

## **INTELLIGENCE WITHOUT AMBITION: NATIONAL DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE (NDS) OF AFGHANISTAN**

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The US so called war on terror in Afghanistan that impacted liberal societies in the West unfathomably in many ways have now entered a crucial phase. Russia and China have joined the theatre of war as the strongest stakeholders, and dancing in the combat zones. After a dishonourable and discreditable defeat in Afghanistan, the US President Donald Trump prepared a strategy to pull thousands of US troops out of the country, but faced irritability in White House and Pentagon. The allies also got out of joint and felt sore due to their whitewashing and embarrassment. They have now dog-tired to stand or act professionally.

The US and NATO forces used all means of viciousness, including unwarrantable dog-rape, and dropped the most powerful Nonnuclear-Mother-of-Bombs which caused incurable disease, death and suffering. They bombed houses, killed children and women with impunity, destroyed the Kunduz hospital and MSF's fully functioning trauma centre, but never succeeded in winning the loyalty of the Afghan nation.<sup>1</sup> Resentful by their kill and burn tactics, Afghan army turned its guns on their officers and soldiers-killed hundreds inside forts and battlefield.<sup>1</sup> Throughout its three decades of war in Afghanistan, Washington's military operations have never been helpful to stabilize the country. Its strongest intelligence infrastructure failed (Fixing Intel, General Flynn 2010) to understand the mental outlook of the people of Afghanistan.

After the fall of the Taliban regime in 2001, the CIA and Pentagon reinvented Afghan intelligence and trained it on controversial streaks. The CIA, and Pentagon armed, trained, and used NDS for their own operational purposes. Afghan intelligence units needed more advanced technology, intercept capabilities and cross-communication between the National Directorate of Security (NDS) and security forces in the field, but the US and NATO forces failed to meet their requirements. The National Directorate of Security (NDS) continued to suffer key intelligence capabilities, especially in gathering intelligence information from remote areas in order to prevent neighbouring states from interfering in the internal affairs of Afghanistan.

In spite of their sweat and continuous combat since the invasion of October 2001, the CIA, MI6, and Eye-5 Intelligence Alliance failed to put the Taliban insurgency in nutshell. With the US forces demoralised

faces, and the Taliban aggressive fighters-equipped with night-vision and sophisticated weapons, airstrikes became the last tenuous line of defence.<sup>2</sup> The failure of America's intervention in Afghanistan offered broader insight into the limits to its global power. President Trump, instead of the promised fundamentally different approach, repeated President Obama's go off in smoke and miss and boat strategy-to cut a deal with the Afghan Taliban, for which the U.S. needed the full backing of Pakistan's military establishment.<sup>3</sup>

Failure of Afghan intelligence agencies to defeat the Taliban in Afghanistan has deeply gloomed international community that consequences of wrongly designed counterinsurgency and counterterrorism strategies are consistently substandard. Disorder and complications the United States and its allies created in Afghanistan are more evident than ever before. Through its appalling and unsuccessfully engineered strategies and military adventures, the CIA, MI6, the NATO spy agencies, and Pentagon facilitated the rise of a new terrorist group (ISIS) that never existed prior to the war on terrorism in Afghanistan. The US civilian and military intelligence fashioned a strategic mistake-reasoning that military action can put the state back in order, but unfortunately failed. The British MI6 came to nothing to collect high-quality intelligence information from Helmand, while the EU intelligence agencies were also running wrong horses to meet security challenges in Afghanistan.<sup>4</sup>

With the geographical expansion of the Islamic state (ISIS), and the emergence of Khurasan group (KIS) in Jalalabad, Russia and China comprehended that these developments were a direct threat to their national security and territorial integrity. Russia established its own Taliban, and adorned the group with sophisticated weapons to counter the Islamic State and exponentially growing US influence in Afghanistan and Central Asia.<sup>5</sup> China supported the Russian plan. Russia also reinvented its old intelligence and political contacts in Afghanistan, while China deployed its army alongside Afghan-China border. Russian military intelligence (GRU) and MGB organized its old cadre in Afghanistan and created an environment, in which neither the US and NATO military commanders, nor Afghanistan's army commanders have been capable to cruise between small and big cities in open air.<sup>6</sup>

In the contemporary international system, states are the fundamental customer of classified and processed intelligence information for security, law enforcement and policymaking. However, Islamic State (ISIS) and the Taliban also perceive a need to collect and process advance information to protect their networks against the theft of their strategic, defence and political secrets. As intelligence is more than an organised collection of targeted information, processing can include technical issues such as transcribing and translating intercepted telephone conversations and verifying the reliability of information. In modern philosophy, intelligence involves a real struggle with human opponents, carried on to gain some advantage over them. Michael Warner understands that argument over the definition of intelligence resembles perhaps nothing so much as a trademark dispute. In essence, the debate among intelligence experts has caused deep confusion over the basic job of an intelligence agency during war and peace times.<sup>7</sup>

During the last 14 years, we have heard or seen no success story from the National Directorate of Security (NDS) in the country because it adopted a political culture and its leadership acted like politicians. The fall of Kunduz, consecutive terror attacks in Kabul and the abrupt appearance of (ISIS) in Afghanistan, raised important questions about the credibility and competency of the Afghan intelligence agencies. Before the Taliban attack on Kunduz, NDS operatives safely left the city without informing the

government in Kabul.<sup>8</sup> Large-scale desertion of the Afghan army soldiers, intelligence units and the police enabled the Taliban to enter the city unopposed. After their capture of the city, they looted weapons, including tanks. The president's appointed investigative team in its 30-page summary report also noted that there was coordination among the police, intelligence and Afghan army commanders.

The CIA and Pentagon killed innocent patients and doctors shamelessly and apologised that their five billion dollar intelligence computer system went offline the day of the bombing on Kunduz hospital. Human rights groups termed it a serious violation of human rights and an unprecedented war crime. In fact, writing on the intelligence mechanism and operation of the NDS is an industrious task as there is limited information available to analysts and researchers in libraries and market. The NDS is a remnant of the Khidmat-e-Etlaat-e-Dulat (KHAD), established in the 1980s, and trained by KGB experts. However, from 1980 to the collapse of the Afghan state in 1992, no intelligence reforms have been undertaken by successive governments in the country.

In 1992, the mujahedeen undermined the basic structure of intelligence and used it against each other. In 2002, when the CIA reorganised the scattered pieces of Afghan intelligence under the name of NDS and trained its officers, two ideological camps emerged. The Soviet trained agents and CIA trained agents opposed each other, and established secret contacts with various mafia groups across the country. The presence of Russian and Chinese intelligence in Afghanistan further complicated the process of intelligence sharing and cooperation between Afghan and western intelligence agencies in the country. The state and system of government has ultimately been hijacked by these agencies. The secret war between Russian, Chinese and US Defence clandestine intelligence agency in northern Afghanistan raised serious question about the intensifying great game in the country, which might possibly prompt a destructive nuclear war in Central Asia.

The exponentially spreading web of foreign espionage in the region and the recruitment of Afghans agents for it cause fear and anxiety. Dr Abdullah in his recent statement raised concern about the existence of foreign spies within the state institutions. "Double agents are more dangerous than insurgents," he said.<sup>9</sup> The fall of Kunduz, Pakistan's re-engagement in the peace process and policy differences between the president and Intelligence Chief Rahmatullah Nabil forced him to resign. He was, in fact, unprofessional, and an incompetent chief who knew nothing about the way intelligence operates. He was acting like a politician.<sup>10</sup>

His precursors were also street children who made the agency ethnicised, sectarianised and regionalised. Now, with the appointment of Major General Masoud Andarabi as the chief of the NDS, it was hoped that he could introduce some structural reforms and changes within the controversial intelligence infrastructure of his half Sovietised and half Americanised agency. Yesteryears' news stories showed that former Afghan intelligence chiefs also acted like politicians and interfered in the decision making process in the country.<sup>11</sup>

Distrust between the government and intelligence chiefs affected friendly relations between Afghanistan and its neighbours. They openly issued statements on television channels and criticised Presidents and their diplomatic approach. They opposed Pakistan's role in the peace process and branded the country an enemy of the Afghans. The way the NDS operates needs to be changed now, introducing wide-ranging intelligence reforms to make effective the NDS and its countrywide networks, which may lead the fight

against ISIS and the Taliban in the right direction. The Afghan leadership needs to depoliticise the agency and expel illiterate elements appointed on ethnic and sectarian lines. The mujahedeen and Taliban supporters within the intelligence agency are making things worse. The roots of the NDS must be re-established in the south and east, and the influence of drug smugglers and war criminals needs to be undermined.

The stories of the failure of Afghan intelligence agencies and their political and religious affiliations and loyalties have badly affected military strategies and counter insurgency measures of NATO and US intelligence circles; secret political and military reports are feared to have gone into the hands of war criminals, regional states and the Taliban insurgents. As per the nature of their controversial work, Afghan agents belong to various ethnic and political groups; therefore, they are bound to report to their masters. Like the Afghan police and army, intelligence network has also been divided between states, warlords, NGOs and foreign intelligence agencies. On July 13, 2012, Khaama Press reported that intelligence organisations of neighbouring states had acquired Afghan intelligence cards and operated independently.<sup>12</sup>

There are many sections within the intelligence agencies; some report about the NATO, US, UK and ISAF military activities to the Taliban; some report to ‘war criminals’; some report to Karim Khalili; some report to the vice president and leader of the Northern Alliance and some report to Iran and Pakistan. An addition to the political and ethnic influence of the Taliban and the former Mujahedeen war criminals in KHAD, the influence of foreign intelligence networks is further making the task of the agency controversial. Recently, a source within the agency told me that the leakage of many important political and military reports has put in danger the lives of many Afghan and NATO soldiers. From a membership card to important intelligence reports, everything is for sale cheaply.<sup>13</sup>

All players in the battlefield used Afghan intelligence for their own purposes while the recruitment of its members on ethnic basis is more worrisome. Experts say that this is the main cause of the failure of the Afghan, US and NATO forces in undermining insurgency and terrorism in Afghanistan. Mujahedeen, Taliban, Iran, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, India, China and Russia play their own roles. Afghan intelligence is playing a double game, providing false information to international community about the military plans of insurgents. The former Pakistani president Musharraf once alleged that Afghan intelligence was being used by the RAW against Pakistan. “Afghan intelligence, the Afghan president and the Afghan government don’t talk of them. I know what they do. They, by design, mislead the world...The Afghan intelligence is entirely under the influence of Indian intelligence. We know that.” Mr Musharraf said.<sup>14</sup>

The way intelligence works is a joke. Appointments on political and ethnic bases are an irksome story. No professional measures of intelligence are adopted; every sectarian and ethnic member of the agency is bound to report his leader, not to help the state in fighting Taliban insurgency. In his well-written book, Michael Herman understands, “We have already seen how national intelligence can be used for mediation and conflict resolution, including such means as its provision to potential antagonists as a stabilising measure; its use in international cooperation on counter terrorism and limiting international arms transfer; and the verification of arms control and other international agreements. Afghan intelligence with its non-professional strategies and security measures, never served the interests of the Afghan state, it served the interest of other states”.<sup>15</sup>

In October 2012, a radicalised member of the Afghan intelligence blew himself up using a suicide vest, killing two US soldiers and four Afghan intelligence men. This is a new and secret tactic of war against the US and NATO forces. The prominent Afghan intellectual and historian, Muhammad Hassan Kakar, in his research book (1982-2004) complains, “The Afghan society may now be regarded a murderous society. The sad thing about it is that there is no investigation for murder cases. Human life has become the life of sparrow, and the principle that might is right dominates. In the past, murder cases were investigated not only among the people where the murder had taken place but also among neighbours, who were summoned to the security centres for questioning. In this way social conscience against murder was awakened.”<sup>16</sup>

On December 13, 2014, the NATO and International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) mission in Afghanistan came to an end with the transfer of security responsibilities to the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) but they could not succeed in establishing the writ of the government in all parts of the country. The challenges of building a strong army for the country remains a dream because the power of the central government depends on negotiations with the Taliban, Islamic State (IS) and regional criminal militias. In the US-led war on terrorism in Afghanistan and the ongoing civil wars in the Middle East and Pakistan, professional intelligence was the only way to assess the strength and lethality of terrorists and insurgent groups. However, the Afghan government never focused on reforming the National Directorate of Security (NDS), Khadamat-e-Aetela’at-e-Dawlati (KHAD) or strengthening the intelligence structure.<sup>17</sup>

The withdrawal of US and NATO intelligence staff from Afghanistan (2014) and the desertion of NDS professional officers to join the Taliban and private militias has left a vacuum that has facilitated IS and the Taliban in their fight against the unity government. Regrettably, one of the major problems of Afghan intelligence is that the relationship between the local population and policy makers has broken down. Two weeks ago, during ISIS’s attacks on Kunduz province, the NDS’s local officials could not accurately estimate the Afghan army’s strength and resources. The NDS misled the army commander to take pre-emptive action and disrupt the terrorists’ supply line. Since the role of intelligence agencies in the Afghan conflict has expanded and they now are a core element in conflict management, coordination and cooperation between the NDS and policing agencies is important.<sup>18</sup>

The NDS does not share all information with the police department and has failed to provide intelligence information to policy makers, Afghan army commanders or other agencies about IS and Taliban activities. The other major challenge is the lack of experience and education within the NDS’s ranks. They have no knowledge of modern intelligence systems or their role in conflict management across the world. Another challenge is adapting intelligence to local needs. The NDS supports and provides intelligence information to leaders, commanders and warlords of a specific community because the Sovietised agency still needs to be adapted to Afghanistan.

The Afghan Military Intelligence (AMI) is also facing numerous difficulties in collecting information about the war strategies of IS and Taliban commanders from remote districts. The agency lacks trained officers to reach remote districts or even those outside the provincial headquarters to interact with the local population. If the AMI and NDS agents in war zones try to collect analyse and process intelligence information, their efforts can allow policy makers and the army commanders to discern friend from foe,

and thus apply professional measures with precision and minimal collective damage, human or material.

A major portion of intelligence information collection and analysis for countering insurgency in Afghanistan is labour intensive and relies on the local commanders being able to interact with farmers, Maliks, educated people and religious clerics regularly. The agencies do not rely on modern methods and cannot differentiate between Pakistani and Afghan Pashtuns or between Afghan Tajiks, Turks and their Central Asian friends. The NDS has often been repudiated by parliamentarians, press analysts and ordinary Afghans for its unprofessional modes of operation, torture and death in custody. The agency has been targeting specific communities and operating on ethnic lines since 2001. Because the agency's roots are in the north, most of its agents do not know the security parameters of the southern, eastern and western provinces of Afghanistan.

Afghan intelligence agencies ultimately rely on human intelligence because they still lack the availability of modern intelligence collection technologies. The NDS and RAMA (a research and intelligence agency) have a weak human intelligence network in the cities and most of their sources are unreliable. The information they receive is useless because the agencies are unable to analyse or process it. There are numerous factors that hinder the performance of the Afghan intelligence agencies. For instance, many NDS agents cannot use Facebook, e-mail and the internet for intelligence purposes. After the US invasion in 2001, the Afghan National Military Intelligence Centre (ANMIC) was established to support senior military commanders in the battlefield but the president and army chief have not been satisfied with its performance in the past.<sup>19</sup> The Directorate of Policing Intelligence (DPI), which provides intelligence information about the arrest and prosecution of criminals, National Information Management System (NIMS), Wolfhound Information System (WLS), National Target Exploitation Centre (NTEC) and dozens of other military and police intelligence organisations have so far failed to lead countrywide military operations in the right direction.<sup>20</sup>

Two months ago, ISIS kidnapped 31 people from Zabul province but Afghan intelligence was unable to determine their whereabouts. After two months, the government swapped 26 prisoners for 19 hostages and millions of dollars. On May 14, 2015, Tolo News reported the closure of 69 schools in Uruzgan province due to the security situation. Some 14 civilians, including nine foreigners, were killed after Taliban gunmen stormed a guesthouse on the outskirts of Kabul.<sup>21</sup> On May 16, the Pajhwok News Agency reported that IS had kidnapped 27 passengers in Sayed Karam district of the south-eastern Paktia province. The residents said gunmen took passengers with them in Badam Kanda. The Taliban forced passengers out of 30 vehicles and took them to an undisclosed location. All these fatalities occurred due to the inability of NDS and AIM to inform the authorities in time.<sup>22</sup>

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