**Changing Scenario in Afghanistan**

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Quick meltdown of Ashraf Ghani’s regime and rapid arrival of Taliban in Kabul palace can be interpreted in many ways. It is quite complicated to identify the victor and loser as the objective of US arrival in Afghan arena still remains vague. This policy flaw was amply exposed by Washington Post last year with disclosure of nearly two thousand authentic documents.

Based upon the disclosures of Washington Post, an article by a writer analyzing the negative impacts of US flawed policies titled ‘Intriguing Truth of Afghan Papers’ was published in Daily Times on 1 January 2020. What has transpired now in Afghanistan at final phase of US withdrawal was always a writing on the wall. Recent optics go in favor of Taliban who emerged on Afghan arena as a major unified group. Taliban-US agreement inked in Doha last year was actually a formal recognition of former group as a dominant stakeholder in comparison with much shaky Kabul government. Obviously, unceremonious sudden departure of Ashraf Ghani from Kabul palace further embossed a final stamp on inefficiency of his government.

Official response on Afghanistan’s chaotic situation presented by President Biden in his address has raised many questions on credibility of the US. While shifting the blame of failure on Afghan army and political leadership, Biden categorically refused to invest any more in Afghanistan on the plea that continuation of such folly might fulfill undisclosed desires of China and Russia. Interestingly, no such thought came to the minds of US decision makers ever before. Though, Biden clearly emphasized that hunting down the AQ and OBL was the prime objective of two decades long stay in Afghanistan but meaningfully he avoided to comment on multiple infrastructural development projects accomplished under various long term bilateral agreements by none other than America.

Besides practical end of Ashraf Ghani’s government with entry of Taliban in Kabul, arrival of Afghan politician’s delegation in Islamabad on same day appeared as another important development. Stance adopted by Pakistan is based on solid principle of non-interference and neutrality. Pakistan maintained patience earlier in response to some highly provoking irresponsible allegations from Ashraf Ghani, and his close aides Amar Saleh and Hamad Ullah Mohib. Changing scenario has very quickly exposed the reality of these critiques of Pakistan as they are now seen blaming each other for the miserable failure. Gradually, international community is realizing that Pakistan’s proposal of stabilizing Afghanistan through all-inclusive interim government should be supported to end the existing chaos.

New government will be facing a great challenge of harnessing the terrorist organizations that are left behind by the departing players.

Pakistan has significantly emerged as a true partner in peace restoration efforts with mature diplomacy and undeniable assistance in evacuation operations. When US had announced completion of withdrawal on 31 August as per the Doha agreement, then why its manifestation radiated so much chaos in Afghanistan? Apparently, it is due to absolutely no resistance from Afghan army for which corrupt ruling elite and US equally stands responsible. It will not be wrong to say that US decision makers already knew about the defeat of Afghan army but their time estimation was inaccurate. This all came much earlier than expectation as Afghan army was nowhere seen resisting the Taliban. This may be taken as a blessing in disguise as bloodshed was averted in absence of resistance. Though, western media is demonizing the Taliban, their entry in Kabul without bloodshed and subsequent actions so far have effectively countered many wrong speculations.

Key regional players Russia, China, Iran, Pakistan and Turkey seem much hopeful about future interim government in Afghanistan which will be surely led by Taliban. Western countries have also softened their initial hard stance and urged Taliban to earn legitimacy through abidance of commitments on fundamental human rights. Let’s be sure that process of a big change in Afghanistan is still evolving. Peaceful takeover of Kabul is much easier than governing and stabilizing a war ridden Afghanistan in coming days.

New government will be facing a great challenge of harnessing the terrorist organizations that are left behind by the departing players. Taliban have asked constructive assistance from neighboring states. These states expect elimination of terrorist groups from Afghan soil. Future Afghan government under Taliban is expected to end the footprints of all militant organizations such as TTP, ISIS, ETIM and Jundullah who have been a source of concern for Pakistan, China, Russia and Iran. If this issue remains unresolved under future interim setup, then a greater wave of destabilization might shake the whole region. India, being a major supporter of Ghani regime and sponsor of anti-Pakistan proxies, seems in a state of diplomatic dilemma amid rise of Taliban in Kabul. Mysterious paralysis of Afghan army in recent scenario has not yet been appropriately assessed which as per US president comprises three lac soldiers equipped with latest combat gadgetry.

A complex challenge may rise for future government if deserters of Afghan army join the ranks and files of existing terrorist organizations as it happened in Iraq. Existence of shadowy network of US contractors in Afghanistan must not be ruled out in the context of prevailing tug of war between global players. The obsession of US with anti-China games in the region are no more a secret. Quad alliance has kept India in lead to counter the growing Chinese ingress in the region. US troops’ withdrawal should not be weighed as a victory or defeat. Terrorist attacks in Dasu and Gwadar on Chinese led projects are not good omens. Situation in Afghanistan is still evolving as calls for resistance are being raised by Amar Saleh and son of Ahmed Masood against future set up. Blasts at Kabul airport, subsequent drone strikes by US on IS-KP targets and terrorist attacks on Pakistan posts from Afghanistan are indicators of a complex challenge. Pakistan should cautiously keep all options open to deal with whatever emerges out of rapidly evolving scenario in Afghanistan.

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