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Afghanistan: The Imperatives of Military Capacity Building by India

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Afghanistan in mid-2016 presents a bleak security picture with the country once again being subjected to series of suicide bombings in Kabul and Taliban again becoming active against the State as part of Pakistan Army's ISI- directed proxy war against Afghanistan.

India has legitimate security interests in the stability and security of Afghanistan arising not only from contemporary geopolitical factors but also from the long civilizational and political ties that have existed as part of their shared history and values of honour and respect for each other. In fact India-Afghan ties predate the creation of Pakistan in 1947.

Pakistan Army flustered that it has not been able to install a Pakistan-friendly Government in Kabul in the last three years has resorted to use its traditional and much-favoured use of proxy war, terrorist attacks and suicide bombings in Afghanistan, more targeted at Kabul, to draw global attention.

Pakistan Army has also been flustered that with changed United States perceptions over Pakistan's strategic utility on the Afghanistan problem, its window of opportunities for eliciting United States permissiveness on its Afghanistan military adventurism has shrunk considerably. Additionally, the United States decision to extend its residual military presence in Afghanistan coupled with US intensified warnings to Pakistan on terrorism sponsorship and providing safe havens for terrorists, besides reining-in Haqqanis terror attacks in Kabul tend to multiply Pakistan Army concerns.

Afghanistan having stood ravaged by two decades long military interventions needs urgent global resuscitation militarily and economically to safeguard its independence from Pak-inspired depredations. While global effort is always slow in materialisation, it is India as the regional

power that must step forward actively and assertively to put into effect a sustained programme of military capacity building of Afghanistan.

India has poured in billions of dollars in Afghanistan to build the Parliament House, restoration of the Presidential Palace, dams, Afghanistan's ring-road expressway and providing roads etc. linking Afghanistan to Iranian ports. These are magnificent gestures in expression of goodwill for the Afghan people. But these are not enough to contribute to Afghanistan's overall and comprehensive security and stability. Afghanistan more than ever needs to build up the military capabilities of the Afghan National Army to withstand Pakistan-inspired and aided aggression.

Afghanistan under both President Karzai and President Abdul Ghani and other Afghan dignitaries have been consistently requesting India to provide military hardware. But for some unexplainable reasons Indian responses in this direction have not been that actively forthcoming. But the time has now come for India to take a forceful call and build the military capabilities of the Afghan National Army.

India's military capacity building of the Afghan National Army has to proceed in tandem along two paths. The most immediate one is being for infusion of tanks, armoured personnel carriers and attack helicopters. In short, to provide punch to the Afghan National Army

The above can be implemented in two or three ways. The first one being to providing direct supplies from existing Indian military inventories. The second option is to let countries like Russia to provide military hardware to Afghanistan and India makes the payments for such military hardware. The third option is for India to refurbish old Soviet military hardware lying in Afghanistan.

The second part involves India providing military training assistance for the Afghan National Army with special emphasis on Special Forces training, commando operations and counter-insurgency operations. This military training team can be imparted within Afghanistan and also increasing the vacancies in Indian Army training establishments in India.

All these programs cannot be reduced to knee-jerk reactions and must follow long -range coordinated and integrated strategies. India should also prevail over the United States to move forcefully in this direction as the most vital stakeholder in Afghanistan's security and stability. In the past, despite the resources the United States did not permit the expansion of the Afghan National Army beyond strength of 150,000 respecting Pakistan Army's concerns. The Afghan National Army must be built to strength of 500,000 seeing the vast spread of Afghanistan and its porous borders since Pakistan continues to display its propensities to create turbulence in Afghanistan.

An additional reason has now come to the fore when India implicitly supported the independence upsurge of the people of Balochistan. In consequence Pakistan Army is likely to intensify its disruptive operations in Afghanistan through Pakistan Army terrorist groups' affiliates. Pakistan would be tempted to do this so as to throw a spanner in Afghanistan's overactive strategic involvement with India. This further reinforces India's imperatives for military capacity building of the Afghan National Army.

Geopolitically, it can be asserted that the United States and Iran should have no logical reasons to oppose India's efforts to enhance the military capabilities of the Afghan National Army. Afghanistan does not pose any military threat to them. It is the Pakistan Army and its proxy war, once again through the Taliban that is intent on reverting Afghanistan to Pakistan's proxy control. China possibly would be the only nation to oppose Indian initiatives in this direction not out of any principles or conviction but to please its conniving ally in the China-Pakistan Axis.

Concluding, one would like to highlight and emphasise that India has legitimate security interest in the security and stability of Afghanistan and strong imperatives therefore exist for India to undertake a massive and sustained drive to assist Afghanistan to build a 500,000 strong Afghan National Army equipped with the requisite military hardware to deter threats from any quarter effectively.

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