

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



October 22, 2017

Insecurity is Running Rampant

The security situation in Afghanistan seems to be deteriorating with each passing day. It seems that the insurgents have turned more aggressive after the aggressive Afghan policy of the United States.

Only in the past week, there have been many incidents that have devoured the lives of both the security personnel and civilians. In some attacks, there have been efforts to start a sectarian war in Afghanistan; while in others, the security personnel have been targeted so that the Afghan government can be shown the strength that the insurgents claim to possess.

In an attack on Saturday, October 21, 15 cadets were killed, and four others were wounded, when the bus they were traveling in was targeted in a suicide bombing in Kabul.

The blast reportedly happened at the gate of the Marshal Fahim Military Academy near Qambar square. The incident happened only hours after an early morning rocket attack hit Kabul. At least three rockets were fired at foreign facilities at about 6am in the morning.

Meanwhile, on Friday, October 20, another suicide bomber hit Imam Zaman mosque in Dasht-e-Barchi in Kabul city. The attack resulted in the death of around 50 people and injury to many others. The attack evidently targeted the Hazara community, as Dasht-e-Barchi is dominated by Hazara residents. There have been similar attacks on Hazaras in Afghanistan in the past couple of years, mostly claimed by Daesh.

Similarly, an attack was carried out in a mosque in Ghor province on the same day that resulted in the death of around 35 people. Both these attacks could be linked in the sense that they were carried out in mosques, and they could be an effort to start a sectarian clash in Afghanistan.

In addition, three other attacks on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday last week, took the lives of more than 100 security forces in Kandahar, Paktia and Ghazni provinces.

Through these incidents the insurgents want to distract the Afghan forces, authorities and people. They want to show that they are still strong and, at the same time, they have the ill intentions of starting a civil war in Afghanistan on ethnic and sectarian basis.

It is really vital for Afghan people and authorities not to get distracted as the terrorists and enemies of Afghanistan want. They should be responsible and sensible enough to remain united and face the ongoing challenges with required will and determination. The terrorists want them to be disunited so that they are able to launch their filthy objectives. They want to ignite another civil war so that Afghanistan is not able to come out of instability and chaos; therefore, it is vital to see the traces of the conspiracy that is being built in the country.

It is really unfortunate for Afghanistan that even after so many sacrifices that are given by the country, the prospects of peace and tranquility are not very optimistic. The insecurity seems to be on the rise in different parts of the country and the response of the relevant authorities are not truly effective. It seems the authorities do not have any clear idea about how to tackle the situation and help the country go through this crucial period with triumph, and now the people are being distracted as well, which is making the task even more challenging.

On the other hand, Taliban and Daesh have spread their networks in different provinces and everyday show their presence in some way or the other. Sometimes they target the innocent civilians and at others they target the security personnel. Afghan security forces, on most of the occasions, take actions only after such incidents and calm down the situation temporarily. When the situation seems to be normalized, the insurgents again move forward and make their attacks.

In fact, the security forces do not seem to have a proactive approach, which may be because of lack of any clear strategy in the top rankings of the government officials, who, themselves, are involved in their own differences instead of standing united to counter the growing threats of Taliban and Daesh.

If the authorities do not get really serious and determined to solve the security issues, it may start haunting Afghanistan to a great extent and may even undo the achievements that have been acquired in the last 14 years or so. The insurgents will keep on carrying out their activities and terrorize the people of Afghanistan like they are doing now. The current situation clearly highlights the fact that the insurgents are not even inclined towards peace process.

However, before any hopes of acquiring peace and tranquility can be turned into reality, the security forces and government authorities must make sure that they fulfill their responsibilities with determination and untiring efforts.

Definitely, Afghan people have given many sacrifices and after so many sacrifices, it is important that Afghanistan should see a future full of peace and tranquility; however, for that to happen it is imperative that Afghan leadership must prove itself capable of designing and following a workable strategy to counter terrorism in true sense.

Regional and International Cooperation Needed to Defeat Terrorism

By Syed Asif Husseini

Terror and instability have impeded development and rehabilitation in Afghanistan. Within the past years, international aid was poured into Afghanistan with the aim of curbing instability. If this aid was spent for the economic and infrastructural development, the standard of life would promote remarkably.

Apart from domestic issues, the support to terrorist groups by mysterious hand was one of the issues which engaged the country for year.

Pakistan was expected to set up a policy of good neighborly relations with the National Unity Government (NUG) but this did not happen. With the establishment of NUG, Afghan President Ashraf Ghani offered to have a good neighborly relations with Pakistan, but Pakistan did not welcome this opportunity; subsequently, a sense of mistrust surfaced. Following the declaration of US policy regarding Afghanistan and South Asia, Pakistan came under great pressure.

Pakistan is likely to take step in building trust between Kabul and Islamabad. This is a highly positive step and reducing tension between the two states will be the best possible option. But the fact is that trust is not an issue that will emerge whenever one wants. Trust will be earned in the process of time and what is gained in short time will be a tactic. Trusting tactic will not be a strategic task.

With such political tactics, Islamabad missed many opportunities. Kabul administration should be aware of the regional policies by now and use its experiences in foreign policy. It should be able to prognosticate policies.

The past shows that Pakistan did not work with bona fide intention. It is believed that it is hard for Pakistan to bring a fundamental changes in its policy for being under the influence of intelligence structure. The policy of intelligence is to figure out weak points and combat against them, whereas the foreign policy of other countries are based on strong and common points and they seek to set up their relations on the basis of common interests.

The tension between Kabul and Islamabad hit rock bottom within the past years and Afghan-Pak officials exchanged harsh words with each other over the issue of terrorism. This dismantled the peace process and regional instability. Recently, the US also asked Pakistan to do more in fight against terrorism.

Although the US President Donald Trump believed, during Obama's administration, that the presence of US troops in Afghanistan was the waste of financial resources and asked for withdrawal of American troops.

Ultimately, he was convinced to take strict measure against terrorists. The attitude of US towards Pakistan was

unexpected by Islamabad. The US new strategy was announced from a base near Arlington military cemetery where 2400 American soldiers were buried. The soldiers were killed in war on terror in Afghanistan. This location for sending message was particularly meaningful for Kabul and Islamabad. Trump said laconically that America could no more remain silent about the terrorists' safe haven in Pakistan.

He said, "Pakistan has also sheltered the same organizations that try every single day to kill our people.

We have been paying Pakistan billions and billions of dollars at the same time they are housing the very terrorists that we are fighting. But that will have to change, and that will change immediately.

No partnership can survive a country's harboring of militants and terrorists who target U.S. service members and officials. It is time for Pakistan to demonstrate its commitment to civilization, order, and to peace."

With the current situation, Trump seems to be determined in implementing his strategy in the country. The increasing of military forces, reinforcing Afghan air forces, and increasing air strikes by NATO and US troops in Afghanistan indicate America's firm decision.

However, such strikes are not a new issue. This is the continuation of the past strategy which was reduced during Hamid Karzai's and Obama's administrations.

The US has resumed its strategy which will provide an appropriate opportunity for Afghan forces. If this issue continues with the same force, Ashraf Ghani's words will be right as he said with strong morale while receiving helicopters in Kandahar, that "the Taliban have no other option but to accept peace."

Anyhow, the reason behind this mistrust will be the unfulfilled promise made by Pakistan towards peace process. Hence, there is not much sense of hope with meetings being held about the issue of peace. Islamabad will have to take honest steps against terrorist networks on its soil. The recent terrorist attacks in Kabul, Ghazni, Paktika, and Ghor, which left hundreds dead and wounded behind, bespeak of the Taliban's lukewarm response to peace talks.

Therefore, Afghanistan must not fall for the false promises of the Taliban and those who support them.

Kabul, along with its international allies, will have to combat terrorism with iron fist so as to protect the rights of Afghan people. It is clear that the Taliban will not come to negotiating table, unless they sustain heavy casualties in battlefields.

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The US Cannot Go It Alone on Iran

By Richard N. Haass

US President Donald Trump has announced what was long anticipated: that he will not certify that Iran is complying with the July 2015 "Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action" (JCPOA) signed by the United States, China, Russia, France, Germany, the United Kingdom, and Iran. Nor will he certify that the suspension of sanctions undertaken by the US as part of the agreement is justified and in the vital national interest of the US.

To be clear, such certifications are not required by the JCPOA. Rather, they are required every 90 days by a law enacted by the US Congress soon after the accord was signed. It is also essential to underscore that Trump did not withdraw from the JCPOA itself. What he chose was a compromise: to make clear his disdain for the agreement without leaving it or reintroducing sanctions that were removed as part of it (a step that would be tantamount to US withdrawal).

What happens next is unclear. Congress has 60 days to reintroduce some or all of the suspended sanctions but is unlikely to do so. It might, however, introduce new sanctions tied to Iran's behavior in Syria or elsewhere in the region. Consistent with this, Trump announced his intention to place extra sanctions on Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps.

If the US were to impose new sanctions for any purpose at any time, it would likely find itself alone. The Europeans, China, and Russia are highly unlikely to join, not only because of financial self-interest, but also because Iran is in compliance with the JCPOA. This is a point made by international inspectors operating under United Nations auspices, as well as by senior US officials, including Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis.

To argue, as some in America do, that Iran is not complying with the spirit of the JCPOA is meaningless: "spirit" is a phrase without legal standing. And while it is fair to argue that much of what Iran is doing in the region is a legitimate cause for concern, it is not grounds for reintroducing sanctions under the accord.

Renegotiating the JCPOA to extend the duration of several of its constraints, make inspections more intrusive, and expand its coverage to missiles is attractive in the abstract. But it is totally unworkable in practice, as Iran and most (or all) of the other signatories of the JCPOA would reject these demands. The threat to terminate US participation in the JCPOA if such changes are not made will thus prove either empty or self-defeating if carried out.

None of this is meant to argue that the JCPOA is a good agreement. Still, Trump's decision not to certify was un-

warranted and ill-advised. The agreement was the result of a collective effort. American unilateralism now could make forging a common front against Iran much more difficult in the future. Trump's move is also bad for US foreign policy. There must be a presumption of continuity if a great power is to be great. Unpredictability can provide a tactical advantage, but it is also a strategic liability.

Here there is an obvious link with North Korea. At some point, the US may determine that diplomacy has a role in managing the North Korean nuclear and missile challenges. But America's ability to offer a credible diplomatic path will be seriously undermined if others judge that it cannot be trusted to stand by agreements.

There is also a more immediate problem: if the US sets in motion a dynamic that causes the JCPOA to unravel, and Iran resumes nuclear activities currently precluded by the accord, a crisis will erupt at a time when the US already has its hands full with North Korea.

Despite these considerations, it would also be a mistake to focus just on the US announcement and not also on Iranian behavior. In the short run, the world needs to contend with an Iran that is an imperial power, one that seeks to remake large swaths of the Middle East in its image. What is needed is a policy of containment of Iran across the region - including support for the Kurds in northern Iraq and Syria, as well as of other groups and countries that are pushing back against Iran.

In the longer run, the challenge is to deal with the JCPOA's flaws, above all with its sunset provisions. The agreement "parked" the nuclear problem, rather than resolving it. Important provisions of the accord will expire in either eight or 13 years. At that time, inspections will not prevent Iran from putting in place many of the prerequisites of a nuclear weapons program that could be made operational with little warning.

It cannot be assumed, as some do, that Iran's intentions and behavior will moderate over the next decade or 15 years. On the contrary, Iran is more likely to remain a hybrid regime in which a government coexists with a permanent religious authority and with powerful military forces and intelligence units that exercise considerable political influence and largely operate outside the government's control. Dealing with an ambitious and powerful Iran thus entails a broad range of other open-ended challenges that define the ever-turbulent Middle East. Without the JCPOA, however, those challenges would become even more daunting. (Project Syndicate)

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