

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



May 15, 2019

## In the eve of New Security Crisis on the Most Harmless People of Afghanistan

In last few weeks, Taliban has meaningfully attacked on central area of Afghanistan with imposing dozens of deaths and injuries on civilians. Two weeks ago several killed and injured in the Baba village of Jaghori. According to the latest local reports, Taliban has warned the people of Baba, Hecha and Pathu and started newly movements in the vicinities of these areas. Four days ago, they attacked on district of Nawmish located in the border area between Daikundi and Helmand and then eleven civilians and passengers were killed as a result of their cultivated land mines. Accordingly, a relatively larger attack carried out in Patu district of Daikundi province that left five deaths and four others wounded. The latest but the most important attack that the Taliban has organized with the help of so-called Kuchi (nomads) was launched in areas of Behsood district of Maidan Wardak province. Unfortunately, about ten people have been killed and several injured in the attack.

In November 2018, Taliban launched massive attacks on these areas, especially Jaghori, Malistan and Uruzgan; they wanted to expose their power and open their way through the central area to the northern regions of the country but with resistance of people and government forces, Taliban could not reach their goals. However, people suffered a lot of human and none human losses as a result of Taliban aggression on harmless people. However, if the government could move quicker, the Taliban attack would be neutralized without heavy casualties and displacement of residents of these districts. As a result, nearly 5000 families were displaced, hundreds of houses were burnt or destroyed, public services such as schools, universities, local businesses all were stopped for months in the areas.

After they were defeated by government and people resistant groups, they started kidnapping, looting and harassing the passengers and resident of Jaghori and Malistan along the Jaghori and Chazni route. According to travelers from Dashte Qarabagh, Taliban has forced them to pay ransom and reportedly the issue has intensified in few last weeks. However, the blockade of the road has always been used as leverage and tactics of the Taliban over the residents of these areas. Repeatedly, Taliban has applied economic sanctions and used roads and killing passengers as means of pressurizing government and people. Reportedly, over the past 18 years, about 1,000 passengers have been killed by the Taliban in Dasht Qarabagh. Generally, they have used every means to put pressure on the government and people while the routes of the Hazara district of Ghazni province which were crossing from territory of foreign Taliban were more insecure.

Now with start of warm season and Taliban's new war strategies, these areas once again are witnessing meaningful targets and bloody attacks. The most controversial and strategic spot in this area is Maidan Wardak province where over the past years has been the scene of conflict over the land and pasture between the residents and Kuchi armed forces. Behsood district is important because the Taliban are organizing attacks in these areas in cooperation with Kuchis, and on the other hand, foreign intelligent networks are also blamed for fuelling the conflicts in this specific area. Moreover, this issue can provoke ethnic conflicts in the country if the government does not immediately proceed to solve the long continued problems.

Given the changes that are taking place in the entire region, and given the interests of neighboring countries in terms of ethnic and religious tensions in Afghanistan, any attempt to flare up war in the central regions of Afghanistan is considered as an ethnic and religious war in the country. Those who have been trying to provoke the historic and religious conflicts through social media networks and other tools, are becoming more active to spread ethnic hatreds and divisions. Because of these sensitivities, Taliban has deliberately chosen this area so as to impose heavy expenses on people and government of Afghanistan.

In recent years, with mobilizing these sensitivities Taliban has succeeded to intensely misuse this weakness. Regarding conflicts between Kuchi and residents that took place during Karzai government, the political and economic mafia collected a lot of money under this name but the cost were paid by people. Given the pledges of the president Ghani during the last presidential elections complains for finding a permanent solution to solve this problem, slightly it decreased the tensions. But now it seems that bigger hands are behind the scene, and a larger scenario is being developed in the area. In the current conflict, the regional intelligence networks and even international terrorist groups are seemingly more involved than individuals. Those who guide the Taliban how to organize these attacks are fully aware of all these sensitivities that can lead to a terribly dreadful war in the country.

Given the mentioned points, the government must pay more attention to these areas and manage the situation well before it get out of the control. Unfortunately, in the Behsood attacks the security forces are not present in the area yet, and the war is led by the Behsood Resistance Front which increases the sensitivities. It seems that the only way to contain these conflicts and misuses is deployment of an army unit and the expansion of the people uprisings within the framework of the country's security institutions. Otherwise, in the near future, we may see a security crisis in these areas, which is very different from the crisis in the whole country. Then it will be too late to manage the crisis.

## Iran-US Tensions Highly Critical

By: Hujjatullah Zia

Tensions between the United States and Iran has escalated as Washington dispatched an aircraft carrier strike group and four nuclear capable bombers to the Middle East.

Besides its last year's withdrawal from the Iran nuclear deal and maintaining sanctions on Iran, the Trump administration added Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps to its list of foreign terrorist organization. Recently, Washington has sent an aircraft carrier, which is said to have at least 40 to 50 planes on it and 6,000 forces gathered within it, to the Middle East that has hit rock bottom between Tehran and Washington.

A miscalculation by military forces in the Gulf was a "very real risk right now" Robert Gates, former US defense secretary, is cited as saying. He added that a conflict between Tehran and Washington would have "tremendous unforeseen consequences in the Middle East" that would be "very, very dangerous".

Exchanges of harsh rhetoric between US and Iranian officials loom large. US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said the military deployments came in response to intelligence about potential Iranian attacks and aimed both to deter them and to be able to respond if necessary. On the other hand, Iran's head of the Revolutionary Guard's air force Amir Ali Hajizadeh said that "if [the Americans] make a move, we will hit them in the head".

Sen. Angus King, a Maine independent who recently visited US troops in Iraq, said in his interview with Foreign Policy Newspaper that John Bolton's fiery rhetoric - as he described the move to send a "clear and unmistakable" message to Tehran - risked provoking Iran into an attack. He was concerned about increasing tensions in the aftermath of Trump administration's aforementioned movements against Iran and described Washington's withdrawal from Iran's nuclear deal "a huge mistake of policy". Calling the situation "very dangerous", King said, "We may be moving toward a military confrontation that would be very harmful". He suggested having "some lines of communication" to avoid confrontation. Quoting Bolton's 2017 statements that "the only solution is regime change" and "in 2019 we are going to be celebrating in the streets of Tehran", King described his style as "confrontation".

It is believed that if Washington's provocative move sparks off a conflagration between the US and Iran, the stability of the whole region will be at stake. In other words, Israel - which is likely to be the first target of Iran - Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Gaza, etc. will be dragged into the conflict. Heavy human casualties and massive destruction and exodus will ensue. The neigh-

boring countries will not be immune to the consequences, either.

Conflict between Iran and the US will have no winner at all. It should be noted that there are a large number of religious ideologists, including men and women, across Iran who will fight to the last drop of their blood. In other words, apart from its military forces, Iran has at least 20 million selfless individuals, who are ready for "altruistic suicide", to borrow the words of French sociologist Emile Durkheim. Since Iran is a religious community and more than 99 percent of them believe that Mujtahids' fatwa, a religious decree by Muftis, are an obligation in Islam, almost each individual will participate in the fight against the US forces if Iranian clerics and Mujtahids issue fatwa for jihad. There is no doubt that all Iranian Mujtahids and Muftis will issue such a fatwa.

Most probably, a number of Muslim migrants as well as Iraqi Shiites will also participate in the fight against the US.

It will be a big miscalculation if US officials believe that Iranians are seeking "regime change" similar to those in Arabic countries. Counting on very few individuals, who hurl vitriolic attack against Iran mainly from outside, will be a terrible mistake. Iranians are still chanting "death to America" in their demonstrations and Friday prayers.

Trump's anti-Iran movement seems unnecessary and very fast. In a commentary titled "The Global War on Terrorism Has Failed. Here's How to Win.", Brahma Chellaney, professor of strategic studies at the Center for Policy Research in New Delhi, said, "The United States lists Iran, Sudan, Syria, and North Korea as state sponsors of terrorism but not Saudi Arabia, despite Trump calling the country 'the world's biggest funder of terrorism'". Accepting Iran as "a destabilizing regional force", the author denied Trump's claim that Iran was "the world's leading state sponsor of terrorism" as he argued that Sri Lanka bombings, the September 11 attacks, the 2008 Mumbai siege, and other largest acts of international terrorism "were carried out by brutal Sunni organizations with connections to Saudi-sponsored Wahhabism but none to Iran" and described "Wahhabism" an ideological source to all major terrorist organizations. With this in mind, Trump administration should not adopt a selective approach towards countries.

Both Iran and the US are recommended to respect and support regional and global stability and resolve their issues through negotiation rather than confrontation.

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## The Future of Peace in Afghanistan is Rooted in Lessons from the Past

By: EFSAS

Introduction

Since the late 1970s, Afghanistan has suffered a series of devastating wars that have taken their toll on the country. Several forms of government have been attempted in Afghanistan since its independence from the British in 1919, from constitutional monarchy to republic, to democratic republic with a communist touch, to a totalitarian Islamic emirate, and finally to American imported democracy. However, these governments have not been able to rule the multiethnic, multilingual and multicultural State without resorting to war, infighting and atrocities. With the parties involved in the present day Afghan war ready to sue for peace, a sustainable, inclusive governance plan has to be set in place, in order to avoid repeating mistakes of the past.

Unfortunately it would seem that, to this date, conflict, political turmoil and instability have become the norm in Afghanistan. A multitude of actors have arisen, both national and international, and reaching any type of consensus in the short term would be nearly impossible. As each actor promotes and propagates its own agenda, the battle for control and influence continues, leaving nothing but continuous state of confusion in its wake.

**Coup d'état, Revolution and Foreign Invasion**

The Saur Revolution and the assassination of Afghanistan's first President Mohammed Daoud Khan is considered the starting point of the country's contemporary troubles. When Daoud Khan bloodlessly overthrew the Afghan monarchy in 1973, he installed a republican regime that was seen as reformative and progressive, yet frictions with the communist parties eventually led to his assassination by members of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA). Following this, the PDPA came to power but conflict within the party prevented any type of advancement and local insurgencies led to the Soviet Union invading Afghanistan to protect its strategic ally government in December 1979. Subsequently, this invasion led to Mujahideen factions taking up arms against the Soviet invaders. Not only did the Red Army of the Soviets prove to be no match for the Mujahideen's knowledge of the terrain and sheer tenacity, in addition the latter had the financial and material support from countries such as the United States (US), Iran, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. By the time peace accords were finally signed in 1988 and the Soviet Union agreed to withdraw its troops, approximately 9% of the Afghan population had been killed, between 1 and 1.5 million, half of which were civilians. By 1986, 5 million Afghans had fled and were living as refugees in the neighbouring countries of Pakistan and Iran.

**Civil War**

The accords signed by Afghanistan, the Soviet Union, the US and Pakistan may have ended one conflict, but soon the country was engulfed in another. The puppet government set in place by the Soviets, led by Mohammad Najibullah, the former director of the Afghan Intelligence Agency, struggled to stay in power. The Mujahideen, who had vanquished their common enemy, had now fragmented and Mujahideen commanders-turned-warlords gained strategic advantages and control over territory, owing to the widening power vacuum. When Najibullah resigned and the PDPA's regime disintegrated, an interim government was set up following the Peshawar accords, signed by the various Mujahideen parties. However, this government was doomed from the start, as infighting persisted and later on a civil war erupted when one of the interim Presidents, Burhanuddin Rabbani of the Jamiat-e-Islami (JeI), refused to step down after his three-month term, followed by the invasion of Kabul by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, a former Mujahideen and leader of the Hezb-i-Islami (HiI) who had refused to sign the Peshawar accords as he felt his group was being sidelined in the agreements.

For four years, the divided Mujahideen would fight each other over Kabul, firing rockets into civilian areas, looting homes, raping and killing civilians. Hekmatyar became known as the Butcher of Kabul, as his group

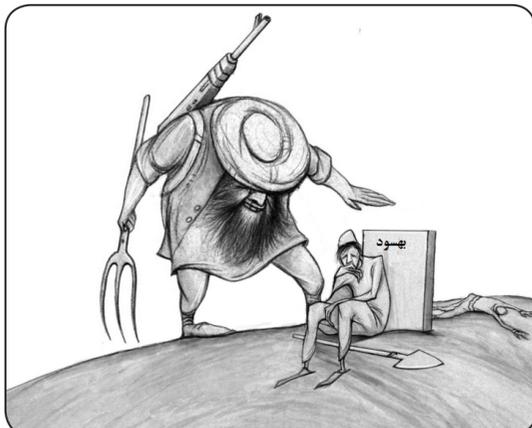
was responsible for a large part of the war crimes and atrocities committed during the 1992-1996 civil war. A prominent opponent of him was Ahmed Shah Massoud, branded the Lion of Panjshir. Massoud had risen to prominence as a tactical genius fighting the Soviets in the 80s, and then became Minister of Defence of the interim government. These two groups were key players in the first few years of the civil war, fighting again on ethnic lines, JeI consisting of a Tajik majority (Tajiks being the second largest ethnic group in Afghanistan) and HiI consisting of a Pashtun majority. India, which had steered clear of the Soviet-Afghan war, had strengthened relations with Rabbani's interim government. India, along with other international democracies, supported the Northern Alliance, formed by Massoud to fight against the Taliban. Massoud, alongside leaders from all ethnicities of Afghanistan, addressed the European Parliament in Brussels in 2001, asking the international community to provide humanitarian aid to the people of Afghanistan and stated that without the support of Pakistan and Osama Bin Laden, the Taliban would not be able to sustain their military campaign for up to a year. Pakistan supported Hekmatyar and the HiI, drawing upon their Pashtun brotherhood - 15% of the Pakistani population is ethnic Pashtun, living mostly in areas alongside the Afghan border - and later on kept funding, training and supporting the Taliban.

**Taliban and US invasion**

While the HiI and the JeI, alongside with few more former Mujahideen factions, were fighting each other, a new threat arose across the border in Pakistan - the Taliban. Recruiting former Mujahideen fighters and students from Pakistani madrassas, the majority of which being ethnic Pashtun, Mullah Mohammed Omar would form and lead one of the most radical Islamic groups in modern history from 1994 until his death in 2013. The primary aims of the Taliban were to impose a strict interpretation of Islamic law in Afghanistan, and remove all foreign presence from the territory. This movement attracted numerous Afghans, fed up with decades of wars, foreign interference and ineffective Afghan governments. In the midst of the civil war, the Taliban, receiving backing from the Pakistani military establishment and its intelligence agency, Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), started capturing Afghan territory until it finally captured Kabul in September 1996. The Taliban established the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, which was recognized solely by Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

Massoud was forced to retreat to the north of Afghanistan and continued the resistance against the Taliban under the flag of the Northern Alliance. The cruel treatment of civilians under the Taliban's radical constitution, especially the condition of women, received global condemnation. However, it wasn't until the 9/11 attacks in 2001 that immediate action was taken against them. After the Taliban refused to hand over Osama bin Laden, founder of the terrorist organization Al Qaeda and the mastermind behind the 9/11 attacks that claimed almost 3,000 lives, the US invaded and overthrew their regime. Another interim government was then set in place, but the US' war against terror in Afghanistan did not end there. While the Taliban is no longer seated in the capital, it still controls around 50% of the territory. As of today, in some regions of Afghanistan, the Taliban is perceived as the legitimate ruler since it offers social services that the government in Kabul has failed to provide. The Taliban has set up religious courts to resolve disputes and has also allowed schools for girls, which use religious texts, to operate. Paradoxically, the Taliban still conducts acts of terror on a nearly daily basis, victims of which are mainly Afghan civilians, in order to consolidate its power against the Afghan government, while also holding close ties to other radical groups operating in the country. Despite the Taliban's continuous use of terror tactics, the US, which is eager to end this 18-year long war, has started discussions directly with them in order to negotiate a peace deal. This has many analysts wondering whether after four decades of war and devastation, the Taliban holds the key to peace in Afghanistan?

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