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Editorial

ANDSF's aggressive approach essential to liberate occupied districts
The US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin has recently said Afghan National Defense and Security Forces should do more to prevent Taliban advances across the country.
Austin has added that to prevent collapse of major cities and populated areas, the ANDSF should fortify their positions. According to Austin, the Afghan forces should adopt such a strategy to prevent Taliban advances or at least reduce their violence.
The statements of Defense Secretary Austin mean return of ANDSF to defensive positions, a situation that in the last one year paved the way for increasing Taliban attacks and offensives and ultimately caused collapse of certain districts at the Taliban hand.
Following the signing of a peace agreement between the US and the Taliban, the ANDSF suspended their cordon and search operations and took practically active defensive position, but contrary to their commitment on reduction of violence and no advance towards populated areas, Taliban started their extensive attacks and drew the scope of violence, to the most secure areas.
Maximally exploiting the ANDSF defensive posture and suspension of their operations, in fact Taliban tried to extend geographically under their control. With intensification of violence, collapse of certain districts, Taliban's violations and their disbelief to peace, the ANDSF resumed their offensives against the insurgent groups.
According to ANDSF officials, during the recent two weeks, as a result of ANDSF and public fighting forces, several districts were liberated from Taliban domination including Sheikh Ali and Sarkh-e-Porsa districts in Paktiya, Kohmand and Saighan district in Bamiyan, Kanoh district in Herat, Najrab district in Kapisa province and Kalat district in Balkh.
ANDSF and uprising forces have been alerted in many other occupied districts and upon receiving attack order, they will liberate further districts. The only existing problem is lack of coordination and synchronization among ANDSF and the local forces. If essential coordination is created and a precise planning is undertaken for recapturing and protecting of districts, no doubt, the ANDSF and local forces will be capable to restore government sovereignty in those areas.
One of the main issues is now that ANDSF simply liberate the occupied districts, but there is no proper planning for protection of those liberated areas, therefore some of the liberated districts are being reoccupied by Taliban.
So recapturing operations of districts and strategic locations must be continued. ANDSF must undertake and adopt precise planning and use local forces for their preservation. Under present circumstances, that large areas of the country have been practically under the enemy's control, return to defensive position means suicide for the ANDSF, people and government.
In such conditions, it's not logical and reasonable that over 300,000 strong equipped ANDSF forces be in defensive position and the enemies, motor-bike rider Taliban, take control of districts, villages, harbor ports, customs and strategic locations and rule over the 35 million Afghan people.
Therefore, all means of pressures must be taken to push back Taliban from the occupied areas and Afghans living under their territory should be liberated. People in Taliban held areas, suffering the most, and they are in dire need of public services. Liberation of the occupied districts, would not only push back the terrorists, but would also restore public services to the war-weary Afghans.

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The United States has a military, intelligence, and moral reason for American forces to remain in Afghanistan

By Larry Provost



The Taliban fighting the Afghan government is a declared enemy of the United States. Leaving Afghanistan ensures that the Taliban will take over most of Afghanistan, which sadly is happening at a quickening pace. A Taliban victory opens Afghanistan to be a hotbed of terrorism as it was after the withdrawal of the Soviet Union and the United States and before the events of September 11, 2001.

Secondly, American withdrawal from Afghanistan creates an intelligence vacuum. American ground forces and their intelligence allies were great survivors of information operations on the Taliban and international terrorism in Afghanistan. Further, such intelligence gathering extends to other interested parties in the area such as the Chinese, Indians, Russians, Pakistanis, and other Central Asian nations. It is inconceivable that in one of the areas that can truly be described as a crossroads of the world, the United States will have little to no intelligence gathering capability. This lack of intelligence gathering capability will have profound implications regarding assessing capabilities of enemies of the United States, whether conventional or unconventional, as well as assessing future threats.

A Taliban win in Afghanistan will also have devastating effects on the morale of American troops when it comes to future conflicts, making it less likely for American commanders and policy makers to recommend force when needed, encouraging less lethal force when necessary and making it less likely for American troops to engage in the variety of different roles. It is the local populace in unconventional warfare situations like Afghanistan.

There is a way for American troops to stay in Afghanistan with a few footprints, which is the best strategy and most effective means of engaging with that tribal society. Such American troops must consist solely of Special Operations forces, most of them being Special Forces, Civil Affairs, and the recently added Psychological Operations: the forces that effectively won the war and were securing the victory

The Special Operations soldiers are those who, like Lawrence of Arabia, believe not only in working with but inspiring amongst the Afghan people. Afghan society is thousands of years old and trust is only won with their people by long-standing engagement. While no disrespect is intended, hard-charging 18-year-old troops are not the most effective means of engaging a society that lives, thinks and often fights as if they were in Biblical times. Afghanistan seldom has been a mind nation but is a country of different tribes. It is only when nations with a large footprint that come in to wage a common quest are asked if us was "When will the Americans leave?" After being asked several times I asked, "Why do people keep asking?" and the answer given has haunted me since. I was told "Because you (the Americans) always leave. You left Vietnam. You left Afghanistan before. You always leave." We cannot forget the Afghan people. They will not forget, even if others wish to.

The author, Larry Provost, served in Afghanistan from 2002-2003 and in 2011. The article also appeared in *Frontball* weblog.

