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Preface

Based on the statistics of the international organizations, after the formation of the National Unity Government, the civilian casualties have increased in 2017, one of the most important reasons behind which is an increased number of airstrikes. With the announcement of the new US strategy for Afghanistan, the air attacks of the American forces increased and as a result the number of civilian casualties also increased and most of such attacks were carried out on civilian gatherings.

In the past several days, the Afghan air forces have killed many civilians in such attacks in Farah and Kunduz provinces. Based on the reports of some of the media outlets from the Kunduz, it seems that the government's claims about the attack are false. Why the number of civilian casualties are increasing in airstrikes? This question is analyzed in the first part of the Weekly Analyzes of the Center for Strategic and Regional Studies (CSRS).

In the second part of the analysis, you will read about the new cold war between Russia and the US in Afghanistan. Since the past several years, there are reports about the relations and even military aid between Russia and the Taliban. Overall, it seems that the geopolitical changes in regional and international levels has given birth to a new cold war, from which Afghanistan will be affected first hand. What is the nature of this new cold war and the relations between Russia and the Taliban? What should the Afghan government do? These are the questions that are analyzed in the second part of the analysis.

The heavy casualties of the civilians in the airstrikes



Last week, the Afghan air forces carried out an airstrike on a gathering in a religious school (madrasa) in Dasht-e-Archi district of Kunduz province, which killed and injured many civilians.

Quoting the governor of Dasht-e-Archi District, [New York Times](#) has written that this attack was carried out by the Afghan force on the graduation ceremony of madrasa. Based on the source, about 1000 people were present in the gathering and 70 of them are killed and 30 others are injured.

On the other hand, the Afghan Ministry of Defense [says](#) that they have targeted a gathering of some foreign and internal armed people and have killed 20 Taliban. The Presidential Palace's statement also [says](#) that the attacked was on a meeting that the Taliban were planning larger attacks against the government. However, the statement adds that President Ghani has appointed a delegation to investigate the civilian casualties in this attack and that they will soon share the results of this investigation with the people.

The former President Hamid Karzai, some Afghan politicians, members of the Parliament, and the public have condemned this attack and have asked the government to investigate this attack and punish those responsible for it.

Why the number of airstrikes in the country has increased? Why the rate of civilian casualties is high in these attacks? What will be the probable consequences and outcomes of the continuation of these attacks? These are the questions that are answered here.

Airstrikes

After the announcement of the new US strategy for South Asia and Afghanistan in 2017, the role of American forces in Afghanistan, which was limited to “council and training”, increased in the battlefield and they particularly increased their airstrikes.

Although the issue of pressurizing the Taliban in the new US strategy increased the morale of the Afghan government, it also increased obstacles on the way of peace in the country because this strategy will increase sympathy for the Taliban within the country.

While reviewing the new strategy, one must keep in mind that in the past years, despite the presence of more than 100 thousand American soldiers in Afghanistan, they failed to defeat the Taliban. The only thing they did was the intensification of the war. The number of the air attacks by foreign forces was high last year as well, which also left many civilian casualties. According to the US air forces, the US forces have carried out [2611 airstrikes](#) in 2017. In 2016 and 2015 this number was respectively 1071 and 236. Based on [the UN reports](#) about the civilian casualties, in 2017 3438 Afghan civilians were killed and 7015 others were wounded. The casualties caused by the air attacks have definitely increased.

In the past years, besides the houses of the civilians, the US forces have bombarded hospitals, mosques and even the bases of the Afghan forces. On the other hand, recently the Afghan air forces are carrying out similar attacks as well and since the beginning of 2018, they too have killed many civilians in their attacks.

Civilian casualties

In the past one and half decades, the airstrikes of the Afghan and foreign forces have cost the lives of many civilians and besides the national and international human rights organizations, the members of the Parliament and politicians have expressed concern in this regard but the question is: why civilian lives are not taken seriously in these attacks?

In this regard, the following points are noteworthy:

First; not respecting the war principles: there are certain international regulations to respect human rights and to protect civilian lives. Based on these regulations, unarmed people, injured people, prisoners, charities, holy places must be taken into consideration by the parties engaged in war. Nevertheless, the same as in some other areas, these regulations are not respected in Afghanistan either and in the past 17 years, they have been repeatedly violated.

Second; the targeted bombardments by foreign forces: after reviewing the airstrikes carried out by the US and NATO forces, it seems that in some occasions they have intentionally bombarded on facilities where the civilian casualties were high.

In 1396 [solar year], the airstrikes carried out in [Haska Mina](#) district of Nanagerhar, [Sawki district](#) of Kunar, Pul-e-Alam city in [Lugar](#), and [Qarabagh district](#) of Kabul are some instances of such attacks.

Third; the challenge of Afghan air forces and investigative organs: on the one hand, the Afghan air forces are not yet capacitated, which is resulted in an increased number of civilian casualties and on the other hand, inaccurate reports, related to the weak intelligence, is another reason for the high rates of civilian casualties. Currently, the Afghan government is focusing on strengthening the air forces and that is why recently their airstrikes have increased. Moreover, such attacks may still be carried out under the orders of the foreign forces because the bombardment of a religious gathering merely due to the presence of a few armed individuals is not justifiable.

The consequences of the increased civilian casualties

Lack of attention to civilian lives in the airstrikes of the Afghan and foreign forces can have the following outcomes:

- Distance between the government and the people will be widened;
- Such attacks will ignite people's hatred and thus they will join the ranks of the anti-government forces;
- Strikes on madrasas, mosques, and religious gatherings can cause the harsh reactions of the people as well;
- This situation also kills the hopes that existed for peace between the Afghan government and the Taliban. By targeting public places, both parties have fueled the mistrust between them.

Afghanistan and the cold war between Russia and USA



Iran and Russia are the two countries whose relation with Taliban is debatable. The last statement of commander of NATO force about the Russia's cooperation with Taliban was a vast controversy.

Russian embassy in Kabul refused John Nicolson commander of NATO forces' claim and analyzed this statement as a trick of putting the responsibilities to others behalf.

Russia and USA have a cold war because of regional and international issues since many years and Afghanistan is changed to a battlefield for them.

Here we have analyzed the nature of Russia and Taliban's relation, the cold war between Russia and USA and Afghanistan's position in this disparity.

Relations between Russia and the Taliban

Taliban got the domination of Afghanistan in 1995 and made a shelter for central Asia's armed contrary regime which was a concern for Russia. Although, Taliban released reconciliation statements and claimed that no thread would come from Afghanistan, but Russian federation still had concerns and helped anti-Taliban forces.

After the US attack to Afghanistan and downfall of Taliban's regime, although central Asia and Ghafghaaz forces was present with Taliban army but Taliban made a location in Wazirstan's regions and far from central Asia's border, which decreased the concern of Russia.

After 2001 Russian was concerned from gradual increment of poppy and named it "poppy war" against them . USA permitted Russia to take part in anti-poppy operation. Poppy was the reason of relation of Russia and Taliban in 2006 and 2007. Taliban was not interested in preventing from poppy production, so the relation was no longer continued.

Russian appointees confirmed that in the last 3 years, Taliban has been recognized as a group of political armed and they have relation with Taliban. Taliban also stated and proved these relations in their official websites that the Taliban has been recognized by regional countries. In this case, this relation is not a hearsay and has been proved by both sides.

From old hatred of Russia and Taliban, this relation is not normal but politic has no permanent friend or enemy. Taliban and Russia hold this relation according to their requirements.

Since Russians believe ISIL to be a serious threat to them and the Taliban are practically in a war against them, Russians have preferred to deal with the ISIL in Afghanistan through establishing relations with the Taliban. There are two probable answers for why Russians chose the Taliban over the Afghan government. First, Russia believes that the Afghan government does not have the ability needed to confront ISIL. Second, Russia accuses both the Afghan government and its foreign allies of supporting ISIL. However, from a different angle, rivalry with the US is viewed as the primary factor behind these relations.

Russia pretends this relation as a political pressure and denies the cooperation of Russia with Taliban, justifies these ties with the need to tackle the threat of ISIL and to ensure the security of its citizens and diplomats in Afghanistan. It seems that Taliban do not expect the cooperation of Russia but can't refuse the political support of a big country like Russian.

The cold war

The expression of cold war was used by George Orwell British author after the Second World War in 1945. Cold war is expressed as a competition between west and east countries, communism and capitalism. After Second World War there was a geopolitics problem between eastern block by leadership of Russia and western block by leadership of USA. From 1947 till the downfall of Russia, the cold war between Russia and America has been continued.

After the 9/11 attacks and the US military attack in Afghanistan, a new phase of Russian policy towards Afghanistan started. Although primarily Russia supported the US initiative to overthrow the Taliban regime and form a new government with the support of ISAF, in recent several years, besides regional and international issues, the permanent US bases in Afghanistan and then the emergence of ISIL in this country affected the Russian policy and in the case of Afghanistan, to some extent, Russia put the policy of neutrality aside.

Emergence and expansion of ISIL in Afghanistan altered the geopolitical situation in the region and after the trilateral meeting between Russia, China and Pakistan over the issue of Afghanistan this change revealed itself in practice.

Russian officials, especially the special Russian representative in Afghanistan, have repeatedly criticized the US policy in the region in general and the US policy in the fight against terrorism in particular. The special Russian representative in Afghanistan has said that if the Afghan government and foreigners failed against ISIL, Moscow would not remain indifferent. He warned of Russian military action in Afghanistan which conveys the picture of Afghanistan turning into the battle ground of Russia and the US.

Besides preventing the expansion of ISIL in Afghanistan, Russia uses the option of “relations with the Taliban” as a mean to pressurize the US in other international cases as well and given the recent warning of Russia, it seems that after Ukraine and Syria, Afghanistan will be another area for Russian-American rivalry, which will further complicate the situation in Afghanistan and will turn Afghanistan into a battlefield for another type of proxy wars. But in the current circumstance, when the US and NATO are present in Afghanistan, Russia’s military intervention seems unlikely.

Afghanistan's position

A few months ago, during his speech in Paktia province, the Afghan President for the first time officially accused Russia of supporting the Taliban and said that “The Taliban are receiving assistance from those who have spilled the blood of one and half million Afghans.” Although President Ghani did not mention any country, but it was obvious that he was indicating Russia. It was the first time that a senior Afghan official accused Russia of backing the Taliban.

The geopolitics importance of a country becomes apparent when the powerful countries of the world seek to achieve their goals and interests through the political geography of that particular country and that since Afghanistan had a geopolitical importance and location, the super powers of the world had always paid attention to Afghanistan throughout the history.

Unfortunately, the history gives testimony that this geopolitical location has not produced any gain for Afghanistan because Afghans have failed to use the politics of the super powers in their own interests. Therefore, this geopolitical importance and location will be beneficial for Afghanistan only when the interests of the great countries of the world are in line with the national interests of Afghanistan.

This is the responsibility of the Afghan government to, somehow, establish relation between the rivalries of the countries in the region and the national interest of the country and the Afghan government should not allow Afghanistan to turn into the battlefield for the proxy wars of the regional and international players.

The end

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