



## Center for Strategic & Regional Studies

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## Preface

For the past two weeks, Abdul Hafiz Mansoor's controversial assertion in Parliament triggered discussions in the media. Abdul Hafiz Mansoor, a member of afghan parliament, recently said in the parliament that mosques and Islamic subjects are the source of terrorism in the country. His views were harshly criticized in the media and in the parliament as well.

In the absence of academic research, making such accusations sparks various sensibilities and, in the current conditions, will have negative consequences. The question arises, whether it is necessary to raise such kind of issue. Does terrorism have a specific definition in Afghanistan and the world? And given the sensibility of the society, what is to be done in this regard?

In the second part of the analysis, you would read about the sixth Heart of Asia Conference. The Heart of Asia Conferences are held every year in one member country and since 2011 it has held six meetings, the recent was organized last week in Amritsar, India. As expected, the Afghan President harshly criticized Pakistan in this conference and rejected \$500m contribution of Pakistan and overall the tenuous Afghanistan-Pakistan and Pakistan-India relations had shadowed the conference.

In this issue of the Weekly Analysis, you would read analysis of the Center for Strategic and Regional Studies (CSRS) on above two issues.

## Do mosques and Islamic Culture subjects train terrorists?



Speaking at the Afghan Parliament, a member of Jamiat-e-Islami Abdul Hafiz Mansoor labeled mosques and Islamic Culture subjects <sup>1</sup> (an Islamic subject at universities) as “terrorist” producers. For the past two weeks, Abdul Hafiz Mansoor’s controversial remarks have sparked debates and discussions regarding Islamic Culture subjects and mosques in media in general and in social media and the Parliament in particular. Minister of Hajj and Religious Affairs had also been summoned in Wolesi Jirga for further explanations.

The West has criticized Islamic Culture, Madrasas, Mosques and Islamic political system long time ago and has considered the political aspect of Islam to be the origin of “terrorism”; but inside Afghanistan, it is the first time that a member of an Islamic movement terms Islamic Culture and mosques as centers of terrorism.

Although there may be some concerns regarding the contents or syllabus of Islamic Culture subjects and as well as management of some of the mosques; but it does not mean that these two are the propagators of terrorism. One should not ignore the other basic factors behind terrorism.

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<sup>1</sup> In this text the term “Islamic Culture” (the first letters in capital) is referred to the Islamic subject taught in Afghan Universities.

Several questions are noteworthy; do we agree with the west with the definition of terrorism? What is the United States and Afghanistan's anti-terrorism strategy? Do mosques and Islamic Culture subjects really generate terrorists? What are the root cause of terrorism in Islamic Word and particularly Afghanistan? In addition, which parts of Islamic Culture subjects needs reforms? In this part of the analysis, we have answered these questions.

### **“Terrorism”; an ambiguous and disputed term**

Before discussing the link between terrorism and Islamic Culture subjects and mosques, it will be better to first define terrorism. The term “terrorism” is ambiguous and disputed term often used by westerns. Not many people share the same definition of terrorism; but according to Alex P. Schmid's research, various organizations and states have put more than 250 definition of terrorism until now<sup>2</sup>.

Although most of the people do not have the same definition of terrorism; but almost all of them agrees with some of “terrorist incidents” or “terrorist activities” as an acts of terrorism. For instance, killing civilians and innocent people, abducting to spread fear in the society or to provoke the state, or to force the government or international community to do something unfit to their working framework etc. However, despite many efforts by a number of people and the United Nations, the term “terrorism” is yet to be properly defined in International legal Law<sup>3</sup>.

At international levels, it seems difficult to present a definition of terrorism that is acceptable to all. Therefore, the term is often used politically and emotionally. The history of the past two centuries also gives testimony of the same fact, many occupier and colonial powers have labeled their enemies who fought for the freedom and independence of their countries as terrorists. For instance, at first,

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<sup>2</sup> For further information see here:

Alex P. Schmid, The Definition of Terrorism, in Alex P. Schmid (edited), The Routledge Handbook of Terrorism Research, 2011, New York

<sup>3</sup> Human Rights Voice, there is no UN definition of terrorism, see it online:

[http://www.humanrightsvoices.org/eyeontheun/un\\_101/facts/?p=61](http://www.humanrightsvoices.org/eyeontheun/un_101/facts/?p=61)

Nelson Mandela was known as a terrorist, the Afghan Mujahedeen and the freedom fighters were also labeled with the same term during their Jihad against the Soviet Union; the Algerian freedom fighters that fought against France were also called terrorists. That is why the quotation “one man’s terrorist is another’s freedom fighter” was recognized worldwide and sparked discussions in terrorism related sciences.

### **The US and the Afghan government’s counter-terrorism strategy**

The United States started its so called “war on terror” in Afghanistan despite the fact that no Afghan was involved in 9/11 incident and nor the United States provided convincing facts to the Taliban for handing over Osama Bin Laden to them; but still the US started the current war in Afghanistan and termed it as anti-terrorism war. From 2001 to 2011, the war on terror was carried-out under the leadership, consultation and strategies of the US; from 2011 to 2014, the Afghan forces took part in this war as well, and then after 2014, security responsibilities were completely transited to the Afghan security forces. Despite all of these, the anti-terrorism war is still an American war.

The Americans themselves as well as the current US President have criticized the US war on terror in Afghanistan and Iraq; and in various parts of Islamic world, voices are raised against this war. Even the former Afghan President Hamid Karzai has also harshly criticized the US war on terror and has termed some aspects of the US anti-terrorism strategy as “Taliban making factory”.

On the other hand, although the Afghan Parliament member Abdul Hafiz Mansoor fiercely criticized Afghanistan’s anti-terrorism strategy and said that, “The anti-terrorism strategy has been a failure in the recent several years, and both the Afghan government and Parliament is to be blame.” But, he criticizes the government for not taking serious measures to tackle terrorism, “Terrorism is an extremist thought rather than explosives. The security forces can prevent explosions but they cannot control the ideas that are spread from one mind to another and through media,” added Mansoor. Such expression would not be beneficial in anti-terrorism fight and it will rather bolster extremism and the so-called terrorism.

### **Do mosques and Islamic Culture really produce terrorists?**

In his speech in the Afghan Parliament, Abdul Mansoor called mosques and Islamic Culture as the two main sources of terrorism. “Most of our mosques spread extremist thoughts; Islamic Culture is currently producing terrorists,” he said.

In academic and scientific discussions, it is almost impossible to accuse the overall subject of Islamic Culture for producing terrorism. But, if one says that the contents of Islamic Culture should be reconsidered or discussed or even if someone accuses some teachers of Islamic Culture for presenting their own opinions instead of curriculum then it would not have been a major issue. But, despite any academic arguments and with the absence of research and surveys, accusing Islamic subjects for training terrorists has rather political and emotional aspects.

This accusation is also wrong from a historical perspective. Although the phenomenon of extremism is emerged in Afghanistan since the 20th century; but before then, despite the existence of mosques and Islamic subjects (Islamic subjects are used to be taught under various titles in the Afghan mosques and madrasas) Afghanistan was free of extremist influences. Moreover, it was these mosques and the subjects taught there that give birth to the brilliant Afghan civilizations of the history, such as the Herat, Balkh and Ghazni civilizations during Ghanznavids, Ghurids and Timurids periods.

### **The main root cause of the terrorism**

Radicalism and terrorism in Islamic world can be traced back to the first decade of twentieth century and is particularly rooted in the British and American policies in the Middle East, for instance, their efforts against Ottoman Caliphate, the Sykes-Picot Agreement, paving the way for Israel in Palestine etc.

During the cold war, western countries supported dictators, puppets and leaders that were not backed by the people in Islamic countries. Thus, people in these

countries become tired of the ensued situation. Later, when some Muslims returned to their countries after Jihad against the Soviets in Afghanistan, they were prosecuted and imprisoned. These deeds increased peoples' inclination towards terrorism.

The post-2001 American war in Afghanistan and Iraq and their activities in these countries resulted in resurgence of the Taliban in Afghanistan and emergence of ISIS in Iraq. That is why we say that terrorism or radicalism in Islamic world is naturally a backfire of the western particularly the US strategy in Islamic countries. Moreover, there might be also some internal factors behind the terrorism and extremism; but the main drivers of terrorism are, largely, external factors.

The fundamental factors behind extremism and terrorism in Afghanistan is not mosques and Islamic subjects, but the US military presence in Afghanistan, its deeds and behaviors at Bagram and Guantanamo prisons, night raids, and insulting religious sanctities. That is why even at some occasions Afghan army soldiers have also opened fire on Americans and other foreign troops. In addition, ignorance, lack of Islamic knowledge, poverty and unemployment are other factors behind terrorism, but these are considered minor factors.

Furthermore, extremism is often linked with terrorism and sometimes both are used as a synonym, which is incorrect; because, perhaps in some cases, extremism is linked with terrorism, but in most other cases, it has no relation with terrorism. This extremism is only in opinion, thoughts and not in deeds or in any incident. If one studies Afghanistan's history, in the past one century, one will find out that here, extremism is rather driven due to ultra-secular policies..

One can briefly say that the US anti-terror strategy in Afghanistan and Iraq is similar to Mohsen Hamid's English novel *Reluctant Fundamentalist*, where a novel character Chengiz becomes an extremist/terrorist due to others' behaviors and deeds. The same is accurate in the case of Muslims across the world and Afghanistan, where people are reluctantly forced towards fundamentalism, extremism and terrorism due to others' policies and deeds.

## Rejecting Islamic subjects and its reform: the two different concepts!

There are three important parts of Islamic Culture subjects:

First, he who teaches it.

Second, the subject in general.

Third, its syllabus.

Demanding reforms or changing the first and the third case is neither controversial nor a bad thing to do and most of the people may agree with it. We also feel the necessity for reviewing the syllabus of these subjects. But, omitting this subject (Islamic Culture) completely from the curriculum of the universities is controversial and debatable; because:

Firstly, almost all the contents are about the universality and comprehensiveness of Islam and worships in Islam, although there *Ejtihadi* (اجتهادی) issues in some parts, which can be interpreted in other ways too; but it do not mean that overall curriculum or the subject itself provides the way for extremism or terrorism.

Secondly, in this period of globalization, when, alongside the political and economic invasion, cultural invasion is also occurring, the Islamic subjects would ideologically and psychologically safeguard our youth and in this era of modernization it would also help in answering those questions that are raised by orientalists and some so called intellectuals.

## Conclusion and recommendations

- Afghanistan is currently passing through worst situations compared to the past one century, therefore, the Afghan intellectuals and senior government officials must seriously avoid sparking religious sensibilities or debates.
- Accusing the overall curriculum and subject of Islamic culture for producing terrorism would further enhance violence and would pave the way for further extremism.
- We demand reforms in some cases as well; but reforms must be brought by a proper method. Reforms must not be based on emotions, should not



produce more violence, extremist thoughts and the strategy of suggesting and bringing reforms must not be based on extreme ways.

- If any meeting or conference is to be held in order to bring reforms in Islamic subjects, then the experts of Islamic Culture must take part and it must be they, who decide how it should be reformed. The contents of Islamic subjects must not be dealt politically, preferentially or emotionally.

## The heart of Asia Conference and its impacts on the region



The sixth Heart of Asia Ministerial Conference on Afghanistan was held in Amritsar, India where representatives of 40 countries and organizations had participated.

Speaking at the conference, once again, the Afghan President Ashraf Ghani harshly criticized Pakistan and said that, even though, there are significant bilateral and multilateral agreements between Pakistan and Afghanistan, the two countries are, indeed, engaged in an undeclared war against each other.

The significance and the background of Heart of Asia (HoA) Conference- the Istanbul Process, and impacts of the recent conference on the regional and Afghan situation are issues that are analyzed here.

## Heart of Asia Conference-Istanbul process

Afghanistan is located at the heart of Asia and given its location, countries in the region has always been keen about the situation; security and stability in this country, because it has a profound impact on the region. Therefore, the process of Heart of Asia Conference was first held in 2011 with the initiative of Afghanistan and Turkey. Afghanistan, Pakistan, China, India, Iran, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kirghizstan, Saudi Arabia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Turkey, Azerbaijan and United Arab Emirates are the member countries of Heart of Asia and its conferences are held in one of the member countries every year.

The objective of the HoA Conference is to address the challenges and shared interests of Afghanistan, its neighbors and regional countries. The conference has three main pillars, which include political consultations, confidence building measures and cooperation with regional organizations.<sup>4</sup> The Heart of Asia is composed of 14 participating countries, 17 supporting countries including western countries and 12 supporting regional and international organizations.

The first HoA Conference under “Security and Cooperation in Heart of Asia” was held on 2 November 2011 in Istanbul, Turkey<sup>5</sup> The second conference of this series was organized in 2012 in Kabul, Afghanistan; the third was held in 2013 in Almaty, Kazakhstan; the fourth was convened in 2014 in Beijing, China; the fifth was held in 2015 in Islamabad, Pakistan and the sixth HoA Conference was held last week (4 December 2016) in Amritsar, India.

In these conferences, the member countries have always emphasized on comprehensive cooperation among regional countries, creates a significant regional process of political negotiation and close regional partnership in order to maintain peace and stability in Afghanistan and all heart of Asia countries. In addition, connecting Afghanistan with the heart of Asia region, escalating political talks, consultation between the countries in the heart of Asia region and comprehensive cooperation to fight terrorism and extremism through correlation and collective work.

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<sup>4</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Afghanistan, heart of Asia, Pillars, see it online: <http://hoa.gov.af/299/hoa-history>

<sup>5</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Afghanistan, heart of Asia, History, see it online: <http://hoa.gov.af/299/hoa-history>

## The sixth Heart of Asia Conference

Despite the fight against terrorism and seeking ways for enduring peace in Afghanistan, diversifying economic and trade ties between Afghanistan and India and other regional countries were also discussed in this conference<sup>6</sup>.

Speaking at the conference, the Afghan President stressed on the necessity to end Afghanistan's reliance on foreign aids and mentioned that the extraction of underground reserves is one of the ways through which our country can become self-sufficient.

Ghani said that Afghanistan pays an expensive price with losing lives on daily basis due to terrorism. He also added that around 30 extremist groups, specified by the United Nations, are trying to create their bases inside the country to insecure Afghanistan and other regional countries.

Once again, Ghani criticized Pakistan and states it is engaged in an undeclared war with Afghanistan and in response to \$500m Pakistani aid, he said that instead of contributing to Afghanistan's reconstruction, this money must be allocated to combat extremism in Pakistan<sup>7</sup>.

Without mentioning any specific country, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi demanded from all regional countries to put an end to the violence and extremism in their respected countries and stressed on comprehensive cooperation with Afghanistan.

At the sidelines of this conference, the Afghan President also met Pakistani Prime Minister's advisor Sartaj Aziz, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Iranian Minister of Foreign Affairs Jawad Zarif. In these meetings, once again, the Afghan President presented Afghanistan's demands for peace and economic cooperation. In his meeting with Sartaj Aziz, Ghani demanded from Pakistan to remain committed to its promises. In the meeting with Jawad Zarif, the expansion of

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<sup>6</sup> For further information, The Heart of Asia - Istanbul Process 6th Ministerial Conference - Amritsar Declaration, [5<sup>th</sup> December 2016](http://www.mfa.gov.af/en/news/the-heart-of-asia--istanbul-process-6th-ministerial-conference), see online: <http://www.mfa.gov.af/en/news/the-heart-of-asia--istanbul-process-6th-ministerial-conference>

<sup>7</sup> Office of the President, Ashraf Ghani's Remarks at the Heart of Asia 6th Ministerial Conference, 4<sup>th</sup> December 2016, Online: <http://president.gov.af/en/news/transcript-of-he-president-mohammad-ashraf-ghanis-remarks-heart-of-asia-6th-ministerial-conference-on-afghanistan>

Kabul-Tehran bilateral relations and economic cooperation between the two countries were also discussed.

At the end of the Conference, a declaration was released in which all the participant countries stressed on political talks and close regional cooperation in order to bolster stability, peace and prosperity in Afghanistan and all Heart of Asia region, and peaceful settlement of all conflicts and differences. The statement also emphasized on promotion of inclusive collaboration between the Heart of Asia countries in order to combat terrorism and the peace accord between Hezb-e-Islami and the Afghan government was also welcomed.

### **Impacts on Afghanistan and the region**

**Kabul-Islamabad relations:** after the formation of the National Unity Government (NUG) in Afghanistan, the Pak-Afghan relations passed through many ups and downs and reached to utmost distrust till the sixth HoA Conference. Meeting with Sartaj Aziz at the sidelines of the HoA Conference, Ghani demanded from Pakistan to fulfill the commitments it had made to Afghanistan, and collaborate with Afghanistan in maintenance of peace and combating terrorism. Sartaj Aziz also pledged that his country would help Afghanistan in its peace process and its struggle against terrorism<sup>8</sup>.

Ghani's criticism from Pakistan and rejection of Pakistan's \$500m aid sparked harsh reactions from Pakistani officials and media. Regarding Ghani's speech at Heart of Asia Conference, Sartaj Aziz said that those speeches were to please India and added that India would never succeed to separate Afghanistan and Pakistan. The Pakistani Minister of Defense Khawaja Asif also criticized Ghani and said that Ghani wants to blame Pakistan for his own failures.

In an interview with Hindu (an Indian newspaper), Ashraf Ghani said about the Kabul-Islamabad relations that Afghanistan had opened its doors for good relations with Pakistan, but Pakistan's response have been negative, and that now it was up to Pakistan whether it wants to establish good relations with Afghanistan or not.

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<sup>8</sup> Office of the President, See it Online: <http://president.gov.af/fa/news/288314>

**Kabul-Delhi relations:** after the formation of the NUG, due to Kabul's rapprochement to Pakistan, it distance itself from Delhi, but later when Afghanistan became disappointed with Pakistan's insincere cooperation in the Afghan peace process, it improved its relations with India.

In the last one and a half year, Afghanistan had warm relations with India and with the Ghani's meeting with Narendra Modi at the sidelines of the HoA Conference, the two sides emphasized on further improving bilateral relations between the two countries. In this conference, the two countries had the same positions regarding Pakistan. Both Modi and Ghani, in their speeches, demanded from regional countries to end violence and extremism in their respected countries. Although Ghani mentioned Pakistan but Modi, without mentioning this country, criticized it.

This conference is also considered significant in terms of economic cooperation between Afghanistan and India. Both countries reached an agreement to establish an air corridor to transit cargos. This corridor can provide access, for both countries, to each other's production and can also facilitate bilateral trade between the two countries.

Overall, as expected, once again, India isolated Pakistan in an important international event, and what occurred at Heart of Asia Conference shows that Afghanistan and Pakistan might have joined hands to stand against Pakistan's policies in Afghanistan and the region.

The end

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### Contact Us:

Email: [info@csrskabul.com](mailto:info@csrskabul.com) - [csrskabul@gmail.com](mailto:csrskabul@gmail.com)

Website: [www.csrskabul.com](http://www.csrskabul.com) - [www.csrskabul.net](http://www.csrskabul.net)

Office: (+93) 784089590

### Contact with Officials:

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

Hekmatullah Zaland, Senior Manager: (+93) 775454048 [hekmat.zaland@gmail.com](mailto:hekmat.zaland@gmail.com)

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

