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**Pakistan and China: the new US game**

I had earlier suspected that the US was deliberately pushing Afghanistan towards chaos and civil war as well as creating troubles for Pakistan. However, I was not completely sure and hence I expressed some hopes regarding the possibility of peace and stability in Afghanistan in my column as well as in different talk shows.

But unfortunately, the recent events in Afghanistan – over the past few days – and the interviews of Afghan President Dr Ashraf Ghani and former Afghan president Hamid Karzai with the German Magazine Der Spiegel transformed my doubts into the firm conviction that the United States is deliberately undermining prospects of peace and stability in the region.

At the end of the Taliban’s three-day ceasefire on Eidul-Fitr, they resumed their violent offensive against the Afghan forces all over Afghanistan; this is indeed unprecedented, at least in the last ten to fifteen years. The Taliban's offensives were already underway in the southern and eastern parts of Afghanistan, and now they have launched fierce battles in the Kunduz province in the far north and the Jawzjan province in the far west of Afghanistan. Moreover, they have also started battles in the Nuristan and Badakhshan provinces in the northeast along the border of China, Pakistan and Tajikistan.

Currently, the Taliban’s offensive against the Afghan forces is in full swing in different parts of more than twenty provinces of Afghanistan. The Taliban even attacked Mihtarlam – the 16th largest city in the Laghman province – which has been comparatively a very peaceful city in the last few years. As a result of the Taliban’s current battles, innocent Afghans have become refugees in different parts of the country.

Displaying a feeling of betrayal and helplessness, Afghan President Ashraf Ghani complained about American disloyalty in his interview with Der Spiegel on May 14, 2021. In the interview, he also tried to put the responsibility on Pakistan for peace and stability in Afghanistan post-US troop withdrawal – stating that “the US now plays only a minor role. The question of peace or hostility is now in Pakistani hands”. He also reiterated his stance on Pakistan’s so-called control over the Taliban and alleged that “Pakistan operates an organized support system. The Taliban receive logistics there, their finances are there and recruitment is there”.

Though President Ghani blames Pakistan for instability, the conditions that he has put forward for negotiation with the Taliban show that he himself is not sincere in achieving meaningful solutions to the Afghanistan crisis. He knows well that such conditions are not acceptable to the Taliban. The gist of his interview is that the Taliban do not want a peaceful solution. His government will continue to fight against the Taliban and he wants the US and Europe to help Kabul against the Taliban and to pressurize Pakistan.

Similarly, former Afghan president Hamid Karzai, in his interview with Der Spiegel on May 22, 2021, has also taken a hard line on Pakistan and blamed Islamabad for its alleged link with and support to the Taliban. However, he also indirectly gave the message that the United States would not want peace in Afghanistan. At the same time, he has expressed high hopes “for the so-called Troika Plus, a diplomatic initiative launched by Russia which also includes China and the United States”. In response to the very first question about the Taliban, Karzai says that “I realized early into my tenure as president that this war is not our conflict and we Afghans are just being used against each other" by external forces.

Referring to his meetings with former US officials such as Brzezinski, Karzai stated that the Americans themselves accept that “America was deliberately promoting radical Islamist forces in Afghanistan and the region” so that they may “create as many conflicts zones around the USSR as possible, a so-called arc of crisis”. He believes that “now, in the 21st century, it’s the United States and the new global superpower China, as well as Russia – all of which are playing out their rivalries in our country”

And it is not only Hamid Karzai who talks about the US-China rivalry but the Americans too openly consider China as their number one rival and main target. It is also crystal clear that Pakistan is a very close friend of China in the region. China, through the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), is reaching out to the Arabian Sea.

A peaceful Afghanistan will give easy access to China and Pakistan to reach Central Asia. So, China and Pakistan will be the main beneficiaries of peace and stability in Afghanistan as well as the main victims of any instability. Now the million-dollar question is: if the US could create the so-called 'arc of crisis' around the former USSR for its strategic interests, then why would it not create such an 'arc of crisis' around China and Pakistan? That will also help the US create trouble for its other two rivals: Iran and Russia.

Previously, I had clearly pointed out that the USA's tactics and pressure are creating troubles for Pakistan and causing animosity with the Taliban. One clear example is that the US itself is withdrawing from Afghanistan but asking for military bases from Pakistan.

Pakistan has neither given a military base to the US nor seems to be in any mood to give one in the near future. But, regardless, baseless claims have been spread in the American and Afghan media that Pakistan has given military bases to Pakistan. As a result, we have seen a strong reaction from the Taliban on this issue of military bases, with the group warning the regional countries of consequences.

Through the Doha agreement, the US has secured the Taliban’s guarantee that Afghan soil will not be used by Al Qaeda and others. Now the US does not care if there is chaos and bloodshed in Afghanistan and if that in turn causes trouble for China and Pakistan. Once the US troops leave, all this will not be of any concern to Washington. If 10 percent of the money that Washington was spending in Afghanistan is given to the different armed groups in Afghanistan, these groups could be easily used against any neighboring country.

In this context, my earlier suspicion has turned into a firm belief that the US deliberately has led Afghanistan into a devastating civil war. Pakistan, China, Russia, and Iran will bear the main brunt of the chaos and instability. That is why I suggest that China, Russia, Iran, and Pakistan should form a separate block and bring together Afghanistan's warring parties for meaningful reconciliation through aggressive diplomacy so as to thwart America's dangerous designs and cunning tactics.

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