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Preface

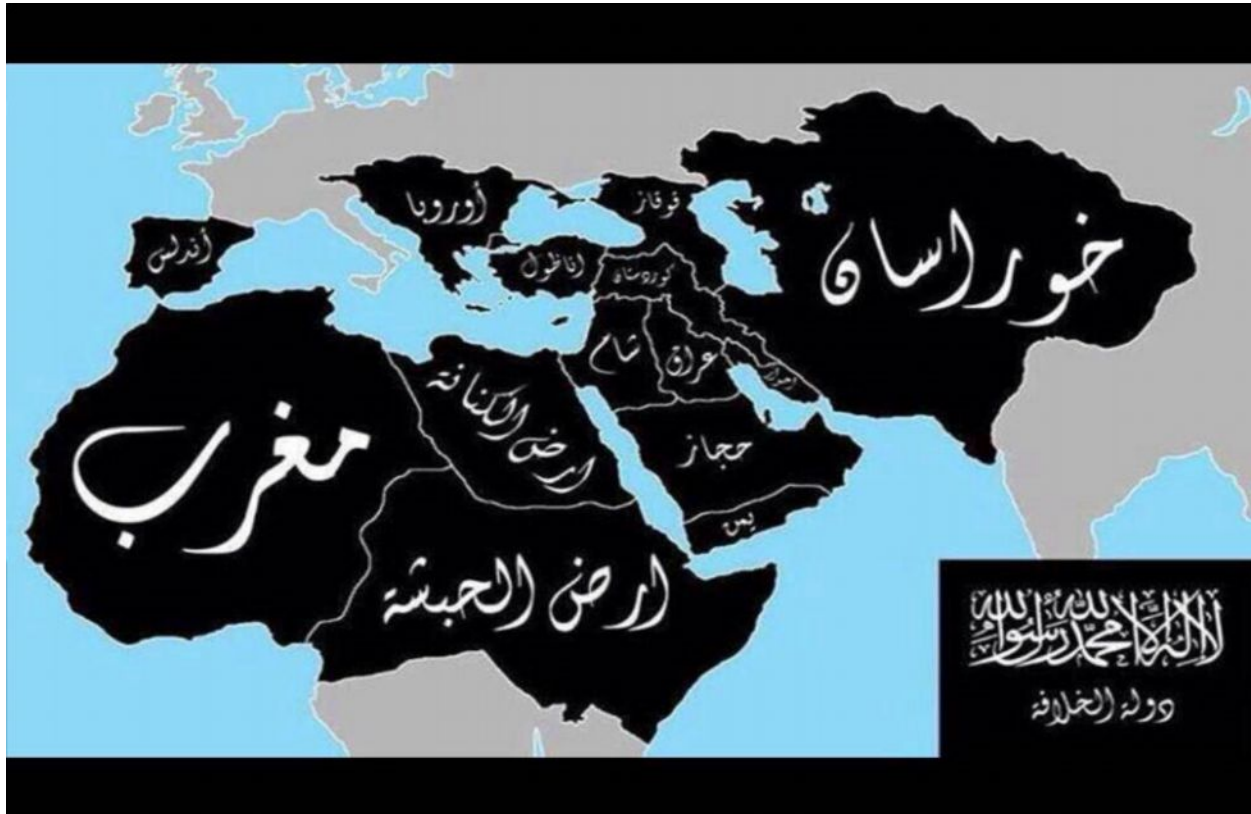
During the last few weeks, ISIS's presence and activities in Afghanistan has dragged international attentions. Taliban's letter to Abu-Bakr Al-Baghdadi and the harsh response of ISIS to the Taliban had a message that the war in Afghanistan has entered into another phase. The high level Afghan security officials, too, predict a more insecure future for the country.

The sudden emergence of the group from Afghanistan has been a source of concerns for the world. During the Ex-president Hamid Karzai's visit to Russia, Vladimir Putin called ISIS a big concern for Moscow. In addition, it has been discussed in international media that the group endeavors to reach out to the mines in Afghanistan. The question is how this group has emerged in a very short period of time in Afghanistan. Whose hands are behind this group in Afghanistan?

Moreover, once again we have been witnessing the blame-game between Afghan officials after the recent security issues. The CEO of National Unity Government, Dr. Abdullah has expressed his frustration regarding Pakistan's role. Though, president Ghani is still hopeful for Pakistan and has accepted demands of Pakistan. A good example can be the controversial MoU. Even then Pakistan did not changed its policy. Now the question is whether the blame-game has taken another start?

In this week's analysis, the researchers in Center for Strategic & Regional Studies have discussed the aforesaid topics.

From Great Waziristan to Great Khurasan



When ISIS was for the first time reported in Afghanistan in early 2015, it was difficult to accept that the group could turn into an active insurgent group. But now after six months, ISIS could have found a place for itself in some parts of Nangrahar province.

Concerns regarding ISIS's presence in Afghanistan are felt out of Afghanistan too. During the ex-president Hamid Karzai's visit to Russia, President Vladimir Putin with expressing his concerns said that ISIS is present in 24 out of 34 provinces of Afghanistan.

The US officials, who rarely express views on ISIS presence in Afghanistan, have expressed the same concerns regarding ISIS presence in different parts of the country.

In northern Afghanistan, the group has started its recruitment. The issue has increased the concerns from central Asia to Moscow.

Who joins ISIS?

Though it is said that most of the ISIS people are the previous Taliban members who have changed their flag, but without Abdul Raouf Khadim who was killed by US drone no other Taliban leaders has expressed his allegiance to IS. Taliban accepts that some people who were previously part of them and were expelled for disobedience have joined ISIS now.

Part of IS in Afghanistan who fought the Afghan Taliban are Pakistani Taliban who parted their way with TTP. The popular figure of them is Shahidullah Shahid who was earlier Taliban's spokesman. But later was expelled from TTP for his close contacts with ISI.

Hafiz Saeed Khan who was selected as Amir of ISIS in Khurasan had been with the Taliban but he himself parted his way with them.

Another part of ISIS has links with Hizb-e-Islami (Hekmatyar). During the last decade neither the Afghan government paid any attention to this group and nor have they not been considered by Taliban as independent group. Now they consider it a good chance to join another group, ISIS.

But another group is present with their fighters in eastern Afghanistan. According to local people, they are Pakistani militia groups. They have arranged their own mobilization under ISIS.

Contrary to Iraq and Syria's ISIS, the ISIS in Afghanistan is not sectarian. The reason may be that the Salafi School is not popular in Afghanistan as yet.

Abdul Rahim Muslimdost, the first Afghan who supported ISIS has belonged to Kot district of Nangrahar. It is the reason why the group has first recruited in this district.

Hafiz Saeed Khan, Amir of ISIS in Khurasan belongs to Orakzai agency of FATA (Pakistan's federally administered tribal agencies). Now a great part of TTP fighters who belonged to Orakzai have joined ISIS.

From Belief to Hostility

As mentioned earlier, those who were not supported by the government and neither by the Taliban have joined ISIS. The hostile among the Afghan Jihadi leaders, Hekmatyar is the only one who has sympathy with ISIS. For instance, he says in his interview with Afghan Zwak:

“The emergence of the ISIS is a natural reaction against the invasion of US against Islamic world, against the non-Muslim governments, and against the interferences of Tehran and support for these governments”.

“ISIS is a movement opposite of Taliban and Governments supported by Washington, Moscow, Tehran and Riyadh and they are against them. All the enemies of Islam consider ISIS as an enemy.”

Hekmatyar thinks the anti-ISIS alliance is of the infidels and enemies of Islam which is the clear proof of ISIS being the right.

The Possibilities of Utilizing Afghan mines

ISIS in Syria and Iraq can get enough money from the oil. Recently, ISIS has introduced its own coin.

It is predicted that ISIS endeavors to utilize Afghanistan mines for its military operations in the region. It is worth mentioning that Taliban has utilized Afghan mines before ISIS.

Taliban has appointed a commission for mines. Its duty is to give mines contracts to internal and external companies.

But in Afghanistan only smaller mines can be extracted by ISIS. For big mines advanced technology is required. The companies having advanced technology will not come to Afghanistan in case ISIS is there.

Conclusion

From the religious point of view ISIS is a Salafi group, which can have influence over a smaller part of Afghanistan. It can exploit the hostilities existed during the long years of war in Afghanistan.

But from ideological point of view, the group should try to amend people in the areas of their rule. But propagating Salafi views in Afghanistan is difficult for them.

ISIS is an international movement which cannot be confined to the Afghan borders. Afghanistan can be considered a route to central Asia. Abdul Karim Khuram, Karzai's ex-head of office had said in an article that US wants Afghanistan to be a greater Waziristan.

Afghan-Pak ties: A new Phase of Blame-Game?



Since the establishment of Pakistan in 1947, Afghan-Pak relations were not good in most of the times. In spite of having common religion, language and culture, the two countries had not have closed ties with each other.

In 2001, when a new chapter in the history of Afghanistan was made, the then President Hamid Karzai endeavored in order to have good relations with Pakistan. Though, Karzai visited Pakistan 21 times when he was president, but the relations between two countries did not improve. In the last days in his office, Karzai explicitly said that Pakistan did not help his government. He repeatedly said that America and Pakistan hold the key to peace in Afghanistan. Even after his term was ended, Karzai remained an anti-Pakistani politician.

When in 2014, a new government was established in Afghanistan; also some efforts were made, to reconstruct the relations of the two countries. Ashraf Ghani stated that his foreign policy has five circles, in which Pakistan enjoyed a vital place. Ashraf Ghani, unlike his predecessor, made efforts to have a better understanding with Pakistan. In his foreign policy, Ashraf Ghani declared that he would have good relations with Pakistan in terms of security and economics. He tried through economic integration to have historical relations with Pakistan.

The Needs of Pakistani help

President Ashraf Ghani is a professional economist. When his government was formed, he stressed more on economic relations of Afghanistan and Pakistan, but in Pakistan there was no tangible change in policy. In APTTA agreement, Afghanistan accepted Tajikistan as a party to it; but Pakistan didn't accept India upon Afghan request. Pakistan said, in order to be part of this agreement, India should normalize its ties with Pakistan. This condition seems impossible.

Ashraf Ghani wants from Pakistan to help in bringing peace and security in Afghanistan. Like Karzai, Ghani expected Pakistan to have key of peace in Afghanistan and can oblige Taliban to commence peace talks with NUG. That is why he delayed weapons agreement with India, dispatch Afghan soldiers to Pakistan for training, granted a free economic zone to Pakistan, in Afghanistan, also signed a controversial intelligence MoU with Pakistani ISI and did many other things for Pakistan. But still, there is no positive reaction from Pakistan.

According to Ghani's government, they should have strategic vision regarding Pakistan, instead of tactical one. Therefore, they omit most of the dishonesties of Pakistan and follow the strategic vision. Regarding Pakistan's not fulfillment of its promises, Ashraf Ghani called his silence as strategic. NUG's new friendship with Pakistan, not only isolated Ashraf Ghani inside government, but also this is used by anti-Pakistan factions as a tool of pressure on Ghani.

On the contrary, Pakistan gained more. In the last decade, Pakistan only this time can receive more privileges and could prevent Indian infiltration in Afghanistan.

From Intelligence Sharing to Blame-Game

As aforementioned, after all the concessions that were made by president Ghani and privileges granted by him to Pakistan, still they did not present any tangible outcome, yet Ghani expects from them and that's why he continues his "strategic silence".

Recently, Afghan government has criticized Pakistan. In June 21st Taliban targeted Afghan parliament; but Afghan secret services blamed Pakistani intelligence and said that a man of Pakistani intelligence, named Bilal, has logistically helped in this attack.

Pakistan's foreign ministry denied this blame. Keeping in mind the fact that this blame come in time, when Afghan government has signed MoU of intelligence sharing with Pakistani secret services. Last week, daily Weesa, disclosed the content of MOU. In a part of that MOU, it was agreed upon, that both countries would share intelligence. This discovery of daily Weesa was also a political pressure on Ghani.

Both countries enjoyed better relation for a very short period of time. While MOU of intelligence sharing between two countries is already signed, yet blaming one party on such a harsh incident discloses that MOU has failed. It is also understood that Urumqi dialogues was a trick to receive more privileges for Pakistan.

Lobbying or Mistrust?

In Afghanistan, people still do not have confidence on Pakistan. This mistrust could not be uprooted through talks only; neither anti-Pakistan lobby is always behind this. Again both parties should be blamed for the emerging mistrust between them. Pakistan shouldn't have mad the promises that was not possible for them to fulfill it. On the other hand, NUG also did not understand the Taliban correctly, that's why they followed the way which was established by Hamid Karzai. Ashraf Ghani still believes that the key to peace is in Pakistan, that's why he rehabilitated its relations with Pakistan and granted them privileges.

Recently, insecurity in Afghanistan and fictitious Urumqi meeting showed that Pakistan has an important role in Afghanistan's peace process as neighboring country, but they will never play the role of Taliban.

Conclusion

The Afghan government urgently gave some privileges to Pakistan. Before testing Pakistan whether it can help to the peace process in Afghanistan or not. President Ghani, before everything tried to form good relations with Pakistan through one sided trust building measures.

Frist: Pakistan cannot have the influence over Taliban to the extent Ghani expected. The Urumqi meeting of China proves that Pakistan cannot force those Taliban to set in peace talks who really lead the war in Afghanistan.

Second: If Pakistan can play a role, it is not sincere, then. For instance, India wants to be part of APTTA. Afghanistan can get benefit from India's coming. But Pakistan opposes this move. Pakistan did not performed its homework in response to the one sided measures of Afghan government. It looks like it is the end of honeymoon.

The End

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