



Center for Strategic & Regional Studies

Kabul

Weekly Analysis-Issue Number 136 (October 3-10, 2015)

Weekly Analysis is one of CSRS' publications, which significantly analyses weekly economic and political events in Afghanistan and the region. The prime motive behind this is to provide strategic insights and policy solutions to decision-making institutions and individuals in order to help them to design best policies. Weekly Analysis is published in local languages (Pashto and Dari) and international languages (English and Arabic).

In this issue:

- Preface 2

The Fall of Kunduz and the new Aspects of Afghan War

- Change in Taliban's War Strategy..... 4
- Why Kunduz Fell to Taliban?..... 4
- The continuing Tragedy in Kunduz..... 5
- The Powerful Presence of Taliban in the North..... 6
- The Northern Insecurities and Reaction of Regional Countries..... 7
- The fall of Kunduz and Discussion on Withdrawal of American Forces..... 8

Consequences of Russian Presence in Syria

- Defending a defeated Regime..... 9
- Interpretation from Terrorism..... 10
- Coordination between Iran and Russia..... 10
- Inability of America in reining up the Syria Crisis..... 11
- Why Syria is important to Russians?..... 12
- Conclusion..... 12

Preface

After Kunduz city fell to Taliban two weeks ago, the extensive fighting is continuing in this province, which has caused heavy casualties to both sides involved in war as well as civilians resident in the area; and among all these, the bombardment of MSF Hospital by American forces carried reactions on the international level.

Taliban have remained in Kunduz city more than they were expected, which manifests change in the fighting strategy of the Taliban. Change in the Taliban fighting strategy, reasons behind the collapse of Kunduz, the ongoing grief in this province, the powerful presence of Taliban in the North and the external dimensions of Kunduz province are analyzed here.

Besides that, in this week's analysis, you are going to read about the recent changes in the issue of Syria in the Middle East. From the very beginning of uprising against the Bashar Ul Asad's régime in Syria, Russians have supported this régime at the international level; however, they took step in order to have military presence in this country and rose against the Westerns and their goals in the area. The question is, with the military interference of Russia in Syria, the crisis of Middle East would take which direction?

These are the issues which will be discussed in details in this issue of Weekly Analysis.

The Fall of Kunduz and the new Aspects of Afghan War



For the last fourteen years American and NATO forces are in Afghanistan; however, the security situation has not become improved, and it has reached to a point where one of the most important provinces "Kunduz" to become seized by and under control of the Taliban for the first time in the past 14 years.

This important news is broadcasted in domestic and international media with a wide extent and considered as a serious threat. Some countries in the region follow the Fall of Kunduz, ongoing insecurities in the North and new development of the Taliban in Afghanistan with a great delicacy. This issue carried international reaction and it looks like the United States would review their war and latest positions in Afghanistan.

Meanwhile, after the fall of Kunduz City, the bombardment of Doctors without Borders' (MSF) hospital in this city which caused heavy human casualties was the incident that had carried harsh reaction at national and international level.

The fall of Kunduz has proved the weakness and incapability of NUG and perhaps the war could become intensified. Besides that, some countries due to fall of Kunduz province and the ongoing insecurities raised their concern on whether insecurities in Afghanistan would spread to their countries or not.

Change in Taliban's War Strategy

At first, it was expected the Taliban would leave Kunduz City soon and/or they would be defeated by the Afghan security forces; however, the Taliban did not leave Kunduz and started face-to-face fighting, instead. However, Afghan officials talk about the defeat of Taliban in Kunduz¹, but, the Taliban claim of having powerful presence in the city² and the city of Kunduz is yet to be fully controlled by any of them.

The fall of Kunduz can be considered as a start of Taliban's new fighting strategy, which has two obvious aspects:

First: Spreading the war of Taliban to large cities;

Second: to control the seized areas.

Taliban were just conducting explosions or small military operations in big cities before the fall of Kunduz province. The aim of those operations was not to seize the areas and control them; however, after the fall of Kunduz, it looks like Taliban have not started war in urban areas, but they try to strengthen their control on seized areas, also.

Why Kunduz Fell to Taliban?

On April 24th, 2015, the Taliban, before the fall of Kunduz, had seized the Gortipa locality of Kunduz which is located near to Kunduz City and is consisted about 40-50 villages. They seized Chardara and Qala-e Zal districts on July, then. From the other side, the Afghan security forces did not clear the Gortipa locality from the Taliban; however, they built a check-post on Gortipa Road in order to prevent Taliban's advancement, instead. Meanwhile, the Taliban strengthen their presence in Khan Abad and Imam Sahib Districts until August³ and then started their assaults on Kunduz City in the late September.

On October 6, 2015, a resident of Kunduz province told VOA that the Taliban in Kunduz province had distributed papers and announced from mosques that they are going to

¹ See Online:

<http://pa.azadiradio.org/archive/local/20151007/1092/2120.html?id=27292402>

² See Online:

<http://alemara1.org/?p=30487>

³ For more information:

<https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/the-fall-of-kunduz-what-does-it-tell-us-about-the-strength-of-the-post-omar-taliban/>

attack the Kunduz city⁴. As the written papers of the Taliban are yet to be received; however, the National Directorate of Security's (NDS) claims about that they were aware of Taliban's attacks on Kunduz city.

Besides that, the fall of Kunduz and the inability of the Afghan security forces (ANSF) in retaking the Kunduz City show that ANSF do not have coordination among them and they do not treat the people well. The deputies of Kunduz people in Parliament also believe that there is a lack of coordination between ANSF.

Bad treatment of Local Police (Arbaki) with local people, presence of Mafia and military capability of the Taliban were the other reasons behind the fall of Kunduz. The former governor of Kunduz province, Mohammad Omar Safi thinks that the drug smugglers and irresponsible local militia had its hand in the fall of Kunduz. He said that he had sent a list of such people to the central government; and in response, he was told to take care of the Taliban and do not touch the others⁵.

The continuing Tragedy in Kunduz

The Kunduz people have suffered a lot from the last two weeks. During this, the hospital of Doctors without Borders (MSF) was bombarded by American forces which caused 22 casualties, 10 deaths and 12 wounded.

On the night of October 3, 2015, the American air forces bombarded a hospital of MSF in Kunduz; in the case, the both sides of war were given information about the hospital, according to MSF Organization. From the other hand, intentionally targeting the healthcare centers and the centers for treating wounded people is against the Geneva Convention and International Law. So, MSF said that the airstrike by American forces on a hospital by American forces is against the Geneva Convention⁶.

It is also told that the American forces did this attack after having agreement with ANSF; because, according to Afghan officials, the Taliban had entered this hospital⁷. This raid

⁴ VOA TV, 1500 Hours News, RTA TV, October 6, 2015.

⁵ The exclusive interview of Mohammad Omar Safi with Shamshad TV, watch it online:
<http://www.shamshadtv.tv/2013-03-27-17-58-02/4015.html>

⁶ See Online:

http://www.bbc.com/pashto/afghanistan/2015/10/151007_ma_mfs_geneva_kunduz

⁷ For more information:

<https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/airstrike-on-a-hospital-in-kunduz-claims-of-a-war-crime/>

was condemned on international level and the President of the US apologized for this incident.

Also, the people of Kunduz are faced lack of food, electricity, health services, bombardment and murder as a result of war continuing from last two weeks. Therefore, a number of Kunduz citizens migrated to neighboring provinces and they exceed 6000, according to the Ministry of Refugees Affairs⁸.

The Powerful Presence of Taliban in the North

The fall of Kunduz shows the powerful presence of Taliban in the North. The Northern Kunduz province has strategic importance for Taliban's upcoming operations and struggles in the North. Besides that, the Taliban started their new military operations from Kunduz for having hopes to this province; in 90s, Kunduz was the first city conquered by the Taliban in the North and it was the last city they left by the end 2001.

The strategic importance of Kunduz City is that is located on the way of two other importance provinces of Badakhshan and Takhar. As the fighting of Taliban intensified in Badakhshan and Takhar day by day; perhaps, it would be a reason behind the Taliban presence in Kunduz.

Before and after the fall of Kunduz, some districts of Badakhshan, Baghlan, Takhar and Faryab are Falld in the North, also. According to a research by "Long War Journal", overall 29 districts out of 398 districts are in control of the Taliban and heavy clash is continuing on other 36 provinces; specifically, 9 districts of four Northern provinces (Badakhshan, Baghlan, Kunduz and Takhar) are in control of the Taliban since September 28, 2015⁹.

Meanwhile, the Taliban have seized the Kohestanant District of Sar-i Pol province last week¹⁰ and the Qaysar District of Faryab province is in control of the Taliban, also. Hence, the insecurity in the North and continues Fall of districts by the Taliban is

⁸ See Online:

<http://www.tolonews.com/pa/afghanistan/21731-kunduz-war-leaves-6000-homeless-officials>

⁹ See Online:

<http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2015/10/taliban-controls-or-contests-scores-of-districts-in-afghanistan.php>

¹⁰ See Online:

<http://www.tolonews.com/en/afghanistan/21702-sar-e-puls-kohistanat-district-falls-to-taliban>

extended from Badakhshan province to Faryab province and these provinces of North have direct border with three Central Asian countries, then.

However, the above-mentioned situation in the North is due for government's problems, internal disputes, and lack of coordination among the security forces and presence of irresponsible armed men; but, it shows the powerful presence of the Taliban in the North, also.

The Northern Insecurities and Reaction of Regional Countries

The concerns of Central Asian countries behind insecurities in the North of Afghanistan are as following:

First: Presence of the warriors of Central Asian extremist groups in the Northern areas of Afghanistan¹¹;

Second: Fear of extending insecurities from Afghanistan to Central Asia;

Third: the Islamic State group, which the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, the Islamic Jihad Union and Jamat-ul Ansar group have pledged their allegiance to this group.

It is the reason which carried the reaction of Central Asian countries and Russia behind the fall of Kunduz and ongoing insecurities in the North of Afghanistan.

At the first days of the fall of Kunduz, the government of Tajikistan closed its three borders with Afghanistan; however, they are open now. The President of Tajikistan expressed his concerns over security situation in the Northern areas of Afghanistan, and according to him, war is going on in 60% of Northern areas of Afghanistan.

The Collective Security Treaty Organization of Russia raised the number of its forces to 70 thousands due to recent insecurities in the North of Afghanistan; these forces are able to attend the battle field in 72 hours. Meanwhile, 2500 soldiers of this organization conducted military maneuvers in Tajikistan in May, 2015. Also, 95 thousands Russian soldiers participated in a military maneuver in September, 2015 in order to prevent unpredictable incidents in the Central Asia. Besides that, Russia would increase the number of its soldiers in Tajikistan from 6500 to 9000¹².

¹¹ The Afghan government confirms that Chechen, Uzbek, Tajik and Turkmen fighters are against insecurities in the North. Also, according to the National Security Committee of Tajikistan, a number of members of Tajikistan's extremist groups are gone away to the Northern areas of Afghanistan near to the border of Tajikistan.

¹² For more information, please read:

<http://gandhara.rferl.org/content/afghanistan-kunduz-central-asian-security/27289273.html>

The fall of Kunduz and Discussion on Withdrawal of American Forces

Along with the improvements of the Taliban, news discussions on the issue of Afghanistan are come to ground in the West especially in the United States, that the Taliban would not take control of Afghanistan and this country would not become the shelter for “extremist groups” as it was in late 90s after the withdrawal of Western forces from Afghanistan.

Considering this, Gen. Campbell, the head of America Forces told the US Senate that America should review the program of the withdrawal of its soldiers; because at the time this plan was made, Daesh did not have presence in Afghanistan and the situation of Afghanistan was different from what it is in 2014¹³.

Also, a US Congressman from the Armed Services Committee in an interview with CNN told that: “withdrawal of American forces from Afghanistan would be a big mistake. The government should not make a mistake which could make the “terrorists” to challenge the security of America again.¹⁴” As hot discussions about this are going on in America, but, some analysts consider this issue as a drama and think that Americans do not intend to leave Afghanistan and they searches their long-term goals through holding such positions.

¹³ Xinhua News, US Commander in Afghanistan proposes change in withdrawal plan, 7th Oct 2015, see it online: <http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/photo/2015-10/07/c_134688471.htm>

¹⁴ News broadcasted on CNN, October 6, 2015.

Consequences of Russian Presence in Syria



Military presence of Russia in Syria has faced the crisis of Middle East with new challenges. Russians by having military presence and supporting the regime of Bashar Al Asad in Syria, along with Iran and Lebanon's Hizbullah, obviously took position against the goals of West in the area.

It looks like Russians, with this presence of them, want to show reaction against America and its allies. In the past, Moscow was a silent observer during the fall of anti-American regimes including Muammarul Qadhafi's in Libya, however, it looks like it does not want to remain as an observer only but it intends to react to the international issues in its interest with more decisiveness.

Defending a defeated Regime

Russians are busy with defending a régime which is defeated in practice. A large part of this country is out of the control of the government and the régime brutally kills its people in order to defend itself. Millions of Syrians have left their home and lands and are migrated to neighboring and European countries.

Defending the Régime that the majority of its people are dissatisfied with it reminds the Afghanistan of 80s. Defense of Russia from that régime, defeated that entire USSR instead of protecting its interests and even resulted emerging extremist groups that even today's Russia feel itself unprotected from them.

Interpretation from Terrorism

However, Russia's interference in Syria is named struggle against the "Islamic State" group, but, in practice, Moscow is still involved in war against the groups that once upon a time were fighting against their counterparts in Afghanistan. Militant groups like All Qaeda and its allies are considered as moderate groups when they are compared with "Islamic State" by US!

The objection of America and the West is that Russian fighter jets instead of bombarding the targets of "Islamic State" bombard the targets of moderate groups; but, Sergei Lawrof has another perception from moderate groups. Sergei Lawrof, the Russian Foreign Minister said: "those who think like terrorists, act like terrorists, speak like terrorists, wear like terrorists and walks like terrorists, are our targets." This definition of Russian officials does not match the definition of the White House from "terrorist" that is who threaten the interests of America. Lawrof in a press conference held on October 2, clearly told that we are not fighting only with Daesh but we are fighting with the terrorists who fight against Assad's regime.

Coordination between Iran and Russia

Russian officials consider the military presence of this country in Syria as it has long background that refers to the Soviet Union; however, the analysts think that extension of Russia's present military presence in Syria is occurred with coordination and cooperation of Iran in order to protect the interests of Russia in the region. Recent visits of Qasem Solaimani, the commander of Quds Forces to Moscow finalized the decision of Russian on having broader presence in Syria. However, Iran rejects the reports on visit of Qasem Solaimani to Russia, but, it is clear that taking such a big decision was impossible with the coordination and cooperation of Iran that has sent forces to Syria previously.

Iranian officials say that Russia and Iran along with Lebanon's Hezbollah in Syria provide "military advices" to Bashar Al-Assad's government in struggle against terrorists. Military advices is the definition that is being used by Western countries in order to help the government of Afghanistan in its struggle against Taliban which include providing air support to government forces and even conducting ground operation by their special forces in this country.

Inability of America in reining up the Syria Crisis

The weak and uncoordinated strategy taken by America in the crisis of Syria made Kremlin to believe that America is losing war to the extremist groups in this country and that the fall of Assad would strengthen the ongoing violence more than ever. The struggles of America on establishing a moderate group which could be enemy to Assad's regime and powerful opponent to groups like "Islamic State" at the same time also became failed. America despite spending huge amount money, failed to form an army consists of its proponent elements in this country, and majority of those who were trained for this job, whether joined the extremist groups or became absent from the scene.

Use of chemical weapons was a red line drawn to Assad's regime by Washington, however, despite crossing this line, the regime of Assad did not face serious reaction of America and this issue harshly weakened the position of America among the opposition of Assad.

From the other hand, the positions of America and its allies in latest years especially in the issue of Ukraine showed they do not have intend to have direct military clash with Russia which encouraged Russians to interfere in Syrian affairs. If the West did not take serious step against this action of Russia, Russians would become encouraged more than ever. Turkey protests against Russia for violations of Russian aircraft into the territory of the country and it is considered as a provocation by Washington and if this action continued and America did not take any step, this issue would embarrass America more than ever.

Why Syria is important to Russians?

The question is that what aims do Russians follow by sending forces to Syria and defending a regime that most of its people are dissatisfied with? Russians could have reasonable reasons for their decision that the most important would be military interference of the West in Islamic countries. Interference of America in Afghanistan and Iraq under the banner of struggle against terrorism and fall of Muammar Al Qadhafi in Libya empowered and spreaded the extremist groups.

The situation in Syria is the same, extremist groups would be successor of Bashar Al-Assad when he falls. From the other hand, Russia by sending force to Syria warns the Western Countries that if Russia defends its interests in Syria, America and the West should imagine intervention in Central Asian countries and some countries in Eastern Europe, because Russians would not leave them alone.

Need to be mentioned that development of forces opponent to Assad's regime in Lazafya area in the West of the country stresses the regime of Bashar Al-Assad. The Assad regime has experienced defeats in Qonaitara, Hasaka and even in some parts of Daraa, Adlab and Aleppo, but, losing Lazafya would be the end of Assad.

Lazafya can be considered as main and powerful center of Alevi community in Syria; it is the largest port of Syria and inveterate supporter of Assad's regime are from this area. If Assad lost this base, not chance would be left for him and if this strategic port is seized by the opposition, Tartos, the second largest port and the entire coastal areas would become seized by the armed opposition of the Assad's regime, then.

Russian navy forces have established a naval base in the Tartos port and therefore, this strategic port in the Mediterranean coast has a lot of importance for Russia.

Conclusion

Conflict of Russia and the West in Syria has entered a new era after Russia deployment their troops in Syria, however, the possibility of military confrontation between Russia and America in this area would be very unlikely. America wants Russia to become involved in the conflict of Syria and if Russians sent ground forces to fight along with the Assad government against its opponents, the Americans would prefer to gradually leave Russians in Syria alone in order to experience another Afghanistan after the collapse of the Soviet Union in another Islamic country this time.

Based on this policy, America instead of overthrowing the Assad's regime through the military means, call for a political solution to the Syrian crisis through negotiation. US Secretary of State, John Kerry wanted Iran and Russia to use their influence and bring Bashar al-Assad to the negotiation table and suspend the removal of Assad until the end of the war in Syria.

On the other hand, the Russian intervention in Syria as a result of collaboration with Iran will make the conservative Arab countries to intensify their enmity with Russia and this feeling can increase the support to anti-Assad groups in Syria.

The End

Contact Us:

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

Website: www.csrskabul.com - www.csrskabul.net

Office: (+93) 784089590

Contact with Officials:

Dr. AbdulBaqi Amin, General Director of CSRS: (+93) 789316120 abdulbaqi123@hotmail.com

Dr. Waheedullah Muslih, Deputy Director of CSRS: (+93) 747575741 drwahidm@gmail.com

Hekmatullah Zaland, Research and Publication Manager: (+93) 775454048 hekmat.zaland@gmail.com



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