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Preface

100 US troops were deployed to Helmand last week and coincide with that one American soldier was killed and another injured in this province. Although since January 2015, foreign troops are training the Afghan forces under “Resolute Support” mission but now it seem that they are eventually returning to the battlefield.

In the last six years, the US President Barack Obama has changed its military policy in Afghanistan for several times and somehow this policy was unstable; reasons behind the changes in US military policy in Afghanistan and the impacts of “new authorities” to the US troops on the Afghan government’s war and peace process are the issues that are analyzed in this issue of the Weekly Analysis.

In the second part of the analysis, you would read about the importation of poor quality and counterfeit medicines in the country. In a press conference last week, officials in the Ministry of Public Health said that more than half of the medicines in Afghanistan are imported through illegal means. In the past one decade and a half, despite the achievements that the health sector had, the importation of illegal and counterfeit medicines was a major problem and not only this problem is not controlled but has also grown bigger.

In this issue of the Weekly Analysis you would read analysis of the Center for Strategic and Regional Studies about the above two issues.

The unstable USA strategy in Afghanistan



Since the formation of the National Unity Government (NUG), the United States (US) has repeatedly changed its policy regarding withdrawal of its troops from Afghanistan and now contrary to its previous policy has deployed its military forces in the battlefield following the intensification of war between the Afghan security forces and the Taliban in Helmand and Kunduz provinces.

The US military strategy in Afghanistan, Washington's unstable withdrawal policy and the impacts of US troops' return to the battlefield on the Afghan government, peace and war are the issues that are analyzed here.

USA strategy for Afghanistan: During Bush and Obama administrations

In 2000, the republicans seized power in the US and White House was surrounded by the neo-conservatives. According to neo-conservatives, wherever USA interests are threatened it must conduct preemptive strikes to tackle the threat.

Therefore, this strategic thinking also influenced George W. Bush's Afghanistan and Iraq campaigns in 2001 and 2003 respectively.

Generally, the US's strategy towards Afghanistan passed through three stages: first, to overthrow the Taliban regime and replace it with a new government. Later-on when the Taliban reinitiated their fight, the US, in the second stage, responded with increasing its troop's level in the country. In the third stage, when the fatalities of US soldiers rose and the US war in Iraq and Afghanistan was criticized inside the United States; the US began its campaign to withdraw its troops from Afghanistan by the end of 2011.

Besides the withdrawal of troops, the US wanted to have military bases in Afghanistan which it achieved after inking the Bilateral Security Agreement with the newly-formed Afghan National Unity Government (NUG).

Obama's unstable policy towards Afghanistan

After the escalation of war in the battlefield and intensification of insecurity in Afghanistan, George W. Bush changed his policy towards Afghanistan for the first time in 2006 and deployed extra troops to the country. At that time, Barack Obama was a Senator and he used to emphasize on the US war in Afghanistan rather than Iraq war; because he believed that the US was attacked from this region and the probability of attack on the states might also be from this region.

When Obama became the US President in 2008, he announced his plan to increase US troops level in Afghanistan and also announced the beginning of US troop's withdrawal from Afghanistan after 2011.

Just after the formation of the NUG in 2014, the Afghan government signed Security Agreements with the US and NATO and accordance to which only 9800 US and 2000 NATO forces were supposed to remain in Afghanistan and in 2016 this number would have decreased to half. But this policy was postponed when the Afghan President and Chief Executive officer visited the US in March 2015 and Obama agreed to keep 9800 US soldiers in Afghanistan until 2015. Later-on in the backdrops of Kunduz fall, Obama changed its policy once again and stated that he

would keep the 9800 US forces in Afghanistan to the end of 2016 and will decrease this number to 5500 in the first month of 2017. But later in July 2016, Obama announced that only 8400 soldiers would remain in Afghanistan by the end of 2016.

Reasons behind Obama's unstable policy towards Afghanistan

Since the formation of the NUG, Barack Obama extended the timing of the US troops' withdrawal from Afghanistan several times. The followings are the reasons behind the change in Obama's policy:

- **Gaining the support of democrats;** after 2006, the casualties of the US soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan increased and eventually people in the United States stood against the US war in Iraq and Afghanistan. In 2008, the democrats won the US Presidential elections with the slogan of ending the US war in Iraq and Afghanistan. According to a survey, 73% of democrats wanted the US troops to withdraw from Afghanistan as soon as possible¹.
- **Pressurizing Karzai;** in 2009, the US special envoy for Afghanistan and Pakistan Richard Holbrook tried to intervene in the Afghan elections and later the US Ambassador's email in which he had called Karzai a "non-adequate strategic partner" which was revealed by Wiki Leaks. The two events deeply impacted Kabul-Washington relations. After the deterioration of relations when Karzai refused to sign the BSA, the US wanted to use these announcements to pressurize Karzai.
- **The Iraq experiment and fear of being blamed in the history;** although Obama is known as the man who put an end to war in Iraq and reduced the number of US troops' casualties in Afghanistan; but he is also criticized who left behind such Iraq in 2011 where civil war began and ISIS emerged and captured many areas. Obama may, therefore, be concerned about putting behind an Afghanistan under domination of militant groups or with a civil war erupted in it.

¹ Read PEW's research here:

<http://www.pewresearch.org/daily-number/majority-support-quick-troop-withdrawal-from-afghanistan/>

- **Regional interest;** Afghanistan is located between Russia and Central Asia, Iran, Pakistan and China and its geographic location is very valuable. Changes are taking place in this region since several years and on the one hand, the issue of US and Russia's cold war is beginning to take shape again and the two countries are practically faced each other in Ukraine, Georgia and Syria; on the other hand, China has started its two significant projects- the New Silk Road and China-Pakistan Economic Zone. Besides that the US has borrowed more money from China than any other country and is also in the anti-China block in the issue of South China Sea.
- **Division of attention in several regions and instability to set priorities;** currently the US's attention is divided in Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria; on the one hand, because of Iraq, Syria and Iran it cannot let Russia open handed in the Middle East (after the failed coup d'état in Turkey, Ankara is also closing to Russia); on the other hand, it cannot shift its attention from Afghanistan at now when deep changes are occurring in this region.

The return of Americans to the battlefield and its impact on peace and war

Based on existing information, the US forces has entered the battlefield during the operations to recapture the Kunduz city; but later until the first month of 2016, the US's role in the battlefield was far decreased. In February and April the western newspapers published reports that after 2014, the US soldiers have once again returned to Helmand province.²

On July 13 2016, The US Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter visited Afghanistan and in a joint press conference with the Afghan President Ashraf Ghani he said that new authorities are given to the US forces in Afghanistan in order to fight against the Afghan Taliban. Before that the US soldiers had to conduct operations against the Taliban only if they were asked to do so but with the new authorities

² Read the February report here : http://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/10/world/asia/us-troops-helmand-province-afghanistan.html?_r=0 and for April report see the Washington post's report : https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/us-troops-are-back-in-restive-afghan-province-a-year-after-withdrawal/2016/04/07/d3c6086a-fc19-11e5-813a-90ab563f0dde_story.html

they will be able to conduct operations or airstrikes before the emergence of threat or as the threat is detected.³

The US deployed 100 troops in Helmand last week, in order to assist in the trainings of the Afghan forces; where one US soldier was killed and another injured in a roadside explosion

Although the return of US and NATO forces in the battlefield would support the Afghan government morally and as the government states it would “raise” the moral of security forces; but it would have bad impacts on war and peace in the country. Because the Taliban have released a statement about the return of US soldiers in Helmand which will give the fighters of the group reason and moral to fight.

³ For further info see here: <http://1tvnews.af/en/news/afghanistan/23512-new-powers-let-us-forces-take-fight-to-taliban--carter>

The import of low quality medicines: Causes and Remedies



Insecurity has led Afghanistan to become a medicine importer country. Officials in the Afghan Ministry of Public Health say that Afghanistan spends 650 million US dollars annually on medicines, 180 million of which is spent for medicines in government sectors (Ministries of Interior, Defense and Public Health).

On the other hand, currently, the country imports 95% of its needed medicines from other countries, but the importation of poor quality, counterfeit, illegal and expired medicines has endangered Afghan's health. The poor quality medicines have led many Afghan patients to seek cure outside the country.

The factors behind the importation of poor quality, counterfeit and illegal medicines in the country and its solutions are the issues that are addressed in this part of the weekly analysis.

The illegal import of medicines

In the past several years, hundred million dollars were spent to promote the health sector in the country. Hundreds of hospitals and clinics were either repaired or newly constructed in various parts of the country and their administrations were also promoted, but in association with the management and control of the medicines we have not had remarkable achievements; as the illegal supply of illegal and counterfeit medicines by individuals and companies is increasing which indicates the poor management of relevant organs.

According to the officials in Ministry of Public Health, currently 40 to 55 percent of medicines are being smuggled, and as a result, poor quality and counterfeit medicines are entering the country. Thus smuggling medicines is assumed to be a major challenge for the Ministry of Public health and the businessmen who import medicines through legal means.

There are several institutions monitoring the importation of medicines in the country, but lack of a mechanism of coordination and cooperation between government institutions such as Ministries of Interior, Finance and Health has resulted in smuggling of hundred thousand tons of medicines from neighboring countries.

Another pivotal factor is corruption in relevant administrations. From the moment that poor quality medicines enter Afghanistan till the completion of the control and custom processes and its supply to bazar there are the possibility of corruption everywhere.

Quality control

Currently Afghanistan imports its 35% imported medicines from Pakistan, 25% from India, 15% from Iran, and the remaining from China, United Arab Emirates and etc. Around 300 companies are established in Pakistan in the past few years in order to produce poor quality medicines for Afghanistan which imports falsely labeled (using the label of reputable companies) medicines that are produced only to be used in Afghanistan.

Despite the control of Ministry of Interior, National Directorate of Security and Ministry of Health, due to the lack of coordination and cooperation among them these medicines make their way to Afghan markets.

Based on a survey conducted by the Ministry of Public Health in 1394, from 1000 companies registered in the Ministry of Public Health, only 200 companies import the essential qualified medicines. Besides that, according to the Joint Anti-Corruption Monitoring and Evaluation Committee, Afghanistan Investment Support Agency (AISA) or Ministry of Commerce and Industries, distributes licenses to the applicant companies irrespective of any criterion and does not monitor the licensed company then. On the other hand, after five years the list of legal medicines is not renewed, while 50 to 60 types of medicines are needed to be added to this list every year.

Lack of well-equipped and standard laboratories at the borders and coincided with that lack of professional and expert cadres who know how to use the new equipment of laboratories is another factor behind the importation of poor quality medicines in the country. It is said that recently, Ministry of Public Health has purchased modern medical machines but due to the lack of experts and professional cadres in medical technology, these machines are exploited in the capital and other cities of the country.

Another problem in this regard is that the transportation of these medicines from Iran and Pakistan takes place in 15 to 30 days in a containers that are not equipped with freezers and sometimes these medicines remain inside these containers for several days in over 40 ° C temperature.

The need to amend the Procurement Law

The Afghan Procurement Law is not implementable not only in medical sector but also in other trade and professional sectors such as “Da Afghanistan Breshna Sherkat- meaning the Afghan Electricity Company in Pashto), Ariana Afghan Airlines and etc. It is needed to prepare and approve particular regulations to each of these institutions in accord with its trading spirit. The 1387 Procurement Law does not describe the details about medicines importation and the 1386 Law has simplified the importation of medicines very much.

The rating system to provide goods and the specification of low prices in the Afghan Procurement Law is an important issue regarding the provision of medicines which pushes the importing companies to seek the cheapest medicines in the markets of the countries that produce medicines and competition between the importing companies also takes place based on these low prices.

This is a mean challenge and also an excuse for businessmen and also paves the way for institutionalization of corruption in respected administrations.

What to do?

In order to prevent the importation of poor quality medicines it is needed to implement the following steps:

- Imposing strict regulations on individuals and companies that are involved in smuggling and selling poor quality medicines;
- To make and implement regulations to produce, import and control medicines;
- Building the capacity of professional and expert cadres to utilize medical technology particularly in the provinces of the country;
- Building specific mechanism to promote coordination between organs associated to the importation and process of medicines;

- Supporting private investment in producing medicines inside the country;
- Confirmation of the medicines produced inside Afghanistan by reputable medicine companies of the world.

The end

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