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Helmand Attacks and Re-emergence of Taliban

Muhammad Rasool Shah

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Ongoing attack and resistance of Taliban in some parts of Helmand is alarming to all those who don't want the present democratic system to end and country to fall in hands of Taliban or numerous militant factions based on religion, ethnicity or sectarian divide. There are so many reasons for Helmand to be so productive that it was the birth place of Taliban and it can once again become the point of emergence of them. Just like the birth of Taliban in 1994, Helmand can give way to them to spread to Kandahar and also capture the important border city of Herat endangering the overall economic activity of the country and movement of forces in the center of the country.

The first important factor that entitles Helmand for this is the wide-spread illiteracy which gives birth to religious extremism. With the exception of the provincial headquarter Lashkargah and the city of Grishk, Helmand is full of villages and small towns where people have never had any approach to modern thinking of enlightened ideas and also the ability to look at the true face of Islamic teachings. The situation is exacerbated by many centuries old rigid tribal traditions where any kind of education or effort of learning is badly discouraged. In such suffocating circumstances, it remains no surprise as why this area should not be the breeding area of strict ideas and large number of people who love and follow these ideas. In the same way, the love to Islam and religion is not based on understanding or rational desire but the blind love that may become detrimental to the followers and the religion if it goes out of the boundaries specified by the religion itself. It is the reason why there exist very few schools in rural areas and majority of

them are not functional. This condition is itself a problem and also giving birth to numerous other problems. On the other hand, there are large numbers of Madrasas or institutes of religious education. There is not present any tangible evidence that they promote religious extremism or work as places where children are given the military training but most definitely, they never give way to any kind of modern teaching or understanding. Some of these madrasas got polluted with militancy after the events followed by 9-11 when Taliban were ousted of power and they started their struggle to resume their power by fighting Afghan and foreign troops on Afghan land. It is also a fact that large number of children belonging to the affluent Helmand families are being sent to Pakistani madrasas present in the backward cities of Quetta and some cities of Sindh and Punjab. Majority of them are getting educated in madrasas which are not liked even by Pakistanis because they have come under the strong influence of militant elements. A report was also issued by our intelligence in which Pakistani government was accused of supporting the Taliban present in Quetta city of Pakistan where their point of activity are madrasas and in these madrasas, majority of the students belong to the backward Pashtun areas of Afghanistan.

Another problem is present in the form of poppy cultivation. In Afghanistan, people of Helmand are considered to be rich and they earned this name and title not because of any business or professional skill but by poppy cultivation on a very grand scale that Afghanistan is the prime producer and exporter of addictive drugs in the world and this trend has remained unchanged for many years now. Taliban legalized the poppy cultivation in their rule and it was for two reasons; one was to generate revenue for their government that was under strict international scrutiny and second to win the hearts of people who were suffering from the economic disparity. Once the people of Helmand and some other neighboring states got used to the high income from poppy cultivation, no other crop was going to satisfy them. It is the reason why, government of Taliban was finished but government could not control the poppy cultivation in the area and our country has since remained the major poppy cultivator even in the democratic government that was badly against this cultivation and spent millions to destroy the crops in these provinces but to no avail. In some areas where government made the people turn to other crops either by hook or by the crook but a recent report had mentioned that militant groups were forcing the people to increase the land for poppy cultivation. In the present scenario as well, a chunk of the income generated from poppy cultivation ends in the hands of Taliban who use this money to carry out their activities and buy weapons and finance their movement.

Helmand also shares a big border with the neighboring Pakistan that has always been blamed of interfering in the issues of Afghanistan. After the Taliban were ousted, there was peace and silence for a couple of years, but later on activities and functionality of Taliban started which started spreading to different parts of the country. Our government and spying agencies have since then relentlessly accused Pakistan of providing shelter, training and all other necessary support to Taliban for destabilizing the government in the country. Almost the same findings were claimed by our security forces in the recent Taliban attack in Helmand. Our security forces claimed that Pakistani soldiers were fighting in the shape of Taliban and they were not able to speak or understand any of the local languages.

The situation has also been exacerbated by the present summer season. In all the summer seasons, country witnesses a sharp increase in the attacks of Taliban in different parts of the

country especially in Helmand and Kandahar where tree-covered mountains and forests provide them with an ideal shelter to attack and hide.

With all the different reasons in mind, the situation in Helmand is not something of routine. More than two weeks have passed and our forces are still struggling to control the area and resume the writ of government. Initially, the fight started when Taliban attacked in large numbers the police checkpoints in Sangin district killing and injuring large number of police. Later on, the fresh deployments and assistance by National Army turned the things around and Taliban had to retreat. They also received fresh help and in this way, the fight got extended to some other parts of the province like Musa Qala, Nawzad and Kajaki. Having a look at the acuteness of the situation, our forces were strengthened by continued deployments of army and police force in the area. After the intensive fighting of many days, the area was cleared of the militants that resulted in the killing of hundreds of militants while dozens of police and national army soldiers and officers also sacrificed their lives for the security of the country. However, the danger is not completely over yet and Taliban are also receiving fresh reinforcements and the fight is in progress.

Many fear that the attack of Taliban in Helmand should not be treated like routine Taliban attacks. In the wake of re-emergence of Al-Qaeda in form of ISIS in Iraq, Taliban are also trying to get their rebirth and Helmand is the best place for the purpose. If not controlled properly, they may cause threat to the government by capturing other areas after coming into power in Helmand. If the efforts of last twelve years have to be saved, all the possible options should be utilized. In this regard, first important thing is to cut their supply line so that they should not be able to prolong their resistance. Patrolling of border along with Pakistan must also be intensified so that any kind of infiltration from across the border should be stopped. Their sympathizers present in the villages and towns of Helmand and other provinces should be pointed out and dealt with properly.

At present, the situation is under the control of government and it is in position to fix the things, but once it slipped out of it, it would be very difficult to save this country from falling into the hands of militants.