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Can the U.S. provide 'Over-The-Horizon' air support for Afghanistan?

By Paul Miller



The United States has said it will provide Afghanistan's military with "over-the-horizon" air support after completing its troop withdrawal from the country. How it can do so with the significant number of personnel constraints that may soon emerge, however, isn't all that clear.

In a bid to do so, the United States government is reportedly fighting the Taliban. These strikes were reportedly announced by the United States in an attempt to provide support, at least until a complete withdrawal from the country by Aug. 31.

U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd J. Austin said in a press conference Wednesday that after Aug. 31, U.S. airstrikes would target Al Qaeda and other terrorist groups in the country, not the Taliban. It's unclear whether or not this policy will change if the Taliban is on the verge of capturing the capital Kabul, where the U.S. is currently about 60 troops.

U.S. officials provided more details on its mission. "Hamidullah's refusal to allow the U.S. use of its territory as a base of operations could degrade its ability to carry out intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) missions over Afghanistan," he said.

The U.S. doesn't have permission to use any military bases in the six countries bordering Afghanistan. That means that its aircraft have to fly from bases in the Persian Gulf or from aircraft carriers.

"Distance will effectively eliminate any U.S. capability to provide close air support for Afghan forces on the ground," Rüdiger Bahr, senior U.S. strategic and policy advisor, told me. "However, such air support could be used for targeting static sites (training camps, ammo caches) or pre-planned offensive operations, ensuring the United States is granted overflight clearance from Pakistan." "Such support is being provided in the form of operations over Afghanistan, Washington has entered discussions with Taliban and Uzbekistan. Bahr said, "The U.S. military supports the U.S. military carrying out operations from Central Asia, provided there are no constraints on its mission."

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Without operational bases in Pakistan, the war will likely be higher for U.S. active military involvement, even through the use of armed drones. "Bahr said, "Any action in support of the Afghan military force would likely require a specific request from the Afghan government, and likely to reach the intelligence and operational agreements with neighboring countries."

However, the United States has announced its intention to carry out unilateral operations should it prove a direct consequence of the withdrawal of Soviet troops, several of them are Afghan NATO members, the U.S. began supporting Afghanistan with US troops, hoping they could replace the Afghan military.

Editorial

Taliban's continued human rights violation

Almost every day, there are pieces of news from different parts of the country that show vehement human rights abuses by insurgent groups. There are in addition to many other cases that are never reported. The Taliban, which held power over roughly three quarters of Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001, still wages war against the Afghan government and targets both soldiers and civilians across the country.

Following the downfall of the Taliban's regime, democracy and human rights were debated hotly and Afghan nation dreamed to live a peaceful life under the aegis of a democratic state. Afghan men and women celebrated democracy through flocking to ballot boxes. However, the Taliban regrouped and sliced the fingers which were lifted during the voting.

Recently, the US said on Friday that reports of violence and atrocities against Afghans indicate the Taliban is showing little regard for human life and human rights on the ground.

Addressing a press conference, the U.S. State Department's Deputy Spokesperson said "while the Taliban have stated they will not harm former interpreters or others who worked for foreign forces, recent reports of violence and atrocities against interpreters and other Afghans indicate local Taliban forces are showing little regard for human life and human rights on the ground."

The spokesperson said the US vehemently condemns these targeted attacks, the destruction of vital infrastructure, and other attacks against the people of Afghanistan. "The Taliban must go beyond issuing statements denying territorial offenses and targeted attacks. If this is truly not Taliban policy, their leadership should condemn these atrocities and violations of basic rights. They must proactively prevent their forces from carrying out these actions on the ground," she said.

US also reiterated that they and other countries have said in recent weeks that the world will not accept the imposition by force of a government in Afghanistan. "Legitimacy and assistance for any Afghan government can only be possible if that government has a basic right - basic respect, excuse me, for human rights."

Constitutionally, citizens are guaranteed the right to life and liberty, to privacy, to peaceful assembly, from torture and of expression and speech. If accused of a crime, citizens hold the right to be informed of the charges, to representation by an advocate, and to presumption of innocence. There is no discrimination on the ground of race, color, or sex in Afghanistan as Afghan Constitution states in Article 27. "Any kind of discrimination and distinction between citizens of Afghanistan shall be forbidden."

The citizens of Afghanistan, man and woman, have equal rights and duties before the law. "Furthermore, the current constitution officially recognizes the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the United Nations Charter, both are mentioned in its preamble and in Article seven."

But Taliban's militancy has badly impacted Afghan people's hope for a bright and democratic future. The group has largely violated human rights and targeted vital infrastructures in their hold territories. Despite of territorial gains, Taliban's recent moves have been national and internationally condemned, where the international community said that Afghan would never go back to the past or accept a regime that belongs to other centuries.

Now, if Taliban seek to choose militancy over negotiations, the United States and its international allies have to change their approach and resume their military pressure on them. The Taliban's political office in Qatar has to be shut and their supporters must be pressured. The world needs to determine a timeline for the Taliban group either return to the negotiating table and honor their deal with Washington or face the consequences of military action.

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