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Preface

The Sino-Pakistan strategic friendship has immense impact on the region. Therefore, the visit of Chinese President *Xi Jinping* to Pakistan is considered an essential one in terms of political and economic aspects of relations. During the visit, two countries signed many agreements and memorandum of understandings. The most important one was the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

The Sino-Pak relation`s background, the importance of recent visit, the CPEC, barriers and its impacts on the region are discussed in this issue of weekly analysis.

With the start of spring, Taliban war season also being commenced. Within the few weeks the security situation in the country has deteriorated. The latest one was the deadly attack in Jalalabad which at least killed around 35 and wounded more than 60 people. In initial reaction, President Ghani linked it to ISIS, but later on this group also condemned the attack.

When the armed opposition of the Afghan government refuses any involvement in such attacks, finally, who would be taken responsible for?

In this week`s analysis the aforesaid topics have been discussed.

The Impacts of Chinese President's Visit to Pakistan



The Chinese President Xi Jinping visit to Pakistan was scheduled in last September. But due to the demonstration of Imran Khan in Islamabad, it was postponed and finally happened on April 20th – 21st.

During the visit, Chinese delegation made some unprecedented pledges. The Chinese officials talked of wide range of investment in Pakistan. The recent announcement was one of China's significant commitments of large investments abroad. It was also the largest investment commitment from a foreign country in Pakistan's history.

Since the visit and Pakistan-China relations are like a strategic alliance with impacts on the region, Pakistan valued this visit more, and reflected a lot in international media.

Background of Sino-Pak Relations

After the communist revolution of 1949 in China, Pakistan was the first Muslim country recognizing Peoples Republic of China which still has immense impact on bilateral relations. Thus the diplomatic relations between two countries officially established in 4 May 1951.

At the first stages, the relations between China and India were friendly. They used to call their relations (Hindi-Chini Bhai Bhai, India-China Brothers). During this time, Pakistan and China did not enjoy cordial relations, because Pakistan was member of SEATO and CENTO, the Western alliance in the region during cold war. But when Chinese conducted operation in Tibet and India gave asylum to Dalai Lama and border disputes also erupted between the two countries, which escalated to war in 1962, the relations between Pakistan and China became friendly.

During General Mohammad Ayub's rule in Pakistan, the relations between China and Pakistan was not very good. When the war broke out between Pakistan and India in 1962, then foreign minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto signed an agreement with China in 1963 and dismissed all the border differences. It was a strategic breakthrough in the relations of both the countries.

After the 1965 Indo-Pak conflict, the defense relations between China and Pakistan expanded and turned into strategic friendship in 1972. China supported Pakistan in 1965 and 1971 wars without one exception¹.

Likewise, when former USSR invaded Afghanistan China supported Pakistan's stance and also assisted Pakistan in crafting GF17 aircrafts, Al-Khalid Tanks and missiles and also cooperated in Pakistan nuclear program.

The relations between Pakistan and China are close to the extent even Pakistan's inclination towards West could not affect them. Largely, the hostility between Pak-India and Sino-India cemented the relations between Pakistan and India.

China-Pakistan Economic Corridor

Pakistan valued Xi Jinping's visit to Pakistan and President Xi received a warm welcome by Islamabad. When Xi's plane entered Pakistani air, eight Pakistani jets escorted it. High level military and political leaders received him in airport.

Xi signed 51 agreements and memorandum of understandings with Pakistan. Besides, a contract of 46 billion \$ was signed as part of China Pakistan Economic Corridor. The amount is to be spent in the following sectors:

¹ China just did not deploy its troops in Indian border.

Under the CPEC agreement, \$15.5 billion worth of coal, wind, solar and hydro energy projects will come online by 2017 and add 10,400 megawatts of energy to the national grid.

An additional 6,120 megawatts will be added to the national grid at a cost of \$18.2 billion by 2021.

The CPEC deal also includes \$5.9 billion for road projects and \$3.7 billion for railway projects, all to be developed by 2017. A \$44 million optical fiber cable between China and Pakistan is due to be built.

From the other side Pakistan is not only facing lack of energy but also due to insecurity foreign investors are not ready to invest in the country. China's investment will accelerate the economic development in Pakistan and also will meet its energy needs.

Obstacles on the way of CPEC

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor project faces some obstacles too; the first one is security problem and the second can be said as absence of a united stance among Pakistani political parties.

Most of Pakhtoon nationalist parties like Awami National Party of Asfandyar wali khan, Qawmi Watan Party of Shirpaw, Pakhttonkhwa Awami Melli Party of Achakzai, Maulana Fazal Rahman and Tahreek Insaf of Imran who now rules Khaybar Pakhtoonkhwa and also some parties in Baloochistan will oppose the new way of route which excludes KPK and Baluchistan. According to first plan, the rout from Kashghar of China was planned to go through FATA, Baluchistan and some other areas of Pakhtoons, but due to insecurities in these areas it was changed to Panjab.

From security point of view, the corridor faces security threats. First, it goes through FATA and Baluchistan. If the area is not secured, the corridor plan will not succeed. And second is that the security situation in Gawadar port is not trustworthy.

The instability in Afghanistan is also an undeniable threat to the corridor plan. Therefore, President Xi requested Pakistani officials to have good relations with Afghanistan.

Impacts on the Region

President Xi's visit to Pakistan can have impacts on the region:

First: the visit will have positive impacts on the regional integration which is pivotal part of President Ghani's foreign policy. Kabul will benefit from China-Pakistan corridor till is connected with China through Wakhan. It will increase Afghan-China business.

Second: the visit will affect china in regional rivalry. Because, since Musharraf's tenure rumors have been circulating that Chinese navy has either got a base or is trying to have a base. If it happened/happens so, China will be able to have a close eye on 40% world oil transport. Besides, it will increase China-India navy rivalry.

Third: the corridor will have a strategic importance for China. Because, from one side it can boost its economy by having connection to energy pipelines, and from the other side, it will have easy access to Middle-East and Europe. Securing the corridor will be in the interest of China, so it will more cement China-Pakistan alliance.

Fourth: China tries to have its own axis to balance the US-India-Japan-Australia pivot. Chinese axis constitutes Pakistan and Russia. Therefore, Beijing wants to cement the alliance more and more. China has already signed an agreement of \$ 400 billion Pipeline with Russia.

Now, Beijing and Islamabad are part of corridor which will be cemented more and more. China also wants to connect its economic relations with Afghanistan and Central Asian Countries.

ISIS: an Invisible Monster in Afghanistan



The recent suicide attack in Jalalabad city, in eastern Afghanistan, which has more than one hundred casualties and it was very heinous and horrific. Initially, Taliban were taken as responsible for the attack, when they refused, later on another group calling itself *Khurrasani* connected with the Islamic State group which is commonly known as *Daesh* or ISIS in Afghanistan claimed the responsibility of this barbaric attack through a newly created Facebook account.

It was the first attack whose responsibility was apparently taken by ISIS in Afghanistan. But the question arises, is ISIS able to the extent to conduct such a destructive attack in Afghanistan? Does Islamic State group under the leadership of Abobaker Al-Baghdadi have any connection with this group who took the responsibility? If it is so, then who are the commanders of ISIS in Afghanistan and why their names have not been broadcasted yet?

Ambiguities Regarding ISIS Activities in Afghanistan and Pakistan

For the first time the rumors regarding ISIS presence came from Waziristan, the tribal area of Pakistan where Al-Qaeda linked fighters enjoy sanctuaries. In that time, Shahidullah Sahid, spokesman of TTP (Tahreek-e-Taliban Pakistan) and Abdul Rahim Mulsimdost (an Afghan previous detainee of Guantanamo bay) pledged their allegiance

to ISIS. Mulsimдост's allegiance was published in ISIS's official web site as well. Shahidullah Shahid was rejected earlier by TTP for the accusation of being close to ISI, the intelligence agency of Pakistan, and Muslimdost has never been a member of Afghan Taliban movement.

It was very expected that ISIS will pick one of the aforesaid persons as the leader of ISIS in *Khurrasan* region, but unexpectedly, Hafiz Saeed Khan from tribal Orakzai agency of Pakistan was selected as the *Ameer* (Leader) and Abdul Rauf Khadim, member of Taliban military commission as his deputy. Khadim was killed in a US drone assault in Kajaki of Helmand in Feb 9, 2015. ISIS has not appointed his successor yet. Since then, there is no authentic information regarding the whereabouts of Saeed Khan and Shahid. There are some rumors revealing Muslimdost went to Syria.

Afghan Government and ISIS

In the mid-2014, several reports have been published regarding ISIS presence in Afghanistan. Most of the reports were regarding *Ajristan* district of Ghazni province. But the then ISAF commander General John F. Campbell expressed in 12 October 2014 that there is no authentic information which can prove ISIS presence in the country.

But sharp before the Munich security conference on 5th February 2015 reports were published in the Afghan media. The publications of such reports were very explicitly connected with the agenda of mentioned conference, where the challenges of ISIS in the world were to be discussed. In order to attract more aids to Afghanistan and long-term US presence in the country, President Ghani needed such atmosphere.

Before that, a container full of American weapons was captured by the local security officials in *ShahJoy* district of Zabul province and it was said that the container was sent to ISIS fighters. The efforts of high level governmental officials to release the container were also reported. Even then, it was not followed and the personals who tried to release the container were not pointed out.

The kidnap of 31 passengers in Herat-Kabul high way was also linked to ISIS in Afghanistan. Another person was arrested who confessed of being ISIS spokesperson had close ties with Ghazni province governor. And recently, Paktika governor accused the National Security Council of aided more than \$200 million to the families of ISIS

members. The disclosure of such an issue by high level government governor cannot be without authentic document.

After the deadly attack of Nangarhar province people are concerned regarding presence of ISIS in Afghanistan. Even in President Ghani's visit to Tehran, the issue of ISIS was one of the top issues that were discussed.

Was ISIS responsible for Jalalabad Attack?

Regarding the responsibility of the attack, when there is no officially announced delegation of ISIS in Afghanistan, neither any web site related to ISIS took the responsibility for it, how it can be related to ISIS? The attack happened and a newly created account in Facebook by the name of Shahidullah Shahid took the responsibility of it. Later on, most of the local media reported it as ISIS's first attack in Afghanistan. President Ghani also linked it to ISIS.

Keeping in view the situation of Afghanistan, it is very likely to buy a suicide attacker and even it is possible to take him into very safe area and conduct explosion. Doing so is as likely by ISIS as by a foreign intelligent agency. From the other side, Abdul Rahim Muslimdost, an Afghan from Nangarhar province, who pledged allegiance to ISIS, have refused any responsibility. Refusal of the attack by Muslimdost and acceptance of the responsibility by an unknown Facebook account makes the possibility more likely that the attack might have been done by intelligence agencies.

The biggest group announces its connection to ISIS in Afghanistan is the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan. The group is composed of fighters from central Asian countries, Uyghur Muslims and Qafqaz led by Osman Ghazi. Earlier, they were close to Taliban, but when they put their international agenda aside, IMU parted its way with them. The group pledged its allegiance to ISIS after, apparently, the long disappearance of Mullah Mohammad Omar.

The IMU has conducted complex attacks in Afghanistan and Pakistan, i.e. the assassinations of General Daud Daud in Takhar and of Ahmad Khan Samangani in Samangan, attack on Peshawar airport and also involved in many other deadly attacks in the region. In Jalalabad attack the group can also be taken as responsible.

Conclusion

The Afghan Officials are of the belief that ISIS in Afghanistan is the previous Taliban with changing their flag from white to black, but they have never named any Taliban commander allied with ISIS. The local officials in Helmand claimed that ISIS is recruiting people in this province. They have even alleged the armed clash between ISIS and Taliban fighters which were refused by Taliban by saying there were no other group members in those area except Taliban.

Some people predicted before an alliance between Taliban and ISIS fighters in Afghanistan. But when Abobaker Albaghdadi commented on Mullah Mohammad Omar, leader of Taliban and termed his leadership era as expired, the possibility was practically became impossible.

Apart from the distinct interpretations of the two groups regarding the Sharia, keeping in view the experience that neither ISIS nor Taliban can tolerate another group in their operational zone, so if ISIS wants to come to Afghanistan, it would be faced the opposition which Nasrah Front faced by ISIS in Syria. Therefore, some analysts put forward the possibility that the Afghan and Pakistani officials may have reached to agreement to defeat Taliban in two countries by a more powerful enemy. From American perspective, ISIS may be able to create threat for China, Iran, Central Asia and Russia, but like the past, Afghanistan and Pakistan will face more lose.

From the other side, propaganda of Afghan government and Americans for the presence of ISIS in Afghanistan has emerged some questions. Broadcasting a video clip by CNN alleging the fighters belong to ISIS in the outskirts of Kabul being trained. The question arises, how the top American TV channel had access to the clip?

The End

Contact Us:

Email: info@csrskabul.com - csrskabul@gmail.com

Website: www.csrskabul.com

Contact: (+93) 784089590

