

CENTRE FOR LAND WARFARE STUDIES
AFGHANISTAN: THE CHALLENGE OF TRANSITION
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SEMINAR REPORT

General

The Centre for Land Warfare Studies (CLAWS) organised a seminar on, “Afghanistan: The Challenge of Transition” at the Seminar Hall, CLAWS Office, New Delhi. The seminar gathered noted experts on the subject to discuss various aspects of the challenges of transition in Afghanistan post the withdrawal of American troops in 2014. The seminar was chaired by Dr. Radha Kumar, Director General, Delhi Policy Group. The panelists were Brig Raj Shukla who deliberated on Afghanistan National Security Forces (ANSF), Amb Ashok Sajjanhar who deliberated upon the role of regional players in the context of Afghanistan and Lt Gen PC Katoch who highlighted the possible future scenarios in Afghanistan. The seminar was attended by serving officers from the Armed Forces, veterans and members from the strategic community, media and other think tanks.

Opening Remarks by the Chairperson: Dr. Radha Kumar, Director General, Delhi Policy Group

The major issue that Afghanistan faces at this juncture is the challenge of transition. One can see three to four trends emerging in the next three to four years' time. There is disappointment in some quarters; it could encourage the spoilers of the Afghan peace process; there is fear of Jihadi forces and Taliban coming to the fore and the dateline also pushes for greater activism.

Three key issue need to be outlined. These are governance, security and internal reconciliation between the ethnic groups and the Taliban. The end of 2012 saw a breakthrough as far as talks with Taliban are concerned but unfortunately there was a lack of follow through.

From 2011, there have been a series of peace initiatives such as the Istanbul process, meetings in Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and various Confidence Building Measure (CBM) initiatives where India played an active role. However, Afghanistan's road map has

become controversial in India because it prioritises Pakistan's role and India is worried about the degree of control Pakistan will exert on Afghanistan after the withdrawal of American troops.

The Afghanistan government has looked to Indian security forces for training, weaponry, long term partnership and for strategy. However, they have held back on further advancement in those fields due to Pakistan. Therefore, in the discourse of Afghanistan post 2014, the question of what will happen in Afghanistan between 2014 and 2024 lingers. As far as India is concerned, India is an active player and must play a major role in Afghanistan post 2014.

Afghanistan National Security Forces (ANSF)- Capacity and Capability to Maintain a Viable Security Structure: Brig Raj Shukla

The combat worthiness of ANSF will influence the nature of political assessment in Afghanistan. ANSF is a very major component in the unfolding history of present day Afghanistan. There is no doubt that there is a glimmer of hope in the capability enhancement of the ANSF but challenges abound, one such major challenge being the stability of the ANSF itself.

An international commitment to Afghanistan on the part of the liberal democracies appears to be lacking. Institutions like the Military take decades to build and the ANSF has not had that time to build its capability and ethos. To that extent, it is doubtful that the ANSF can function in the manner of other military forces. In a phase of transition, it is quite a task to merge speed and discipline within a timeline. Other challenges facing the ANSF are the rampant corruption that is prevalent in Afghanistan. The nervous alliances between various groups also affect the stability of the force. This factor can be a big spoiler in the long run even if there is a belief within the force that they can succeed in the political context. Under such circumstances, even if there are possibilities of ANSF being empowered, the battle space will remain unconquerable. There is however hope on ANSF as in the recent past they have proved their combat worthiness.

Present day Afghanistan is a functioning state with all state institutions in place. By 2009, US forces were laying greater stress on governance aspect with lots of institution building being worked on. The Americans also worked on stabilising the villages and allowed the Afghans to pick their own strategies at the cost of their own as they realised that the root to military success in Afghanistan had to be indigenous. The capability of the ANSF should hence be viewed objectively as building an institution is not an easy task and the process only started in 2008. Therefore, the need of the hour is the right strategic acumen as it takes years to bring about tangible changes.

Current statistics puts ANSF at 1,74,000 personnel and they have their task cut out for them. The Army will form the heart of counter-terrorism efforts and it would also be required to support the Afghan Police forces and provide support in casualty evacuation. Accumulatively, they have a huge ambitious task ahead of them.

There are also serious concerns about the ANSF. These pertain to the comprehensiveness of the institution building process, cohesiveness of the institution, low levels of literacy in the ANSF, high desertion rates and drug usage by ANSF personnel.

Around 2008-09, ISAF military strategy was reworked and by 2011 there was suitable implementation of the reworked strategy through which they could disrupt the workings of organisations such as the Haqqani Network. Inroads were made in areas of fighting such entities but it remains fragile.

Post-pull out, ANSF will be the main force to deal with instability in Afghanistan. ANSF will also assume 70 percent of the operations as districts have been already handed over to them. ANSF will also work towards dismantling of Taliban. The upcoming campaigning season will however provide a glimpse of the effectiveness of the ANSF and its power of retention and cohesiveness.

Role of Regional and Extra Regional Players: Amb Ashok Sajjanhar

Afghanistan will evolve in the next couple of years. However, at the international level, there seem to be a sense of fatigue and elusive peace in the country. Nevertheless, the flow of aid has not stopped and in Tokyo in 2012 an announcement of a USD 16 million aid package was made. Strengthening of media has also decelerated the process of stability in Afghanistan.

Security deficit and vacuum will be filled by variety of factors. There is a need for strategic depth as far as Pakistan is concerned. Iran wants the Americans to go while China has not yet ascertained its role but is certainly going to play a role in the defense sector. Russia will get involved in some other areas. But the truth remains that unless the Central Asian states, China, India, Russia and Pakistan get involved, it is highly likely that Afghanistan will fall back into the hands of Taliban or embroil itself in a bloody civil war.

There is no doubt that the peace process will gain ground before the withdrawal of the American forces. Certain reasons for withdrawal of the Americans point towards people at home being tired, budget calculations and the fatigue associated with war. It is highly unlikely that the peace process will be able to gain headway in the immediate future as the Afghans and the Americans are enveloped by distrust. There is a sense that the

whole gamut of processes and involvements does not seem to represent a change of heart but to play in the political space of Afghanistan.

As far as Pakistan is concerned, victory in Kabul and attempts to turn back to the 2001 days is delusional. Big warlords, Islamism and Taliban seem to be hedging against American participation in Afghan elections. Central Asian states particularly Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan would not like Taliban influence in their country and would hence seek to keep them at a distance.

The current efficacy at the regional level remains doubtful. Kazakh government is aiding Kabul for stability and reconciliation but has made limited impact. China's policy on Afghanistan remains narrowly defined as they seem to be more interested in financial support, maintaining their alliance and protecting their investment. China is also benefiting from the large natural resources of Afghanistan and hence would prefer stability. For the Chinese, the large scale investment including defense investment in Pakistan is also a factor to be kept in mind while considering its role in Afghanistan.

The United States has been accused of leaving Afghanistan with a job half done. While China has been enjoying immunity from Islamic terrorism, it would be best to bring China onboard when it comes to the discourse of reconstructing Afghanistan. It is also in best interest of China to stabilise Pakistan and work with it bilaterally. As far as Iran is concerned, they could play a stabilising role once the NATO and the Americans leave. Iran has been taking part in reconstruction process since 2001 and the trade between Iran and Afghanistan is high. But the trade has been seriously affected due to high level of drug trafficking from Afghanistan. Afghanistan's keenness on strong ties with Iran cannot however be ignored. Saudi Arabia can bridge negotiations with the Taliban and influence Pakistan.

Initiatives such as Istanbul initiative which commenced in 2011 comprising fourteen countries where India is an active member, and organisations such as Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and STSO headed by Russia have been taking initiatives in the reconstruction process of Afghanistan.

India is keen on securing and stabilising growth in Afghanistan. India, the Central Asian Republics along with Russia, China and many other nations have similar interests in Afghanistan. India for instance has more than USD 2 billion investment in Afghanistan and does not bear the reputation of being influenced by the Taliban. India needs to collaborate actively with all the regional players and needs to ensure that policies enunciated are Afghan centric and not Pakistan centric.

Possible Future Scenarios in Afghanistan Post 2014 and Recommended Indian Responses: Lt Gen PC Katoch

An important element in shaping Afghanistan's future is its demography. There is a major ethnic rivalry in Afghanistan. For instance, when Soviets invaded Afghanistan, they went after the Pashtuns and the non-Pashtuns consolidated themselves. Therefore, in the multi-party polity that Afghanistan has, no party is going to win the ultimate majority. As a matter of fact, there are four coalitions that are going to contest the 2014 elections. Even today, one can see that the non-Pashtuns are not happy as the government is giving leeway to the Pashtuns.

The economy in Afghanistan is predominantly a drug economy. Afghanistan is considered as the highest drug producing country in the world. Trafficking in Afghan opiates generated USD 61 billion in illicit funds in 2009 out of USD 68 billion global illicit opiate trade. Most money went to traffickers all along the transnational heroin distribution routes and some went to insurgents. However, agriculture remains the key to economic growth in Afghanistan. While 50 percent of the economy is tied to drugs, there is unemployment to the tune of 35 percent. Mineral resources remain largely untapped. The latest development in the economy is that there has been a promise of providing security in the investment sector.

Illegal weapons are also a major concern in Afghanistan. It has been argued that there are currently at least 1,00,000 illegal weapons in Afghanistan facilitating conflict and undermining the fragile democracy. Pakistan has been accused of playing a double game as its secret service agency; the ISI is accused of supporting the Islamist militants and nurturing anti-Indian regime in Afghanistan. More so, the concept of Good Taliban and Bad Taliban has been professed by Pakistan. It has to be seen what role Pakistan plays when the Americans finally withdraw from Afghanistan.

Chinese weapons are also supposedly used against US-NATO forces in Afghanistan. But China contends that no internal norms have been broken even if China had been accused of already inducting 15,000 of its citizens under development projects in Afghanistan while US invasion was underway in 2001. Iran is looking at imposing its relations with Kabul and the Central Asian Republics. Iran has already invested USD 340 million in developing Chabahar port and is eager to develop its eastern region and expand trade with Afghanistan and the Central Asian Republics.

According to the new American strategy of Afghanistan during 2010-11, estimates of residual US troops post 2014 were 30,000 to 40,000. However, during 2012, there were estimates of about 10,000 personnel charged with administrative and training duties. New US declaration limits residual troops to 2,500 to 6,000 only. This implies that US Special Forces support may be confined to intelligence operations only and UAV and air cover may be reduced.

Terrorism, extremism, and organised crime constitute the main threats to peace and stability in Afghanistan and the stability in the whole region. The base principles for negotiation with the Taliban and allied mujahedeen remain the ones outlined by the Afghan Loya Jirga and Parliament: Firstly, break ties with al-Qaeda; secondly, renounce violence, and thirdly, abide by the Afghan Constitution, including its protections for women and minorities.

There are five steps to Afghan peace process roadmap to 2015. These are:

- End cross-border shelling, transfer of Taliban prisoners by Pakistan to Afghanistan or third country; pressure Taliban to sever ties with al-Qaeda.
- Agreement on the terms of direct peace talks.
- Offer Taliban non-elected positions at various levels of government.
- Consolidate outcomes and agreements achieved as a result of direct negotiations between Afghan Government, Taliban and other armed groups.
- Expand regional and international cooperation in areas that are crucial for sustaining long-term security and stability.

As far as alternate future for Afghanistan is concerned, the US has been accused of squarely subcontracting Afghanistan to Pakistan by drastically cutting down numbers of residual troops. It is worth mentioning here that the Chicago Summit in May 2012 had called for full transition in parts to be completed by mid-2013 and ANSF taking over full responsibility. However, one thing appears to be certain and that is Afghanistan is entering a serious phase of chaos as there are fears that the Taliban may overrun US base in Kandahar while US continues to hold bases at Bagram, Shin Dhand, and Mazar-i-Sharif. Taliban may also establish 'Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan' with its capital at Kandahar and continue attacking the North.

India should open direct dialogue with China on Pakistan, terrorism, reconstruction and reconciliation of Afghanistan, and engage in multilateral dialogues on future of Afghanistan. India and Afghanistan should join hands to covertly monitor and control fault-lines of Pakistan. India should also assist Afghanistan to establish Industrial Security Force and private security forces thereby reducing unemployment and providing security for mining, infrastructure and development projects to boost economy along with supplying military equipment to Afghanistan. Regular exchange of intelligence teams as part of 'Security Cooperation' under the India-Afghanistan Strategic Partnership Agreement, 2011 should also be carried out.

In the economic front, India can provide knowledge from its agricultural universities, CSIR, IITs and IIITs to optimise employment in Afghanistan and raise agricultural output. India can also study and assist industrialisation of Afghanistan for economic and poverty alleviation through creating jobs.

Remarks by the Chairperson

Post 2014, insignificant international presence is incorrect. For the period 2014-2024, the Americans are already talking about air defence challenges. India and the United States have also talked about what is required for ANSF. India will have a better chance in the period post 2014. It is also important to keep in mind for India not to fill a gap but to work in coordination with other countries. United States will remain the major player in Afghanistan and not Russia and China. Turkey and Europe through NATO will have considerable influence.

In the past ten to twelve years, Tajiks and Hazaras have gained considerable power. Psthuns and non-Psthuns is a dated argument. There are more level playing fields, more opportunities and they should guard against their own tendencies.

The US is also in talks with elements of Taliban and with the Afghan government. India also should be taken on board as it has security interests in the region.
