

US pre-emptive winter offensive in Afghanistan

The US Maj. Gen. Eric Olson in Kabul announced on Tuesday that thousands of US troops were preparing for a winter push against Taliban insurgents to pre-empt an expected spring offensive that could upset plans for Afghan parliamentary elections in April 2005.

There could be an unhappy co-incidence between the Taliban spring offensive and the parliamentary elections. "The aim is to tighten Afghanistan-Pakistan border by sending troops on raids against rebel leaders", he said. The operation might as well be launched within days of Karzai's formal inauguration as the president of Afghanistan on December 7. The US-led force of about 18,000 would attempt to target militants in their 'winter sanctuaries' so that they could be in no position to launch attacks to disturb the April parliamentary vote. The operation has been given the name of "Lightening Freedom".

With all these preparations going on the US ambassador to Afghanistan Zalmay Khalilzad, behaving more like former British Residents, urged the militants strongly to contact tribal elders and lay down their arms to avoid being targeted. Behaving as an authority on Islam, he advised that continued resistance was contrary to the will of the people of Afghanistan and of Islam. It is not understood on what legal ground the US diplomat could make such an offer or threat in a sovereign country. Or is it because of the presence of 18,000 US troops in the country who are trying to wipe out the Taliban to install Karzai on a firm footing as the "Americano" in Kabul?

Mr. Khalilzad made all these exhortations in a recent press conference he held in Kabul. He urged the Afghan fighters to pledge their allegiance to the Karzai government and in return they would not be punished.

While sermonising that Afghanistan has entered a new phase after US occupation, there was no need for them to stay in the mountains and be targeted.

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The offer made by US ambassador is dubious; at the one hand he offers them olive branch that the Taliban who lay down arms would not be punished and in the same breath he contradicts himself by saying that those who were guilty of serious crimes the offer does not apply to them. Who will decide about the seriousness or otherwise of the crimes committed when the name Taliban is in itself the most heinous sin for the Americans? President Karzai has said in the past that Taliban who lay their arms would be granted amnesty if they renounced terrorism and dissociated from bin-Laden's al-Qaeda network. Karzai has many times advocated the need to include former Taliban moderates in Afghanistan's political process. As a natural consequence the Taliban were quick to reject the deceptive offer.

Two years after their ouster from Afghanistan, the Taliban are making their reappearance by launching guerilla operations against the US-led coalition forces, killing and kidnapping aliens involved in the reconstruction work. They are strongest in the South and East where violence continues to plague the region. Last week a roadside bomb killed US soldiers in Uruzgan province, an area where militants allegedly cross to and from Pakistan. US troops have several new camps close to the Pakistan border. Afghan forces would also reposition 'along and astride' routes used by militants with an understanding to strengthen cooperation with Pakistani troops across the border.

US special forces have already been moved closer to the main Torkham border crossing in Nangarhar province where the American troops recently conducted raids on suspected al-Qaeda targets. The occupation Gen. Olson apprehended that the militants might attempt a 'spectacular act' during Karzai's inauguration. He was not sure of any specific plans by the militants to attack the ceremony. Perhaps it was part of the US pre-emption plans to kill the Afghans to ward

off their apprehensions.

It is not the shadow of power that prevails but the shadow of death that would take over Afghanistan and the world at large because of the aggressive designs of a superpower. This trend of thought has not received the desired international support, as ruthless exercise of superior power is not the singular path in the shaping of politico-economical issues. Only rarely the naked desire for power emerges unashamed. Despite all the carpet-bombings Afghans were defiant, and that spirit of defiance is being revived to punish the perpetrators. He was none other than Martin Luther King who said, "he who accepts evil is as much involved in it as he who helps to perpetrate it".

The persistency of militant attacks is a red signal for the American-led forces stationed in Afghanistan. These will gain further momentum and there won't be any let off. The axe forgets, but the cut log does not. Wake up before it is too late. The US promised peace, is nowhere to be seen. Even the garrison city of Kabul is not safe at the hands of the militants. Parts of eastern and southern Afghanistan have been rendered more and more insecure due to the increasingly daring militant attacks. The Taliban had declared last March that they were aiming to regain power in Afghanistan, and since then there has been a steady increase in their attacks especially in the southeast of the country.

Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, a former prime minister, a politician and a warlord has called upon the Afghans to launch Jihad against the US forces. He is on the US-wanted list on the charge of terrorist activities.

In his about 20-minute address on the subject, he urged the Afghans to wage a war because of the continued US hostility against the Muslims in various parts of the world; Indonesia, Iraq, Palestine and Afghanistan and drew parallels to the US offensives against the Muslims with the Crusades that America is leading in the third millennium. He threatened that

Afghan resistance would do anything possible in their struggle and would even use suicide bombers to accomplish their mission. Hekmatyar proclaimed if they could not fight in an organised manner they would get even by resorting to sporadic attacks.

Ironically, Hekmatyar was once a CIA protégé and was a frontline fighter against the Russians in Afghanistan. The other disturbing factor is that Mullah Omar and most of the Taliban leaders that include bin-Laden and some of his al-Qaeda lieutenants, survived the US invasion and were believed to be guiding resurgent groups in various parts of the country. The freelancing insurgent groups have completely jeopardised the security of the country and nobody appears to be safe from their onslaughts.

UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, while speaking to the three released UN workers expressed his doubts over the security situation in the country. Large tracts of Afghanistan are still off-limits to international human organisations because of an unending stubborn Taliban-led insurgency. There is a growing recognition that something more should be done to stop daily attacks on Afghans, foreign aid workers and US troops. But the question is who will bell the cat?

Hamid Karzai is surviving by riding on the US shoulders and a time will soon come when these shoulders would bend down to offload the dummy. How long the US troops can hold the shoulders intact depends more on their interests rather than the survival of Hamid Karzai; the poor man who is not safe without being surrounded by the US troops. Historically, Afghanistan has been recognised as the most difficult country to be ruled. Can Karzai rule the unwieldy Afghans with armed US-guards as if he was an American combatant, and for how long? The answer does not lie in the US history. For that Mr. Karzai would have to unfold the pages of Afghan history to find an answer.