



Fateh Sami

3 June 2023

Northern Afghanistan: A Crucible of History and Conflict

A Historical Perspective: The Significance of Northern Afghanistan

With the establishment of the Taliban, the big game enters a new stage. The rule of the Taliban has created a favorable environment for terrorist groups to expand safely. Terrorist groups active in Pakistan and on both sides of the Durand border have entered Afghanistan. These groups have the full support of the Taliban and have established bases all over the country.

The movement of these groups in northern Afghanistan has raised concerns among Central Asian countries. Due to their political, commercial, and economic interactions with the Taliban, the officials of these countries have sometimes expressed their concern and have urged the Taliban to form a comprehensive government in Afghanistan to resolve this impasse. However, a nationwide government is not acceptable to the Taliban at all. The Deputy Chairman of the Cabinet of Ministers and Chairman of the State National Security Committee of Kyrgyzstan, Kamchybek Tashiev, recently said at a meeting of security heads of the USSR's newly independent states in Northern Afghanistan:

"The concentration of terrorists in the northern provinces of Afghanistan has reached such dimensions that it threatens the integrity of the southern borders of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan."

These countries are extremely concerned about the existence of hundreds of bases of terrorist groups in northern Afghanistan and fear the start of a new proxy war or another big game by international terrorist organizations and their "supporters" in the region. However, the transfer and movement of terrorist groups in northern Afghanistan began during the time of Hamid Karzai with the support of the then Interior Minister Atmar and Ashraf Ghani to plant the ideological roots of terrorism in the north.

After the withdrawal of Americans and Westerners from Afghanistan, there will be excuses for America's involvement in the intelligence game, geopolitical competitions, and confronting its rivals in the region. According to reliable sources, the National Police of Afghanistan submitted a list of 24 terrorist groups in Afghanistan to the International Police (Interpol) on February 24, 2015. This list included 32 terrorist training centers with 85 leaders active against Afghanistan in Pakistan. Based on this list, nearly 168 large and small groups were engaged in terrorist activities in Afghanistan, with the number of fighters estimated at 60,000 to 100,000, who were fighting against the then Afghan government.

With the Taliban coming to power in Afghanistan, these groups have now moved to the north and settled in the northern provinces of the country from Panjshir to Badakhshan, Kunduz, Takhar, and Faryab. Each of these groups now has military bases in the mentioned provinces. At present, the Americans are not worried about this because, according to the agreement signed between the US and the Taliban in Doha, the Taliban are committed to confronting groups that the US considers "revolutionary or terror groups." The definition of terrorism depends on the interests of the countries involved in the great game around the world.

On the other hand, US President Joe Biden and NATO have emphasized that they will continue reconnaissance flights and, if necessary, air strikes against "terrorist groups" in Afghanistan. America's strategic haste to cooperate with Pakistan and the Taliban to fight ISIS has its roots in the controversial Doha Treaty. By providing forty million dollars per week to the Taliban, the United States considers this group an alternative to the republic and a cover for its proxy war.

The Dawn of New Proxy Wars: Implications of Taliban Rule

The northern regions of Afghanistan have held significant importance since the time of the first great game between the Tsars during the period of Peter the Great and Britain, and later during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, and subsequently, during the American presence in Afghanistan. In the current competition between Russia, China, and the United States, the significance of northern Afghanistan has increased due to the Wakhan Corridor and its suitability for "proxy wars." The northern provinces, especially Kunduz and the ancient region of Khandeshi, have been strategically important since ancient times. Kunduz and Kapisa were safe bases for national freedom fighters against invaders from Alexander the Great to the Sassanids, Genghis Khan, and the Safavids. From time to time, with the loss of one, the other became a bastion of defense against the invaders.

Due to the importance of the north, Pakistan's intelligence, as the heir of British interests in the region, has a special focus on it. During the first period of Taliban rule, thousands of individuals affiliated with the Taliban, Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, Sipah-e-Sahaba, Jaish-e-Mohammed, and other groups were relocated to northern Afghanistan. These relocations were based on strategic goals and the geopolitical utility of this region. The Dasht-e-Leili incident and the transfer of several thousand Taliban fighters and their allies from Kunduz to Karachi and Peshawar, based on an agreement between Pakistan and the United States at the time of the fall of the Taliban, clearly demonstrate the importance of the north and the military and intelligence maneuvers in this region.

Currently, the north of Afghanistan holds great geopolitical importance and is not only the axis of intelligence and proxy wars between Russia, China, and the United States, but also holds significance due to the proximity of the resistance forces and their access to the logistics channels of Asian nations. The distance of the north from the logistics channels of Western countries has made the Taliban a key player in the ongoing big game. The relocation of terrorist groups to the north and the creation of hundreds of bases due to the tight competition between Russia and China with the United States, especially after the conflicts in Ukraine, raises speculations about the beginning of a new big game in the region.

The tensions between regional and global powers have had a serious impact on the situation in northern Afghanistan. This impact is influenced by the increase in regional and global tensions, particularly the confrontation between China, Russia, and Iran with the United States and its

allies. It is now up to the resistance front to see how they can eradicate terrorist groups from the north by leveraging these opportunities and creating new movements. If successful, the Commonwealth countries will need to reassess their stance towards the Taliban's opposition. Otherwise, the current deadlock will persist, negatively affecting the spirit of cooperation among the people and resistance fronts. In this scenario, the Taliban and their foreign supporters will benefit.

Given the current strategic competition and the critical and dangerous stage in the Middle East, potential military conflict in Taiwan, and escalating tensions in Ukraine, defining and interpreting the outcome of the current big game is premature. However, these developments could accelerate or decelerate changes and transformations. The increasing internal divisions within the Taliban and the intensifying attacks from military fronts against the Taliban are factors that could disrupt the current equilibrium. The activities of the Taliban's opposition, including destroying important Taliban strongholds, creating new bases, mobilizing people, writers, analysts, and journalists, and seeking aid from the Commonwealth of Nations, will significantly impact the future of Afghanistan and the region.

There are notable internal divisions within the Taliban, such as between the factions led by Mullah Baradar and Haibatullah, as well as between the Kandhari and Helmandi factions, regarding the distribution of state resources, wealth, mines, drug trafficking, and money distribution. The information provided by their sponsoring countries will affect the pace and effectiveness of the developments in the north.

Increased unrest across the Amu Darya and intensified terrorist attacks in the Commonwealth of Nations have strained the patience of Azerbaijan, Armenia, Uzbekistan, Belarus, Tajikistan, Russia, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and Moldova, altering the bilateral equation. This is why the Taliban have been monitoring terrorist groups in northern Afghanistan. However, this oversight is not permanent; the various intelligence affiliations of terrorist groups in the north cannot be controlled by the Taliban. Thus, the foreign supporters of these groups play a crucial role in maintaining or disrupting the current situation in Afghanistan, particularly in the north, where the Taliban are unable to prevent it.

The Taliban have ideological commitments and strategic pacts with other terrorist groups that were their partners during the 20-year war with the United States. Each of these groups considers itself a key player in the Taliban's victory. Consequently, breaking these pacts is not easy and is viewed as an anti-Islamic act by the collaborating terrorist groups. One reason for the Taliban's failure to meet Pakistan's demand to stop TTP attacks is the existence of similar pacts.

Navigating the Quagmire: The Future of Northern Afghanistan.

In conclusion, it should be remembered that Afghanistan under the rule of the Taliban is turning into a powder keg, and the smallest spark could ignite the entire region. This is why the countries of the region and the world, both supporters and opponents of the Taliban, have sought to engage with the Taliban in various ways. However, behind this engagement lies the political, economic, and security exploitation of Afghanistan's underground resources. In general, it has the appearance of deterrence because regional and global authorities know that dealing with terrorist groups is more dangerous than playing with fire.

Meanwhile, the world watches as Pakistan burns, stoking flames with firewood laid by its own military. The countries of the region and the world must understand that terrorism is a barren pursuit that yields no benefits. The Taliban are now ensnared in the web of terrorism and are unable to save themselves or Afghanistan and its people. The Taliban conflict has no winners in any proxy war.

The proxy wars of jihadi groups against the Soviet Union, the Taliban's proxy wars against the US, and now the new proxy wars with ISIS in Afghanistan, which has become a breeding ground for global terrorists, will not yield tangible results. From the era of the first great game to the second and third rounds, the players have faced terrible and disgraceful defeats. Therefore, it would be logical for regional and global powers to stop competing and fueling proxy wars in Afghanistan. Instead, they should focus on saving the country from terrorism and helping its people, avoiding deceptive political interactions with the Taliban. "The world should recognize that the Taliban have neither national nor international legitimacy. The Taliban's oppressive, mono-ethnic, anti-human system, especially their blatant hostility towards women's rights, is clear evidence of their lack of popular support and the reason for their decline. The Taliban have been assigned an intelligence mission, and by ignoring criticism, the world risks missing the crucial message at the cost of the Afghan people's fate. Future generations will judge the international community harshly if it continues to play with the destiny of Afghanistan, leaving the Afghan people vulnerable and feeling disgust about the players on their soil

List of Terror Organizations: Terrorist Groups Operating in Northern Afghanistan

The groups mentioned encompass a range of terrorist organizations active in Afghanistan and neighboring regions. These groups operate under different leaderships and affiliations, Taliban group led by Mullah Baitullah, with deputies of Sirajuddin Haqqani, head of the Haqqani network, and Mullah Muhammad Yaquf, son of Mullah Muhammad Omar

- Taliban factions associated with Maulvi Mansour and Mullah Rasool, along with their deputies Mullah Baz Mohammad Harith, military deputy, and Mullah Mansour Dadullah, Mullah Sher Mohammad Akhundzadeh, and Abdul Manan Niazi, political deputies, active in provinces including Herat, Farah, Badghis, Faryab, Helmand, Zabul, Ghazni, and Paktia
- ISIS-affiliated groups such as Lashkar-e-Islami, Jamaat-ul-Harar, Karam Agency, Khyber Agency, Orakzai Agency, Hangu, and Peshawar, former border groups of Pakistan
- Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan, founded by Baitullah Masood, collaborating with Al-Qaeda, along with Amu, Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan, Sipah Sahaba, Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, and Harakat al-Jihad al-Islami
- Al-Qaeda and affiliated groups like The Islamic Movement or the Islamic Movement Party of Uzbekistan, led by Juma Namgani and Tahir Yoldash, and currently led by "Mujahid Osman Ghazi", active in provinces including Badakhshan, Takhar, Kunduz, Maimana, and Ghormach, affiliated with ISIS
- Al-Jihad al-Islami movement, founded by Fazlur Rahman Khalil and led by Qari Safiullah Akhtar
- Hezb-i-Islami Khalis, led by Anwar Haq Khalis
- Army Tayyaba, a Pakistani and Kashmiri group led by Hafiz Muhammad Saeed

- Lashkar-e-Islami, related to Khyber Agency and founded by Mufti Munir Shaker, with current leadership of Mangal Bagh
- Indian terrorist group led by Abdul Azim and Martyr Barry Gate
- East Turkestan Islamic Movement, a close partner of the Taliban and Al-Qaeda
- Jaish-e-Mohammed, a Kashmiri group led by Maulana Masood Azhar
- Haqqani network led by Sirajuddin Haqqani, known as an arm of the Pakistan Army
- Islamic Emirate of Waziristan, led by Haqqani
- Sipah Sahaba Pakistan, politically supporting Lashkar-e-Jhangvi and opposing Shiites
- Tehreek Nafaz Sharia Mohammadi, led by Safi Mohammad
- Islamic Jihad Alliance, claiming control over border areas between Afghanistan and Tajikistan
- Lashkar Jangavi, founded by Haq Nawaz Jangavi and Ishaq Malik, an anti-Shia Mujahideen movement close to ISI
- Mahaz Fadai group, a branch of Mullah Dadullah's group founded by Mullah Najibullah or Omar Khattab
- Brigade Guerrilla 055, Arabs associated with Al-Qaeda in the past, stationed in Rishkhor section and Balkh battle fortress, and Caucasus Emirates led by "Doku Umarov", active in Russia and the Caucasus
- Chechen, Amu, Islamic Party of Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan groups joining ISIS

The origin of these conflicts is rooted in funding from Saudi Arabia and Persian Gulf countries, with a significant portion ending up in the hands of Pakistani generals

.....to be continued.5 | Page