffering casualties.

Since UNAMA started to record the number of civilian casualties in 2007, totally 84246 civilians have been killed and injured by the parties involved in war till the end of 2017, according to UNAMA statistics.

In 2014, after formation of National Unity Government (NUG), the Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA) became signed with the United States for the sake of security and peace in Afghanistan; but, unlikely, the war got intensified and the civilian casualties got increased. According to UNAMA, approximately ten thousand civilians have suffered casualties every year since the NUG formed, and overall, the situation is being deteriorated as the battlefield turns into furnace, which it signposts a catastrophe in Afghanistan.

Institutions observing civilian casualties, to a large extent, relegate the burden of civilians casualties in Afghanistan on Armed Opposition Group (AOG); nonetheless, besides AOG, Afghan and foreign forces are important elements behind civilian casualties, which, considerably, goes unheeded in these reports. Civilian houses, madrasas, masjids, funerals, ceremonies and other civilian gatherings are targeted by blind foreign forces' air bombardments time to time which have resulted in thousands of Afghan civilian casualties in last few years.

Upsurge in Airstrikes on Civilians

Overall, air bombardments have been increased in Afghanistan since the announcement of new US military strategy for Afghan and South Asia; however, civilians have been mostly targeted by these bombardments in the last few weeks.

Last week (December 2, 2018), eight civilians including women and children became killed and four other became wounded as a result of Afghan and foreign forces' joint operations in [Paktia](#) province of Afghanistan. Before that, civilians became targeted by bombardments of Afghan and foreign forces in [Helmand province](#), which caused in murder of 23 civilians including women and children as UNAMA confirmed; however, the international media reported the number to be 30. Similarly, about 15 civilians had suffered casualties due to joint operations in Logar and Ghazni provinces.

Air bombardments play vital role and is considered as an important factor when it comes to civilian casualties, in the case, 5982 bombs have been dropped for the purpose of crushing the AOG by the US since January 2018 to last day of October 2018; however, the outcome was to keep the war heating and to have the civilians to suffer further casualties. The trend has not got any positive upshot because winning the Afghan war through military pressure is something that has not been effective for the last 17 years and can be called as the repetition of past unsuccessful experiences only.

Despite air bombardments and AOG assaults, some mysterious explosions and attacks are another factor behind civilian casualties. The bloody attack on the birthday ceremonial of Prophet Mohammad in Kabul which claimed the lives of tens civilian is the latest example of such attacks.

Notwithstanding, it can be said that lack of paying attention to war principles, blind bombardments and terrorizing the people by the parties involved in the ongoing Afghan war are the things that have paved the way toward upturn in the civilian casualties.

Latest Peace Developments and Civilian Casualties

For the purpose of putting an end to the on-going Afghan war, recent direct talks between Taliban and the United States and the steps directly taken by US in this regard have emerged hopes among Afghans on having the on-going war ended as well as to be living in a peaceful Afghanistan.

As, however, it seems, US and Taliban want to put pressure on each other in the battlefield during the talks on Afghan peace in order to attain more privileges during talks through showing their clout to each other; but, the trend has concluded in harm to civilians.

In recent times, the Afghan government and foreigners have increased their bombardment and night raids on Taliban and, in return, the Taliban have augmented their grand focus on battlefield and explosions, whose [latest remarkable attack](#) was on G4S British Company which claimed the lives of 10 persons including four foreigners and wounded of 27 others. Though, the civilian casualties have unprecedentedly increased attributable to these pressures and, in part, the houses of local people are being directly targeted by Afghan and foreign forces join air operations.

Regrettably, Afghan government has always been silent over civilian casualties during Afghan and foreign forces' operations and is yet to take any serious intervention despite widespread public objections in this regard. The act could increase distance between ordinary Afghans and the government and could, even, make some enraged Afghans to join the ranks of the AOG and take weapon against the Afghan government. And, it is something called as one of the important reasons behind strengthening the ranks of AOG. End

Announcing Presidential Elections Timeline and its Uncertain Fate



Afghan Independent Elections Commission (IEC) announced the schedule for upcoming Presidential Elections on November 28, 2018. The registration of presidential candidates will be commenced from December 22, 2018 up to 12 days, based on the schedule. The primary list of candidates will be announced on January 8, 2019 and the final list will be published on February 24, 2019.

IEC said that, based on the [schedule](#), the campaign period for candidates will be from February 19, 2019 to April 17, 2019. The presidential elections are planned to be held on April 20, 2018 and the final results will be announced on June 16, 2019.

IEC announced schedule for presidential elections while, from one hand, it yet to be able to announce the results of the previous parliamentary elections and, from other hand, there are hopes for putting an end to the Afghan war and making peace with Taliban considering the latest efforts of the United States on concluding a peace agreement with the Taliban, and it something that will not be ineffective on the fate of the upcoming elections.

The topics discussed here are: feebleness in the electoral commission and the impact of on-going peace talks between US and Taliban on the fate of the upcoming elections and, considering the recent political and security situation in the country, whether the upcoming elections will be held in accordance with schedule or not.

Afghan Elections Commission

After the National Unity Government became formed as a result of agreement of the two electoral teams following the most controversial presidential elections in Afghanistan in 2014, reforming the electoral system was one of the important matters in the political agreement forming the government, postponement in which incurred disputes between the President and the Chief Executive of Afghanistan; however, President Ghani, at the end, established the electoral system reform commission through a decree in order for the problems in the field to become resolved. Nonetheless, the country's electoral system has not become reformed as result of these interventions and thus an emaciated commission, then, became established.

Last month, the commission held the parliamentary elections, which were supposed to be held in 2015, with all of its ups and downs; while a month has been passed, the results are yet to be announced for entire provinces of the country.

The Afghan Independent Elections Commission is, however, faced the harsh criticism and opposition of political parties and coalitions and considering the manner in which the parliamentary elections were held, the people and political parties have lost their trust on the IEC. As the IEC performed as poor as it caused the Independent Electoral Complaints Commission (IECC) to [invalidate](#) the entire vote of Kabul and asked for re-holding the Parliamentary Elections in the province.

Nevertheless, the internal disputes among members of the electoral commissions, lack of required coordination among the IEC and IECC and existence of administrative corruption inside the commission are the matters that have bleakly reduced the reputation of these institutions.

Presidential Elections and Efforts on Making Peace with the Taliban

After the special envoy of US Department of State for leading peace talks with Taliban, Zalmay Khalilzad became appoint, the efforts on initiating peace talks with Taliban also got severed. During his mission, Khalilzad has tried to establish coordination and unity of views on Taliban in international and regional level and among some countries as well as political parties and circles inside Afghanistan and to make the different countries to cooperate in the matter.

Although, these effort are continuing and Khalilzad, after meeting the Taliban representatives in Qatar, has started his third regional visit; however, despite all hopes towards the talks, they are still blear to an extent.

By the way, although the Afghan government has always stressed on that the Afghan government is the only authorized address for peace talks with the Taliban that is able to take the final decision on peace with Taliban and, thus, it has declared a roster of a board of 12 for advancing peace talks with Taliban immediately after peace talks became initiated between US and Taliban. The trend has been criticized by members of Afghan parliament as well as Afghan political. Then again, it, apparently, seems that the Afghan movement is marginalized in peace talks with Taliban and the recent government's efforts (forming a board for peace talks, announcing the schedule for elections and repeatedly emphasizes on holding them, are indicating that it wants to put "pressure" on US through this mean.

Although the different views of Afghan and US government regarding peace talks are yet to, obviously, impact the Kabul-Washington ties, however, after the initiation of US special envoy talks with Taliban have increased the possibility of suspension of the presidential elections, as Khalilzad had told journalists in Kabul that he [hopes](#) to reach a peace agreement with Taliban before the presidential elections.

On the other hand, there are analyses that the US, through its latest efforts on peace with Taliban, tries to, once again, engineering the upcoming elections as they are getting close. As that US Defense Secretary has told in his recent remarks that we want to end the war in Afghanistan but we do not withdraw from the country.

Fate of Upcoming Presidential Elections

Whether the upcoming presidential elections will be held in accordance with the IEC schedule or not; the following points are worth noting in this regard:

First; disputes within the National Unity Government (NUG), oppositions of political parties with government regarding the capacity and performance of the IEC and at all the deficiency and poor performance of the commission are the cases that reduce the possibility of presidential elections to be held on the given date.

Second; the Afghan security situation, as half of the Afghan soil is controlled by Armed Opposition Group (AOG) and there is war in most of the areas in the country; therefore, the possibility of holding presidential elections in such circumstances seems arduous.

Third; the other point and the most important of them is the outcome of peace talks with Taliban that will determine the fate of the upcoming presidential elections. If peace talks with Taliban really forwarded and if it is planned for the US to reach to an agreement with Taliban, then, there is vast possibility for the upcoming presidential elections to be suspended for a while; however, if the ongoing peace talks failed and no development was seen in peace talks with Taliban, perhaps, the elections would be held. Nonetheless, they will be also accompanied by problems, poor management and deficiencies as the previous elections. Then, holding such opaque and fraudulent elections alike that of 2014 will, once again, face the country with the risk of political instability; which will be followed by political skirmishes.

End

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