**The Plight of Chaos on Afghan Soil**

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With Taliban raging with violence in rural Afghanistan and taking hold of some important chokepoints and towns, while overlooking Tajikistan, Iran and Pakistan, and well set to take their offensive confiscations to the capitals of the districts under their control; the Kabul regime is showing no urgency for intra-Afghan talks, whereas, the regional countries are rushing for ways and means to secure their respective frontiers and national interests; the situation in Afghanistan seems to be spiraling into a long and bloodier civil war.

The irresponsible and abrupt withdrawal of troops by US has undermined the likelihood of an agreement for ceasefire and power sharing in somewhat broad-based interim administration. Now, even the US protégé Ashraf Ghani feels no qualms in expressing his dismay on President Joe Biden’s sudden decision for withdrawal. His decision not only emboldened the Taliban to strengthen their position, but also caught the Kabul regime off guard, leaving the Afghan security forces in disarray with sudden shrinkage of their support and supply lines. This was evident by their constant humiliation at the hands of Taliban.

President Ashraf Ghani and his partners were not certain about the plans that the American leadership had for Afghanistan in the post-withdrawal period. It was hard to imagine that the US is washing its hands off Afghanistan, while ignoring the geo-political and strategic tumult, the unfolding civil war, and the militant outfits, which are believed to not only be present in Afghanistan, but also actively seeking space for foray in the adjoining countries. It was also unbelievable the renewed US policy of “the containment of China” would completely divert the American leadership from the threats posed by the militant outfits and the dire situation in Afghanistan.

Can the US and its Western allies afford to see the recurrence of the situation of Iraq in Afghanistan with Al-Qaeda multiplying into many branches?

Apparently, the US has lost the war in Afghanistan but its interests are still intact in this region and also beyond the Oxus River. The Americans could have left Afghanistan in much better position with hopes for durable peace and stability had they gone whole heartedly for a regional approach to resolve this festering imbroglio. Their mishandled withdrawal has boosted the confidence of the ascendant Taliban, and President Ashraf Ghani, since his maiden meeting with President Biden, has been banking on the promised US economic and military support to turn tables on Taliban. His delusion to defeat his adversary with the strategic and financial assistance of the US or one of its proxies, defies the unfolding ground realities. The war will only bring untold miseries to Afghans, and could even culminate into the disintegration of the country.

It seems that the Americans too share his delusions. With the US and NATO troops on the ground and economic and financial aid in trillions, over the last two decades, the Afghan security forces were not being able to defeat the Taliban. Then how come the limited air support and reduced economic assistance would prop up the crumbling Ashraf Ghani regime and its demoralized security forces to look Taliban in the face? This only underscores the need for a strong US intervention to help realize a post-withdrawal agreement between the warring factions. Only a powerful country such as US can do this by enforcing ceasefire and power sharing agreement, while guaranteeing the security of persons who have worked with the foreign forces. The other plausible alternative would be to swiftly evolve a consensus among the regional countries for the deployment of UN peacekeeping troops.

Conversely, a bloodier civil war in Afghan land will cause severe political, economic and strategic tremors in the surrounding countries with unprecedented violence, extremism, militancy and sectarianism. The uncertainty that engulfs the situation has prompted regional countries to seek ways and means to secure their strategic interests. Prominent on the catalogue of these states are Pakistan, Iran, Turkey, China, Russia and India. India, reportedly, has started delivering military help to Ashraf Ghani regime. To Indian strategists, the stalemate in war serves their national interest, while Pakistan has no doubts India’s strategic presence in Afghanistan would create mayhem in Balochistan. China would also view India’s intervention with serious trepidations.

Pakistan is also very concerned about the spillover of the civil war and its fallout including resurgence in terrorism and refugee influx. The Central Asian Republics are also equally apprehensive being geographically linked with Afghanistan. These states especially Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan have chronically remained vulnerable to terrorism in the past, prompting some of them to enter into security pacts with Russia. Any volatile situation in Afghanistan would certainly cause resurgence of terrorism in these countries given the presence of ferocious militant outfits including the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and Hizb-e-Tahrir within this region and on Afghan soil.

China’s concern with the resurgent East Turkestan Islamic Movement and overall Uighur problem, which could potentially receive a fillip from this volatile situation, needs no elaboration. The recent visit of the senior Taliban leaders to China could be viewed from this perspective. China would make all-out efforts to guard against any disturbance in its sensitive region of Xinjiang. Iran is flexing its muscles to secure the Shia community in Afghanistan. Reports suggest that it has already moved a strong contingent of Fatimiyoon from Syria to its frontier with Herat, already overrun by the Taliban. Iran reportedly has over 30,000 trained fighters in this Militia under the IRGC.

Can the US and its Western allies afford to see the recurrence of the situation of Iraq in Afghanistan with Al-Qaeda multiplying into many branches? The withdrawal has reduced US influence in Afghanistan and Central Asia, given its contestation with Iran, China and Russia. The US leadership is just muddling through now. It is not enough to pay lip service to peace in Afghanistan or call a belated huddle of the three-plus one – Pakistan, China, Russia and US – to work out plans to confront the flux situation. This would bring a pause in the conflict without ending it.

The US leaders are morally bound to do more with regional states and with Afghan leaders on board. They cannot run away from Afghanistan with their hands drenched in Afghan blood or scapegoating any country. The situation is still redeemable if leaders take diligent actions to ensure peace and stability on Afghan soil.

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