

January 26, 2019

**Pakistan: Playing Masterfully the Peace Game**

Afghanistan peace talks is going on between the US and Taliban; leaving Afghan government in the sidelines. The United States and Afghanistan's Taliban opened a new round of peace talks Monday in Qatar that continued on Thursday. Though Taliban had already rejected the peace talks with the US envoy in Pakistan, they had well prepared for the talks; managing two car bombings, the bombing of Green Village that according to the interior ministry officials killed three Afghan military personnel, and one civilian. However, reports varied on the number of wounded. And some outlets put the number as high as ninety. Among those who wounded, the overwhelming majority of which were civilians, twenty-three were children and twelve were women. The second car bombing last week that wounded more than a hundred people, and more than a hundred more lost their lives was launched on an Afghan military base in Maidan Wardak province. Due to the attack, a member of the US military was killed too, which is expected to impact the Trump administration's withdrawal plan.

**Why, Where and Who Masterminded the Attacks**

As the Afghan security forces remain too overstretched to take on the growing menace of the Taliban in different pockets of the country and their high casualty rates, it raises serious doubts about whether they can be an effective provider of security once the US withdraws half of its troops. And as the peace talks is approaching a critical phase, the Afghan Taliban and the strategic supporters of the group tend to make the most benefits out of this process and realizing this goal will be impossible, unless the group has an upper hand in the battlefield. As a result the Afghan Taliban with the support of the intelligence agencies of some external states design and launch its attacks on the areas that these agencies identify as strategic targets.

As the Afghan President has indicated in Daus meeting, Pakistani actors has allegedly kept contributing to the strength of the Taliban in order to avert threats perceived from the American influence in Afghanistan. As Afghan Taliban lack the capacity to launch such attacks, the intelligence evidence show these attacks have been designed in Pakistan supported by ISI.

**Why Taliban refused talks in Pakistan**

Monday's meeting was originally set to take place in Pakistan where Khalilzad stayed for several days before traveling to Qatar. Sources said Taliban officials refused to come to Islamabad unless the U.S. side agreed to discuss a withdrawal plan for U.S.-led foreign troops from Afghanistan. However, political commentators believe that, the main reason behind the refusal of the talks have been the immediate advantages Pakistan has been looking for. The first advantage granted to Pakistan, was that when the South Carolina Republican senator, who is considered close to President Donald Trump, spoke after a meeting with Prime Minister Imran Khan; Graham, in his press conference Sunday, noted Pakistan was taking significant steps under Khan's leadership to promote Afghan peace and regional security. He praised Pakistan's effort to fence the 2,600-kilometer largely porous border the country shares with Afghanistan to deter cross-border terrorism. As the issue of Afghan-Pak is one of the main causes of conflict and tensions between the two countries, and its fencing is also one of the causes of tensions between the two, such appreciation means nothing but supporting the Pakistan cause of Durand line. Second, while the peace talks are going on, Pakistan's Prime Minister Khan also arrived in Doha for official meetings with the Qatari leadership. According to diplomatic sources Khan is likely to make contact with Taliban officials during the visit to encourage them to help in negotiating a political resolution to the Afghan war. The question that requires a true answer is that, who decides on peace talks, Taliban or Pakistan. As it is somehow clear, it is Pakistan that actually identifies where the talks shall be held and what conditions shall be set by Taliban to benefit Pakistan and undermine the national interests of Afghanistan.

In a nutshell, any peace talks without direct involvement and ownership of Afghan government will not end to a peace deal leading to stability in Afghanistan. As, the Afghan peace process has national, regional, Islamic and international dimensions, unless these issues are not ensured, addressing just the Afghan dimension will not result to putting an end to the conflict.

**Recent Attack on a Military Base Questions Afghan Government Claims to Reform Security & Defense Institutions**

By: Mohammed Gul Sahibzada

Conflicting reports were out after an attack on security personnel in Maidan-Shahar, capital of Maidan Wardak province. Initial reports described casualties as one hundred twenty-six people dead and scores of others injured, yet other reports mentioned the number much lower than this. Whatever the casualties might be, the attack on Monday by Taliban insurgents, using a suicide squad on a military training base in Maidan-Wardak province has been the bloodiest one ever seen in years. These grim figures and the ability of insurgents to plan and carry out sophisticated attacks of such a scale and magnitude on a sensitive Afghan military facility is unprecedented. These incidents debunk Afghan Government claims to bring reforms and improve the ability of security and defense institutions to make it a capable force to defeat an entrenched insurgency, supported by neighboring Pakistan and Iran, which continues to take immense toll on the lives of Afghan people, economy and security of the country since last eighteen years now. Most of these attacks are of nature and types that Taliban insurgents have used before, hence a historic trend is available to avert such tragedies by making defense and attack strategies to avoid repetition of such deadly incidents. It is no secret that Taliban insurgents receive training, support and mentoring from neighboring Pakistani, and recently, from Iranian intelligence agencies to weaken Afghan State by causing disruption in security, economic activities, creating chaos type of situation, making anti-state propaganda and most of all, creating insecurity among the general public in Afghanistan. By suing Taliban insurgents as their tool to carry out such high profile attacks on Afghan security and defense institutions, these countries want to score more points and ask for more in the ongoing so called peace negotiations. In the face of such big challenge, Afghan security and defense institutions and leadership should keep a watch round the clock on the types, styles and sort of attacks carried out by Taliban insurgents and other terrorist groups operating in the country.

Taliban insurgents 'have no political philosophy to govern a state', hence they only want to rule by force and fear - knowingly or unknowingly - that their very presence and campaign is because of the mercy of an enemy state i.e. Pakistan. In addition, Taliban insurgents have been portrayed to be 'the largest insurgency in the world' by some so called researchers (!) - some of whom have put their numbers reaching to more than one hundred and fifty-thousands! These whooping lies were published three weeks ago in mainstream regional news outlets at a time when ongoing so called

peace negotiations were in progress in the Middle East. And the purpose of such propaganda was to serve the interests of enemy states in peace negotiations who support Taliban insurgents to pursue their hidden agenda under the cover of a maneuvered settlement to Afghan war. History has proven it times and again that unless the wishes of Afghan people are taken into account, there will not be any kind of peace or so called negotiated settlement to Afghan problem. It is alarming to see such overt involvement of neighboring countries involvement in the bloodshed of Afghan citizens, and on the top of it, their blatant and shameless defense for their actions under the pretext of their so called 'national interest'. Afghan Government should continue to unleash improvement and hone fighting, surveillance and intelligence skills of the defense and security personnel. It is worth mentioning that some serious steps are being taken by Afghan leadership to improve performance of defense and security institutions, but the enemy is far more sophisticated who have successfully embedded themselves in the body and blood of Afghans under the cover of religious sentiments to gain political mileage. Thus, Afghans are inevitably turning their guns to one another but the enemy is sitting safe in their military headquarters basking in the flow of favorite events occurring to their benefits. Yesterday's attack might add to the myth of Taliban to claim it as a 'big victory' and to tout it as their so called 'military strength' to show the world they can strike anywhere, but in the world of military things, the real strength is to form frontlines and flex muscles in open military campaign, which will determine defeat or victory. Stealth strikes, which cowardly kill innocent civilians, cannot count toward military strength. It is one thing when we see a shameless campaign to purport Taliban as a force to reckon with because of the propaganda unleashed by our enemy states, and by use of leverage of the enemy states in important international platform, and making genuine impact and leaving lasting footprint in the political landscape of the country is another thing, which Taliban or any other terrorist groups have miserably failed to do. Therefore, Afghan Government and the people of Afghanistan should stand strong and defend the country and the values this great nation has held so high and strong since centuries. We cannot get peace by begging. We have to earn it 'by blasting the swollen fingers' of a merciless enemy who do not believe in human value, peace and tranquility.

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**The Consequences of Delay in Announcing Election Results**

By: Mohammad Zahir Akbari

More than three months have passed from the beginning of parliamentary elections but its results has not announced yet. According to the schedules, the Initial results of the parliamentary election were supposed to be announced on 10th of November 2018 and its final results were supposed to be announced on 20th of December 2018. The gradual announcement of election results might be a good tactic to prevent from a collective turbulence but practically it looks that the tricks are leading to a reverse outcomes. The public anger is reaching on its culmination steps and day to day become more dangerous. In the recent few days, a number of parliamentary candidates closed the four main routes to Kabul and prevented any entry and exit of citizens for several hours. From one hand, this caused a lot of problems for ordinary people and on the other hand, it was a warning to burst of social anger. Undoubtedly, this is the only a small part of the negative consequences emanated from the hesitation in announcing election results. There are many factors that can propel the issue to other angles and crisis.

In fact, there are a lot of true and untrue ideas and analyses about the delay in announcing the outcome of the election but most of them are baseless speculation and assumptions. But undoubtedly, this has many negative consequences for the country administrative, social and political processes. One of the most immediate and applicative consequences of the delay in announcing the outcome of the election is disruption to the next year elections. Next year we will have four simultaneous elections including presidential election, provincial council's election, district council's election and parliamentary elections in Ghazni province. Each of these elections is very important and vital to the stability and establishment of order in the country.

Once, the presidential election has been delayed for three months which confronted many waves of criticisms. If it repeats again in the process of holding elections, the country will face many serious social and political crises. Failure to hold presidential elections have far worse consequences than any other elections and no farther delay is acceptable for Afghan people. Thus, Provincial council elections are also important in their own place because with ending the previous round, local offices will remain without a supervisory authority and may face serious troubles. The election of district councils is also very important due to its political role and being effective for the remote areas of the country. Legally, One-third of the Meshrano Jirga members shall be elected from the members of the district councils, and some members of the Loya Jirga, if elected, shall also be elected from the members of the district councils. The Ghazni's controversial elections are also held at this stage, which is very important in its place, especially if we look from the provincial perspectives.

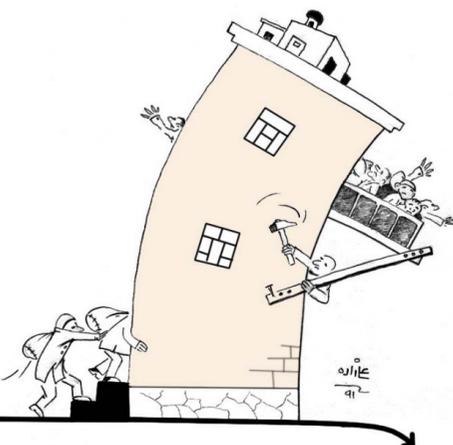
Another negative consequence of delay in announcing results of the election is disturbance in the administrative and legal procedures of the country. However, the current parliament has gone to the winter

vacation but if we cannot pave the way for presence of new members of parliament during this period, we will be faced with legislative gap. Many laws, regulations and national level decisions must be passed from the filter of parliament otherwise it may raise a lot of legal and political questions.

The other negative and even more dangerous, consequence of delay in announcing election results would be the illusion of victory by some powerbrokers or those who are supported by them. As we know, in the last election, many of the powerful men and their supported members could not attract the votes of people. Nevertheless, they think that their votes have been stolen and a systematic fraud has taken place in the electoral process. As we saw in few past days, a number of protesters closed the four roads of Kabul and said whatever they wished to the government and the election commissions. While there were many people in the gathering whose votes were very low and never gained enough votes to be the winners of election process. However, it does not mean the election were fair and transparent but it means that delay of announcing election results, trouble the water for benefits of certain opportunists.

The most important and major negative consequence of delay in announcing election results is showing the weaknesses and inability of the commissions. The total function of the commissions, especially the poor performance in announcing the election results have caused that the credibility of Electoral commissions fall sharply. Therefore, the IEC extremely downgraded in the public opinion. Now, it is very difficult to restore confidence of the people in the elections with the same commission for holding the elections next year. Recently, the vice president of Afghanistan spoke of comprehensive reforms in the Afghan electoral commissions, saying that, due to widespread allegations, fraud, misconduct and corruption, not only damaged the credibility elections commissions but also damaged the prestige of government. As a senior government official, he reiterated that the work of the electoral commissions has become a tool for teasing and insulting of friends and enemies.

Warning the election commissions, the vice president stressed that the patience of the people has overflowed and no longer can tolerate the weaknesses and the inefficiencies. It is clear that the view of the vice president is not his sole personal opinion, and he, on behalf of the leadership of the Afghan government, has made it clear not only to the electoral commissions but also to the people of Afghanistan and the international community that the Government of Afghanistan is not satisfied with the current status of the commission. And there is need for fundamental changes in these two commissions. It seems that without fundamental changes in the structure of election commissions, it is not possible to hold four important elections next year. Mohammad Zahir Akbari is the permanent writer of the Daily Outlook Afghanistan. He can be reached at mohammadzahirakbari@gmail.com



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