Thousands of terrorists enter Afghanistan from Pakistan, political parties

By: Suraya Raiszada

Following surge in Taliban attacks on a number of Afghanistan's northern provinces, a number of political parties in Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa by debating on current situation of Afghanistan and holding a tribal jirga in Charsada city criticized Pakistan government's policy towards Afghanistan.

Expressing concern over increasing violence by the Taliban group in Afghanistan, Pakistan political parties say that thousands of terrorists and fighters are entering Afghanistan from Pakistan on daily basis.

In the tribal jirga attended by members of Pashtun Protection Movement, Awami National Party, leaders of the Labour Party, civil society activists and political experts, leader of Awami National Party Emal Wali Khan delivered speech and said that thousands of armed fighters were entering Afghanistan from Pakistan with the name of 'Jihad', while they were going for destruction and bloodshed.

"These days, dead bodies of terrorists are brought to Pakistan, where they are buried with full honour under the national flag of Pakistan. Why do we close our eyes? Where are the safe havens of Taliban?," Emal said.

The organizers of this tribal jirga say the jirga was aimed to find a way for ending the current war in the region and soil of Pashtuns as presence of terrorist groups is a serious threat to not only Afghanistan but to the whole region and world.

This comes amid increasing insecurities and surge in Taliban attacks in Afghanistan. Previously, Afghanistan government had repeatedly blamed Pakistan for interfering in internal affairs of Afghanistan and supporting terrorist groups, providing them with safe havens and funding them financially.

On the other hand, United Nations Security Council (UNSC) in its recent meeting has condemned Taliban's increasing violence and attacks on provincial capitals and asked the group to focus on peace talks with Afghanistan government.

Following the UNSC's recent statement, a number of social media activists in Afghanistan and some foreign countries have launched a hashtag calling for the international community to exert sanction on Pakistan government. In this campaign, the social activists have also asked the United Nations Security Council to impose sanction on Pakistan for its proxy war in Afghanistan.

Such tribal jirgas had also held in the past and criticized the Pakistani government for its policy towards Afghanistan, asking the government of the country to stop interfering in internal affairs of Afghanistan.

This comes after Chris Alexandar, former Canadian ambassador to Afghanistan, by criticizing the Pakistan government for its proxy war had said the international community should impose sanction on Pakistan for its proxy war in Afghanistan.

With seriously criticizing Pakistan's policy towards Afghanistan, former Canadian ambassador to Afghanistan had said the real decision-makers among negotiating team of the Taliban group were not the Taliban but Islamabad and Rawalpindi.

In his tweet, he had said that war would soon end if Pakistan came under sanction.

A number of Afghan experts by criticizing the Pakistani government say the people and government of Afghanistan have clear evidence that dozens of fighters that have been killed in recent fighting in Afghanistan have been citizens of Pakistan.

Rahmatullah Nabil, former chairman of Afghanistan National Directorate of Security (NDS), says Pakistan's ISI has sent about 600 Jaish-ul-Adl militants from Dalbandin, Noshki, Mashkeel and Panjgur of Balochistan, to Nimroz, Herat and Farah provinces of Afghanistan with all military equipment, in order to help the Afghan Taliban in fighting. Based on all this evidence, it is time that the international community particularly the United Nations Security Council should impose sanction on Pakistan for supporting terrorist groups and its proxy war in Afghanistan, where dozens of innocent civilians are killed on daily basis.

Suraya Raiszada

The Recent Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) Meeting: Outcomes and Implications

By: MD Pathik Hasan

The recent conference of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization was held on July 15-16, 2021 in Tashkent, Uzbekistan. About 250 participants and 40 delegates from 50 countries and 30 world-renowned organizations were part of this conference. This meeting of SCO was attended by Prime Minister of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan Imran Khan, President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan Ashraf Ghani, President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev, foreign ministers of Central Asian and South Asian countries, foreign states, executive heads of regional and international organizations, global financial companies, and renowned research and analytical corporations.

The heads of Pakistan and Afghanistan were invited to the conference as both countries are strategically very important and serve as a link between Central and South Asia along with providing the route to ports to the landlocked Central Asian countries. Along with the Uzbek foreign minister, External Affairs Minister of India S Jaishankar moderated the session who was also the first speaker of the plenary session.

The conference of SCO was held with the vision of highlighting the challenges and opportunities associated with regional connectivity in the context of Central and South Asian countries. Although the conference included various important thematic sessions such as economy, transport, communication, trade, cultural and humanitarian cooperation, Afghanistan's security situation and the outcomes of the SCO contact group meeting in Dushanbe dominated the overall conference.

Regional Connectivity

The SCO meeting has basically contributed to two issues- the regional connectivity, peace and stability in Afghanistan.

The Secretary-General SCO in his speech considered Shanghai Cooperation Organization as an important platform that provides an opportunity for the region to develop optimal connectivity. He emphasized that trade, economic growth, and progress are associated with the building of optimal transport routes. He highlighted the importance of building some railway routes such as Mazar-i-Sharif – Peshawar, Mazar-i-Sharif – Herat, and Uzbekistan-Kyrgyzstan-China. He spotlighted that these railway tracks would not only provide a link between the North-South and East-West region but also give Afghanistan and other landlocked Central Asian countries access to ports thereby facilitating regional trade and economic activities. The Secretary-General also mentioned the positive role of the SCO meeting for the implementation of important projects such as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Prime Minister of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan Imran Khan also highlighted the importance of China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) considering it as the flagship project of BRI.

The SCO meeting also recognized the importance of regional trade and infrastructural development. The development on infrastructure will help to produce and supply energy among the regional countries.

The Secretary General Norov has proposed to expand Afghanistan's export potential, implementation of energy projects like CASA-1000 and TAPI pipeline and transport corridors.

In addition to the connectivity in terms of infrastructure, the SCO meeting-2021 provided an opportunity to the government representatives of the countries, which do not generally experience deep ties, to meet each other and exchange their views thereupon facilitating the region's stability. For instance, the foreign ministers of China and India met and conveyed their concerns about the bilateral agreements regarding the Line of Actual Control (LAC) (News18 2021).

Prime Ministers of Pakistan and Uzbekistan also exchanged their views and reaffirmed the bilateral cooperation in different sectors like tourism, railways, military expertise, and vocational training. Moreover, $500 Million worth of deals were signed by Prime Minister of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan Imran Khan with Uzbekistan (PMO Pakistan 2021; Voice of America 2021).

However, the start of the SCO session was marked with an open spat between the Prime Minister of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan Imran Khan, and the President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. When President Ashraf Ghani accused Pakistan of allowing 10,000 Jihadis to Afghanistan, Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan responded by saying that Pakistan had done every effort to bring the Taliban to the dialogue table.

Peace and Stability in Afghanistan

Even though Afghanistan is only an observer state at SCO, still it is important to note that initially SCO was created with the intention of dealing with the possible threats to the regional stability arising from destabilized Afghanistan. However, the recent withdrawal of US and NATO forces made the condition of Afghanistan the most concerning issue for the whole region.

Therefore, it was of no surprise to learn that the stability and peace of Afghanistan was the most dominant theme at the SCO in the latest meeting. To restore peace and stability in Afghanistan, the SCO meeting provided a platform for joint statement and five proposals by the Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi.

SCO-Afghanistan Contact Group: Joint Statement

In his speech, the Secretary-General SCO recalled the meeting of the SCO-Afghanistan Contact Group that was held on July 14, 2021, in Dushanbe in which the foreign ministers of all the member states and other important regional and international stakeholders participated.

All the foreign ministers pledged that they advocate the development of independent Afghanistan; realize the importance of peace in Afghanistan for regional security, and are convinced by the fact that this crucial time is marked by a need for assistance to the Afghan people to regain and restore the peace process. All the neighbors showed their keen interest in the development of peace in Afghanistan while respecting the culture and traditions of the Afghan people. It was reassured that all the states respect the sovereignty, territorial integrity, and independence of Afghanistan in accordance with the principles of the UN charter.

The international organizations such as the UN, especially the UN regional center for Preventive Diplomacy, UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, and the Special Envoy of the UN Secretary-General were encouraged to play a pivotal role in the conflict of Afghanistan to facilitate the peace process. Inter-Afghan peace talks were applauded and the importance of including the voice of all the ethnic groups was emphasized. All the member states, at the end of the joint statement, showed their willingness to keep deep ties with Afghanistan and provide support to the fighting country by increasing the participation of Afghanistan as an observer at the SCO.

Five Proposals by the Chinese Foreign Minister

At the SCO-Afghanistan Contact Group meeting, the foreign minister of China Wang Yi also introduced five proposals to address the law and order situation in Afghanistan after the withdrawal of NATO forces.

First, China accused that the United States initiated this conflict in Afghanistan, therefore, the US cannot simply walk away from the deteriorating situation in the country. In the second proposal, the Chinese foreign minister said that the SCO should utilize all the potential of the anti-terrorism institutions to stop the resurgence of terrorism in Afghanistan.

In the third proposal, the Chinese foreign minister highlighted the importance of joint efforts of the region to restore the reconciliation process in Afghanistan.

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As fighting rages in Afghanistan, health workers are struggling

Since May, when foreign troops started withdrawing from Afghanistan, we have witnessed heavy fighting. In recent weeks the clashes between the Afghan army and the Taliban have intensified even more and have moved into more urban areas. Three provincial capitals – Kunduz in Kunduz province, Zaranj in Nimruz province and Sheberghan in Jawzjan province – have already been captured by the armed group.

In Lashkar Gah city in Helmand province, there has been relentless gunfire, air raids and mortars in densely populated areas. Houses are being bombed and many people are suffering severe injuries. Fighting within the city has made it harder for Doctors Without Borders (MSF) to respond. Our staff are part of the community and they, like many people, are afraid to leave their homes. It is just far too dangerous to move in the streets and life has come to a standstill. Some of our colleagues are staying overnight in the hospital so they can keep on treating patients. The situation has been dire for months, but now it is even worse. Despite the challenges, the MSF-supported Boost Hospital remains operational and has seen a marked increase in trauma needs over the last week.

In just one day, we performed 20 surgeries on people injured by violence, which is unheard of for MSF here, as we are not Lashkar Gah's main provider of trauma care. Before last week, we had been operating on average on two war-wounded people per day. The main trauma centre in the city is run by another organisation, and it too is under immense pressure. The people they cannot admit are sent to MSF for care.

From August 1 to August 6, MSF treated 170 war-wounded patients and performed 71 surgeries on people injured by the violence. And in total between May 3 and July 31, our teams have treated 482 war-wounded patients, nearly all of them (92 percent) for injuries caused by shells and bullets and about a quarter of them (26 percent) being minors and children. And the number of patients seen by MSF is just a fraction of the actual number injured by the violence.

The fighting has also exacerbated health needs beyond trauma care. Given the lack of well-functioning and affordable medical facilities in Helmand, people rely on the 300-bed Boost Hospital, the only referral hospital in the province, for essential neonatal, paediatric, inpatient, intensive care, maternity, malnutrition, and surgical services, among others.

Since May, MSF staff have witnessed an alarming increase in the severity of patients' illnesses when they arrive at the hospital. People described how, despite needing medical care, they have been forced to wait at home until the fighting subsides or to take dangerous alternate routes. With fighting taking place not far from Boost hospital and people too afraid to leave their homes due to the violence, access to healthcare is dangerously low

"We have had patients who were caught in crossfire. On top of something like severe diarrhoea, they would also arrive with a bullet in their shoulder or their leg," explains one of our doctors working in the MSF Emergency Room and Intensive Care Unit at Boost hospital.

"The conflict leads people to think ten times if they really want to make the journey. They delay until they cannot wait any more, when their relatives have not opened their eyes for two or three days, have shallow breathing and are unresponsive. From a medical perspective, that is almost too late." And when people do make it to a health centre and receive care, that does not necessarily result in complete recovery. The effects of the conflict have long-term consequences too, as one patient with bullet wounds to both his arms explained: "All my family depend on me, but I feel like in the future I will not be able to work because of my injuries. It will be very hard for me to feed my family. I have left my home and I cannot go back there."

Even among MSF staff, the impact of the fighting is clearly visible. One of my colleagues, an MSF doctor, explains, "Healthcare staff are exhausted. The work itself, seeing all these patients, is hugely difficult. And then on top of that, people have to deal a lot with outside pressures and worries." MSF continues to provide much-needed healthcare in Boost Hospital and continues to operate healthcare projects in four other locations around the country: Herat, Kandahar, Khost and Kunduz. **Monitoring Desk**