Afghanistan's National Security Geostrategic Challenges

by

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Afghanistan's national security has serious and huge challenges due to significant anthropological, sociological, economic, demographic, geographic, political, and cultural impediments that dominate the Afghan society. Recently, the U.S. government tries to create a coherent national security structure and policy for Afghanistan and to stop disunified efforts and mismatched resources. The focus on U.S. policy to create a strong security, governance, and economy. These will lead to a strong Afghanistan.

External factors of the Afghan situation are: Turkmenistan as major oil and natural gas producer has an interest to dominate the Afghan and Pakistani markets. Uzbekistan has a large ethnic group in Afghanistan. The Uzbeks have a small connection with Afghan warlord Abdul Rashid Dostrun and have openly supported him. Tajikistan has also an ethnic group in Afghanistan. Also, some Tajik fled to Afghanistan to avoid the local civil strife. In addition, Tajik government has its own Islamic fundamentalist groups, thus it is interesting for stable Afghanistan. Iran has long-held animosity toward Afghan people, going back to centuries to the time when Afghan Sunni Muslim army overthrown the Persian government. The Iranian theocracy totally resents the impact that Afghan narco-trafficing does to Iranian society. The Iranians have a historical and cultural aversion and animosity toward the Taliban. Iranians support non-Taliban insurgent groups. Russia has an interest to Afghanistan since the times of the British Empire. Russian government wants to dominate the oil and natural gas resources in the area. China also seeks an economic dominance in the region. India wants to use Afghanistan as counterpoint to Pakistan. Pakistan has an interest to dominate Afghan socio-political life due to cultural connections. Specifically, Pakistan has historical, demographic, and political ties with Afghan society. Since Pakistani independence in 1947, national security and interests for Pakistan has been a strong effort to protect its border with India, thus this overriding national interest motivates most of Pakistani government's actions relative to Afghanistan. This complex relationship between Pakistan and Afghanistan creates a serious animosity over the Pushtunistan issue. Pakistan supported and supplied the Taliban leaders included Mullah Omar. In the Pakistani view, a weak Afghanistan creates strategic depth in Pakistan's defense against India. Finally, Saudi Arabia supported the Taliban regime due to religious connection.

The American government focuses on the following six major security issues:

1-The disruption and defeat of al-Qaeda;

2-The denial of terrorist safe havens in Pakistan and Afghanistan;

3-The protection of the United States from attacks by other radical Islamist element operating in the region;

4-Preventing Afghanistan and Pakistan from becoming exporters of radical Islamic fundamentalism;

5- Stability within the Pakistani regime and the region; and,

6-Nuclear safety and security in Pakistan.

In additions, in 2010, the United States initiated a seven part socio-political program:

1-"Rebuilding Afghanistan's Agricultural Sector";

2-"Stregenthing Afghan Governance";

3-"Enhancing Afghan Rule of Law";

4-"Supporting Afghan-led Reintegration";

5-"Combating the Afghan Narcotics Trade';

6-"Building an Economic Foundation for Afghanistan's Future";

7-"Advancing the Rights of Afghan Women and Girls."

The Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) created the conditions of some local militias to be used against the Taliban.

Moreover the American government introduced the policy of "Strengthening Afghan Governance", which has three sections:

1-"Reducing Corruption," which includes creating and administering Afghan anti-corruption tribunals, a major crimes task force, an attorney general's anti-corruption unit, a High Office of Oversight and a mobile pay and financing capability;

2-"Enhancing Sub-National Governance," which includes launching and administering a District Plan, local governance and community development activities, an Afghan Social Outreach Program, the Afghan Municipality Support Program, and a Performance-Based Governors Fund;

3-"Enhanicng Afghan Capacity," which entail "encouraging merit-based appointment," "leveraging our assistance…to incentivize improved performance, accountability, and transparency," and "ensuring effective representation…in support of Afghan efforts to reform Afghanistan's electoral system and nascent democratic machinery [while] encouraging greater participation by women in Afghan electoral politics.

Furthermore, the United States implemented five strategic and operational goals in order to further stabilize the Afghan socio-political system:

1-"Protect the population."
- "Prioritize effort in high-density population areas where insurgent groups operate primarily with disaffected Pashtun population."
- "Reduce civilian casualties."

2-"Enable Afghan National Security Forces."
- "Accelerate and expand indigenous security force capacity and capability."
- "Partner at every echelon."

3-"Neutralize malign influence."
- "Identify and report corruption."
- "Forge responsible and accountable governance."

4-"Support extension of governance."
- "Gain active support of the population by the empowering legitimate sub-national leaders with effective population security measures."

5-"Support socio-economic development."
- "Gain active support of the population by creating security conditions that provide space for community-based development opportunities."
- "Connect economic corridors."

Currently, the Obama administration focuses on four significant and crucial national security objectives:

1-Contain or prevent the menace of terrorist attack on the Afghan homeland or various American interest in the region;

2-Severly prevent the proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) from the area;

3-Safeguard and sustain socio-political stability; and,

4-Prevent and stop rising peer competitors in the region and in Afghanistan.

Regional powers such as, China, Russia, India, Pakistan, Iran, and Saudi Arabia can complicate the situation and create serious security challenges for the United States. In addition, the emergence of the Islamic State ISIS serious endanger the nation-building and political and economic stability in the region and Afghanistan. Nonetheless, President Obama has no clear strategy how to defeat ISIS. The absence of American strategy of defeating ISIS ensures a chaotic geostrategic environment in the region. It is imperative that Afghanistan not to become a safe haven of Violent Extremist Organizations (VEOs). The American policy needs to adopt new strategies taking under consideration the rapidly changed, global, regional, and domestic geopolitical environment. The American government must: 1) complete the destruction of Al

Qaeda, 3) Sustain and safeguard the reconstruction of Afghan socio-political and economic structures, and 3) Create a regionalize strategy. These strategic policies will safeguard and promote the U.S. national interests in the region. The United States to execute the specific elements of the strategy the levels of American military presence was as follows, under the Bush administration: 2002: 5,200, 2003: 10,400, 2004: 15,200, 2005: 19,100, 2006: 20,400, 2007: 23, 700, 2008: 30,100. By December 2008, the American military presence was 71, 555. At the beginning of the Obama administration the 56,000 soldiers stationed in Afghanistan and reached 127,000. In addition, the U.S. Defense Department increased drone operations. Since 2012, American presence has declined significantly.

Currently, United States has 9,800 troops in Afghanistan. Those forces operate largely in Kabul region. The Afghan forces have serious troubles fighting the Taliban due to lack of military experience. Lately, Taliban overrun the city of Kunduz. It is evident that the Obama administration want a way out of Afghanistan. Absence of American troops in Afghanistan will create a power vacuum. Then the Taliban, Al Qaeda, and ISIS could easily move in and fight for dominance. President Obama decided to extent the U.S. military operations in Afghanistan. Nonetheless, the Taliban and other Islamic terrorist organizations continuous to create serious challenges for American and NATO forces. Terrorists utilize bases that they are located in North and South Waziristan and other areas in the Afghan-Pakistan border. The major strategic goal for the Taliban is to re-Talibanize Afghanistan. It is imperative for the survival of Afghanistan that American and NATO armed forces remain in the region.