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News analysis: Afghan peace dialogue with the Taliban remains in limbo

By Abdul Halee and Chen Xin

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Amid continuing charges and counter- charges between Kabul and Islamabad and increasing militancy in Afghanistan, efforts to bring the Taliban into the Afghan political mainstream looked increasingly difficult to succeed, analysts here said.

"Since the intelligence agencies of some countries in the region are involved in a proxy war in Afghanistan to find a negotiated settlement is a very complex job," political analyst Ahmad Zia Rafat told Xinhua in a recent interview.

Rafat, a professor at Kabul University, said that since the Taliban has been used as a pressure group by Pakistan against the Afghanistan government, it could not possibly enter into a dialogue with Kabul unless with the permission of Islamabad.

However, Taliban has rejected the notion, saying that the group is independent and would act and fight independently free from foreign influence.

To accelerate the process of peace talks with Taliban, a delegation of the government-backed peace body, the High Council for Peace would be visiting Pakistan soon reportedly to seek the release of Taliban former commander Mullah Brother who was arrested in 2010 in Karachi city of Pakistan.

"I think the release of Mullah Brother and taking him to Kabul would not change the mind of Taliban leadership to hold direct talks with Afghan government," the analyst said, adding that the Taliban usually dismiss any of its leaders who are arrested or who would join the government.

Afghan peace talks were started in the 1980s and since then whoever was in power in Kabul had initiated talks with armed groups in the country, notably the Taliban, but all these efforts failed.

Interestingly the armed groups opposing the government in Kabul have their bases in neighboring Pakistan prompting some Kabul officials to conclude that these armed groups are being supported by Pakistan. But Islamabad has consistently denied these accusations.

In 1980s, the then Moscow-backed regimes had frequently offered peace talks with the Pakistan-based Mujahideen groups. Even though, the direct and indirect contacts for achieving national reconciliation continued till 1992, all had ended in a fiasco.

The then government of Najibullah in Kabul collapsed; Mujahideen groups had overrun Kabul in April 1992 and established their administration. Nonetheless, the war didn't end as a new breed of Taliban, with bases in Pakistan had emerged, forcing new rulers in Kabul to ask the help of Pakistan in trying to open talks with the militants.

Despite holding several rounds of talks between the administration of the erstwhile Burhanudin Rabbani and the Taliban, the group finally ousted the Kabul regime and established its authoritarian reign in 1996.

According to Afghans, the same scenario is happening right now, with the incumbent Afghan government trying to open a dialogue with the Taliban.

Blaming Pakistan's Inter-service Intelligence (ISI) for backing Taliban militants, Afghan officials allege that Pakistan's lawless tribal areas along the border with Afghanistan have served as safe havens for Taliban militants.

In a counter-accusation, Pakistani officials have blamed Afghanistan for allegedly supporting anti-Pakistan militants.

Pakistani Interior Minister Rahman Malik, according to media reports, said recently that Mawlana Fazlullah who escaped Pakistan couple of years ago has taken shelter in Afghanistan's Nuristan province where he is reportedly organizing attacks inside Pakistan. The claim has been denied by Afghan officials.

Taliban militants have increased their attacks since launching its spring offensive early May this year. Recently, the Taliban beheaded 17 civilians and executed 10 Afghan soldiers in Helmand province besides killing two NATO soldiers in Laghman. The militants also carried out a suicide car bomb attack in their former stronghold Kandahar late Monday night killing four civilians and injuring 21 others, mostly non-combatants.