

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Most Kind



July 02, 2015

The Evolving Islamic State in Afghanistan

The creeping emergence of the Islamic State group is increasingly becoming a nightmarish insurgency development in Afghanistan. An American commander has confirmed that there are links between Afghan Islamic State fighters and the main militant group in Iraq. However, according to the US military the Islamic State in Afghanistan is not as serious as the militants in the Middle East. The comments are coming while earlier American military officials had said that despite operational activities of the Islamic State group in Afghanistan, there are no direct connections between the Afghan Islamic State and the main headquarters of the group in Iraq and Syria. In the meantime, speaking to a gathering of women activists, politicians and diplomats in Kabul on Tuesday June 30, 2015, President Ashraf Ghani said that extremists from over ten countries are fighting as part of the insurgency in the country.

The comments made by the US commander over links between Afghan and Middle Eastern factions of the Islamic State are coming as an alarm for Afghanistan. However, the extent of the relations between the Afghan militants and the main group in the Middle East remains unclear. So far, the common belief in Afghanistan has been that the militants announcing their loyalty to the Islamic State group are disgruntled factions of the Taliban who are not directly commanded by the Islamic State in Iraq/Syria. If the case is true, the nature of relations between the self-declared Islamic State group in Afghanistan and the militants in Syria and Iraq would be a milestone for the evolution of the Taliban-IS insurgency in Afghanistan.

Despite unfounded optimism in the Afghan government, there is a high chance of direct dependency of the IS militants in Afghanistan with the main group in the Middle East. In recent months, the Islamic State has been actively expanding their activities and recruiting fighters particularly disgruntled members of the Taliban. The Afghan Islamic State group has made considerable progress in promoting their program in Afghanistan and increasing their power against the rival Taliban. The Taliban and the Islamic State has clashed in many districts of the eastern Nangarhar province as well as in Southern Farah province. Initially many believed the Islamic State would never be able to find a foothold in Afghanistan. However, now the Islamic State not only has found a foothold in the country but also powerfully confronted the Taliban and the government of Afghanistan. Now the newly emerging group has an undeniable presence in Afghanistan.

Now it appears the nature of relations between the Afghan Islamic State militants and the group's main headquarters in Iraq is changing. If the Afghan faction of the Islamic State group manages to work under leadership of the Syrian Islamic State, the situation would change for worse. Seemingly the Afghan Islamic State's control by the Syrian/Iraqi Islamic State would be inevitable. The Islamic State would ultimately emerge as a major threat to security and stability of Afghanistan in the coming decade. However, it is premature to predict the Islamic State's power and influence in the country against its rival group, the Taliban. Most probably Taliban or part of the group will remain as the main insurgency in the country. But the Islamic State would also come to a prominence in the insurgency at national level.

On other hand, the threat of the Islamic State would be directly related to the progress of the peace talks with the Taliban. If the Afghan government manages to cut any kind of a peace deal with the Taliban's main group, there would be a high chance of a split between the Taliban. The hardline elements of the Taliban have always opposed peace negotiations with the Afghan government. In case of cutting a peace deal with the Taliban, the hardline elements will probably be pushed to the Islamic State group's ranks. If any split happens among the Taliban, the group would no longer be able to prevent its members from joining the Islamic State or countering the influence of the group.

The deepening rifts between the Taliban and the Islamic State group in Afghanistan also suggest increasing control of the Afghan IS fighters by the main Iraqi Islamic State. Recently, the Islamic State has warned Taliban members over fighting against the emerging group threatening to kill themselves and burn their homes. As President Ghani said, hundreds of foreign militants are fighting in Afghanistan. Given the Islamic State ferocity, foreign militants in Afghanistan may also incline to join the Islamic State group. According to Interior Minister Noorul Haq Ulomi, hundreds of foreign fighters from Pakistan, Central Asian republics, the Russia's Chechnya, and the Turkic Muslim minority in western China have established bases in Afghanistan after being pushed out of Pakistan. In practice, these foreign militants have their jihad approaches common with the Islamic State group while they have fundamental differences with the Taliban.

The Afghan government cannot afford underestimating the emerging Islamic State group in Afghanistan. Nor it can afford the Iraqi Islamic State's increasing control and influence over the Afghan militants splintered from the Taliban. In addition to equipping and training Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF), the government needs to forge a regional approach for shred combat against the militant groups particularly the Islamic State. As the President suggested "there should be enhanced regional cooperation to address regional challenges", the Afghan government needs to redouble its efforts to work with the regional powers for building a shared regional approach in fighting the Islamic State and other militant groups.

Electoral Reforms Crucial to Credible Future Setup

By Asmatyari

The Electoral Reform is considered a crucial need of Afghans subsequent electoral distaste emerged after the former presidential election. Nonetheless, the different position owned by the leaders of National Unity Government (NUG) is said to be the main reason for the delay. Parliamentary elections are a very difficult challenge –given there are not set electoral rules –complicates the state of affairs. Without due electoral reform the conduct of parliamentary elections will be a difficult and challenging task.

Afghanistan requires a legitimate and functioning government committed to implementing a comprehensive program of reform to empower the Afghan constitution, thereby making the values of the Constitution a daily reality for the people of Afghanistan. Stability of the country is strengthened by a genuine political partnership between the President and the CEO, under the authority of the President. Electoral reforms are also a major part of the agreement between then presidential candidates Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah after last year's disputed presidential election. It was the September 2014 agreement, the twin head of state and government agreed electoral reforms to ensure that future elections are credible. Without making needed reforms the unity government would exercise extra-constitutional authority until electoral reforms are made before conducting parliamentary and district council polls.

Many local and international election advocates have repeatedly raised their concerns saying the government is less interested in reforms –a conflicting approach to reform in this sector is the underlying evidence to the aforesaid issue. It is not the members of civil society who raises concern over delay of reforms –the members of Wolesi Jirga too expressed concerns over the delay in electoral reforms, urging the two leaders to set aside their differences in the larger interest of the country. How would the country decide and head towards the future undertakings provided the essential reforms are not made; the role and responsibilities of descended to corresponding institutions and individuals are not ascertained. It is undeniably comprehensible –the slot of chief executive is yet to be legitimized following the required amendments in the constitution. The legitimacy will only crystallize provided the new parliament is installed –regrettably it's delayed due to discordance.

Earlier, the German special representatives for Afghanistan and Pakistan have stressed the need of electoral reforms without further delay. Identically, the Afghanistan Contact Group (ACG), Daniel Feldman, the US special representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, stressed it was necessary that the elections were acceptable to everybody in Afghanistan. In that pursuit the installment of electoral reforms commission stand out to be prior most duty of government. In the light of loud criticism over 2013 election result the NUG evolved following a broad based consensus –the fate of lifelong stability of NUG is decided by the mutually agreeable electoral reforms. It should be ascertained that 2019 presidential elections would meet all the critical requirements on credibility and liability provided the NUG implements its commitments for bringing electoral reforms. Responding at the mounting pressure of civil society and in-

ternational reform advocate institutions', earlier the government formed electoral reform special commission that would assume the due course of action making the upcoming parliamentary and local council election credible and the business of government well defined and implementable. The commission was assigned to bring about fundamental changes to the electoral system and build trust between the people and government. Doing so, President Ashraf Ghani issued a decree announced the 15-member special commission choosing female lawmaker Shukria Barakzai is the head of the commission and Sediqullah Tawhidi the deputy head. Nonetheless, the CEO's office has opposed Ghani's appointment of Shukria Barakzai as the head. As a result, the commission has not formerly started working. This is patent move underscoring the underlying differences between president and the CEO –seems to be predominantly the clash of interest than the crucial changes. But election monitoring groups warned that any further delay in finalizing the commission would result in losing opportunities and would also result in losing the public's trust in the elections.

Conversely, a deliberate controversy is imminent to surface subsequent to formation of Head of electoral reform commission although Independent Election Commission (IEC) owns a head –but his circle of influence is indeterminate. In the presence of one commission what would be the status of other commission is hitherto undecided. What would be the area of jurisdiction of these commissions is shun in ambiguity? Commissioners of the Independent Election Commission (IEC) are fighting off calls for them to be replaced while insisting that, at this point, they are the only ones who should be making changes to improve future elections. This controversy is an addition to the one existing between political elites.

It is witnessed when everyone is talking about electoral reform; the internal strife really transform into a struggle for control of the electoral bodies and, ultimately, the design to turn the outcome of upcoming elections as par expectation. This is not the only conflict emerging on finalization of head of reform commission, history recorded clash of interest on account distribution of important ministries between the variant stakeholders. The ministry of defense and important department till date await a legitimate office bearer that could facilitate improving the notorious condition of law and order in the country. Beleaguered amongst controversy the issues of national interest pushed to background –there are certain diplomatic issues are too lingering their fates.

In order to ensure the stability of National Unity Government (NUG) and easing power-sharing agreement calls for the convening of a Loya Jirga within two years to consider amending the Constitution to create the position of an executive prime minister. Loya Jirga is a special type of Jirga that is mainly organized for choosing a new head of state in case of adopting a new constitution. Subsequent, to disputed election result of previous election the office of Chief Executive was created whose constitutional status is yet to be affixed by Loya Jirga and the two houses of parliament. Likewise the impartiality of future elections depends upon the degree of requisite reforms are made. The dream of vibrant, developed and prosperous Afghanistan can only come true when the required reforms are installed in constitutions and duly implemented.

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Construction and Maintenance of Roads in Afghanistan

By Dilawar Sherzai

There are various types of developments that are believed to be essential for the people of a country in the modern world. As a result of these developments the people are able to make their lives comfortable. And within a country, the government bears the responsibility to make these developments attainable. In the modern and developed countries, where the governments are very capable and agile, the developments are very frequent and take place as per the needs of the people, whereas in the underdeveloped and developing countries such developments are scanty.

One of the developments that are believed to be very much important for modern way of living is the construction and maintenance of roads. Through roads it is possible to link different parts of the country and, at the same time, different parts of a village or city. This connection makes every part of the country easily accessible and resultantly supports the people in making their lives easier. Without proper networks of roads it is impossible to think of efficient and effective transportation. The networks of roads basically provide an infrastructure for different other types of developments that are necessary for a country.

Business is one of the factors that are highly dependent on well-maintained roads. The production companies have to transfer their products to different parts of the country and city, which is impossible without roads. The timely transfer of their products does not only bring them money but also assists the customers in fulfilling their needs on time. It is not always possible for all the businesses to transfer their products from one place to another through airplane, therefore the roads provide them an easier and cheaper means of transportation. Moreover, the businessmen and other official personnel have to travel to different countries and even different parts of the country usually; therefore, they would need the support of an effective transportation system equipped with healthy roads.

The roads are also very much useful in providing the people and making them avail the humanitarian services as well. It is very difficult to provide different types of services to the people who live in the remote areas of the country. They, because of no access to development works, are always far away from medical services, proper education, clean drinking water, electricity and even proper food to eat. As there are no roads that lead to them, they always suffer from dearth of basic requirements and government is not able to reach them and even know about them.

The roads are also very much necessary for bringing about beauty to a place and support people to have safe recreational journeys. It is really weird and unpleasant to find the roads that are broken and dusty. Moreover, the ugliness further increases in such roads when there is rain or overflow of drain water. Such conditions can cause different types of diseases as the drain water may remain on the roads for days and invite mosquitoes and other insects. In addition, the drain water, containing dif-

ferent types of bacteria, dries on the road and afterwards is blown in the air by passing vehicles and wind and becomes the stuff the people breath, which can cause different types of lungs diseases.

Afghanistan is one of the countries that are suffering from the lack of proper network of roads. There are many areas in the country that are not accessible through proper roads and people remain away from attention and proper services. Leave the other parts of the country aside, the condition of roads in the capital Kabul are pathetic as well. Anyone, who might have experienced travelling through different parts of the capital city, can witness the agony they face in such an experience. There are only few roads that are well-maintained while the rest are nothing but ancient remains that support dust more than vehicles and people. Afghanistan does not have latest technology that can support in maintaining their roads. Attention and consideration in this regard is of great importance. Afghan government, donor agencies and developed countries that are willing to support Afghanistan can divert attention to this important issue. Currently, Japan has taken an important step in this regard. As, it is widely known and appreciated for its advancement in technology, it has decided to support Afghanistan by handing over 106 different machines to the Afghanistan Ministry of Public Works for maintenance of roads in 25 different locations in 12 provinces.

A statement from the Japan Embassy has said that Tokyo has decided to provide additional machineries for seven locations in five provinces, including Saripul, Herat, Kapisa, Takhar and Samangan in order to enhance road maintenance capacity, especially against snowfall, avalanche, flood and other natural disasters. It is also worthy to note that the "Project for Improvement of Road Maintenance Capacity in Afghanistan" is executed with the partnership of Japanese International Cooperation System (JICS) with the total budget of \$32 million USD. As a result of the implementation, road maintenance capacity of the provinces, such as Kabul, Maidan Wardak, Ghazni, Badakhshan, Badghis, Baghlan, Bamian, Daikundi, Ghor, Logar, Paktia and Parwan would be significantly improved.

Speaking on the occasion of handing over ceremony on Wednesday, July 01, Hiroshi Takahashi, ambassador of Japan to Afghanistan, said, "The improvement of road maintenance by these machineries will stabilize the networking of transportation and movements of the people and promote the trade and products from rural areas to the main cities. Afghans would also have better access to the basic social services like hospitals, schools and markets and the economy, which would change social life of people for the much better."

Such supports are very much crucial for Afghanistan and can assist them in developing strong infrastructure. Afghanistan is in crying need of latest technology in almost all fields of life and in case of maintenance of roads the requirement becomes even more essential as the situation is not satisfactory in this regard.

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