



GEOPOLITICAL OUTLOOK

VOLUME-2

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THE BLOOD-'KURD'LING TRUTH

There's a history behind all the political chaos erupting in the Middle East. It all started with the **fall of the Ottoman Empire in World War I**, where the Treaty of Lausanne demarcated a Modern Turkey and in this process, **crushed the dream of a home of an over 35 million strong community- The Kurds**. Consequently, this led to a nine decade old armed struggle in the region which goes on to this date.

The Kurds are the **largest ethnic group** in the world **without a country** of their own. Where do they live? In the heart of the Middle-East, dispersed by the respective borders of Turkey, Syria, Iran and Iraq. As of now, they have specific place to be neither do they have their own identity. What do they want? Since the fall of the Ottoman Empire in World War I, all that these intensely passionate and cultural people, with a rich history and background of their own, **want is an independent, autonomous nation – Kurdistan**.

The struggle for Kurdish independence came under international limelight after the referendum on 25th September, 2017, in which **93% of the three-fourth Iraqi Kurds voted** for an **Independent Kurdistan**. In Iraq, the **six million Kurds** make about **19% of the Iraqi population**. Although they enjoy the autonomy provided to them by the 2005 constitution, this partial freedom was the result of a series of rebellion against the Iraqi rulers. The worst befell upon them during the reign of the notorious **Saddam Hussein** who was behind **the genocide of over 5000 Kurds**.

In spite of gaining political democracy in the Northern region of Iraq, there were frequent **disputes** between the **Iraqi government** and **Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG)**, especially over Kirkuk, which is a vital part of the Kurdish statehood and its financial independence. Iraq has continuously tried to uproot Kurds from the oil-rich city of Kirkuk. On the other hand, seeking to **maximize Kurdish autonomy**, KRG started **exporting oil independently**.

After reclaiming the disputed area captured by ISIS in 2014, KRG floated the idea of a referendum for independence which materialized in 2017. Naturally, this was unacceptable to Baghdad. In fact, like fuel to fire, Baghdad, in a desperate attempt to maintain its power, took control of oil fields and imposed an air blockade that lasted for six months.

Currently, **Masrour Barzani**, the Prime Minister of Kurdistan Region of Iraq since June 2019, is fighting at global platforms in order to urge governments to take action against ISIS, which frequently targets Kurdish region and his government is focused on the **ongoing elections in Iraq to bring a government to power that supports the Kurdish independence**.

Iranian Kurdistan comprises the North West region of Iran. **Kurds**, who are by **majority Sunni Muslims**, have been a **long standing victim of the religious persecution by Iran's Shia Muslim majority**.

Though Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP), the most important organization for the Iranian Kurds, managed to establish the **Mahabad Republic** during WWII with the backing of Soviet Union, it collapsed shortly after the win of the Allied Force. Ever since, there has been struggle for independence but their **goal has not yet been achieved**. The Kurds in the region have been treated brutally and **denied their basic human and civil rights**. The Iranian regime, which has a well-oiled and well-funded propaganda machine, managed to convince the **world of the equality and commonality of interests** of all the people of Iran but the ground reality has invited strong **condemnation against the Iranian government**. The recent attack of Iran on US base in Iraq in retaliation for the *US* killing Qassem Soleimani may be a warning signal in disguise for Kurds to choose sides carefully.

In **Syria**, **Kurds** are the **largest ethnic minority**, constituting about 10% of the Syrian population. In 2011, peaceful demonstrations against President Bashar al-Assad escalated into an armed civil war; eventually, forcing the **US to step in and ally with the Kurdish militia** to tackle the expansion of ISIS, which took advantage of the war to capture vast territories. As they swept ISIS out of the territories, they took control of the land (including most of the border with Turkey) rather than handing it back to the Syrian regime.

Turkey considered Kurdish control of Syrian-Turkey border a threat to its national security, as it could lead to increased insurgency and a dissenter's sanctuary. This hostility put the US in a tight spot as it was Turkey's ally as well. As a result, the **US troop** became the **de facto peacekeeper, patrolling the Turkish border**. It even persuaded the Kurdish authorities to withdraw border forces in show of good intent. When **Trump came to power**, he persistently tried to **withdraw the American troops** from the middle-east. When he **successfully ordered his troop to retreat** on October 6, 2019, the Turkish troop and its **Syrian Arab proxies invaded the Kurdish region** three days later.

The **immediate beneficiary** of Trump's decision was Turkey and its Syrian Arab proxies, who captured large territories. **ISIS** might also **benefit** from the instability of its strongest enemies. However, the **biggest winner** is the **Syrian government**, which got access to the area under Kurdish authority for half a decade. Although officially, the **administrative power still lies in the hand of the Kurdish regional government**, there is fear that **Assad government will take control** in the near future. America's retreat also allowed Russia to expand its influence in the region, which became the main ally of the Kurds after being "**stabbed on the back by the US**".

Since the air strike on October 9, the **conflicts have only become worse** with the violence focused mainly in Idbil, which is the only territory controlled by Turkey in Syria. This **tit-for-tat strategy** has **left thousands dead** and Russia in a bind as it is desperately trying to bring the two states closer. This active confrontation seems to have no end in the near future.

In the coming future, there seems to be only **two possibilities**. Either the heart of **Middle East** will be a **transformed into a bloody abattoir** or the situation may **reward the ethnic population with an own identity- Kurdistan**.

THE ASIATIC CLASH OF TITANS

Amidst all the chaos, be it the US-China trade war, the global economic slowdown or the increasing financial scams, a **much graver concern** signaling large trouble for India as well as the world is the Japan – **South Korea dispute**.

This dispute has been lasting for ages right after the 1965 treaty, ratified between both the sides. The **Koreans were once subjected** to the **tyrannical rule of the Japanese**. They were treated inhumanely and were confined under dire conditions. The **Korean women** were treated as **'sex slaves'** or euphemistically called as **"Comfort Women"** during the World War II. All of this ruthless act simply boiled down to the 1965 treaty demanding the **Japanese** to apologize and **pay reparations for mistreatment** of the **Koreans**. Japan agreed to pay **\$500 million** in **grants** and **low interest long-term loans** which was roughly 1.5 times of South Korea's national budget at that time. Under the terms negotiated between the then military dictatorship in South Korea and Japan all issues were considered to be settled completely and finally. But this deal left two major problems. Firstly, **the treaty didn't succeed to settle all the problems** related to the colonial past. Secondly the **Korean government** did not take into **consideration the individual's rights** to ask for reparation. In 2015, Tokyo again, agreed to make a one-time contribution of one billion yen as part of the settlement over the Japanese's military use of "comfort women" during wartime. However last year the Supreme Court of **South Korea ordered the Japanese companies to pay reparations to the wartime laborers**.

This decision triggered the **Japanese** and the **South Korean** to **initiate a trade war**. Japan's trade ministry retaliated to the Supreme Court's decision by introducing a **new licensing requirement** on exports of three chemicals that are required by South Korea to produce **'high-tech'** products like **semi-conductors** and **display panels** on July. The South Koreans were infuriated by such a move. They did not find the **Japanese's justification** regarding such a move **claiming it was made to prevent sensitive materials** from being **shipped illegally** to **North Korea** for military goods, valid. They responded by **boycotting Japanese clothing, cars and beers**. This also affected the tourism sector. Small firms like **Japanese Inns** who majorly have South Korean customers are running **empty hotels**. Why let businesses fall victim to political play?

With no respite on the ongoing trade spat, Japan did not stop striking back. It **removed South Korea from its whitelist of countries** that received trading benefits, the ongoing tensions worsened with South Korea **complaining to the World Trade Organization** about **Japan's export controls** and it **too removed Japan** from its own **whitelist of trusted trade partners**. The worst move ever made by the **Koreans** was when it recently **refused to renew** the general security of military information agreement (**GSOMIA**). This breach of agreement would **no longer enable South Korea to receive any secrets or news** related to **North Korea's nuclear and missile program**.

Fraying ties between the two countries has enabled **both China and North Korea to capitalize the situation**. China has **grabbed this opportunity to spread its influence far and wide**. It acted as a **mediator at a trilateral meeting** of foreign ministers in late August encouraging Japan and South Korea to engage in continuous dialogue to resolve their differences. The **US officials expressed disappointment over South Korea's move** but the **Trump administration does not seem to care** much about the growing conflict. Seoul's willingness to listen to American advice may have been undermined by the way **President Trump has mocked President Moon and badgered South Korea for more money to pay for the presence of U.S. troops**. Things could worsen for the world. Already the impact of this disputed bilateral agreement has caused the **Japanese car sales to plummet to 57%**, number of **Korean visitors to Japan to fall by half** and South Korea's export to Japan to fall by 6.2%. Japan is South Korea's fifth largest export market and South Korea is Japan's third largest export market and for the entire economy.

Imagine, your favorite smartphone Samsung or your personalized UHD television of Samsung's prices shooting into the sky like a rocket. This is pretty much what is going to happen. Since **Japan has imposed restrictions on the export of important chemical substances**, some of Korea's corporate crown jewel like **"Samsung" or "S K Hynix"** will have **production problems**. Think about "Apple" product lovers. Their supply chain would also be disrupted since they rely on them for certain components. These **Korean companies supply over 60% of the memory chips globally and 90% of smartphone screens**. In reality the **medium and small enterprises** are the ones who **bear the brunt** of this conflict. Usually South Korea's chaebol – big conglomerates seem to overcome their difficulties at least on the surface level. This happens because of the existence of "crony capitalism". Governments usually tend to ensure that the blue-chip companies of their economies do not face much problem.

There seems to be increased friction in the relationships **between the Japanese and the South Koreans even in the field of sports**. **Japan's flag with a red ball, 16 red rays emitting from that was essentially a military flag. From 1870 until the end of the Second World War, it was imperial Japan's war flag**. This former military flag is quite different from the national flag of Japan but there is a long and deep story of bloodshed and colonialism hidden within this red orb. **South Korea is not fond of that flag for its signified resurrection of the honor for the country's failed war effort**, much like Americans who cling to their confederate flags and the country's imperial aggression. **South Korea asked the Japanese government to not use the flag in portraying the 2020 Tokyo Olympics**. The international Olympic committee has the right to make a decision to exclude the flag from being displayed in the Olympics since it is not the national flag.

The **only solution** to this dispute for the countries is to **negotiate talks**. If this clash does not come to an end, the generations to come would witness a **war of titans**. The only question is whether the **battle of instruments** would be of **trade or nuclear weapons?**

SRI LANKA'S SHIFTING STANCE

An article analysing how Sri Lanka's stance over the years on the Hambantota port have changed as a matter of diplomatic policy changes:

The **island of Sri Lanka** has been one of the **most politically active zones** in the international geopolitical arena. Hambantota (South Sri Lanka) which has always been a major part of the cause would be delved deeper in this article. Hambantota, the so-called **Dynamic city of Sri Lanka** was hit badly in the **2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami**. Also, there was a civil war going on which caused a huge loss. All the resources were damaged due to which it was unable to cover up the losses. In 2007, **China** which always had **malicious intentions for its territorial expansion**, saw this as an opportunity for its ambitious BRI (Belt Road Initiative) Programme and **signed an agreement** with the **Sri Lankan government** to **make Hambantota** similar to **Guangzhou** (a city in China) by providing assistance.

The war was over by 2009 and now Sri Lanka got Mahendra Rajapaksa as its president. He wanted overall development mainly of Hambantota which was his hometown. He announced his plans of a port in Hambantota to various countries in order to get a loan. India couldn't help citing a poor economic viability and that even the IMF had denied. However, **China offered a direct loan of \$307 million via its EXIM bank** with a **condition** that **infrastructures** would be **constructed by Chinese company**.

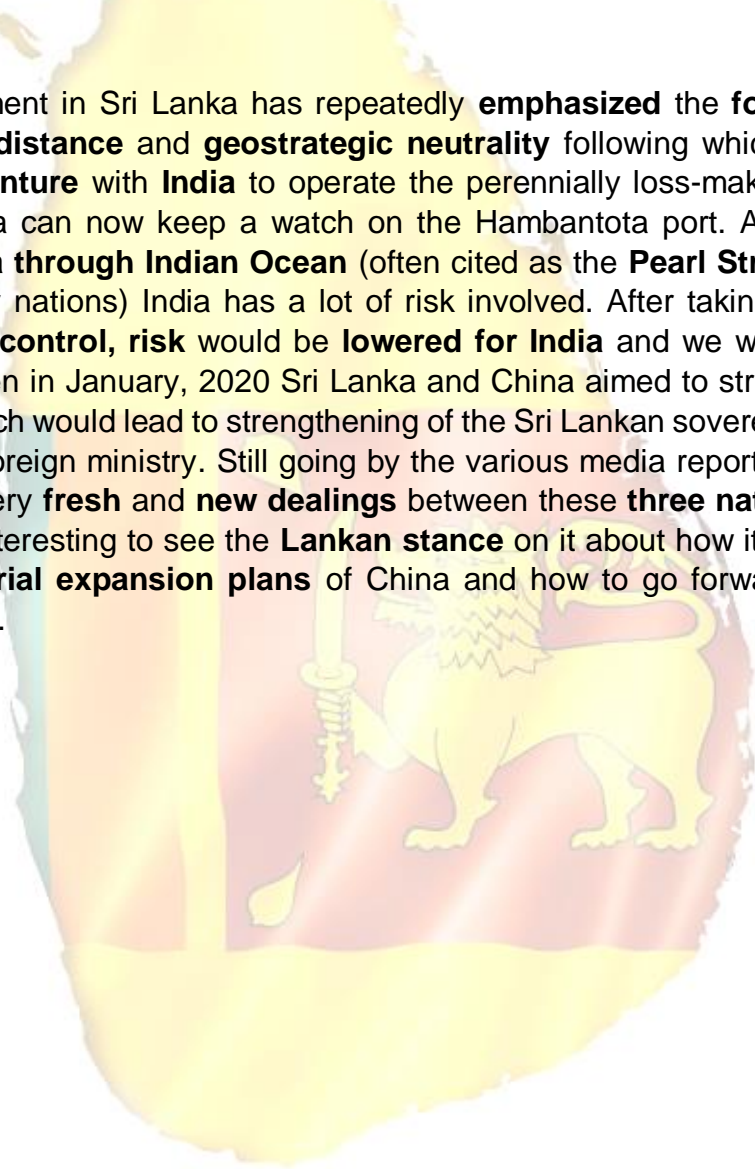
President Rajapaksa asked for more loans. The **Chinese debt increased from millions to billions** in 2009-2015. The total **debt of Sri Lanka** crossed **13 billion dollars** which then paved its way to fall into the "**Debt Trap Diplomacy**" of **China** as a result of direct investment projects financed by it. President Rajapaksa needed more money for the elections. China provided assistance to Rajapaksa as he was in good terms. Still Rajapaksa lost the elections.

Maithripala Sirisena was the new president. He wanted to clear all the debts with China. Meanwhile, the port project weighed heavy on the Sri Lankan finances. In the southern province, many projects had been carried out before 2015 like the **Mattala Rajapaksa Airport** but they were a complete failure. The **projects failed** as the **Hambantota has a poor connectivity** with the upper part of Sri Lanka and the Colombo port was used for all ongoing business and trades. There was no need of these projects. There were **no profits from the port projects** and even China knew it well which was a part of the **China's big dirty game** and everything was going

according to its plans. So, the Lankan government had to **lease the Hambantota port to China for 99 years against 1.1 billion dollars.**

The Hambantota port was totally (85%) under the Chinese control. Now, there was a **risk that China might make a naval base** there. The dominant international presence of USA was also challenged seeing which **USA who had always criticized Sri Lanka** at the UN by **citing human rights violation in curbing LTTE protests** by the Lankan government which was now forced to change its stance to **pro-Lanka** as was **stated in the Pentagon report**. Due to its **naval unit in Hambantota**, Srilankan government **renegotiated** the terms with China to **reduce the Chinese stake to 70 % in the port.**

The new government in Sri Lanka has repeatedly **emphasized the foreign policy principle of equidistance and geostrategic neutrality** following which **Sri Lanka** formed a **joint venture** with **India** to operate the perennially loss-making airport in Hambantota. India can now keep a watch on the Hambantota port. As **China** has **surrounded India through Indian Ocean** (often cited as the **Pearl String strategy** of China by many nations) India has a lot of risk involved. After taking **Rajapaksa Airport** under its **control, risk would be lowered for India** and we would be on a better stance. Even in January, 2020 Sri Lanka and China aimed to strengthen their economic ties which would lead to strengthening of the Sri Lankan sovereignty as said by the Chinese Foreign ministry. Still going by the various media reports, we can be assure of some very **fresh and new dealings** between these **three nations in 2020** and it would be interesting to see the **Lankan stance** on it about how it **handles the malicious territorial expansion plans** of China and how to go forward with their **closest ally India.**



EUROPEAN MIGRANT CRISIS

Aylan Kurdi, a three-year old Syrian Refugee drowned in the Mediterranean Sea while trying to reach Europe, leaving behind one of the saddest photographic representations of the European Migrant Crisis. The **European migrant crisis** is a period beginning in 2015 characterized by an **increasing flow of migrants from civil regions** in the middle-east to the European Union in **search of jobs, living and a better future** for their children. In this period, the **asylum seekers** in the EU **exceeded one million per year** for the first time after World War II. These numerous refugees pose **raising challenges** to the receiving countries leading to **long term social, economic and fiscal effects** on these economies.

Economic Effects

The economic cost of these refugees is one of the debatable issues across the European continent today. While some feel that there might be **adverse effects** on the destination **country labour markets in terms of employment, wages and productivity**, others state that **migration reduces average wages and increases unemployment** of the workforce in the **short run**, while it is neutral in the long run. "Refugees do cost a lot as they take out more than they bring in", "they take our jobs away", "they drag down wages" are some of the comments in the European Union expressing these positions.

According to the research, the number of **first-time asylum** applications in the **EU** has historically been below **half a billion until 2013**, with around 300,000 per year on average between 2009 and 2016. It was in 2016 that the total number of asylum applications in EU significantly exceeded 1 million. As regards destination countries, the **largest increases** in the number of first-time asylum applicants, expressed as a **share of the total population**, were **recorded in Finland** (around ten times higher in 2015 compared 2014), **Hungary** (around five times higher) and **Austria** (more than three times higher). In absolute numbers, the inflow of first-time asylum applicants in Germany increased from 203000 in 2014 to 476000 in 2015 and 745000 in 2016. In contrast, most EU Member States in the Central and Eastern Europe, e.g. the Czech Republic, Croatia, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovenia and Romania, have registered rather few asylum applicants both in 2014 and 2015.

Greece, Italy and Spain all are facing **high rates of unemployment**, particularly **among young people**, have experienced cuts to the welfare state and economic conditions have been deteriorating for many segments of their populations. As the consequences are felt in the strongest and stable economies of the European continent, we can easily imagine that economic concerns related to the arrival of refugees are even more intense in states whose economies are in worse conditions and still recovering from the enduring crisis started in 2008.

Humanitarian Conditions

The Migrant crisis showcases **the brutal reality of how civil wars and failed economies** lead to a humanitarian crisis where survival of the population becomes uncertain. The sheer magnitude of the refugees indicates the **urgency of their rehabilitation**. The large number of refugees face a life of despair without **access to basic necessities**. Moreover, there has been an abject failure of the media worldwide in explaining and bringing to the world's notice the massive humanitarian setbacks faced by the refugees day in and day out.

From **lack of living structures to food requirement**, the asylum seekers face economic and social injustice in everyday life as they do **not have access** to any kind of **legal protection of their rights**. The United Nations Human Rights Council (**UNHCR**) has been actively involved in looking after the human rights concerns of these refugees but even their **actions have not been concrete** enough to **solve the majority problems** of the refugees.

From **running from their homelands** to trying to **get permission to enter and live in better countries**, the asylum seekers have always faced a system where **injustice against the foreigners is deep-rooted** in the minds of the people. **Xenophobia** has become a **real problem** for the refugees as they **adjust** to the **new environment** and **settle in new countries**. Getting employment is a real problem as employers always prefer to **hire the domestic applicants** due to **easier application processing** as no permission screening is required.

Many of the European countries like **Germany, United Kingdom and France** showcase themselves to be the **center of refugee rehabilitation** but the **actual situation shows otherwise**. The countries in question have taken in **huge numbers** of asylum seekers which has led to them **crossing their saturation point**. Now, these countries are struggling with responsibly managing the refugees and providing them another chance to have control of their lives. In order to **avoid the blatant eviction of refugees**, like what happened at the Calais Jungle at the France-UK border, there is a need to **develop a mechanism of handling refugees** on a global scale. Such mechanism would lead to **reduction in the pressure** created on **certain big countries** which end up **accepting more refugees** than they can handle, which is ultimately **detrimental for both the parties**. Many International bodies have tried to keep the Migrant Crisis in check, but the vital question still stands – **“How should an international crisis be handled and what should be the accepted tradeoff between economics and humanity?”**

AFGHAN-US TRUCE TALKS

Afghanistan, a country in the Southeast Asia which has ever since 1970s been a **victim of the turmoil of war**, was elevated as a significant U.S. foreign policy concern in 2001, when the **United States**, in retaliation to the terrorist attacks of September 11 2001, **led a military campaign against Al Qaeda** and the **Taliban government**, that harbored and supported it. In **the intervening 18 years**, **the United States suffered** around **2,400 military fatalities** in Afghanistan (including 17 in combat in 2019 to date) and Congress has appropriated approximately **\$133 billion for reconstruction** there. Currently, an **elected Afghan government** has **replaced the Taliban**, and most measures of human development have improved, although future prospects of those measures remain mixed. The **fundamental objective** of **U.S. efforts** in Afghanistan is **“preventing any further attacks on the United States by terrorists enjoying safe haven or support in Afghanistan.”**, very conveniently deciding the future prospects and the fate of the war driven country in their hands.

Until September 2019, U.S. military's engagement in Afghanistan appeared closer to an end than perhaps ever before, as **U.S. officials negotiated** and **confronted directly** with **Taliban interlocutors** on the issues of **counterterrorism** and the **presence of some 14,000 U.S. troops**. However, on September 7, 2019, President Trump announced that those talks, led by U.S. envoy Zalmay Khalilzad, had been called off. Such a move made by the US was instigated because the Taliban did not adhere to their side of promise in the deal. They did commit crimes which included the killing of an US military soldier. News simply stated **“Trump Declares Afghan Peace Talks with Taliban Dead.”** As viewed from the perspectives of **Indians**, this rescission is of some **benefit**. Our sworn enemy **Pakistan** that has already **not been receiving sufficient funds** as **promised** earlier by the **US** for its **development** would have surprisingly gained more aids from the US for helping it come with **conversations** with the **Afghanistan government** and also placing it in the roundtable rendezvous. There would be nothing better than Pakistan the home for terrorist being supported by US. But fortunately talks were of no help despite the Taliban's stated willingness to reengage and some reports of informal U.S.-Taliban meetings, the pause on official U.S.-Taliban talks evidently remains and it is unclear under what circumstances the United States might announce their resumption. Afghan government representatives were not directly involved in those talks, leading some to worry that the United States would prioritize a military withdrawal over a complex political settlement that preserves some of the social, political, and humanitarian gains made since 2001. Observers speculate about what kind of political arrangement, if any, could satisfy both Kabul and the Taliban to the extent that the latter fully abandons armed struggle.

President **Trump** has expressed his **intention to withdraw U.S. forces** from **Afghanistan**. The U.S. commander in Afghanistan stated in October 2019 that the **U.S.** has gradually been **reducing the number of U.S. troops** in the country in 2019 and the **Pentagon** has reportedly **drawn up contingency plans** to execute a **withdrawal of all U.S. forces** in the event President Trump makes such an order. Many observers assess that a **full-scale U.S. withdrawal** would lead to the **collapse of the Afghan government** and perhaps even the **reestablishment of Taliban** control. It is not just that but several unexpected and unfavorable events might be unfolded. Afghanistan might just slide back into a **civil war** or it may fall back under the **heel of Taliban repression**. The **investments of blood** and treasure made by the US in Afghan would simply go in vain. Lots of research analyst,

Bureaucrats have suggested that **US** should **not** make an **immediate decision** to quit.

Doing so would leave a whole country on the verge of collapsing. Even If US wishes to withdraw it must be a **gradual process**, ensuring such that before they leave **good ties** are formed between the **Afghanistan government** and The **Taliban**. Trump's emphasis on immediate withdrawal seems to have a greater underlying importance than the reasons simply stated on the surface level. Not just **uniting American families** and **lifting soldiers** from the state of a police patroller to a **respected intelligence** and **strategic officer** but also expressing powers of **political strength**. 2020 for sure signifies to be an important year for Mr. Trump. By many measures, the Taliban are in a stronger military position now than at any point since 2001, though at least some once-public metrics related to the conduct of the war have been classified or are no longer produced (including district-level territorial and population control assessments). Underlying the negotiations is the **unsettled state of Afghan politics**, which is a **major complicating factor**: while preliminary results from the all-important **presidential election**, which took place on September 28, 2019, are not expected until mid- November, **low turnout, allegations of fraud, and multiple candidates' claims of victory** could presage contention and **instability**.

The United States would pull **5,400 troops from Afghanistan** within **135 days of signing an agreement with the Taliban**, the American special envoy told Afghan leaders on Monday. That pullout would be the start of what is expected to be the gradual withdrawal of all **14,000 United States troops** that could end **America's longest running war**.

Mr. Khalilzad has not shared those details, but Western officials have previously suggested the **timeline for the full withdrawal** of American troops would probably be **16 months**, if the Taliban meet **certain conditions**.

The **deal** with the Taliban is intended to immediately **reduce violence** in several provinces where the American troops would start to leave, though the exact nature of that reduction — whether it would essentially be an expanded **cease-fire** — was not clear. Mr. Khalilzad is also said to have told Afghan leaders that, as part of the agreement, the United States would reserve the right to assist Afghan forces should they be attacked by the Taliban.

A deal with the Taliban, if announced, could be the beginning of an **end** to the nearly **two decades of American military presence in Afghanistan**, which began with the attacks in the United States on Sept. 11, 2001. The war has **cost the lives** of **tens of thousands of Afghans** and **more than 3,500 American and coalition soldiers**. But, getting into **peace talks** with the Taliban seems to be more like **convincing arsonists** to put out the fire.

A deal between the Taliban and the United States is only a first step of what will remain a **complicated peace process**, opening the **path for the insurgents** to **negotiate the political future of the country with other Afghans**.

What we can hope is for to Afghanistan to **rise** from the **debris of militants, lack of transparency**, consistent and **incessant interference** of **outside forces** and rebuild itself. As it is rightly said- **Afghanistan** has a **lot of children** but **very little childhood**. Let's see whether it will be able to **gain its lost identity**.