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Preface

According to the US President Barack Obama's policy about war in Afghanistan, it was planned that American forces will leave Afghanistan by the end of 2016; however, the US changed its soldiers' withdrawal strategy and planned that 5500 soldiers will be staying in Afghanistan beyond 2016. The point is why President Obama changed its withdrawal strategy? And what would be its impact of U.S. soldiers' presence on Afghanistan's current situation, peace, security and economy?

On the other hand, these decisions are made after the Taliban captured a number of districts in the North of the country and seized the strategic province of Kunduz for some days in the last month. Therefore, the Russian and Chinese concerns and attentions have increased toward Afghanistan.

Last week, a memorandum of defense cooperation was signed between Afghanistan and China and the Afghan officials in their visits to Russia have also requested Moscow to provide Afghanistan with military assistance; but, what are China's concerns about Afghanistan in these days? And what is the measure of the possibility of China and Russia's military assistance to the Afghan government?

These are the issues which will be discussed in details in this issue of weekly analysis.

The Staying of American Soldiers and its impact on the present scenario



Last week, the US President Barack Obama announced his policy about the stay of American troops in Afghanistan. According to this new military policy, the American force of 9,800 troops would remain in Afghanistan through most of 2016, before dropping to 5,500.

The new policy of the U.S. government about the continued presence of the American forces carried out positive and negative reaction of Afghans. The National Unity Government (NUG) welcomed this new policy of the United States of America; however, the Taliban and some other groups in Afghanistan considered it as prolonging the war in Afghanistan.

You will be reading the analysis about American military policy in Afghanistan especially regarding the steps of the withdrawal of its forces, the reasons behind this new military policy, the position of Afghanistan in the American foreign policy and the impact of the continued presence of the American troops on peace, security and the current situation in the country.

The Confused US military policy in Afghanistan

The air assaults of US on Afghanistan started by October 7, 2001 and almost 13000 American soldiers had presence in Afghanistan by November; this number increased by 20300 in April 2004, then. At that time, America became involved in the war of Iraq and focused its entire attention on this country. Therefore, the number of U.S. soldiers reached to almost 25000 by the end of 2007.

The number of American forces in Afghanistan exceeded by 60000 in 2008 and 2009. After Obama won the 2008 Presidential Elections under the slogans of “Change” and “Ending Two Wars”; Afghanistan once again became considered in the U.S military policy. From a hand, Obama withdrew its forces from Iraq and from another hand decided to send 33000 fresh troops to Afghanistan by the end of 2009; however, at the same time, he announced the withdrawal of his forces by mid-2011, also. Hence, the number of American soldiers in Afghanistan reached to almost one hundred thousand in August 2010.

On June 23, 2011, President Barack Obama [announced](#) that all the 33,000 additional U.S. forces he ordered to Afghanistan in December 2009 will be home within 15 months.

In the Chicago Conference-2012, it was decided that a lot of foreign soldiers will withdraw Afghanistan by the end of 2014, the combat mission of NATO and America will end and the control of security affairs will be transmitted to Afghans.

Then, in 2013, after the Afghan President Hamid Karzai rejected to sign the Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA), the U.S. used the repeating announcement of withdrawal of its forces as a tool of political pressure; however, the series of the withdrawal of American forces slowly going on.

By the end of 2014, President Obama [announced](#) the end of the combat mission of American forces in Afghanistan; however, he said, at the invitation of the Afghan government, and to preserve the gains we have made together, the United States--along with our allies and partners--will maintain a limited military presence in Afghanistan to train, advise and assist Afghan forces and to conduct counterterrorism operations against the remnants of al Qaeda.

The latest U.S. drawdown policy

After Obama won the Presidential Elections in 2008, his policy until 2015 was to withdraw the entire American forces from Afghanistan by the end of 2016 and through this, he would become a President who ended two wars.

Barack Obama, considering the situation in the world, region and America and Afghanistan itself, changed its Soldiers' Withdrawal Strategy twice in 2015 only. After he met President Ashraf Ghani in March 2015, he decelerated the withdrawal of American force from Afghanistan. According to previous plan, only 5500 soldiers out of 9800 soldiers were expected to be remaining in Afghanistan. President Barack Obama on [March 24, 2015](#) granted Afghan requests to slow the drawdown of U.S. troops from Afghanistan and said he would maintain a force of 9,800 through the end of 2015 while sticking to a 2017 exit plan.

After the Kunduz City seized by the Taliban and was under their control for two weeks, America changed its policy, also; Obama [announced](#) that U.S. forces will remain in Afghanistan at their current levels throughout much of 2016, yet another delay in their scheduled withdrawal and an acknowledgment that America's longest war won't be concluded on his watch.

Why Obama changed the Withdrawal Strategy?

The reasons behind why the US President changes his military policy in Afghanistan and brought changes in the Soldiers' Withdrawal Strategy twice in one year are as following:

- **The Situation in Afghanistan;** the internal situation of Afghanistan is considered as a reason behind change in U.S. military policy by the government of America and Obama himself. This new strategy of America created after the fall of Kunduz province and capture of tens of district by the Taliban. The important point is that if America could not weaken the armed opposition of the government and could not maintain security even when it had a hundred thousand soldiers in Afghanistan, so how can it do it with its 5500 soldiers?!
- **The Situation in the Region;** the on-going situation in the country is another reason that has made American to stay in Afghanistan. America, with having presence in the region, wants to compensate its lost game in Ukraine and Syria. From the other hand, Russia has extended its relations with other countries in the region, for example, it has better relations with Pakistan for the first time in past few decades.

Hence, the Secretary of former Afghan President Hamid Karzai, Abdul Karim Khuram has mentioned this point in his latest article and has considered the fall of Kunduz as a drama in order for American forces to stay in Afghanistan.

- **The Upcoming Election of America;** this new military policy would have importance for the Democratic Party in America's upcoming Presidential Elections. However, this decision of Obama would harm the foreign policy of the possible candidate of the Democratic Party "Joe Biden" because he is well-known with backing the soldiers' withdrawal strategy; however, from the other hand, Hillary Clinton, another possible candidate of this party welcomed this new position. To be mentioned, this announcement of Obama regarding Afghanistan has empowered the foreign policy position of the Democratic Party.

Afghanistan: in the US Foreign Policy

Emerging of the "Islamic State" group in Iraq and the issues of Ukraine and Syria caused the importance of Afghanistan to become decreased in the US foreign policy in 2014 and 2015; however, as the position of Russia empowered in Syria and Ukraine day by day and America still avoid itself from engaging in Iraq directly; so this new decision of Obama shows that the attention of America toward Afghanistan is increased.

The impacts of U.S. forces presence

Impacts of the continued presence of American Forces in Afghanistan are comprehensive; but its main impact would be increasing motivation for the government's armed opposition in order to continue their war; the war would be continuing and the peace would not be maintained until other three years. Hence, the Taliban, in their declaration on remaining the American soldiers in Afghanistan, ordered their fighters to speed up their war. The lack of maintaining peace and security would have unexampled negative impacts on the Afghan economy in past one and a half decade. The war in Afghanistan has cost more than \$9 billion in 2014 when most of international troops left the country, a [study](#) released on Monday said.

Besides that, if the American forces stay in Afghanistan, it is possible that Afghanistan would become the field of regional countries' rivalries once again; in the case, the rivalry of Russia is increasing with America day by day and recently China, in a statement expressing its reaction on staying American forces in Afghanistan, said that the independence, territorial integrity and sovereignty of Afghanistan should be respected.

The Possibility of China and Russia's Military Cooperation with Afghanistan



It seems that with the withdrawal of American forces in Afghanistan and extending the war in this war-torn country, the regional countries are trying to prevent the negative consequences of withdrawal. China and Russia are among the neighboring countries of Afghanistan that have concerns about this situation. These concerns have increased especially after the group of “Islamic State” started its activities in Afghanistan.

During the visit of Masoom Stanekzai, the acting Defense Minister of Afghanistan to Beijing in order to attend the Sixth meeting of the Strategic Studies Institute of China, the Chinese authorities expressed their readiness for military assistance to Afghanistan. In this visit of Masoom Stanekzai, he [signed](#) a memorandum of cooperation between the Defense Ministries of Afghanistan and China with China’s Deputy Chief of Staff. In May 2015, Noorulhaq Ulumi, the Interior Minister of Afghanistan in his visit to China had [also signed](#) a memorandum of Bilateral Cooperation with his Chinese counterpart.

On the other side, Gen. Abdul Rasheed Dostum, the First Vice-President of Afghanistan had [requested](#) military assistance from the Russian Federation in his visit to Moscow. In this analysis, the possibilities of these two countries’ military assistance to Afghanistan, considering the latest developments in the international relations, will be discussed.

The Background of Sino-Afghan Relations

Afghanistan and China, as the two neighboring countries, have had friendly relations for centuries together. Once, the Silk Road was the trade route of the vast country of China to Europe and these commercial caravans were passing through Afghanistan. In the past, China had fruitful cooperation with Afghanistan in the irrigation projects.

China was one of the countries which had supported Afghans during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. This country had always called for the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan at the United Nations.

With America's invasion of Afghanistan and the overthrow of the Taliban regime, China welcomed the new developments in Afghanistan. Chinese were hoping that America's war on "terrorism" will take the region out of extremism and violence toward peace and stability and as a result, it will enhance economic cooperation between the countries that China is hardly in need of.

China invested in the largest mining project in Afghanistan's Aynak copper mine near Kabul as well as in oil extraction in the area of the Amu Darya in Northern Afghanistan. Over the past fourteen years, China has helped Afghanistan in various sectors that were related to the reconstruction of Afghanistan.

During Hamid Karzai's visit to Beijing on 8 June 2012, a document of strategic cooperation containing 9 articles [signed](#) between the Presidents of both countries; this document was emphasizing on expanding cooperation between the two countries in the political, economic, cultural and security areas.

What is behind China's increasing Concerns?

China, however, does not have a long border with Afghanistan and it is also located in heavily impassable areas, but the challenges of war in Afghanistan can impact this powerful country. During the Taliban regime, delegations from China were travelling to Afghanistan on a regular basis and as the Uyghur fighters were receiving military training inside Afghanistan; they were expressing their concern over this issue, and each time, the Taliban were promising that they would prevent this work.

China did not recognize the Taliban government but it kept its relations normal with Kabul. That's why the Taliban consider China as a country that can play a positive role in the Afghan peace program today.

On the other hand, China and Pakistan have close and friendly relations and that is why the Afghan government also hopes that China's influence on Pakistan would be fruitful in the Afghan peace process.

The importance of China for Afghanistan led Ashraf Ghani, the Afghan President to head to Beijing in his second official foreign visit right after taking power and exchange views on different issues including the Afghan peace process with Chinese officials.

The possibility of Russia's military cooperation

After the beginning of the withdrawal of foreign forces from Afghanistan, the Afghan government found that the Afghan forces are as well trained and equipped as Westerners were initially promised. Karzai repeatedly complained about the situation and accused America with breaking its promises. He had repeatedly emphasized that if Western countries do not equip the Afghan forces as it needed, so he has to have cooperation with other countries that his aim was the Russian Federation.

The National Unity Government (NUG) has also recognized the same problem. Perhaps, the appointment of former Communists in the important military posts was to encourage Russia to provide Afghanistan with military assistance.

Alexander Mantysky, the Russian ambassador in Kabul for several times has spoken of his country's readiness for providing military assistance to Afghanistan. General Abdul Rashid Dostum after his visit to Russia said that the Russian authorities are ready to give modern weapons and even war planes to Afghanistan; however, it seems that fulfillment of these promises needs money. Previously, America had bought a number of Russian helicopters to Afghan forces from Russia which some of them had become destroyed during the conflicts.

The Afghan government with very simplicity thinks that insecurity in the north and the activities of *Daesh* can encourage the Russians to provide Afghanistan with military assistance, but the military balance has been changed in the region with Russia's military intervention in Syria. As far as the relations between Russia and China become closer, ties between Russia and Pakistan are expanding, also.

The regional policies of Beijing and Moscow

China and Russia cannot stay away from events in Afghanistan and they get use of each step of the mistakes of America in favor of expanding of their influence in the region. While America has lost the game to Russians in Ukraine and Syria; for the Americans to deal with China and Russia in the region, only the battlefield inside Afghanistan and the back of the battlefield "Pakistan" remained.

Pakistan is more important to Russians than Afghanistan; because Afghanistan, during the past fourteen years and even in the presence of 150 thousand foreign soldiers, counted itself defenseless against Islamabad. Russians believe that America and the West implement most of their plans in South Asia through Pakistan; and therefore, Pakistan is important for the future of Afghanistan and Central Asia and so they should become closer to this country.

Vladimir Putin in 2011 had said that Pakistan could be a good friend of Russia in South Asia and the Islamic world. Strategic negotiations started between Russia and Pakistan began in 2013. In June 2015, Raheel Sharif during his visit to Moscow discussed about military cooperation between the two countries, and in July, Nawaz Sharif met Putin on the sidelines of the UFA conference. In October, an agreement was signed between Russia and Pakistan which make the Russian public company of (Rvstyk) to build a pipeline that length 1,100 km from the liquefied gas terminal of Karachi port to Lahore which will cost between 2 to 2.5 billion dollars. The project will be completed in 3 to 4 years.

In August, Pakistan and Russia agreed that Russia should give four MI-35 helicopters to Pakistan in order to fight against terrorism and also negotiations to buy weapons and military equipment including aircrafts of type (Su-Khu) are going on.

Conclusion

After years of war in Afghanistan, it seems that Russia and China have reached the conclusion that they should deal with Pakistan in order to curb insecurity in Afghanistan, because the Afghan government itself believes that the key to peace in Afghanistan is in hands of Pakistan.

Considering these issues, it seems unlikely that China and Russia will provide the Afghan government with heavy weapons, and hence, put the Taliban, that are fighting against *Daesh*, in a position to eventually join it. The complexity of the situation in Afghanistan has caused the regional countries to have cautious approach to this country.

The End

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Note: Please let us know your feedback and suggestions for the improvement of Weekly analysis.