

Dual leadership and Indisposed Struggles for Peace



On 22nd March, 2020, Mike Pompeo, US secretary of State had an unannounced visit to Kabul, in order to resolve conflict over presidency between President Ashraf Ghani and former CEO Abdullah Abdullah and establish an all-inclusive government. Previously, Mike Pompeo was able to overcome obstacles that were facing peace agreement between the US and the Taliban. But apparently, he returned to the US without any hope for disposition. Is presence of two presidents actually an obstacle for peace? And how are the conditions for prisoners' release, appointment of peace negotiation delegate and consequently, bringing peace to Afghanistan? Answers to these questions will be discussed in our analysis.

Pompeo's visit to Kabul and the drama of two presidents

To resolve conflicts between Ashraf Ghani and former CEO Abdullah Abdullah, Mike Pompeo, US Secretary of State visited Kabul a few days ago. As Mike Pompeo replaces John Kerry, former Secretary of State, unlike John Kerry's achievement to resolve conflicts between the two leaders, Mike Pompeo was not able to establish another Unity government. As a reaction, the US Department of State threatened to reduce their funds of the current and next year by a billion



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dollars. In addition, the proclamation also states that the United States will also reconsider their support in international conferences.

In addition to annihilations caused by the Coronavirus to Afghanistan and the world, reduction in US aid will severely affect the economy of Afghanistan. Conversely, President Ashraf Ghani, in his speech after the cuts in US aids said that the reduction in aid will not affect the country because his administration was already prepared for such conditions. He stated that, he is not only ready to establish a unity government, but convinced to give positions to his former teammates in the new Cabinet. However, he is not ready to accept any demand that contradicts the constitution and accused Dr. Abdullah Abdullah for such demands. Dr. Abdullah Abdullah on the other hand, stated to a press conference that considering the delicate conditions in the country, he ready to forego many things. However, accused Ashraf Ghani of not making any relinquishments, which according to him, was the reason in cuts of US aids. He marked the cuts as the first stage of reductions in support from the US and expressed his concerns about losing more support of the US and the international community. Converse to their current stands, they were emphasizing on avoidance of any attempts for establishing a unity government. Yet, the continuous visits of US officials show that the US wants to experience a unity government in a new form.

The peace agreement and the issue of prisoners

According to the peace deal between the US and the Taliban, the Afghan government will release 5000 prisoners of the Taliban and the Taliban will release 1000 prisoners of the Afghan government before commencing the intra-Afghan dialogue. After some dramatic alterations in political decisions, it has been decided that the first group of prisoners will be released from Bagram prison. While according to the deal, in exchange for the releases, the Taliban and obliged to commence intra-Afghan negotiations for peace. The first part of the peace deal also states that some prisoners should be released by both sides, in order to establish an environment of trust and assurance. The recent visits of US officials to Kabul shows US's commitment towards the peace agreement. Additionally, the US's continues requests for establishing a unity government also indicates their tendency towards gaining the interests of the United States.



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This is because, if the US actually wanted to efficiently finalize the peace agreement, they would have closed the deal before commencement of the presidential elections. On the other hand, the Taliban's request for pre-negotiations release of prisoners and the Taliban's refusal to negotiate with the government as an official side, is great challenge for peace, which will not only delay the results, but may remove hopes for peace. While the recent video conferences between the Taliban, the Afghan government, the US and Qatar government and visit of the Taliban's delegation to Kabul in order to confirm the list of their prisoners, has increased hopes for resolving the prisoners' release issue. The Taliban's delegates visit was previously delayed due to the coronavirus outbreak and the prisoners' release process is planned to commence on 31st March, 2020.

Announcing of Delegation for intra-Afghan dialogue

On 28th March, 2020, the Afghan government announced its Masoom Stanikzai lead 21-membered delegation. Afghanistan's state ministry of peace has expressed that all sides have been consulted before announcing the delegate. Yet, some political leaders still criticize the comprehensiveness of the delegation and says that it only favors the Afghan government and they have been consulted by any means.

Considering the structure of the delegation, inclusion of members from key political parties, civil activists, and women have been placed. However, considering the complicatedness of the peace issues and the experience, it is suspected the will not be able to perform such great responsibility. On the other hand, the Taliban's proclamation about the peace delegation indicates they expect the government to be participant in the delegation, without being the party in-charge. Through the proclamation, the Taliban has once again emphasized that they are not willing to negotiate with the Afghan government as an opposite side. Such dissensions will not only affect the prisoners' release issue, but will also challenge the peace process. Another main cause of interruption in peace process is promises made by the US government, yet, blames the Afghan government for the delays. Through this, they not only avoid blames, but delays the peace process. As their involvement has facilitated presence of two presidents, the



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continues requests for a unity government has eased prisoners release issue and a way in for intra-Afghan dialogue.

Conclusion

Presence of dual presidents and inability in implementation of promises made in the peace deal between the US and the Taliban has increased violence in the country. For instance, some groups strive to sabotage the process by bringing violence to the picture, as shown via attack on the Temple of Sikh residents of Afghanistan. Therefore, the opportunity for peace should not be wasted.

Considering the complicatedness of peace process, those which creates obstacles for peace must be eliminated, if the intention of both sides truly is bringing peace to Afghanistan. Through this, experiences of destruction and violence and be avoided and challenges facing the peace process can be reduced.

The Afghan political leader should resolve the dissension between Dr. Abdullah Abdullah and President Ghani as soon as possible, so that the opportunity for peace can be efficiently utilized. In addition, compared to the US and other countries, Afghan leaders have the higher chance of establishing an environment of trust and assurance. Their efforts will consequently result a last peace and a comprehensive ceasefire in the country.

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Afghan Education; Challenges and Solutions



Part (2): External Challenges

Reforms in Education Sector

The transitional government of Afghanistan in 2002 inherited a malfunctioning and defective system of education, both in terms of human resources and capacity, and in terms of building and infrastructure, which had a limited capability to provide education services and its quality was seriously questioned. The following statistics provided by the Ministry of Education show some of the problems at that juncture from the perspective of the Ministry of Education:

- Less than one million boys were receiving education in 3400 public schools by 20700 teachers, and the education system of that time did not meet the needs of the people.
- There was no single, national and standard curriculum and standard textbooks available.
- Only four Teacher Training Institutes (Dar-ul Mua'limin) were active in four provinces having 400 students and 50 teachers, all of whom were male.



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- There were 38 partially active professional and vocational schools, with 1500 students and 50 of the male teachers.
- On yearly basis, only 22000 male students were trained in literacy courses.
- Only 7900 students were enrolled in 15 higher education institutions.

Since 2002, the education sector has pursued fundamental reforms and has attained remarkable achievements. Some of the major developments and improvements of the Ministry up to the late 2009 are as follows:

- Seven-fold increase in student enrollment: A total of 7 million students attend school in 12000 public schools, including 37% of them are women.
- More than eight-fold increase in the number of teachers: "Meaning that today, the number of teachers in the education system is about 170000, 30% of whom are female."
- The number of formal Islamic education schools has increased to 550, with 136000 students "Talaba" seeking Islamic sciences, whose 9% is comprised of female students.
- The administration of Islamic Education has been promoted from a Department to the level of Deputy Ministry of Islamic Education, and, for the first time in history, a branch of the Al Azhar University (Al Azhar Institute of Islamic Sciences) will be inaugurated in Kabul and might gradually expand to major cities of the country.
- A national curriculum has been prepared for all public and Islamic schools. The new textbooks for basic education (1-9) have been compiled, printed and distributed, and it is expected that the textbooks of the secondary period of general education will be completed by 2010 and those of Islamic education by 2014.
- The number of teacher training centers has increased from 4 to 42, with at least one center operating in each of the provinces with dormitory facilities both for male and female, with 42000 students (38% women).



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- Furthermore, at the district level, 73 teacher training centers have been established alongside the schools to improve the quality of school teachers at the in-service programs.
- Enrollment at the technical and vocational education has increased thirteen times, with 2000 students (16% female) teaching in 60 vocational and professional schools.
- More than 95000 students (27% female) graduated from Grade 12 in 2009.
- Since 2002, more than 250000 (62% female) have completed a six-month literacy course each year.
- For the purpose of strengthening public participation to improve the quality of education, 8500 school councils have been established and 4500 schools have been built with the active support and participation of local people.
- Of the schools that had been shut down in previous years due to security problems, 220 were reopened in 2009, with more than two hundred thousand students receiving education there.
- Reform and development of the department is in progress; issues related to governance, monitoring and evaluation are strengthened. The new ranks and payroll system, which has been a major driver of quality improvement and livelihoods, is being implemented rapidly, with up to 70000 teachers now benefiting from the system. Launching and adapting it results in necessary and appropriate increase in the salaries of all employees, including teachers.
- Around 63000 students are studying in more than 24 universities and higher education institutes.

External Challenges

In the previous report, we discussed in detail the internal challenges that has made the education sector complicated. We will now briefly outline the external challenges of Afghan education in order to be able to focus on the third section regarding the strategies and solutions.

1) Insecurity: The biggest obstacle toward Afghan education is the ongoing war and security in the country. The Afghan Ministry of Education is an impartial



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body and should not be sacrificed by any armed or political group for the purpose of its political and military agenda, and, thus, prevent the education system in Afghanistan.

War, lack of security and insecurity have left about three and a half million eligible children with no access to education up to 2019. There are currently more than 1000 schools closed due to insecurity, and there is probability of rising the number. Insecurity has not only shut the schools down but also prevented new schools from being built.

2) Usage of schools as military shelters: Many remote and unsafe schools are used as a military bases between the Taliban and the government, as security forces have turned a school into a military base in Helmand province as well as in the Chah-e Anjir area of Nad Ali district. Helmand and Uruzgan are among the provinces that use a limited number of schools as military bases; across Afghanistan, 67 schools have now become strongholds, with 4 at the hands of the Taliban and others serving as bases of the security forces.

3) Schools without Buildings: According to statistics provided by the Ministry of Education, around 9 million students are being educated in more than 17000 schools. Some of these schools are either having a half-constructed building or no building at all. Of the 17000 schools, 9000 have buildings, 8000 are without any building.

4) Low Budget: The budget allocated for education in the country has not been used properly and as needed, and this has left Kabul schools themselves without any building or half-completed building; and, a large number of students receive education under tents or at rented houses.

In the intervening time, President Ghani had ordered the Ministry of Urban Development to build 100 schools using prefabricated plots and build another 6000 schools with a budget about 200 million USD. Besides that, Ministry of Education announced the construction of 2000 more schools with a balanced population in different areas.

5) Unprofessional teachers: Unprofessionalism of more than 40% of school teachers is a serious challenge facing the country's education. Ministry of Education has not hired professional teachers in the last few years and with a shortage of teachers, unprofessional teachers and unqualified teachers in remote areas of the country. However, the Ministry of Education in response says that



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professional and experienced teachers are not willing to teach due to the insecurity in some areas and a poor livelihood system, so the ministry plans to send some professional teachers to various parts of the country with the intention of paying for their living expenses along with high salaries.

Nonetheless, it seems that recruiting 26000 professional teachers and sacking non-qualified teachers a 12th graders in 34 provinces of Afghanistan is not an easy task.

6) Corruption: In 2002, the number of students reached 900000 male students and there were no female students, but after 2002 to 2013, the figure went up dramatically, to 11 million students, which ministry and the government found it to be a great achievement; however, after a report of the USAID, the number of students in Afghanistan dropped to 9.2 million, which is questionable.

Besides that, the 40880 ghost teachers, 1033 ghost schools, 1400 school construction projects without legal procurement procedures, over 20 million USD embezzlement in the textbook printing contracts, disappearance of 64 school-related materials containers (notebook, boxes, pen, foodstuffs, and etc.) and dozens of other things that the Ministry of Education has looted are highlights of corruption in the ministry.

8) Weak Administration: Despite efforts to strengthen cadre capacity, the executive capability of the education sector at the capital and provincial level is yet to be adequate, mainly because of the lack of skilled personnel who are not willing to work in the ministry with a low salary. Shortage of “proper workplace” facilities and equipment, especially the information technology has further complicated the problem of lack of proper management at the Ministry of Education.



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Announcement

Please be informed that CSRS will change its weekly analysis to biweekly from 1st April 2020 with better quality and content.

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