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Preface

Although the hostile behavior of the Afghan government regarding the face to face meetings peace process has raised concerns, the recent statement of Zalmi Khalilzad, the special representative of the United States for Afghan peace in his latest trip has eliminated these concerns and has increased hopes for the success of the peace process.

Zalmi Khalilzad in his meeting with Ashraf Ghani said that there was no difference of vision and views between the Afghan government and the United States, and they were serious about the peace, in which people and Afghan government have central role. The Afghan president has also said that they had agreed on a new and clear roadmap with Khalilzad on the peace process.

Zalmi Khalilzad travels to Kabul in a time, when the meeting between the Taliban and the U.S. in Pakistan was delayed. Although the Taliban stated that the cause of the delay was the UN's blacklist, it seems that there are other reasons behind the delay. These issue are discussed in the first part of CSRS weekly analysis.

The second part of CSRS weekly analysis contains a discussion on the 55th Monich conference. Afghan president Ghani and delegates have also participated in the conference. The conference is conducted in a time when the issue of U.S. pullout is greatly discussed. Although it was anticipated that the issue of Afghanistan will be an important agenda of the conference, on the contrary, there wasn't remarkable discussion about the issue.

The Islamabad meeting; Is the blacklist an obstacle for peace?



A few days ago, The Taliban stated, in a proclamation that based on the Pakistani government's official demand, their representatives will meet the U.S. representatives and the prime minister of Pakistan before Doha meeting.

The Islamabad meeting was planned in a time, when the crowned prince of the Saudi Arabia had also a trip to Islamabad. It is being said that the Taliban representatives would have met the crowned prince as well. Similarly, it was presumed that through the meeting, the U.S. and Saudi Arabia were trying to encourage Pakistan to assist honestly for the Afghan peace.

The development in Islamabad coincides with planned meeting of the U.S. representatives and the Taliban in Doha on 25th February, 2019.

Here, we discuss the delay of Islamabad meeting and the main causes of the delay.

The Islamabad meeting

Since a few decades, Pakistan is consistently trying to have Afghanistan under their influence. Although Pakistan is pressured by international stakeholders to encourage the Taliban towards peace, and the Taliban have agreed to negotiate, Pakistan is now trying to achieve their objectives by involving itself in the peace process.

As the meeting was planned to be conducted on 18th February, the Taliban, in a proclamation said that their representatives would meet the prime minister of Pakistan to discuss the Pak-Afghan relations, Afghan refugees and trade-related problems.

Following the recent proclamation of the Taliban, the Afghan government, people and other stake holders seriously reacted. Many social media users criticized the Taliban. Some former members of the Taliban also expressed concerns regarding the issue. In addition, Ashraf Ghani also criticized the Taliban's visit to Pakistan and said "Pakistan should explain their links with the Taliban". Later, the ministry of foreign affairs of Afghanistan officially complained to the United Nation about this visit.

Meanwhile, The former president of Afghanistan, Hamid Karzai also said that through peace talks, Pakistan is striving to influence in Afghanistan. According to him, the Afghan peace should be obtained without the influence of Pakistan and all the problems should be resolved through intra-Afghan talks.

Why the Islamabad meeting got delayed?

The following are considered to be the main reasons of the Taliban representatives' meeting with the U.S. representatives and Imran Khan.

Belligerence in the region: Before the Islamabad meeting, in an attack on Indian army in Kashmir, around 45 soldiers were killed. India blamed the Pakistani intelligence for the attack and to seek vengeance, threatened to attack on Pakistan. In order to lessen the animosity between Pakistan and India, Pakistan requested the United Nations to play a role in eliminating the hostilities.

These conditions have led to two possibilities. Firstly, since India is a strategic partner of the United States, the U.S. might have requested to delay the meeting. They may also have considered to reduce the concerns of the Afghan government through the delay. Secondly, by looking at the circumstances and considering the pressures on them, Pakistan might have decided to relinquish the meeting.

Consideration of the regional competitions by the Taliban: The visit of the Taliban representatives to Pakistan was planned in a time, when the crowned prince of Saudi Arabia had a trip to Pakistan. In addition, a ferocious attack of Jael-Al-Adl group on the revolutionary guards of Iran which killed 27 soldiers. Iran lambasted Pakistan for the attack. It is presumed that, due to the Taliban's diplomatic relations with Qatar and Iran, the Taliban cancelled the Islamabad meeting. That is because both; Iran and Qatar do not have decent relations with the Saudi Arabia.

Complaint of the Afghan government to the U.N.: After the announcement the Taliban representatives' visit to Pakistan, the Afghan government complained to the U.N. Security Council. The Afghan government has said that the Taliban are in the blacklist and cannot travel freely to wherever they want to go. In the complaint, it is requested that the visit of the Taliban delegates to Islamabad should be prevented and by doing so, the demands and legal authority of the Afghan government should be respected.

Regarding the delay of Islamabad meeting, the blacklist is an issue which was also pointed out by the proclamation of the Taliban. The proclamation said that, as some of the Taliban leaders are in the blacklist, the travel to Pakistan is cancelled and the meeting has been delayed. However the question is: the Taliban, including Moscow, have travelled to many countries, why the U.N. did not stop them from traveling before?

Are the concerns of Afghan government going to reduce?

The decision of the Afghan government to call for the consultative loya Jirga in Hoot of this year, mentioning one year period for peace by Ashraf Ghani in Munich conference, trip of the acting foreign minister of the United States to Kabul, Afghan delegates meeting with the vice president of the U.S., Mike Pence and Zalmi Khalilzad, and Khalilzad travel to Kabul are the indicators that show a reduced in the concerns of the Afghan government towards the peace talks.

Although Ghani was worried about the recent face to face meetings between the U.S. and the Taliban, after meeting with Zalmi Khalilzad, stated that they have agreed on a new working plan.

In his visit to Kabul, Zalmi Khalilzad has also mentioned about a negotiation team for peace talks with the Taliban and said that, for peace in Afghanistan, a national and honest negotiation team is needed. He said that the Loya Jirga should create a team and consider them as their representatives in negotiations.

Regarding the statement of Zalmi Khalilzad, the presidential palace said that based on the need, there can be changes in the peace delegates. In addition, Khalilzad has said, he is trying to pressure the Taliban to negotiate with the government. It appears that the distance between president Ghani and the U.S. is shortening. The United States want the Afghan government to be a supporter of their peace process, not an adversary.

Position of Afghanistan at the 55th Munich security conference



The 55th Munich conference was started in Munich city of Germany, on 15th February and ended on 17th February 2019. The conference was conducted to resolve the current political and security challenges and obstacles. Including 35 leaders of countries, 50 Ministers of foreign affairs and 30 defense Ministers, many other representatives of corporations and Non-governmental organizations participated in the conference.

Ashraf Ghani as the Afghan delegates also participated in the conference. Besides participating in the conference, he met separately with the leaders and high ranking officials of other countries. In these meetings, the focus of Afghan officials was on Afghan peace and its definition.

The 55th Munich Security conference was held in a time, when the Afghan peace and U.S. army pullout issues were the headlines of news in Afghanistan. It was anticipated that the issue of Afghanistan will be a key agenda of the conference, however, there was a minor attention to Afghanistan.

Here, we discuss the 55th Munich Security conference, discussion on Afghanistan, and margins of the conference.

The 55th Munich security conference

The Munich security conference is held to evaluate the security of the world every year since 1963 at Bayerischer Hotel at Munich of Germany. The conference has become a largest independent association, where more than 70 well-known faces get together to exchange views and ideas about the security of the world.

The participants of the conference include leaders of governments, ministers, parliament members, high-ranking security representatives, distinguished personalities from International organizations, representatives of civil societies, manufacturers and media.

The 55th round of yearly security conference was held last week on 17th, 18th and 19th February, 2019. The issues regarding the future of the European Union, state of trade and international security, weapons control and the likely clash between the United States, China and Russia were main mainly discussed in the conference.

During the conference, the vice president of the Unites States of America, Mike Pence pointed Iran as the biggest threat to peace and security in the Middle East. He objectively requested the European countries to forsake their nuclear agreement with Iran. In his speech, he said “The time has come for the Europe to abandon nuclear agreement with Iran”. On the contrary, Mohammad Jawad Zarif, minister of foreign affairs of Iran refused the accusations of Mike Pence and called Washington as the main cause of instability in the region.

Another issue discussed in the conference was regarding the ISIS, and stressed on the elimination of the ISIS. The conference talked over the strategy of the west about the ISIS.

Afghanistan's issue in Munich Conference

Although there are no final decision about anything in Munich conference, polling and significant political meeting were held. Afghanistan also participated in the conference in order to attain aids of the international community, especially in the field of peace and security.

It was anticipated that, due to the current condition of peace negotiations between the Taliban and the U.S. and the issue of American pullout from Afghanistan, the issue of Afghanistan was one of the main agendas of the conference. Contrariwise, only Prime Minister Angela Merkel shortly talked about Afghanistan. Merkel, during the last day of the conference warned about the U.S. pullout and said "Great things are accomplished by Germany. The people are now convinced that the security of Germany should be safeguarded in Hindokush."

Ashraf Ghani, in a questions-and-answers meeting, strived to clarify the demands and expectations of Afghan government regarding the peace process and aids of the west. Ghani tried to explain the definition of sustainable peace to the international community and emphasized that there cannot be sustainable peace without the control of Afghanistan.

Munich conference verge

The security conference was suitable opportunity for bilateral meetings between the high-ranking officials of countries. The conference was a good opportunity for Afghan official as well, in order to meet with the international community. Here, we look at the meetings of Afghan officials in the Munich security conference.

Meeting with the U.S. officials: President Ghani at the margins of the conference separately met and discussed about the peace process and reforms in elections with Vice-president Mike Pence, Special representative of the U.S. for Afghan peace Zalmi Khalilzad and speaker of the United States House of Representative Nancy Pelosi.

Mike Pence in his meeting with president Ghani appreciated the call for Loya Jirga and attempts of reform in the election commission and promised that the U.S. will not let Afghanistan to become a safe heaven for terrorists. In addition, Zalmi Khalilzad exchanged thoughts with Ghani about the recent efforts for peace, including the call for Loya Jirga and progress made so far. Nancy Pelosi also discussed the peace process and enactment of Loya Jirga and assured that the United States is committed to everlasting aids with Afghanistan, which include the peace process and battle against terrorism. United States is a strategic ally of Afghanistan and will remain one. President Ghani appreciated the support of the U.S. and added that the peace discussions should result a sustainable peace in Afghanistan.

Meeting with the European officials: Besides the U.S. officials, Ashraf Ghani had bilateral meeting with officials of the European countries. Among them were Prime minister of Germany Angela Merkel, Prime minister of Norway Erna Solberg, UK's minister of defense Gavin Williamson, chief representative of the European Union for foreign affairs and special representative of the EU Federica Mogherini and the Turkey's defense minister Hulusi Akar.

Overall, the focus of meetings were on intra-Afghan peace negotiations, combat with terrorism, Presidential elections, regional aids, development and state of peace in Afghanistan. In addition, every European official promised ever-lasting support to Afghanistan.

Meeting with the officials of other countries and organizations: At the verge of the conference, Ashraf Ghani met bilaterally with NATO's secretary general Stoltenberg, UAE's minister of foreign affairs Dr. Anwar Mohammad Qarqash, Emir of Qatar Tamin Bin Hamad Al-Thani and Uzbekistan's Foreign minister Abdul Aziz Kamilov. In these meetings, the main issues of discussions were the Afghan peace process, mutual support to combat terrorism and strengthening mutual relations of countries.

In summary, although there was very little attention to Afghanistan in the conference, the government strived to show the world that Afghanistan is in the front line of war and needs assistance in the field of security and combat with terrorism. By taking the advantage of the recent attacks on Iran and India, the Afghan officials attempted to strengthen their stand and pressure Pakistan through the international community.

End

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