In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Most Kind



**December 19, 2015** 

## The Crucial Military Partnership

Afghanistan on Friday and discussed Afghanistan's security conditions with Afghan security officials. Mr. Carter said the purpose of the trip was to review security conditions in Afghanistan and assess ways for the US to help Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF). During his visit, US Defense Secretary met with Masoom Stanikzai, Afghanistan's acting defense minister. Speaking at a joint press conference with Afghan acting minister of defense, Carter said that next year will be a challenging year for ANSF, as the militant groups would try to find a foothold in the country. However, he assured that the United States and the Afghan government would continue to fight terrorists. US Defense Secretary's visit to Afghanistan comes at a time when a bloody year of Taliban campaign is concluding and the Taliban is going to prepare for another year of fighting.

2015 was a challenging year for Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF). ANSF managed to repulse Taliban's offensives in many parts of the country. However, there were numerous security setbacks on parts of Afghan army and police forces as well as the leadership of the war by the Afghan government. Taliban insurgency this year was the most audacious since the fall of the group's regime in 2001. The Taliban managed to launch large-scale attacks on government and public institutions as well as civilians and non-state targets across the country. In the very beginning of the fighting season, the militants orchestrated the most complicated offensive in the northern parts of the country. Later, the Taliban managed to capture the northern city of Kunduz. This was the group's biggest military achievement against Afghan government since the fall the Taliban regime. Although, ANSF managed to retake the city with the help of US-led Resolute Support Mission forces in the country.

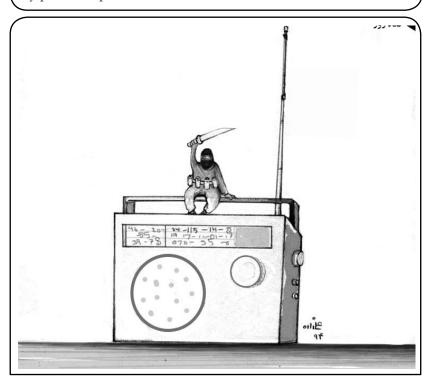
As 2015 is closing to its end, there is continued fighting between ANSF and the various militant groups across the country. Afghan forces fought numerous militant groups this year. This was while they received very limited direct military help from the US-led NATO forces, as the coalition has ending its combat mission in Afghanistan. While the US and NATO role in the Afghan conflict were getting shrunk, ANSF faced new enormous security threats from amalgamates of militant groups, most particularly the Islamic State group. The Islamic State came into prominence in some parts of Afghanistan in 2015, and will remain a long-term threat for Afghanistan's long-term security and stability. Recently, the top US commander in Afghanistan warned of Islamic State militants' attempts to establish a regional base in the country.

The visit by the US defense chief is coming at a crucial time when the two countries need to overhaul the anti-insurgency strategy as the militant groups are preparing for the next year offensive. It is crucial for both the government of Afghanistan and the United States to ensure the Taliban's offensives in the seasonal fighting are repulsed and their post-2015 insurgency contained. Any peace process in Afghanistan would only work if the Afghan government and its international backers manage to defeat the Taliban largely through military means. Afghanistan and the United States need to boost cooperation and agree on comprehensive post-NATO strategy for fighting the Taliban. The Afghan government forces will be able to tackle the insurgency if they receive sufficient funding and military equipment from the United State and its partner countries.

The US is continuing to play a key role in equipping and training ANSF. However, due to the nature of the country's current involvement in Afghanistan, it would be insufficient if the level of US support to ANSF remain at its current level. However, the review of US presence in Afghanistan beyond 2016 and the pace of the country's exit from the Afghan conflict which saw thousands of US forces staying in Afghanistan after 2016 was a right development at a crucial time. Given the current level of US involvement in Afghanistan, the future of the anti-insurgency efforts of the Afghan government and its international backers is unsustainable. Both the United States and the Afghan government need to redraw the two countries' future military partnership for dealing a possible prolonged insurgency.

The upcoming years of the anti-insurgency would be difficult for the Afghan government forces. The Commander of Resolute Support Mission in Afghanistan, General John Campbell, recently warned that foreign fighters from Syria and Iraq are joining Daesh militants in Afghanistan. This is while the Taliban are preparing for a dual fight against the government in Kabul and the emerging Islamic State group. While in Kabul on Friday, US defense chief said, "I expect in the next year further fighting to be hard too, the reason that the minister and I are meeting here today is to make sure that next year and every year thereafter the Afghan forces will get stronger and stronger".

There would be a prolonged and bitter insurgency ahead of Afghanistan. The Afghan government needs to prepare for such a battle and the US would inevitably continue to support ANSF to overcome the upcoming security threats. Both Kabul and Washington need to fight the Taliban from a position of strength. For this to happen, Afghanistan and the United States need to further enhance the bilateral security partnership.



## Islamic State's Creeping Influence in Afghanistan

By Abdul Ahad Bahrami

**¬**op American commander of the NATO forces in Afghanistan has warned that the Islamic State group is attempting to establish a regional base in Afghanistan in the eastern city of Jalalabad. In an interview with Associated Press, General Campbell said that "foreign fighters" from Syria and Iraq have joined Afghan fighters, who have allegiance to the Islamic State, in eastern Nangarhar province. He said that there are "signs" that supporters of the Islamic State in Nangarhar are trying to consolidate their relations with the group's leadership in Syria and Iraq. The NATO commander said that IS wants to build a base in Jalalabad to use it as the main base for the so-called Khurasan province. The comments from the top US commander in Afghanistan is another warning for growing influence of the Islamic State group in Afghanistan. The so-called Islamic State group has been in fierce fighting with the Taliban in recent months. There are reports that dozens of militants from both the Taliban and the Islamic State have been killed during infighting between the groups in eastern Nangarhar province and other areas such as Nimroz, Ghazni and Zabul provinces. The fresh warning over expansion of the Islamic State group is coming at a time when insecurity is further spreading in Afghanistan with various militant groups increasing their militant activities across the country. A recent semi-annual report of the Pentagon to US Congress said that the Taliban has stayed active in 'traditional strongholds' and overall security situation in Afghanistan has deteriorated in the second half of 2015. The warning is coming also at a time when the Taliban are suffering from an internal split which may cause further infighting among different branches of the once united Taliban led by the group's former leader Mullah Muhammad Omar. In recent months, there have been clashes between two main rival Taliban groups led by Mullah Akhtar Mansoor and Mullah Rassoul.

Gen. Campbell has said that many of those who have allegiance to the Islamic State of Afghanistan are "the disgruntled members of the Taliban." Given the recent split of the Taliban after announcement of death of Mullah Omar, there is the possibility of even more infighting among the Taliban and more defects of Taliban's disgruntled members into the Islamic State ranks. The infighting Taliban rival groups and the erosion of the both the main Taliban faction and other splinter groups may provide an appropriate environment for the Islamic State to further grow and expand its influence across the country in particular eastern province of Nangarhar. Though there is profound grassroots resistance among the Taliban against the creeping influence of the Islamic State in Afghanistan, the activities of various militant groups may also work as a driver forcing militants to join the more organized and formidable Islamic State.

The bitter resistance of the Taliban against emergence of the Islamic State group in Afghanistan is something helpful for preventing the group to establish bases and expand its power across the country. The government of Afghanistan is not fully equipped politically and militarily to counter the influence of the Islamic State group and defeat it at the initial phases of its emergence. While the Afghan government and its military agencies are involved in tackling various threats stemming from the militant groups, it fails to sufficiently focus on fighting the Islamic State group. The menace of the Islamic State has been growing, though at a slow pace, across the country in recent months. Though the Afghan government's counter terrorism military operations have been underway against the group, it is the Taliban who have been playing a deterring role against the Islamic State. However, the Taliban's anti-Islamic State fighting has not stopped the group, and may not do so in the future as well

Integration of relations between the Islamic State group in Afghanistan with the leadership of the main group in Iraq and Syria is a major threat for security and stability of Afghanistan. However, the threat would not remain contained to Afghanistan. It would further destabilize the region including Pakistan and the Central Asian states in the north. Therefore, all involved parties including the government of Afghanistan and other regional and world players need to play an active role in fighting the influence of the Islamic State group in Afghanistan. The Afghan government and its NATO supporters should devise more comprehensive plans against the Islamic State which includes regional players such as Iran, Pakistan. The governments of Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan have a relatively common ground on Islamic State's influence in Afghanistan. All the three neighbors as well as Russia and the Central Asian neighbors are opposed to the growing influence of the Islamic State in Afghanistan. The United States and the Afghan government need to use the potential capacity for a regional cooperation in some of formal or informal ways for stopping the Islamic

The government of Afghanistan's peace initiative with the Taliban would be crucially endangered if the Islamic State group manages to further expand its power in Afghanistan. Any peace negotiations with various militant groups would be already difficult for the government of Afghanistan. Considering a more powerful Islamic State group in Afghanistan, any sort of peace negotiations with the militant groups would be in vain. There is the possibility for the government to cut some sort of peace deal with the main Taliban faction in the future. However, there are many spoilers for a potential peace process in Afghanistan, one of which is the Islamic State group of the so-called Khurasan province. The Islamic State also pursues a more dangerous agenda of ethnic and religious hatred among the different ethnic groups in the country. Given the group's potential threats to the future of the country, the government of Afghanistan and its international backers need to stop the menace of the threat of the Islamic State and prevent it from gaining more influence and power.

Abdul Ahad Bahrami is the permanent writer of the Daily Outlook Afghanistan. He can be reached at ahad.bahrami@gmail.com

## Migrants shape a better Asia and the Pacific - If we let them

By Dr. Shamshad Akhtar and Ambassador William Lacy Swing

## **Exclusive for the Daily Outlook**

ver land, by air and by sea, the people of Asia and the Pacific are on the move – this is the finding of the forthcoming Asia-Pacific Migration Report, the result of United Nations research led by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and the International Organization for Migration. More than 59 million migrants lived in receiving countries of the Asia-Pacific region in 2013, while the number of people migrating from countries of the region has doubled since 1990, reaching more than 95 million. Their destinations vary, but include countries such as Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia, the Russian Federation and Kazakhstan, as well as countries further afield in the Middle East, Europe and North America.

The factors underlying these mass movements of men, women and children vary. Many migrant workers leave home to seek jobs or higher wages in the growing economies of South-East Asia or the oil-rich countries of the Middle East. Others are refugees fleeing violence and persecution, stateless people trying to find dignity and recognition, or students hoping to access educational opportunities not available in their own countries.

People move using formal channels where possible, but informal, irregular ones where they cannot. Irregular migrants are at risk from people smugglers, who pack them onto overcrowded and unsafe boats; traffickers and unscrupulous employers, who exploit them for profit; and authorities who do not recognize that even if some irregular migrants may have broken laws, they are all still human beings with rights.

Migrants risk isolation, xenophobia, and abuse – and yet, still they come. Why? Because despite all of these risks, migration is the single best opportunity for many people to improve not only their own lives but also those of their families and communities. The remittances they send – Asia-Pacific countries received more than \$249 billion in remittances in 2015 alone – lift people out of poverty, feed children, pay for their health and education, and help to build resilient homes and communities.

But we should always remember that migrants move not only for their own benefit. They are also responding to needs in countries of destination for labour. When they arrive, they work, generating wealth, expanding GDP, sometimes even sustaining industries. This is as true for those at the low end of the skill spectrum as for doctors, engineers and innovators. This point is often overlooked. Instead, migrants are often regarded as problems or turned into scapegoats, accused of "stealing" jobs and depressing wages. In fact, the evidence suggests otherwise; generally, the impacts of migration are positive. If all migrant workers were to leave Thailand, for example, the GDP would shrink by 0.75 per cent. A ten per cent increase in the number of labour migrants in Malaysia actually raises the employment of national workers by one per cent, often releasing them to access better-paid, higher-skilled jobs.

This is not to deny the real challenges that migration can bring. Some national workers at the lower end of the labour market may find their wages depressed and employment opportunities reduced – but only slightly. This is not an effect of migration, but rather a result of the social and economic conditions that kept these people in vulnerable, low-paid employment in the first place, and which enable the exploitation of migrant workers.

The best way to ensure that migration supports development is to enable people to migrate in a regular way, with dignity and respect for their rights, to meet labour market needs. The alternative of vulnerable migrant workers is not only contrary to the values of human rights, it also means that national workers are vulnerable too.

We should use the opportunity of International Migrants Day, on 18 December, to recognize, celebrate and facilitate the contribution that migrants make to the development of countries in Asia and the Pacific. Let us go further, and reject the stereotypes, embrace the evidence, and take the necessary steps to maximize this contribution and prevent negative impacts. In particular, we should lend our support to meeting the challenge set in the new Sustainable Development Goals: to build a new migration system that enables people to move safely and prevents abuse for the benefit of all.

Dr. Shamshad Akhtar is an Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Secretary of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP). She has been the UN's Sherpa for the G20 and previously served as Governor of the Central Bank of Pakistan and Vice President of the MENA Region of the World Bank

Ambassador William Lacy Swing is the Director-General of the International Organization for Migration. He has previously served as Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Western Sahara



Chairman / Editor-in-Chief: Dr. Hussain Yasa Vice-Chairman: Kazim Ali Gulzari Email: outlookafghanistan@gmail.com Phone: 0093 (799) 005019/777-005019

www.outlookafghanistan.net



The views and opinions expressed in the articles are those of the authers and do not reflect the views or opinions of the Daily Outlook Afghanistan.