

Afghan National Army: Challenges and Counter Strategies Post 2014

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Abstract

The situation of Afghanistan has been evolving around insecurity after the drawdown of North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Corruption, weak governmental institutions, interference of foreign states and non-state actors and instability in Afghanistan is a serious challenge to Afghan National Army (ANA). As ANA had demanded to hold the lead of security operations by their own; thus, with the withdrawal of NATO and International Security Assistance Forces (ISAF) the security responsibilities are handed to ANA. However, previous and new challenges will test the capability of ANA. Beside incompetency, Afghan army has a history of dependency on International support. Hence, with the withdrawal of assisting forces; the challenges will turn more complex. The aim of this research is to analyze the challenges to Afghanistan especially to ANA after the withdrawal of NATO and counter strategies to these challenges and its implication in the future. This study is based on qualitative research method and data is analyzed through content analysis in detail, under the light of theory of Realism and Neo-realism. This study finds that political, economic and social instability has caused many serious issues not only to Afghan nation but as well to the institution of ANA. Terrorism has got more roots with emergence of ISIS in Afghanistan. The fall of Kunduz and strategic locations of Helmand province to Taliban are considered consequences of the incapacities of ANA. The years after 2014 have not shown any progressive results in countering these challenges, though several strategies and initiatives have been taken to resolve the proposed challenges.

Key words: ANA, terrorism, Taliban, NATO, ISAF, Afghanistan

Introduction

The Afghan Army being an essential institution of Afghanistan lost its establishment in the bloody civil war and resistance of nationalist fighters in the name of liberty of Afghanistan. The prolong civil war (1979-1992) resulted in the loss of huge Afghan Army which was effectively build up in the regime of Najibullah with the assistance of Soviet. But after the intervention of USA and NATO, ANA was established as best hope to resolve the security issues of Afghanistan but in 2009 this speculated hope became wrong because ANA's poor led, illiteracy and corruption. The corrupt politicians of Afghanistan proposed a self-deceiving report to Washington about the number of ANA which was to increase from 70,000 to 122,000 men and to strengthen the number to 240,000 by 2014 (Giustozzi, 2009).

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These results are never going to bring stability in Afghanistan. Security of a country is highly dependent on the strength of its military power. In the realist world a state must boost its hard power to assure its security from internal threats and external threats. In the case of Afghanistan the assurance of security is missing. After years of being dependent on international assistance Afghan government requested to hand over the responsibility of security to ANA but the outcomes and commitments are as it was expected negative.

Several challenges have been posed to Afghanistan, security, political instability, corruption, weak economy and extreme hostilities by insurgents. The challenges of insurgents are pivotal above all other issue. Taliban, Al-Qaeda and ISIS have targeted the bases and camps of military in order to null the security sector of country. According to website of ANA, Afghan National Army has been active since 1880s but in reality provided by Ali Ahmed Jalali is that ANA has been recreated four times in these 150 years. This is illustration of history of ANA which is not convincing though. (Chandra, 2008)

Initial formulation of ANA

By the early 2002 Operation Enduring Freedom proved to be successful in urban and rural areas. The coalition commanders did not want a long-term occupation like in Bosnia. Soon after the invasion, efforts started to make new army, the likes of ANA (Younossi, 2008). In 2002 the coalition forces announced to create a 70,000-man national army and border patrol, U.S. \$130 million was proposed for the first year. Other nations promised aids but of little support. By 2004, the U.S. military officer predicted that ANA would be at full strength, as it appeared too optimistic. As per Initial plan 70,000-man army with a 1:10 officer-to-enlisted ratio in two years would have required the Kabul Military Academy to graduate nearly 450 officers every six weeks. (Synovitz, 2008)

In April 2002, British trained a single Afghan battalion. International Security Assistance Forces (ISAF) trained 4,000 Afghan Soldiers who had to take the responsibility after the ISAF's planned withdrawal at the end of 2014. Outside Kabul, Afghan Special Operation Forces (SOF) were training, funding and commanding their own anti al-Qaeda units. These forces were effective in fight but were neither ethnically mixed nor devoted to the national government. SOF salaried their forces at a rate higher than the Afghan government could compete, confusing efforts to integrate these units into the national army. (Anja & Singer, 2002) The initial phases to establish strong and effective military units were fruitful, but after the withdrawal of NATO the challenge of security was unpredictable that whether the Army could fulfill the expectations of people. Similarly Afghan government is for surely corrupt and unaccountable in term of maintaining security of state.

Planning of ANA

Groundwork for a national Afghan army started when U.S. and coalition forces began drawing up strategies for a post-Taliban Afghanistan. At a December 2001 conference held in Bonn, Germany, all the major Afghan political and military players, along with the United States and Afghanistan's adjacent countries, gathered to determine the construction of an acting government. The result was an agreement, signed on December 5, 2001, that documented the coming need for an Afghan army and established the Afghan Interim Government. One year later, on December 2, 2002, at a conference held in Petersburg, Germany, the original target and framework for the new army were agreed upon. The army was to consist of 70,000 soldiers separated among an air corps, infantry units, and the new Ministry of Defense. (T, 2008) By

April 2002, the “lead nation” policy had appeared which distributed the task among five nations: Germany would be responsible for developing the Afghan National Police (ANP); Italy would lead judicial reform; Japan would coordinate Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) of warlords and militias; Great Britain would assume accountability for counter-narcotics efforts and the United States would build the ANA. (Anja & Singer, 2002)

In the early stages of the course, the Afghan Interim Government and the United States, as lead nation, needed to agree whether to build the new ANA from scratch or to build on some of the existing structures. This verdict was suspended until September 2003 when they decided to begin the process from a “tabula rasa,” meaning that all structures from the Ministry of Defense (MoD) to the ground units were to be built from scratch. This decision permitted the building of a strengthened MoD more capable of implementing the reform and less vulnerable to corruption and old power struggles. From 2002 to 2005, the U.S. developed the ANA through the Office of Military Cooperation–Afghanistan (OMC-A), which was later modernized as the Office of Security Cooperation-Afghanistan (OSC-A) when it assumed the extra mission of training the ANP. Both these organizations were secondary organizations of Combined Forces Command–Afghanistan (CFC-A). CFC-A was the predominant operational headquarters. In line with the idea of a small footprint, the first image of the ANA involved training militia leaders as company-grade officers with warlords as generals, all unified under a power-sharing agreement. Under this idea, the United States would provide uniforms, equipment, and training so that within five years what started as isolated militias would be a fitting defense force for a developing country. Policymakers disagreed about the facts of this approach as opposed to shaping a brand-new army, but it held sway and ultimately arose as the prevailing approach. (Editor, 2015)

Within a year, the United States had restrained the idea for two reasons. First, the transformed militia troops performed poorly in combat. Coalition commanders found that local politics often outplayed national interests during operations. Integration was hard because some illiterate militia leaders lacked skills essential to operate within the formal order of a conventional army. Second, the Kabul government needed to spread its influence in the provinces, and the local influence over military forces subdued that process. (Wyatt, 2011)

To improve the excellence and size of recruits, the United States introduced a national recruiting center program. These centers curtailed the influence of local strongmen in employment and improved ethnic balance among the recruited ranks. The Combined Security Transition Command–Afghanistan (CSTC-A) confirmed that recruiting young soldiers to ANA has not been a key problem, stating “KMTC (Kabul Military Training Center) has never missed a recruiting target.” Some recruitment is done through local village heads who, after deliberations with the recruiting center representatives, send numerous local men to the training sites. When new applicants for the officers’ course were being enlisted in 2007, 1,700 individuals from 32 provinces applied for the 300 billets. The only areas with very little enrolment are in the volatile Kandahar and Helmand provinces in southern Afghanistan. The latest recruitment figures from Kandahar Province show the problem.

Challenges and Gaps in Institution of ANA

Today, the United States splits its strategy for fielding the ANA into three phases: ANA Development, Transition to Afghan Primacy, and Transition to Strategic Partnership (CSTC-A,

2007a). In first Phase, the United States, with the coalition help, mans, equips, and trains a self-sustaining 122,000-man army. With projected population of 30 million people, most of whom live in poverty, it would not seem difficult to employ an army of 122,000, mainly given the salaries, which are very good comparative to the civilian population. In second Phase, ISAF teams assess the ability of ANA units to conduct self-regulating operations for six consecutive months. In third Phase, the ANA continues to conduct self-governing operations, i.e., it is capable of planning, performing, and supporting multi-unit operations without oversight, while the U.S.-Afghan relationship changes to a traditional security support partnership. (NATO, 2015)

Ethnic Composition

A lasting concern is the ethnic makeup of the ANA. Evolving an ethnically composed army was one of the main goals of the training program. After years of civil war and suspicion among numerous groups in Afghanistan, attaining an ethnic balance has been a significant task. CSTCA and the MoD know that there is a surplus of Tajiks in the ANA officer and Non-Commissioned Officers (NCO) corps, but it is uncertain what the ethnic balance should be. As one can observe, some ethnic groups, such as Hazaras and Uzbeks, are underrepresented, whereas Tajiks are overrepresented in the officer and NCO categories. The ratio of Pashtuns fall unevenly in line with average estimations of their percentage of the Afghan population. (AFP, 2011)

The ANA is on path to reach its near-term manpower aims, but there are some difficulties in attaining the increased force size. The force is not ethnically composed now, and recruiting in Pashtun areas has been difficult. The capacity to pay the salaries of an additional 40,000 soldiers is also a question. Afghanistan's GDP is only \$11 billion, and the annual federal budget is \$4 billion, much of which is foreign aid (O'Hanlon, 2008). Growing the army by one-third will stress an already-stretched budget. It is possible that an international commitment will be necessary to safeguard that soldiers get paid. Finally, OMLTs and Embedded Training Teams (ETTs) fall short of what is desired now, and the force rise will only worsen the problem. This is not to say that the strength cannot be expanded to the new number, but doing so will not be easy. The issues drew out here must be addressed for it to happen at all. (Sharif, 2010)

NATO Involvement in ANA-Operational Mentor and Liaison Team

NATO's participation with the ANA largely involves assisting the Afghan government and with the operational service and drill of the ANA units. An important part of the ISAF role to the rebuilding program is the OMLT program. The United States as principal nation for the ANA program has the key responsibility in all areas—from managing to basic and collective training, funding, equipping, sustainment and endorsement. The ISAF OMLTs fall below the operational command of the Command-ISAF (COMISAF) but work on the ground under plans and directives issued by CSTC-A and Task Force Phoenix, which is also in charge of evolving doctrine and principles for the ANA. As of October 2008, COMISAF is also Commander of U.S. Forces Afghanistan, and thus has direct command over CSTC-A. CSTC-A and Task Force Phoenix hold the sole obligation for ANA development until the authority is given back to the Afghan establishment. (Fonte, 2011)

The ISAF OMLT program comprises primarily of officers and non-commissioned officers from a widespread range of troop-contributing nations who are embedded in Afghan units as counselors and trainers to the ANA and as co-operation officers to ISAF and CSTC-A. The goal of the OMLT program is to help the focused progress of ANA so that it can take obligation for

security in the country. As described in the ISAF operation plan. (Dahl, 2005) NATO's exit from Afghanistan is, *inter alia*, reliant on the successful formation of combined security structure that is owned by the Afghans, capable of upholding security within its own borders and of deterring foreign foes. (Saceur, 2005, p. C-2-1)

Operational Proficiency of ANA

Six years after its initiation, the ANA is playing an active but not yet major role in providing security. Coalition troops still participate in most combat, but, per NATO, at the *Kandak* level the ANA leads around 50 percent of all military operations and participates in more than 80 percent. Still, assessing the strategic capability of the ANA poses challenges. ANA has been deploying with the U.S. forces to engage Taliban and other rebellious forces since 2003—for instance, in July of that year in Paktika province (as part of Operation Warrior Sweep) and in November of the same year in Kunar and Nuristan provinces (as part of Operation Mountain Resolve). ANA was also involved in suppressing factional fighting in Herat and Maimana. Additionally, ANA provided additional security during the 2003 Loya Jirga. In 2004, ANA continual deployment with international forces in Operation Princess and Operation Ticonderoga in eastern and southern Afghanistan. Deployment of ANA during Operation Cadina in 2005 is another example. The ANA contribution in joint operations increased significantly in 2006 during Operation Mountain Thrust and Operations Mountain Lion in southern and eastern Afghanistan respectively, where 2,500 ANA soldiers fought shoulder to shoulder with the coalition forces. Three main conclusions about ANA performance. First, ANA soldiers are competent fighters. Second, they can play an important role in intelligence get-together, and lastly, their skills have improved because of the U.S. and coalition training. (Jones, 2009)

Evidence of operational proficiency is largely circumstantial, although there are some quantitative indicators. Numerous narratives attest to the operational capability of the ANA units. Quantitative ratings present a more controlled endorsement—for example; only seven of 42 infantry *Kandaks* (Battalion) (17 percent) have reached CM 1. Although progress seems, the ANA still has a long way to go. Regrettably, the road may be uncomfortable. The Taliban has reformed, filling its ranks with capable fighters, and coalition forces are besieged to keep the Taliban at bay, let alone pass the job of security to a budding army. (Lubold, 2008)

Leadership, Command, and Control

The command and control structure of the ANDSF looks good on paper, but the organization is administratively heavy at the top and weak at the bottom. In the words of one senior Afghan general, the “force has an inflated head and skinny legs.” Political intrusion by official and unofficial power agents and the circumvention of formal command levels disturbs established actions, plans, and normal unit functions. The coordination and operative cohesiveness of the ANA, ANP, and National Directorate of Security (NDS) forces in the field are precariously lacking. The multi-layered command and control system slows communication and the employment of decisions made both at the top and the bottom (up through the chain of command). Cooperation cells established at the corps headquarters (bringing together the ANA corps commander, provincial police chiefs, ABP, and NDS) function in a stove-piped way, with no actual cooperation. The same design of dysfunction exists in provincial canters and at battalion and company levels in the districts (army, police, ABP, and NDS). (Jalali A. , 2015)

Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance

Intelligence breaches are caused by the rough development of Afghanistan intelligence institutions, lack of expert capacity, lack of means for ISR, poor management among different intelligence and investigation elements, and failure to operationalize acquired intelligence in a timely and coordinated way. In addition to the NDS, several intelligence units have been formed and organized within the structure of the ANDSF, including the Assistant Ministry of Defense for Intelligence, the ANA General Staff Intelligence Directorate, and the MOI Directorate of Police Intelligence. These units were shaped at different times for different purposes by separate institutions with different political preferences. They have been supported and assisted by different contributors and trained using various methods and means. Thus, they have developed unequally and adopted different professional cultures. The NDS is still sturdily influenced by the legacy of its past, when it was formed based on the KGB model during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in the 1980s. The NDS became an intelligence agency with the authority to capture and detain suspects and conduct war operations. While such actions contribute to dynamic actions in counterinsurgency operations, they strongly affect the agency's main role as a national intelligence agency. Further, the situation puts the agency in race with the ANDSF for scoring partisan points by carrying out special operations. Such race raises a reluctance to share strategic and operational intelligence with other parts of the government and poor management across agencies. (Shanker & Chushman, 2009)

Illiteracy Breeds a Problem

Illiteracy in the army breeds a whole range of difficulties, mainly as far as the logistics and managerial components are concerned. Characteristically, even the under developed Battle Support Services of the ANA are typically staffed by combat officers with no background in logistics. With such a low standard of educated people, there is not even going to be enough to staff these services, which is because of their own nature need more advanced schooling than combat infantry. It is also doubtful that among the new recruits will be many persons with advanced management skills, who will one day be needed to manage the increasingly complex ANA system once it becomes fully independent. The present situation might also become pounded in the future by the fact that the acceptance of the American model in maintenance, contracting Private firms to provide the facility, has also proved quite unproductive. Few firms demonstrated the essential skills and more over they have been unwilling to provide their facilities to the units deployed in the combat zone, particularly the south, because of the uncertainty predominating on the highways. On the optimistic side, for the kind of war the ANA is fighting and for the gears it is going to use, an illiterate combat force should not, in principle, be an impossible problem. Packages are in place to provide at least some very basic learning skills such as writing one's own name and reading a serial number. (Brookes, 2009)

The elementary problem is thus: Afghanistan cannot accommodate or bear the army model being forced on it. Here the reference is not just to the fiscal cost of an army of this type and size, as the Americans in specific are willing to shoulder the costs for the foreseeable future. The real crisis narrates to the management and logistical necessities underpinning the human resources needed to keep the organization in place and prevent it from crumbling. Decisions about how to grow and equip the ANA continue to be made with complete disrespect for the reality in the field. Even positive progresses like the delivery of new equipment have a darker side: the M16 and the associated machine guns and M-4 carbines are especially difficult to maintain and can fail due to dust and mud, which are omnipresent present in Afghanistan. Bringing the ANA up to

the task of efficiently preserving its new weapons even when not under the direct inspection of its mentors is likely to be a difficult task. The common consumption of hashish and the weak discipline do not bode well either. As far as the growth of the ANA goes, the main short-term worry is the quality of the officer corps. Given the relative scarcity and powerlessness of non-commissioned officers, as well as cultural backgrounds and attitudes that attribute total importance to charismatic headship, ANA units are intensely shaped by their commanding officers. In the words of an Australian officer, 'the spirit of the *Kandak* (battalion) is directly imitated in the battalion commander like no other army I've seen before'. A large share of the present officer corps is already illiterate (50 percent in the south in 2006) and this is only likely to deteriorate. By distinction, as the ANA is expected to increasingly take charge of planning its own actions and executing them, the level of skills essential among Afghan officers will only increase. The skill of several corps commanders to do the required operative planning on their own is already in serious distrust. (Davis, 2008)

Force Generation and Retention

One main factor affecting the sustainability of the ANDSF is the high rate of attrition within the rank and file of the ANA and ANP (attrition rarely disturbs officers and non-commissioned officers). Attrition was projected between 4,000 and 5,000 33 per month during the initial summer of 2015 and enlarged slightly during the following months. The ANDSF's general attrition numbers in 2015 averaged 2 percent per month. The RS mission guesses that ANDSF fatalities were approximately 59 percent higher in the first half of 2015 compared with the same time the previous year. The ANP and ALP suffered most of ANDSF fatalities, because they are often positioned in remote and isolated posts while not adequately armed or well-trained. (DoD, 2014)

Afghan Air Force (AAF)

In the battle field air support serves as force multiplier to armies. Quick movement by air and land can be a paramount help to ANA and ANP. AAF was established with ANA but up to this date still AAF is going through embryonic stages. ANDSF's current airlift capacity is insufficient to quickly move the reinforcement supplies to battle fields. To deliver emergency supplies to isolated posts or military checkpoints. Any operation in Afghanistan significantly needs air support. Mounting surprise raids (night raids) for countering insurgency is considered one of the successful tactics but ANA is still dependent on air forces of US. The gaps in aviation support not only lessen the effectiveness of military but also down the morale of forces. Due to topography of Afghanistan, air support serves a key force to deter the actions and free movement of insurgents. The recapture of Kunduz 2015 was mainly due to US Air support similarly in Helmand province to secure the important districts the need of air aviation was must. In accordance to SIGAR report, between 2010 and 2012 US provided more than \$5 billion for the development and advancement of AAF and \$3 billion for equipment and aircraft, \$ 2.9 billion in 2014. (Sedra, 2014) Afghanistan has a significant need for air support.

ANA and Challenges Beyond 2014

The current situation of Afghanistan is still evolving around insecurity. Drawdowns of international forces have not left positive achievements for the country. The security of a state is the most substantial element according to theory of realism. Thus, in case of Afghanistan, the defenders of the country have been confronted with several challenges. Confrontation has been increased from the insurgents and new extremist groups. Though, Taliban has traditional roots in

Afghanistan but ISIS has now got hold in Afghanistan. Recently USA dropped MOAB in Nangarhar on the locations of ISIS. Taliban along ISIS has harmed ANA even after the withdrawal of NATO.

Dependency on international assistance is still indicating the unaccountability of ANA. For Afghanistan, 2016 was another year continued with both ups and downs that tested the nerves of government, people, and the international community's resolve to assist the country. Disappointments of the National Unity Government (NUG) of Afghanistan included the Taliban's brief re-capture of the strategic provincial capital of Kunduz for a second time, the re-emergence of the Islamic State in eastern Afghanistan, and the government's incapability to create service opportunities to stop the migration of Afghans into Europe. Meanwhile on the upside for the NUG, 2016 has seen the peace deal with Hizb-i-Islami Gulbuddin, enlarged connectivity with China, the opening of the first rail connection between Afghanistan and Turkmenistan, and successful exertions to isolate Pakistan at the regional and global level. (Ahmadzai, 2016)

Hold of Taliban and Al-Qaeda

The large scale of insurgencies has records in Afghanistan for about more than decades. Hundreds of western mentors and instructors have practiced their ability with ANA and its government to produce effective strategy to counter Taliban and other insurgent networks. After 2001 independent non-Afghan insurgents have supported Taliban to make their struggle victorious. The supporters of Taliban included Al-Qaeda. The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) and related organizations such as Pakistan's Tehrik-e-Taliban (TTP), Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), and additionally other small ones. Similarly, Hizb-i-Islami which is the ranked second as insurgent faction, Haqqani Network and The Islamic State known as Daesh. ISIS has large presence in eastern part of the country. These mentioned Organizations have highly contributed in destruction of ANA and in diminishing the governing structure of Afghanistan. (Giustozzi, 2017)

The campaign to capture Kunduz city in September 2015 was planned a year in advance in order to gain supply of every required material for campaign. This hostility from Taliban is transition from guerrilla warfare to hybrid warfare. Until 2015 Taliban had old weaponry such as Kalashnikov, PK and DShK machine guns, RPG rocket launcher but now they have more advanced weaponry such as anti-tank (RPG 29), heavier anti-craft machine guns (ZPU), heavier mortars and more secure communication system. These innovations have represented much greater challenge to ANSF and US forces. (Giustozzi, 2017)

The summer raids of Taliban are fearless and smooth in confrontation with ANA's incompetency in war and artillery. Except 215 corps brigade of ANA which is fully ready to counter any kind of threat other brigades are still incompetent to hold off Taliban. With external powers and internal chaos makes it difficult for ANA to counter the threats. A report of 2016 by United Nation (UN) shows that 84% of killing in Afghanistan is due to Taliban and 6% from the foreign forces, which clearly indicates the incompetency of ANA and ALP. Though different heads of ANA claiming that with sustainable resources and well equipped army, ANA have the potential to sustain peace and prevail peace for a long-lasting period. (Borger, 2014) Internally divided and externally isolated, Afghanistan poses a threat to international community due to her ineffective institutions and corrupt leaders and drugs production at its height, it will be difficult to overcome the situation after NATO draw down.

Emergence of ISIS (Islamic States of Iraq and Syria)

The Islamic State's Khurasan province (IS-K) emerged in Nangarhar province of Afghanistan in 2014 and it has made efforts to expand though it has got roots in Helmand as well. IS has been recruiting militants from tribal areas of Pakistan and low level of Taliban from Afghanistan. Pentagon in February 2016 has estimated the number of ISIS in Afghanistan to 1000-3000. The fighters of this organization are a mixture of Afghans, Pakistani nationals and most are of Central Asia including foreigner nationals. The areas of influence of Nangarhar by ISIS are connected to Orakzai and Khyber Agencies of Pakistan. The influence of external actors in this dilemma is inevitable. (Johnson, 2016)

In 2015, Islamic State activities in the eastern part of the country were heightened. They decreased after joint offensive operations of both Afghan and coalition forces, which weakened the group, however, without completely overcoming it. The Islamic State did carry out some attacks by aiming civilians in Kabul this year and is again emerging as a serious security threat. The Taliban see ISIS as an opponent and threat. In 2017, the Islamic State is thought to be likely to continue gaining ground if it is not conquered by either the Taliban or Afghan government forces, with the help of global forces. (Ahmadzai, 2016) Taliban as opponent of ISIS is a positive point for Afghan government as the clash between the two groups can have diminishing return but if both are organized then it will be a serious challenge. By fall of 2015 violent activities of ISIS reached to a high level. On 24 July 2016 a blast shocked Kabul and killed about 80 men and 260 plus casualties. (Visser & Popalzai, 2016) Such failures of ANA towards insurgency by ISIS are a serious threat to security of Afghanistan.

The Failures of 2016

Insecurity rose across Afghanistan this year, in specific in the northern and southern parts of the country. Like in 2015, the Taliban recaptured the capital of Kunduz province in the north, which government forces recaptured from the Taliban only after strong fighting. Not limited to Kunduz, the Taliban also prolonged their rebellious activities across Faryab, Jawzjan, and Baghlan provinces in the north. Furthermore, Helmand province, which has so far remained one of the most disputed regions between the government and Taliban, witnessed bloody battles in 2016. The Taliban furthermore launched group assaults on Lashkar Gah, the capital of Helmand province, but were effectively repelled by Afghan government forces. Furthermore, the Taliban also started heavy battles to seize Tarin Kot the provincial capital of Uruzgan province, but were once again pushed away by Afghan National Army after ferocious clashes. (Ahmadzai, 2016)

These important gains by the Taliban prove that they are more organized and better armed than before; they moreover possess the ability to challenge the writ of the government and have exposed the gaps and inadequacies in the Afghan government's management of security. A new report stated that the Afghan National Army has more generals than the U.S. military, for example. Existing gaps are further worsened by a tendency to appoint inexperienced people in the security sector. (Ahmadzai, 2016)

Challenges Ahead

2019 is not going to be an easy year for the Afghan government as it will face tests at multiple levels. The government still lacks a strategy for key reforms at the organisational level and, at the

same time, it has remained unsuccessful to bring about good governance and decline corruption. One recent survey suggests that Afghans pay \$3 billion in bribes to get everyday tasks done. Corruption has remained a key inhibitor of growth and prosperity of the nation and its army. Apart from generating service opportunities, the Afghan government needs to place skilled professionals in the security sector to overcome holes. A lack of proper management combined with an increase in bribery in the security ranks has had severe consequences. The government needs to put all internal differences aside and bring conclusive reforms to the security device.

On the foreign policy front, the Afghan government needs to trigger its diplomatic apparatus to persuade regional players including Russia, India, China, Pakistan, and Iran that peace in the region is related to peace in Afghanistan. The recent Russia-China-Pakistan tripartite conference about Afghanistan without Kabul's participation is another signal that the country's leadership needs to convince these players that such moves will gain no benefits and will in its place confuse the Afghan quagmire, which can not only worsen the situation in the region, but can also have an adverse impact on state-to-state relations.

Afghanistan will be once again pushed toward enmity and will turn into a buffer state between Russia and the United States in case of the failure to persuade regional power brokers such as Russia and China. Afghans have already paid a hefty price for superpower rivalry during the Cold War. Thus, the Afghan government needs to plan a balanced foreign policy that ensures that larger powers understand the stakes in the country in 2017. (Ahmadzai, 2016)

Counter Strategies Attributed to These Challenges and their Outcomes

Political instability is one of the critical reasons to the challenges proposed to ANA. After the election of 2014 there had been clashes between Ghani and Abdullah for months with negative consequences. To resolve the issue a political agreement was signed in September 2014 between Ghani and Abdullah persuaded by US which justified the powers of both leaders. (Felbab-Brown, 2016) According to this resolution it is the job of both leaders to work for advancement of ANA. Besides this, both leaders have the policy to make US not to reduce its army in Afghanistan in order to assist Afghan Army. It is assured that US also wants to keep its bases in Afghanistan to keep in check the other powers and to fight terrorism because ISIS has also now presence in Afghanistan. This strategy of Afghan government will surely have fruitful results as it is the need of the time that ANA still needs assistance from international forces. Additionally, the presences of US will high the moral of ANA in future operations and improve the hold of security in the country. Plus the presence of US will serve as a trump card to external influences. The fall of Kunduz 2015 was a terrible shock to capability of ANA just after the withdrawal of International force in 10 months and yet Kunduz was recaptured by Air support from US. Thus it proves that Afghan Air Force is incompetent and ANA needs air support. This is the factor mostly scholars believe is highly missing in the institution of ANA. The case of precarious situation of ANDSF in Helmand province in southern Afghanistan was a similar threat. When Helmand's deputy governor reported that Taliban are in strong position to hold the whole province. Thus the British forces flew to assist ANDSF to take over the situation in crucial district of Sangin in Helmand. General John W. Nicholson said that ANDSF took initiative to replace the failed leaders in Helmand, provided with reinforcement and substantially armed air crafts have been dedicated to province. (John F. Sopko, 2016) For advancement of Afghan Air Force (AAF) Afghan leaders and international funding agencies are focusing on Afghan Air

Force by making efforts to provide all necessary needs. Financially US and other funding agencies have promised for funds. In response to several attacks from insurgents (likewise Kunduz, Helmand and Kabul) ANA did not collapsed like Iraqi forces collapsed in confrontation with ISIS. Nevertheless ANSF has been able to remove Taliban from their areas of engagement but only in limited districts/areas. In 2015 the Afghan government requested US to provide with financial aid for increasing the numbers of its military. It is also well known that now Taliban has come around table of negotiation with Afghan government which shows little improvement in progress of peace but it is not guaranteed though. (Felbab-Brown, 2016) This illustrates that the fearful atmosphere created by insurgents will remain a threatening challenge for years.

General Campbell said that the number of ANDSF has to reach at least 352,000 through 2020 and the budget for it will be \$5.4 billion per year. According to report of DoD Afghan government is unable to pay these cost by its own. Neither the economy of Afghanistan will growth that quickly to cover this need for security. USA and its Allies have though discussed future plans to share this burden in a conference held at Warsaw 2016. In the same year US has contributed about \$4.1 billion. (John F. Sopko, 2016) For sure if these plans are transparently followed by Afghan government, it will prove a success in institution of ANA as well in security of Afghanistan but on the other side it indicates the incapability of Afghan government and ANA. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has concluded that Afghan government will not be able to pay the cost to maintain ANDSF until at least 2023. NATO summit in Warsaw took place in July 2016, in which a partnership agreement was renewed under the framework of NATO to support Afghan government to maintain ANDSF. (Jalali A. A., 2016) These funds will be utilized to equip, train and provide all facilities to ANDSF such as education, medical facilities, and increase of salaries. The presence of US forces will assist ANA in their military operation until ANA fill the gaps in military operations and to better lead the command and control of Afghan military.

The departure of International forces have left the country with another issue of unemployment, as thousands of Afghans had jobs associated to foreigners and it resulted to decline the GDP of Afghanistan but the new president has promised to resolve this issue gradually by improving the law and reducing corruption. Corruption is still the question raised by people in their interviews because the modern young Afghans know that the removal of corruption will surely solve many issues of the country. To maintain law and order Afghan government has to advance military which illustrates that the ANA will be the primary subject to be developed.

To maintain the law and order or to keep check and balance or to investigate any other progressive project in Afghanistan is high risk job. Official leaders, political personnel and even SIGAR (Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction) the largest US organization and other agencies cannot get access to investigate the development program and projects. Thus this issue will surely enhance the corruption. Again the matter of security comes to ANA and its capability that how will they clear the hurdles of security for clear investigation. Similarly economic budget and the financial aids provided by International communities have no convincing progress because corruption has deemed its consequences. Ghani has promised the nation that these funds will be used transparently in order to provide all basic civic facilities to Afghans. But speculated results of these funds have not yet been according to promises and if these threatening situations remained unchanged, surly will result in strong comeback from insurgents.

For improved security, the Number of ANA has to be increased but unfortunately the number of recruitments has declined because the civilians are pressurized by insurgents not go for this economic opportunity and service to country. Serious deficiencies are found in the institution of ANA and it has been realized; thus, from 2011 improvement has been initiated by the government of Afghanistan to develop the Intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR).

ANDSF continues to face threats from both Afghan insurgency and other extremist networks and these threats endanger Afghanistan's stability. Afghanistan and Pakistan share a long border and this border provides safe havens to these groups in both countries. The cooperation between these states is must because Pakistan and Afghanistan military crackdowns push these terrorists across the borders where they regroup and rearm (Jalali A. A., 2016). Islamabad and Kabul have to go for settlement of this issue for peace in both states. Especially Pakistan can play pivotal role if it chooses to. In 2016 Pakistan's Foreign Minister Sartaj Aziz said that Islamabad has considerable control over Taliban because its leaders, their families and medical services are in Pakistan. (Jalali A. A., 2016) Though beyond its regional interests, Pakistan is not desirable to see Taliban threaten the regional peace. As in recent policy shift Pakistan does not distinguish between good and bad Taliban. Therefore, to defeat this threat Pakistan and Afghanistan has to fight cooperatively against terrorism. The relation between Kabul and Islamabad has been good when Ghani visited Islamabad but some setbacks were caused due to mistrust produced by the death of Taliban leader Mullah Omer in Karachi. (Jalali A. A., 2016) Suspicions have although blurred the process of cooperation but both states have to reconsider their policies for stability and countering terrorism.

Afghan government did not take full charge of security until the presidential election. The fully-fledged counterinsurgency strategy of ANA was gradual process. For the betterment of this approach NUG was supported by an advisory mission Resolute Support (RS) lead by ISAF (Giustozzi, 2017). In 2015 Afghan counterinsurgency strategy was considerable and positive step. The mentioned Strategy can be described as follows:

- Control over the substantial locations and assets defined by ISAF, all administrative centers including the remote districts
- Political negotiation with Taliban
- To enhance the role of special forces and Afghan local police (ALP) in counterinsurgency in most of clean-up operations
- To proliferate the presence of official militias and ALP in those areas highly effected by insurgents

The EU has been supporting the European Union Police Mission in Afghanistan (EUPOL) project associated to Afghan National Police. (Ghiasy, Strand, Hartmann, & Sheikh, 2017) Similarly US has been supporting the training of ALP to counter criminal challenges along terrorism. EU and its member states in Brussels conference Oct 2016 pledged to assist EUR 5 billion to Afghanistan for prior developments. (Ghiasy, Strand, Hartmann, & Sheikh, 2017). If the money is utilized in transparent way, it will surely have possible positive results in several fields. For instance to counter corruption, infrastructure development, resolve the issue of Afghan returnees, economic developments, government institutions, stopping human rights violations, advancement of ANA and security of Afghanistan, countering drugs business and stabilizing the education sector both in civilians and Afghan military. The project of Afghan

National Peace and Development Framework (ANPDF) 2017-2020 is a vision to develop Afghanistan in almost every field if it is well organized by Afghan government with the support of its sub ordinate institutions. As of now, the implications of these strategies and policies have not been seen.

Among the provinces, Helmand and Kandahar were more importantly given attention after the fall of Kunduz. Head of RS (Resolute Support), Gen. Nicholson in 2016 said that Kandahar must be protected at all cost as Helmand also needed protection because the presences of insurgence in these two provinces are limitless. After the episode of Kunduz, the Afghan political and security elite seriously commenced discussions about how to deal with such threats. Security policies of Afghanistan contained Formal negotiations with Taliban's political leaders with the coordination of key regional players such as Pakistan and China. (Giustozzi, 2017)

In response to dire governance situation, Afghanistan and its international partners established the Civilian Technical Assistance Program (CTAP) in 2010. (Miller, 2013) Afghan governance under CTAP has to identify the issues and particular needs. After identification Afghan ministries has to the international technical experts for assistance. The distinguished factor in this program is the international experts has not to solve the problem, but has to lead them how to solve the issues in order to build up their capabilities and competency.

Reconciliation and reintegration with insurgent groups is required for long-term stability in Afghanistan. Negotiation with Taliban was initiated several times but it failed due to several reasons. The demands of Taliban and opinion of Afghan and leaders and civilian always cause stalemate because of the deal of release of their leaders or prisoners of war. Taliban want accomplishment of this deal whether that can produce stability or not. Taliban mostly want the departure of foreigners from the territory of Afghanistan and the release of their leaders. The office for Taliban which was opened in Doha, Qatar, but closed before it opened because the factor of mistrust remained. There must be incentives for both sides on the table of negotiation in order to promote integration and progress the negotiation in future. And if it is the mean of Afghan government to clear the state of insurgency from Afghanistan so the pluralism in Afghan military has to be successfully monopolized for the legitimate use of force.

Implications and Outcomes of Counter Strategies

It is certain that these above initiatives which International community and Afghan government have proposed will have positive implications but it will take time. Thus Afghan government has to wait to see the developments. Along this, terrorism will pose more challenges until 2020 because the feeble Afghan government is not in a situation to hold these waves of critical challenges, until it stabilizes the institution of ANA. First of all the alteration must be initiated hierarchically from the top. The seriousness of political and elite leaders have to transparently look out for support provided to the country by international funders. Best utility of the initiated programs mentioned above will have positive outcomes. The Afghan military needs such assistance. Probably best utility will have best outcomes and will surely secure the situation in Afghanistan. Once ANA's capability gaps are filled surely the factor of terrorism will perish with passage of time. The economic stability is the dire need of ANA and to influence the lives of Afghans until the economic stability Afghanistan has to rely on funds because many security strategists claim that "Economy is the new currency of security". Millions of dollar are funded to Afghanistan each year now it is up to Afghan government's capability that how they serve the nation.

Conclusion

The strategies to counter the posed threats to Afghanistan seem productive but in past and recent times it has provided unsatisfying outcomes than what was expected. The global scenario is changing day to day, thus, Afghanistan has to reconsider its policies toward development of nation and ANA to secure the fate of the country. The outcomes would surely have best implications in Afghanistan, but if the proposed strategies are well operated and investigated other than the insurgents will never allow the country to flourish and let ANA to hold the security of the Afghanistan. The fact is inevitable that Afghan governance is still in its embryonic stages but the outcomes and implications of these strategies are time consuming, thus, the international funders, Afghan government and Afghans have to wait years to see its best conclusions.

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