

The insurgency in Afghanistan's heartland

THE insurgency in Afghanistan has expanded far beyond its stronghold in the south east. Transcending its traditional Pashtun base, the Taliban is bolstering its influence in the central-eastern provinces by installing shadow governments and tapping into the vulnerabilities of a central government crippled by corruption and deeply dependent on a corrosive war economy. Collusion between insurgents and corrupt government officials in Kabul and the nearby provinces has increased, leading to a profusion of criminal networks in the Afghan heartland. Despite efforts to combat the insurgency in the south, stability in the centre has steadily eroded. Yet, with nearly one fifth of the population residing in Kabul and its surrounding provinces, the Afghan heartland is pivotal to the planned transition from international troops to Afghan forces at the end of 2014. Given the insurgency's entrenchment so close to the capital, however, it appears doubtful that President Hamid Karzai's government will be able to contain the

ment officials and infiltration of Afghan security forces in neighbouring provinces has, meanwhile, gutted the government's ability to expand its reach to the periphery. In the rural areas of Ghazni, Wardak, Logar and other nearby provinces, where unemployment runs high and government presence is low, the insurgency has found safe havens far from the borders of Pakistan. A little more than a year after the transfer of additional U.S. troops was completed, violence increased across the country, hitting new peaks in May 2011 as the Taliban launched their spring offensive, which resulted in the highest recorded number of civilian casualties incurred in a single month since the U.S. engagement in Afghanistan began in 2001. It is unlikely that this trend will be reversed anytime soon. Following the announcement by President Barack Obama on 22 June 2011 of U.S. plans to withdraw 33,000 troops by September 2012, it appears likely that the insurgency will push forcefully to gain more ground before the military drawdown reaches its final phase by December 2014.

Nearly a decade after the U.S.-led military intervention began, little has been done to challenge the perverse incentives of continued conflict in Afghanistan. Insecurity and the inflow of billions of dollars in international assistance has failed to significantly strengthen the state's capacity to provide security or basic services and has instead, by progressively fusing the interests of political gatekeepers and insurgent

commanders, provided new opportunities for criminals and insurgents to expand their influence inside the government. The economy as a result is increasingly dominated by a criminal oligarchy of politically connected businessmen. On the surface, security conditions in the capital city appear relatively stable. The nexus between criminal enterprises, insurgent networks and corrupt political elites, however, is undermining Kabul's security and that of the central-eastern corridor. Afghan citizens, meanwhile, are squeezed on all sides -- by the government, the insurgency and international forces.

The insurgency's penetration of the greater Kabul area has also intensified competition between Taliban fighters associated with Mullah Omar's Quetta Shura (leadership council), the North Waziristan-based Haqqani network and Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's Hizb-e Islami. Violent rivalries between commanders of these insurgent groups in places such as Kapisa, Logar and Wardak have resulted in the loss of hundreds of lives. Caught in the middle are

ordinary Afghans who remain fearful of a Taliban return to power. Tasked with quelling the violence, NATO's International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) is perceived as unable or unwilling to distinguish between civilians and insurgents and to reduce dependence on corrupt government officials in its counter-insurgency strategy.

Stabilisation and improving security beyond Kabul will depend on confronting corruption in the capital and outlying areas. This will require a comprehensive reassessment of current anti-corruption efforts, which so far have proven ineffective. Building capacity in the judicial sector while weeding out corruption is crucial for lasting reform. Afghan agencies with the combined mandate of countering corruption, organised crime and terrorism financing such as the Special Investigations Unit, the Major Crimes Task Force and the Financial Transactions Reports Analysis Centre of Afghanistan need more support. A broad review of the policies and operational practices of the country's national intelligence agency, the National Directorate of Security (NDS), will also be important to ensure against abuses of power that may further fuel the insurgency.

Fighting the insurgency is synonymous with providing citizens security and basic services and tackling corruption. The Afghan government and the international community must accept and prepare for the risks that come with targeting powerful political and business elites in and around Kabul for prosecution and sanctions. The potential short-term pain of political tensions that may arise over such prosecutions is worth the long-term gains associated with striking at the primary causes of the insurgency -- poor governance, corruption and misuse of force by Afghan or foreign forces. With just three years left before the bulk of international forces withdraw, the window of opportunity to expand security outside Kabul is fast closing. It is unlikely that this can be achieved unless a better balance can be struck between taking the fight to the field and countering the causes of the insurgency. Failure in Afghanistan is not inevitable, but without a recalibration of the current counter-insurgency strategy, success is far from guaranteed.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To the Government of Afghanistan:

- Invest more resources in building the state's capacity to confront organised crime and corruption:
 - fully reinstate the Major Crimes Task Force and Sensitive Investigations Unit as independent law enforcement bodies; outline and implement a public policy of non-interference in corruption investigations;
 - expand the capacity of the Financial Transactions Reports Analysis Centre of Afghanistan and consider creating an agency liaison to parliament that regularly produces public reports about the agency's findings; and
 - clarify criteria for corruption investigations and harmonise policy on pursuing sensitive cases involving high-level officials; reinvest resources allocated for anti-corruption across judicial institutions with special focus

on building capacity in the attorney general's office.

2. Launch a full-scale review of National Directorate of Security operational and administrative practices:

a) implement more aggressive procedures for the monitoring and oversight of operational funds at the provincial level; and

b) enhance the powers of parliamentary Internal Security and Defence Committees to call security agencies such as NDS to account and adopt policies and legislation that provide for more detailed budgetary information about NDS to be submitted to parliament on a regular basis.

3. Conduct anti-corruption efforts in a more robust and public manner by prosecuting high-profile officials implicated in supporting the insurgency and by working with international partners to impose sanctions against individuals and firms who have financed it.

4. Provide stronger support to the attorney general's anti-corruption unit by realigning the unit's priorities to focus on the prosecution of racketeering, bribery and extortion schemes by government officials at all levels.

5. Enhance and enforce regulatory controls over currency trading through increased monitoring and investigation of informal currency traders; and adopt stricter controls over the import, export and trade of national and foreign currencies within the country's borders by creating incentives for currency traders to register while imposing harsher penalties on unregistered ones.

To the U.S. and NATO/ISAF:

6. Realign financial support to reflect concerns over corruption; insist on greater accountability for international aid spent on reconstruction and in support of Afghan national security forces, particularly for aid in support of NDS and other security organs.

7. Revise and implement counter-insurgency policy guidelines to encourage more rigorous review of information and broadening sources of information in order to minimise the risk of civilian casualties and wrongful detentions; increasing accountability mechanisms and encouraging greater transparency in the investigation of civilian casualties, alleged abuses and wrongful detentions.

8. Insist on more stringent vetting procedures for appointees in the Afghan security forces, particularly in NDS, and the swift removal and prosecution of security officials found to be involved in facilitating insurgent activities.

9. Strike a better balance between spending on the improvement of the tactical capabilities of Afghan national security forces and increasing the investigative capacity of law enforcement and counter-terrorism agencies.

10. Consider partially withholding funding for security sector development until the Afghan government demonstrates a genuine commitment to supporting the Major Crimes Task Force, Sensitive Investigative Unit and other anti-corruption agencies.

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threat and stabilise the country by then. Countering the insurgency in these crucial areas requires the implementation of long-overdue reforms, including more robust anti-corruption efforts, stricter oversight over international aid and greater support for capacity building in the judicial and financial sectors.

Although the number of major attacks on Kabul has recently declined, insurgent networks have been able to reinforce their gains in provinces and districts close to the city, launching smaller attacks on soft targets. Outmanned and outgunned by the thousands of foreign and Afghan security forces in and around Kabul, Taliban attacks inside the capital are not aimed at controlling it physically but to capture it psychologically. Once that objective is achieved, the political and financial cost of doing business for foreign forces and diplomatic missions located in Kabul will be too high to sustain for the long haul.

An aggressive campaign of assassinations of govern-

Reformation in Uzbekistan and the political realities

MEHERUN NESA

SINCE its independence in 1991, the government of Uzbekistan took the development initiatives for the reformation in economic and political sectors. As the country was under the structure of the Soviet Union so for the sake of the development as an independent country the government needed to take such initiatives. But from the very beginning, Uzbekistan has followed its own way of political and economic development, showing little interest for political pluralism or an open economy while preserving several old principles of Soviet structures. Now-a-days, the reformation process of the country has been questioned by the political realities because no development is possible without a sound political structure. The country is ruled by dictatorship, headed by President Islam Karimov, with no legal opposition parties and no free elections since its inception as an independent state. The economy of the country is closed, which is largely run for the benefit of a small elite group of families in or close to the government. The existing political realities of the country have made the reformation process difficult to be implemented.

Though the constitution 1992 of Uzbekistan provides for separation of powers, freedom of speech and representative government but in reality, the executive holds almost all power, the judiciary lacks independence and the legislature has limited power to shape laws. The power to select and replace provincial governors rests on the president. Although many democratic features have been included in the new constitution and though from the beginning of his presidency, Karimov remained committed to establish democracy in Uzbekistan but it can be superseded by executive decrees and legislation and often constitutional law is simply ignored. According to the constitution, the president is directly elected to a five-year term that can be repeated once, but in reality the president, Islam Karimov, has been in power for about two decades in the country. He is the head of state and is granted supreme executive power by the constitution. The president also may declare a state of emergency or war, as commander in chief of the armed forces. He is

empowered to appoint the prime minister and full cabinet of ministers and the judges of the three national courts, subject to the approval of the Oly Majlis, and to appoint all members of lower courts. In a power struggle situation, the president also has the power to dissolve the parliament, in effect negating the Oly Majlis's veto power over presidential nominations. Thus all the power is in the hand of the president, which seems that he is the state of his own.

Since the early 1990s, independent political parties have been effectively suppressed and five pro-government political parties hold all seats in the parlia-



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ment. In true sense there is no meaningful political opposition in Uzbekistan. Many prominent opponents of the government have fled, and others have been arrested since independence. The exact number remaining in custody is unknown, it may be several thousand. Torture has been used as a routine investigation technique by the police force and the intelligence service, which leads to the death of a large number of prisoners in custody. Political prisoners and suspected extremists are allegedly treated worse than ordinary prisoners. This political harassment creates the disappearance of opposition parties that leads to the lack of alternative leader and without the presence of opposition parties it is not possible to establish a true democratic government through election. The role of civil society is totally ignored though the government was committed to ensure the rights of the civil society. In

this situation, it has become a big question that who will take over the power of the country.

There is very little press freedom and harassment of journalists over critical articles occurs frequently. The ministers always avoid the media scrutiny, elections are entirely under executive control, there is no legal political opposition, and there is widespread persecution of regime opponents. Corruption is rampant, reaching to the top levels of the political system. In case of security issue, Uzbek officials pointed to the difficult security situation in the region, and the threat from militant groups based in Afghanistan and Tajikistan is a major reason for this lack of liberalisation. And the human rights situation in the country is improving slowly. The improvement is uneven that leads to the regular killing of media people, political prisoners and others alike.

In the context of Uzbekistan, Clans are not necessarily kin-based and can be broadly defined as regional patronage networks, which are very important in the functioning of the Uzbek state. There exist three clans on the mainstream analysis of Uzbekistani politics, the Samarkand clan, the Tashkent clan and the Ferghana clan. The President Islam Karimov comes from the Samarkand clan, generally speaking the ruling clan and the Tashkent clan is often found at high positions in the state. However, for the development of democracy the central power needs to balance between the different clans and people.

Thus we have seen that different bitter realities still exist in Uzbekistan's political structure, which are neither avoidable nor acceptable. The reformation process is ongoing and four interrelated strategic programs have been developed for 2011-2015, covering areas like industrial development, infrastructure, transport and communications construction, reforming and improving the stability of the financial and banking system as well as the formation of a favorable business climate in the country. But the truth is that if the above mentioned political realities are not changed then no economic development, no democracy and eventually no reformation can be possible to establish.

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Iran fires medium-range missile in war game



IRAN'S elite Revolutionary Guards fired 14 missiles in an exercise Tuesday (June 28, 2011), one of them a medium-range weapon capable of striking Israel or US targets in the Gulf, state media said. In response, the US State Department accused Tehran of "bragging" rather than complying with its international obligations.

The Guards' aerospace commander, Brigadier General Amir Ali Hajizadeh, insisted Iran's missile programme posed no threat to European nations but was merely intended to provide defence against Israel and US forces in the Gulf.

"Today, on the second day of the exercise, we fired Zelzals (Quake), Shahabs (Meteors) 1 and 2, and the Ghadr (Power)," a medium-range missile which is a modified version of the Shahab-3, Hajizadeh told state television. He said the missiles were not a threat to European nations.

"Iran's missiles have a maximum range of 2,000 kilometres (1,250 miles) and are designed to reach US targets in the region and the Zionist regime," the official IRNA news agency quoted him as saying. "The Zionist regime is 1,200 kilometres away from Iran and we are able to target this regime with our 2,000 kilometre range missiles from Semnan and Damghan (in central Iran)," he said.

"We have the technology to build missiles with a longer range but we do not need them and we are not seeking to build such missiles." Iran has said that its latest exercise is not aimed at any country but carries "a message of peace and friendship."

IRNA said the Guards fired nine Zelzals, two Shahab-1s, two Shahab-2s and a single medium-range Ghadr on the second day of their Great Prophet-6 exercise. Iran unveiled the Ghadr, which has a range of 1,800 kilometres, following a successful test in September 2009. The Zelzal is an unguided surface-to-surface missile with a maximum range of 400 kilometres.

Source: defencetalk.com