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## **Preface**

After the latest waves of insecurities in the north of Afghanistan, the Central Asian countries and Russian's attentions increased toward Afghanistan and they have its concerns about the extension of these insecurities to the region.

Therefore, the possibility of Russian military assistance to Afghanistan and even the possibility of air assaults by Moscow in Afghanistan as like Syria are discussed. Meanwhile, the head of SCO accepted that Afghanistan has recently requested for full membership in this organization.

You are reading about the main reasons behind the Central Asia and Russia's concerns in Afghanistan and their future perspectives in the future in this week's Analysis.

Also, as the attacks of the Taliban increased in the various areas in the country especially in the North, Nawaz Sharif, the Prime Minister of Pakistan talked about efforts for reinitiating face-to-face peace talks between the Taliban and the Afghan government; however, Pakistan has repeatedly made such kind of promises but there is not any improvement in this regard; so, what are behind Pakistan's latest efforts?

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

## The increasing concerns of Central Asian Republics and Russia regarding Afghanistan



For the last six months the one-after-another falls of some regions and districts in the north of Afghanistan had created concerns in the Central Asian countries; however, after the fall of Kunduz city by the Taliban, new waves of concerns had risen in these countries and now have encouraged them to take practical steps.

Due to the ongoing insecurity and instability in the north of Afghanistan, the Central Asian countries had taken such measures to prevent the extension of this instability to its countries.

What are behind the concerns of Central Asian Republics and Moscow in Afghanistan? What would be the form of Russia's increasing interest in Afghanistan? Whether it would be launching assaults beyond providing assistance as it has done in Syria? And besides that, why Kabul had requested for receiving full membership in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) in present situation?

## **Reasons behind Central Asia and Russia's Concerns:**

The reasons behind Central Asia's most concerns are as following:

### **First: Instability in the north of Afghanistan**

A number of districts in the north of Afghanistan was seized by the Taliban before and after the fall of Kunduz; according to a research conducted by [Long War Journal](#), 29 district out of 398 are fully controlled by the Taliban and only the centers of 36 other districts are in the hand of the government and the remaining areas of these districts are controlled by the Taliban, also. After the fall of Kunduz, [9 other districts](#) became seized by the Taliban in the north of Afghanistan and this series of seizing districts by the Taliban is extended from Badakhshan to Faryab. In this case, the line of insecurities has border with three countries of Central Asian Republics; this situation has provoked the Central Asian countries and has made them to have its concerns. Therefore, Tajikistan had closed its borders with Afghanistan at the first day of the fall of Kunduz, Russia transferred its high military technology in its Base-201 in Tajikistan and now the Collective Security System of Russia is going to increase security precautions on the border between Tajikistan and Afghanistan.

### **Second: Presence of Central Asia's Citizens in the Ranks of *Daesh***

A number of Central Asia's citizens pledged its alliance to *Daesh* after it does emerge in Iraq and Syria and declaration of "Islamic State". Of course, there is not concrete information about the citizens of Russia and Central Asian Republics in the ranks of ISIL or "Islamic State"; however, according to a news broadcasted by Reuters, Russian officials believes that there are 2400 Russians citizens and about 3000 Central Asia's citizens in the ranks of *Daesh*.

### **Third: Central Asian militant groups pledge of allegiance with *Daesh***

A number of Central Asian militant groups have pledged its allegiance with the leader of *Daesh*, Abu Bakr Al Baghdadi; the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, the Unity of Islamic Jihad and the group of Jamaat Ul Ansar are among these groups. Their pledges of allegiance with *Daesh* have increased Central Asian Republics and Russian concerns.

### **Fourth: The Emergence of *Daesh* in Afghanistan**

The emergence of *Daesh* in Afghanistan is another challenge for Central Asian Republics and Russia. Their Presidents, Defense Ministers and Foreign Ministers have had expressed its concerns, regarding *Daesh*. Recently, a conference on Afghanistan was

held in the Russian Ministry of Defense and the Russian officials said that round up to 3000 individuals are with *Daesh* in Afghanistan.

### **Russian's Military Assistance to Afghanistan**

Now, Russia has increased its military assistance with Afghanistan due to the said concerns. Kabul has realized the concerns of Russians and Central Asian Republics and has moved its foreign policy to a course that would receive assistance from these countries in order to remove instability and provide security to Afghanistan. Therefore, for this purpose, Afghanistan has requested for a full membership in SCO.

After the NUG establishment, ties between Afghanistan and Russia become wider with each passing day. The President, the First Vice-President, the Foreign Minister and the National Security Advisor of Afghanistan had visits to Russia and the meetings of Afghan officials are increased with the special representative and Ambassador of Russia.

On April 10, 2015, Kabul made request to get MI-35 military helicopters from Russia. Moscow is ready to provide these helicopters. Recently, the special representative of Russia to Afghanistan, Zamir Kabulov said that an agreement would be signed regarding this issue with both countries in October. Recently, the Russian Defense Minister has also said that Russia is ready to provide every kind of military assistance to Afghanistan. Russian Federation's representative to NATO, Alexander Grishko, has said that Afghanistan cannot fight *Deash* alone.

### **Whether Russians would be conducting Air Assaults in Afghanistan?**

If Russians provide assistance to Afghanistan and the situation does not change in the country, so, whether Russians would conduct air assaults in Afghanistan as it has done in Syria or not? Therefore, last week, a number of newspapers in Afghanistan have published topics regarding the possible air assaults of Russia in the north of Afghanistan as like as it done in Syria. Perhaps, it was told that the Russia would do it, if insecurities were increased in the Northern parts of Afghanistan day by day and the government became failed in providing security; however, the possibility of Russia's air assaults in Afghanistan seems impossible due to following reasons:

**First:** Russia is involved with the issue of Syria and Ukraine and it is not only faced with serious reaction of the West but it has also faced sanctions by America and EU as a result of the Ukraine issue.

**Second:** Moscow considering its past experience in Afghanistan would not repeat the same mistake again.

**Third:** The only concern of Russia in the Northern Afghanistan is that instability should not spread to Central Asian Republics; they are not afraid of the Taliban to a large extent, because the member of the Qatar Office have cleared to Russians that the agenda of the Taliban is very much limited within the boundaries of Afghanistan.

**Fourth:** The Taliban have made a special force against *Daesh*; Therefore, Russian would not attack Taliban in the Northern Afghanistan.

**Fifth:** Russians cannot do this job due to serious objection of America and NATO.

**Sixth:** The Afghan government would also show serious objections regarding Moscow's decision to airstrikes Northern Afghanistan.

### **Kabul's Request to get full membership in SCO**

Last week, the head of SCO, Dimitri Mizintsif, has declared that Kabul has officially requested to get full membership in this organization. After Ashraf Ghani took power, Afghan authorities had talked with Russians and Chinese regarding this issue. However, Kabul is requesting to get full membership in SCO in such a time that from one hand the entire Kunduz province was controlled by Taliban for several days and a large number of districts have fell and from the other hand, *Daesh* has also strengthen its position in Afghanistan.

However, Afghanistan has natural potential to become a full member in SCO; why it has not received the membership of this organization yet? The reasons behind this would be presence of American and NATO forces in Afghanistan and beside that, the foreign policy of Afghanistan, to a large extent, was dependent on the West. However, when the Americans declared its withdrawal from Afghanistan, the relations between Hamid Karzai and America became unfriendly due to the 2009 Presidential Elections, and moreover, the insecurity in Afghanistan reached to its high level in this year, also. So, Afghanistan was given an observer status in SCO in 2012.

The reasons behind Afghan request to get full membership in SCO would be as following:

- In order to increase its security cooperation with China and Russia;
- In order to get military assistance from Russia and China;
- In order to get assistance regarding the war on terrorism from the countries that have membership in this organization, because this organization was originally established with the motive to counter terrorism
- The government claims that almost 3 million Afghans are addicted with narcotics and the SCO can help Afghanistan in this regard.

The Foreign Ministry of Afghanistan hopes that Afghanistan would receive full membership in this organization. The situation of Afghanistan plays a helpful hand in this regard because there is insecurity in the North, the *Daesh* group is strengthening in some areas of this country day by day and the American and NATO are about to withdraw from the country. Pakistan and India are also given full membership in this organization that would play a helpful role in the membership process of Afghanistan.

## Peace Process: from Afghan Government's efforts to Pakistan's repeated promises



After the deterioration of relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan, the Pakistani officials have once again spoken about the revival of peace talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban. In this regard, the Pakistani Prime Minister, Nawaz Sharif, reported his efforts to resume the peace talks. Previously, Pakistan's Army Chief, General Sharif had also said that if the Taliban did not make peace with the government of Afghanistan, they would join Daesh, then.

Two rounds of negotiations between the representatives of the government of Afghanistan and those who were introduced as Taliban's representatives by Pakistan took place in Urumqi and Islamabad. In the Murree negotiations near Islamabad, when the debate reached a cease-fire, negotiations were postponed to the next round, but as the death news of Mullah Mohammed Omar was disclosed, the negotiations became postponed to an uncertain future, and the next round of negotiations is yet to be held.

The Afghan government has welcomed the statement of Nawaz Sharif, however, this time, it has set a condition for the initiation of peace talks and has said that before anything else Pakistan should stop its support to the Taliban.



## **Pakistan's Isolation and Nawaz Sharif's visit to America**

Ashraf Ghani's friendlier policy, despite the shortcomings, toward Pakistan was to show the international community that Afghanistan is honest in its relations with Pakistan. Therefore, Pakistan came under pressure after the negotiations between the representatives of the Taliban and the government of Afghanistan and the disclosure of the death of Mullah Mohammad Omar and also President Ghani's several statements about Pakistan's involvement in an undeclared war with Afghanistan and that first of all the peace should be made with Pakistan. Hence the Pakistan Army Chief of Staff, National Security Advisor to the Prime Minister and the Prime Minister himself had talked about its struggles on initiating peace talks.

Nawaz Sharif is scheduled to travel to America and meet President Obama in the next few days. Part of the agenda of his visit is to discuss about the issue of Afghanistan as well. That's why some analysts think that the recent statements of the Prime Minister of Pakistan on the eve of his trip to America, is a promotional campaign. However, it still seems that Pakistan, for ensuring its own interests, became obligated to improve its relations with Afghanistan and besides that to show international community that his country is honest in its relations with Afghanistan. But, Pakistan's repeated promises for honest cooperation in the Afghan peace process and not fulfilling them have cause the Afghan side to see the Pakistan's efforts with doubt and a strong guarantee is needed now.

## **Peace Efforts through High Peace Council**

In President Hamid Karzai's administration, efforts to attract the Taliban started. At the beginning, the government did not consider the Taliban as a remarkable group and it was thought that there is no need to make peace with this group in the presence of foreign troops and that the peace is achievable through war.

Reaching peace through war means that the opposition must be defeated in the war and so there would be no need to negotiations. Based on this vision and belief, Hamid Karzai established the High Peace Council.

Hezb-i Islami party led by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar that did not participate in the Bonn-I Conference and continued its war against the government of Hamid Karzai, gradually realized that war is not the solution to the problem of Afghanistan and if the Party can

reach an understanding with the Kabul government, it could cooperate with the government instead of fighting against it.

Hekmatyar sent delegations to Kabul and presented a proposal on solving the problem of Afghanistan to Hamid Karzai, however, the government of Karzai did not pay attention to this proposal which was reviewed by Hekmatyar for several times; nevertheless, these visits resulted reintegration of the heads of these delegations in the government and an understanding did not become made with the leadership of the Party. On the other hand, the Party had lost its power as a force fighting against the foreign forces and the Afghan government.

This experience made Hamid Karzai to start this game with the Taliban, also. At first he was in contact with the Taliban's leaders based on ethnicity. Mullah Biradar, deputy of Mullah Omar, from the descent of Popalzai tribe, which Karzai also belong to the same tribe, was focused on. However, as the first condition of the Taliban is withdrawal of foreign forces from Afghanistan and establishment of a government based on Islamic Sharia, so, the Taliban cannot be convinced to reintegrate. Hence, the efforts of the High Peace Council (HPC) remained fruitless and it would not have achievements after that.

### **Putting Pressures on Pakistan**

In the case, the first condition of the Taliban for peace negotiations was full withdrawal of foreign forces from Afghanistan, the National Unity Government (NUG) signed the Security Agreement with America within 24 hours after it sworn in, and through this it blocked the road to negotiations with the Taliban. The condition of Hamid Karzai for signing the Security Agreement was providence of peace in Afghanistan, but, the leaders of NUG had thought that the presence of American forces in Afghanistan and its long-term military assistance would be guaranteeing peace in Afghanistan.

Ashraf Ghani, before becoming the President, was talking about peace but he, in response to those who were considering him careless about peace for signing the Security Agreement with America, had said that China and Pakistani have promised me that they would make the Taliban to make peace with us. I do not need to negotiate with the Taliban.

Ashraf Ghani, with such a confidence, provided a lot of concessions to Pakistan and accepted a series of commitments. However, it must be admitted that not only Pakistan is involved in the issue of Afghanistan, but, the interests of a lot of countries including

America and UK are tied to insecurity in Afghanistan. Russia, after passing a period of difficulties, recovers and a new Cold War between Russia and America is going to take shape, the rivalries between the oil-rich Arab countries and Iran is taken from Syria and Iraq to Yemen and India and Pakistan are engaged in its disputes until now. So, considering Pakistan as a solution-key to the problems of Afghanistan and expecting countries like China to put pressure on Pakistan is fruitless.

Mullah Akhtar Mohammad Mansoor, the new leader of the Taliban, in his first speech, had mentioned this issue that the peace negotiations were just a game and the war would be continuing. Some individuals interpret this word of the new leader of the Taliban that there would be no negotiations anymore and the Taliban would return to their position before 2009 once again.

However, the new leader of the Taliban mentioned the Taliban Political Office (TPC) in his speech, also. Considering that TPC is the only source appointed for negotiations, so, it could be understood that the peace negotiations are not removed from the agenda of the new leader of the Taliban, but, the only way to direct negotiations with the Taliban is not putting pressure on Pakistan.

### **Whether the Taliban would Join *Daesh*?**

Recently, remarks about the presence and power of the “Islamic State” in Afghanistan are heard that seems exaggerated. Gen. Raheel Sharif expressed concerns regarding the situation in Afghanistan that perhaps the Taliban would join Daesh, if the peace negotiations were not started between the Afghan government and the Taliban.

Gen. John Campbell also expressed his concern about the broadening the scope of Daesh for recruitment in various parts of Afghanistan and the ambassador of Great Britain in Kabul also called the activities of Daesh in Afghanistan “worrying”. This statement is heard in circumstances where the Taliban have insecure a large part of the north of Afghanistan and had presence in the important city of Kunduz for two weeks.

Magnification of ISIS by America and UK would be due to fear that if foreign forces withdraw from Afghanistan, the Taliban would bring large parts of Afghanistan under their control. During past fourteen years, the West suffered enormous financial costs and human casualties; therefore, now, they cannot say that the Taliban are still strong. Such a confession would mean admitting defeat. People in the West think of that if our

forces were unable to defeat the Taliban in over fourteen years; so, they have to return home, then.

Hence, being the self-made group named Daesh on the ground and magnifying it can create a new mentality among the people in the West. Meaning that, the new emerged enemy is more dangerous than Taliban and Al Qaeda and so our forces should stay in Afghanistan in order to fight them.

### **The Need of an Intra-Afghan Understanding**

The latest insecurities in the country and fall of Kunduz has showed that the Taliban, after 14 years of War on Terror, headed by America, are yet to be defeated and even have powerful presence in the play, now. This is the obvious reason behind the failure of the strategy of achieving the peace through war.

For the both sides of the war, it should be noted that the regional conflicts are being complicated day by day that provoking ethnic and religious conflicts are its initial characteristic. If this war continues in our country, we will not be able to get out of this dangerous abyss and will be drawn willy-nilly into it. This war will cause the entire ethnicities of Afghanistan to become defeated and their enemies to become succeeded.

The only solution to the problem of Afghanistan is establishment of an intra-Afghan understanding. Intra-Afghan understanding and efforts for creating an impartial mediation group can prevent the continuation of proxy wars among other countries in Afghanistan.

The End

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