

Slumber of Winter's Sojourn

By Harriss Ali Akakhail

Winters, across Afghanistan are exacting and extremely harsh at northern side of the country. All major passes and gorges, running north to south and east to west are frozen at this fall and the limited number of access roads in Afghanistan is mostly out of order for vehicles to be play upon it. This climatic change makes the curves over war graphs goes down well and both varying sides i.e talibans and Afghan / Foreign forces takes a deep slumber, to regroup and recuperate well before the start of next spring.

For last 11 years, since the time talibans have announced and launched proper fighting seasons in a year, war commences in Afghanistan well at end of April in a calendar year and spikes up pace till November, amounting to almost 7 months duration. When the fighting season ends, talibans fizzle out for a slumber of winter's sojourn along with their families, wounded ones recuperates and those who left for eternal abode are being prayed upon. This is the time when talibans elders sits and calculates expenses, dead, injured, attrition ratio, areas gained and lost along with future predictions and game plans. Winters are crucial in a sense that money earned from drug protection routes all over the year are filled in the coffers and payments are done to the weapon suppliers over the black market. While on the other hand afghan and foreign forces also gets off the hook from talibans onslaught and takes time out to rest, revise modules, check on financial exercises, look after the injured, count on the dead ones and jot down future course of actions. So all in all, winters in Afghanistan are actually the time when there is complete lock down from the horrors of war and mayhem of bloodbath.

After US President Donald trump announced his afghan policy review in late august 2017, present winter does not seems to

be the one like observer have gauged in last 11 years. During this fall, U.S. /NATO forces are doubling the size of Afghan Special Forces, amounting to 37,000 in numbers, as they seek a future where victories against talibans and ISIS are attained by Afghan Special Forces. In this regard, few months back an Afghan Special Forces corp is also being raised at Kabul. This Special Forces corp is now being backed up by air assets like turbo prop A-29 super Tucanno close air support aircrafts and MD-530F attack helicopters along with Cessna 208 caravan aircraft for intelligence and resonance purposes. This corp size strength shall be ready by all means till the month of April this year, when the fresh fighting seasons beings. Also during this fall, close to 6000 additional U.S. / NATO troops are in process of landing and getting adjusted to Afghanistan's war. One more vivid change by this fall is that every night there are 8 to 10 daring air raids over Taliban and ISIS-K (khurasan) hideouts across Afghanistan by US Special Forces operators followed by relentless drone and Jet airstrikes. Indeed it's giving sleepless nights to the talibans / ISIS-K fighters and the old fashion sojourn in winters is a forgone story now. Spike in night raids and drone strikes was perceived after U.S president gave complete leverage to his forces to attain victory by best of all means. Till now, numerical exercises of night raids / drone strikes have earned few dividends to U.S. forces in Afghanistan like the killing of talibans Special Forces commander, Haji Nasir and Al Qaeda important commander, Umer Khitab.

US forces commanders in Afghanistan and afghan top leadership in particular have always complained about a quarter of Taliban fighters, mostly the top leadership, fizzling out to afghan refugee camps in Pakistan during winters for a low activity life oscillating between their families. They claim that winters is an opportune time to pluck these high value targets but limitations bounds them as they are not in afghanistan. But this time, that's even not the case as Pakistan have strict check and balance system over the

borders. Proper visa restrictions are imposed for incoming Afghans and process of registration of all refugees living inside Pakistan have been complete. So, gone are the days of such hypothetical claims and this fall, Afghan Taliban top tier shall all be there, inside Afghanistan and it's up to US intelligence to be agile enough to nab these wanted men.

Then, exceptions are always there, there may be few amongst the top Taliban leadership who would still reside over in Pakistan and that's the real bone of contention presently tangled between U.S. and Pakistan. As U.S. asks Pakistan to nab them and hand them over while Pakistan recoils back that, we don't have any information of their movements inside Pakistan and if you have any knowhow of it, identify and we shall act on it. Over numerous occasions in past 3 months, intelligence was shared by U.S. and Pakistani forces promptly acted but to no avail except for one case when the Canadian / US couple was released from the clutches of Haqqanies near Kohat city of Khyber Pukhtoonkhuwa province.

How well this strategy of preparations at this fall like strengthening the strength of Afghan commandos along with air assets and relentless aerial bomb runs would be deduced within next few months' time but during the present course, U.S. commanders in Afghanistan needs to realize that killing top 5 or 10 of Taliban won't be a bounty over here as they needs to focus more on the lines of communications and logistics of Taliban. From where they get an ample supply of weapons and explosives, that question needs to be addressed. Pressurizing Pakistan to get the top 5 won't draw a relative desired results as alternative command structure always persists within Taliban ranks. If one commander dies, within no time the next takes over and he paddles the accelerator with more vigor. Prime example in this regard would be of Taliban ameer, Mullah Akhtar Muhammad Mansoor or Haqqanies influential commander Sangeen Zadran as when they both got a hit from a drone strike at different occasions but within no time

alternative leadership filled the vacuum.



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