

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



February 16, 2016

Developing ANSF's Capabilities

Afghan Air Force (AAF) showcased its warplanes on Friday at a special ceremony held in Kabul. Speaking to the Afghan Air Force readiness performance program, President Ashraf Ghani said that, in the field of politics, the Afghan government would protect the achievements of the armed forces gained at the battlefields. Ghani once again reiterated his commitment to revive the Afghan Air Force (AAF), criticizing the disintegration of the former Afghan Air Force as result of short-sightedness and lack of commitment. Strengthening AAF has been a key priority of the national unity government since its takeover two years ago. Government officials say the US is set to deliver more warplanes to AAF. The government believes empowerment of the air force would have drastic impacts on the battlefields and turn the tide in favor of government forces fighting the insurgent groups.

The government eyes on the air force to help the government forces more effectively in fight against the insurgent groups in 2016. However, the capabilities of Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) have drawn attentions in recent weeks as the Taliban are preparing to launch a new offensive this year. US military commanders overseeing training of Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) say that the forces suffer a number of shortcomings in capabilities in the fight against the insurgent groups. According to deputy chief of staff for communications for NATO's Resolute Support Mission in Afghanistan, the ANSF need to develop four capabilities to be successful in the anti-insurgency campaign. The capabilities, as put by the commander, are a readiness cycle, reducing the number of checkpoints, making leadership changes, and filling the force's ranks.

With the spring fighting season coming closer, concerns over the prospect of security in the country are increasing. The government has made it a top priority to strengthen the fledgling air force in a hope to better counter the upcoming wave of insurgency. The national unity government has taken major steps forward to reenergize efforts for equipping and training AAF. India and the United States have started to make major contributions to rebuilding AAF with providing warplanes and other equipment. The recent efforts for strengthening AAF would definitely enable the force to play a considerable role in the war efforts against the Taliban. However, they are far from sufficient to ensure that the ANSF would have the capabilities and resources to effectively fight the Taliban. In addition to strengthening AAF, the government needs to concentrate on bringing reforms to the leadership of the armed forces and management of the war efforts. The government needs to recognize the fact that for turning the tide in favor of the ANSF in the fight against the Taliban, it would require a robust and sound leadership of the war efforts and effective military strategies. The government needs to reconsider its war approach, bring reforms to the leadership of the security agencies as well as military units directly fighting the insurgents.

However, the constraints of the ANSF have not been limited to lack of a robust and fully functional AAF supporting ground forces fighting the Taliban. Afghanistan's ground forces also suffer major shortcomings in capabilities and restrictions in resources. The Afghan government has done a good job in persuading the international community to better support the ANSF particularly AAF. However, the national unity government has much been blamed for lack of proper management in the war efforts and the leadership of the security forces. Army and police forces suffer high rates of casualties in the fight against the Taliban. Along with the losses on the battlefields, this has resulted in desertion of soldiers from the army and police ranks. This is a major issue for the ANSF, undermining the efforts to put an end to the attritions and develop sustainable security forces.

When judging the performance of the government, though, it should be taken into account that the national unity government took over at a time when many new challenges started to develop and threaten long-term stability of Afghanistan.

However, it also cannot be ignored that some faulty military strategies and shortcomings on the side of the government undermined the anti-insurgency campaign and resulted to poorer leadership and communications in the army and police forces. There have been serious instances of mismanagements over the management of the anti-insurgency campaign across the country.

There have been widespread criticisms from the observers, NATO commanders and other military experts over the faulty approaches of the authorities to the campaign against the Taliban offensives. These make Afghan security and defense forces highly vulnerable in the ongoing campaign against the insurgent groups.

US military commanders have time and again warned that the ANSF suffer lack of proper leadership, recommending bringing changes to the senior ranks of the army. Readiness of the ANSF in timely responding to Taliban activities has long been questioned. In instances of Taliban mounting major offensives, there has been an apparent lack of quick response on the side of the security agencies resulting to casualties and catastrophic military setbacks. What the ANSF crucially need is to improve coordination in the chain of ground units, the commanding officers and the central headquarters. The higher leadership of the military and the commanding officers need to be able to make time-manner strategic decisions over the war issues. This is vital for seeing real differences in the counter-insurgency campaign.

ISIL - A Threat to Afghanistan and Pakistan

By Hujjatullah Zia

The self-proclaimed Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) has changed to a menace for both Pakistan and Afghanistan. The ISIL group has aggravated the security situation and created a sense of fear in the air via practicing their radical ideology, which is deeply embedded in their hearts and minds. It is self-explanatory that violence and carnage run in the blood of ISIL fighters, therefore, they trample upon the rights and dignity of mankind on the grounds of one's caste, creed and color. It is believed that as a result of the ISIL emergence in Afghan-Pak soil, the graph of civilian casualties increased and political instability escalated further.

In a recent statement, Pakistan's director general of the Intelligence Bureau (IB), Aftab Sultan, said that ISIL emerged as challenge in Pakistan since the militant groups, particularly Sipah-i-Sahaba and Lashkar-i-Jhangvi, have soft corner for it. Though ISIL and Afghan Taliban were in conflict, the Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) coordinated with it, he added. Following the denial of Pakistan's interior ministry of ISIL's emergence, he said that the IB had busted a big ISIL network after several members reached Punjab following Karachi's Safoora Goth carnage in May. Mr. Sultan held the banned TTP responsible for major terror incidents in Pakistan and said the group had been realigning with Lashkar-i-Jhangvi and Sipah-i-Sahaba. He also mentioned killings of Superintendent of Police Chaudhry Aslam in Karachi and Awami National Party (ANP) leader Bashir Bilour in Peshawar.

Similarly, some members of Afghan Taliban pledged allegiance to the Al-Baghdadi's caliphate. ISIL fighters gained firm foothold in Afghanistan and lately stoked sectarian violence. It is believed that the bloody episodes, which victimized ethnic minority groups and the recent hostage-takings, were carried out by ISIL fighters in the country. Hence, this group intends to trigger racial tensions and sectarianism among the nation - it will lead to a great instability and may sow the seed of hatred if not curbed on time. The already staggering Afghan casualty figures have soared to new heights after the international combat mission ended a year ago. The country suffered almost 5,000 civilian casualties only during the first half of 2015; nearly 30,000 Afghan soldiers and policemen were killed from 2009 to mid-2015. December saw a 57 percent rise in civilian casualties. With the emergence of ISIL fighters and their mysterious involvement in violence and bloodshed, people have lost their hope and desire for a peaceful life and a large number of Afghan citizens flocked to foreign countries. Political turmoil wrecked havoc on economy and unemployment reached its peak. In other words, the escalated militancy stagnated the economic cycle and ultimately paralyzed the whole financial activities. As a

result, the bulk of the NGOs left the country and top traders and investors withdrew their money from the country. Since a number of university graduates failed to find job, brain-drain took place and this has added to the challenges. In short, the militants, including the ISIL fighters, have posed great threat to the country.

The insurgency seems to continue unabated, mainly after the emergence of the ISIL group. The Pakistani IB chief also warned that Pakistan could see more terror attacks because it was not possible to completely eliminate terrorists in the next decade.

Gen John Campbell, commander of the Resolute Support mission in Afghanistan, has said in his recent statement that the militants' hideouts exited on both sides of the Durand Line. Pakistan and Afghanistan, therefore, should tackle the issue together, he added. "They've got to talk military-to-military on how they can get after a common enemy that knows no border, knows no boundaries," Campbell is cited as saying. "Afghanistan is at an inflection point," he told congressmen, acknowledging the war-devastated nation was yet to achieve an enduring level of stability that justified a cut in support. Whether he pursued terrorists into Pakistan or not, the general replied that he could not talk about the rules of engagement in an open forum. A better option than sending troops into Pakistan would be to train Afghan forces to fight the insurgents.

The US earlier designated the ISIL group's affiliate in Afghanistan and Pakistan as a terrorist organization. The US State Department said the order concerned the Islamic State group's "Khorasan Province" - which US officials refer to as "ISIL-K." It said, "The group is based in the Afghanistan-Pakistan region and is composed primarily of former members of Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan and the Afghan Taliban." Based on the statement, the group pledged loyalty to the head of the Islamic State's self-proclaimed "caliphate", Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, in January 2015. "ISIL-K has carried out suicide bombings, small arms attacks and kidnappings in eastern Afghanistan against civilians and Afghan National Security and Defense Forces, and claimed responsibility for May 2015 attacks on civilians in Karachi, Pakistan."

Hence, both Afghan and Pakistani officials believe that ISIL is a common threat and gained foothold within the two countries. Moreover, rumor says that ISIL fighters will intensify their terrorist activities in coming spring inside the border - the same as the Taliban's spring offensive and it would increase civilian casualties if not curbed on time. In a nutshell, this group will create greater challenges with the support of some Taliban members, who pledged loyalty, and help of Lashkar-i-Jhangvi and Sipah-i-Sahaba, as Sultan has mentioned. So, Afghan and Pakistan governments will have to combat ISIL fighters strongly and leave no room for their strength.

Hujjatullah Zia is the permanent writer of the Daily Outlook Afghanistan. He can be reached at zia_hujjat@yahoo.com

More War than Peace

By John Andrews

Only the dead have seen the end of war." George Santayana's dictum seems particularly appropriate nowadays, with the Arab world, from Syria and Iraq to Yemen and Libya, a cauldron of violence; Afghanistan locked in combat with the Taliban; swaths of central Africa cursed by bloody competition - often along ethnic/religious lines - for mineral resources. Even Europe's tranquility is at risk - witness the separatist conflict in eastern Ukraine, which before the current ceasefire had claimed more than 6,000 lives.

What explains this resort to armed conflict to solve the world's problems? Not so long ago, the trend was toward peace, not war. In 1989, with the collapse of communism, Francis Fukuyama announced "the end of history," and two years later President George H. W. Bush celebrated a "new world order" of cooperation between the world's powers.

At the time, they were right. World War II, with a death toll of at least 55 million, had been the high point of mankind's collective savagery. But from 1950 to 1989 - the Korean War through the Vietnam War and on to the end of the Cold War - deaths from violent conflict averaged 180,000 a year. In the 1990s, the toll fell to 100,000 a year. And in the first decade of this century, it fell still more, to around 55,000 a year - the lowest rate in any decade in the previous 100 years and equivalent to just over 1,000 a year for the "average armed conflict."

Sadly, as I note in my new book *The World in Conflict*, the trend is now turning upward. Given that so many of Africa's wars, from the Democratic Republic of Congo to the conflict in Somalia, began decades ago, the explanation lies elsewhere: in the Muslim world from northern Nigeria to Afghanistan and beyond.

Since Syria's civil war erupted in 2011, the death toll has reached more than 250,000, and half of the population has been displaced, causing a flood of refugees into surrounding countries and into the European Union. Indeed, the Syrian conflict alone has been enough to change the graph of conflict - and the upward trajectory becomes even steeper when the deaths in Iraq, Yemen, and Libya are included.

Those who hailed the Arab Spring five years ago must now recognize that its blooms died fast. Only Tunisia has reasonable democratic credentials, whereas Libya, Yemen, and Syria have joined Somalia as failed states, and Egypt, the most populous country in the Arab world, has reverted to an autocracy verging on dictatorship.

The question is when - or if - the trend will turn down again. Thanks largely to multilateral bodies such as the United Nations, states very rarely go to war with other states (Russia's brief war with Georgia in 2008 is an exception proving the rule). Likewise, thanks to the EU - awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2012 because it had "for over six decades contributed to the advancement of peace and reconciliation, democracy, and human rights

in Europe" - another Franco-German war is inconceivable.

Instead, wars are between states and non-state actors - between, say, Nigeria and Boko Haram, or between India and its Naxalite insurgents. Or they are civil wars - for example, in South Sudan or Libya. Or they are proxy battles of the type that characterized the Cold War - witness Iran's deployment in Syria of Lebanon's Hezbollah fighters to defend Bashar al-Assad's regime.

Whatever the various, often overlapping, causes of conflict - ideology, religion, ethnicity, competition for resources - the Prussian general Carl von Clausewitz two centuries ago gave the pithiest answer to the question of why we resort to violence: "War is an act of force to compel our enemy to do our will."

But can force alone compel the submission of the Islamic State and the demise of jihadist extremism in the Muslim world? There are two reasons to doubt that it can. One is the reluctance of militarily strong outside powers, whether America and its NATO allies or Vladimir Putin's Russia, to "put boots on the ground" after their painful experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan (a disaster for the Soviet Union in the 1980s and in this century for the US and NATO).

The second reason is the underlying appeal of the Islamist message to many of the world's 1.3 billion Muslims. The nation-states of the Arab world are colonial inventions, superseding the caliphates - Umayyad, Abbasid, Fatimid, and finally Ottoman - that once spread civilization from Mesopotamia to the Atlantic. When Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi in June 2014 announced a new caliphate, with himself as "commander of the faithful," it struck a chord. Moreover, the brutality of his fundamentalist Islamic State seems to many not so very different from the behavior of Saudi Arabia, which has spent decades spreading its Wahhabi fundamentalism through mosques and madrassas around the world. In other words, the message must change if peace is to return to the Muslim world. That will not happen soon. Sunni Saudi Arabia will first have to moderate its antipathy to Shia Muslims in general and Shia-majority Iran in particular. Meanwhile, the Islamic State has manpower, money, territory, and military expertise (much of it from former officers in the Iraqi army). Saudi Arabia will eventually recognize that it needs Iran's help to defeat the Islamic State. And eventually the Islamic State will implode as its subjects demand the right to listen to music and behave as they want. Sadly, "eventually" is the key word. Saudi Arabia's instinct, born of the centuries-old antipathy between Arabs and Persians, is to see Iran as a threat to be confronted, rather than accommodated. As for the Islamic State, North Korea is proof that brutal regimes can be very durable. In the meantime, the graph of deaths from conflict will keep trending upwards, mocking the world's diplomats, peacemakers, and pretensions to humanity and civilization. (Courtesy Project Syndicate)

John Andrews, a former editor and foreign correspondent for *The Economist*, is the author of *The World in Conflict: Understanding the world's troublespots*.

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 authors and do not reflect the views or opinions of the Daily Outlook Afghanistan.

