**Challenges Faced by the Taliban**

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A report prepared by the UN Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team and submitted to the Security Council in July had pointed out Al-Qaeda’s presence in at least 15 Afghan provinces, primarily in the Eastern, Southern and South-Eastern region. It also noted the existence of other terrorist outfits like Daesh, Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and TTP on the Afghan soil, warning that threat from these groups planning complex attacks remains a strong possibility. The report further said that TTP continued to pose a threat to the region with the unification of splinter groups and increasing cross-border attacks. The TTP had increased its financial resources from extortion, smuggling and taxes. This report was compiled before the fall of Kabul to the Taliban.

These groups were very active during the Ghani regime. The TTP and the IS were enjoying the support of Indian RAW and Afghan intelligence agency NDS. They had been carrying out acts of terrorism within Pakistan. Even Baloch insurgents had sanctuaries on the Afghan soil, which they used to carry out attacks on Pakistani security forces in Balochistan. The change in ground realities in Afghanistan has deprived these groups of RAW and NDS’s support, but they are still in a position to conduct sporadic attacks, as predicted in the UN report and corroborated by the IS attacks on Kabul airport. Yet another assault on Pakistani security forces in Quetta on Sunday, September 5, martyred four security personnel; causing injuries to about two dozen people.

Though the Taliban hold sway over the entire Afghanistan after achieving victory in Panjshir, they still need to face daunting challenges about installing a government of national consensus. They need to make sure that, as per their assurances and commitment with the international community (also agreed in the peace deal with the US), these militant groups are not allowed to use the Afghan soil for terrorist attacks.

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As per vibes emanating from Afghanistan and the statements given by the Taliban leaders, efforts are on the anvil to install an inclusive government. This, is, undoubtedly, an arduous undertaking in a tribal set-up and explains the delay in this regard. That is why Pakistan is repeatedly urging the international community to support the Taliban in forming a new government and remain engaged with them to achieve peace and security in Afghanistan. As a stakeholder in peace in Afghanistan, Pakistan has worked very hard to end the conflict. These efforts culminated in a peace deal between the Taliban and the US while promoting reconciliation.

In the backdrop of the new situation, Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi has spoken to several international counterparts and also visited some Central Asian countries to garner support for the Taliban and lent them support for the formation of the new government. Pakistan also hosted a virtual meeting of the special representatives or envoys of the neighbouring countries of Afghanistan, including Iran, China, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. Pakistan’s Special Representative for Afghanistan, Ambassador Mohammad Sadiq, chaired the session that concluded with unanimous agreement for peace in Afghanistan. It was said to be vital for the security, stability and prosperity of the entire region.

It is quite satisfactory to note that today’s Taliban are more flexible and accommodating than of yesteryears. They have committed to the international community to form an inclusive government, respect human rights and to not allow the terrorist outfits to use Afghan territory for carrying out their heinous acts. That sounds very encouraging. In this regard, they have announced a general amnesty, allowed the women working in government departments back to work and also permitted them to go to schools and universities.

After the successful installation of a government of national consensus, the biggest challenge for the Taliban government would be dealing with the terrorist outfits present on its soil, as revealed in the UN report. Al-Qaeda has lost its ability to operate at the global level, but it is still capable of keeping local relevance by allying with local terrorist entities. The splinter groups of these organisations may ally to keep themselves alive. However, the Taliban government has a high stake in getting rid of these groups because their recognition is contingent upon fulfilling their commitment. Regional countries, including Pakistan, will also be looking up to the Taliban government to effectively deal with terrorism emanating from the Afghan territory. But easier said than done.

ISI DG General Faiz Hameed’s visit to Afghanistan, at the invitation of the Taliban leadership, is also very significant from the perspective of the formation of government in Afghanistan and dealing with terrorist organisations. Pakistan can surely help the Taliban by sharing intelligence. A positive outcome of his visit is that contrary to an earlier statement of the spokesman of the Taliban that it was for Pakistan to deal with TTT, it has now been categorically assured that the Afghan soil would not be allowed to be used for terrorist acts against Pakistan.

Reportedly, the UN Secretary-General and Chairman of Joint Chiefs of Staff of the US, General Mark Milley, have expressed fears of Afghanistan relapsing into civil war. General said, “My military estimate… is that the conditions are likely to develop into a civil war.” He questioned whether the Taliban-who are yet to declare a government-would be able to consolidate power and establish effective governance. Instead of expressing fears about an undesirable eventuality, the collective responsibility of the international community is to prevent its recurrence by extending all-possible support to the Taliban in the formation of the new government.

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