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Submitted by asiaadmin2 on Wed, 09/12/2012 - 06:59

Paper No. 5010

20-April-2012

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All is not yet lost in Afghanistan. The Taliban and its affiliates such as the so-called Haqqani Network are alive and active not only in the interior provinces, but even in Kabul. They still retain the surprise element in a large measure. Their morale is undented. So too their capability to improvise and innovate complex attacks on multiple targets using multiple modus operandi. The flow of suicide volunteers for their operations is not showing signs of drying up.

2. Their Tet-like co-ordinated attacks in Kabul and some provinces on April 15, 2012, were almost as spectacular as the co-ordinated attacks launched by the Vietcong on the Vietnamese New Year's Day (called Tet) in 1968, but not as effective and as lethal.

3. Just as the US and South Vietnamese intelligence were taken by surprise by the Vietcong attacks of 1968, the US and the Afghan intelligence were also taken by surprise. They had failed to detect the infiltration of the cadres of the Taliban and its affiliates into the areas to be targeted and their preparations for the attacks. It is easy to infiltrate men undetected, but should have been difficult to infiltrate RPGs and other medium weapons and the explosive devices if the physical security barriers had functioned effectively.

4. The fact that neither the intelligence agencies nor the physical security barriers could detect the smuggling of such weapons into Kabul and other cities indicates that the Taliban has probably built up caches of arms and ammunition in different parts of the country that could be used for such surprise attacks.

5. While there was thus a worrisome failure of intelligence and physical security as there was in Saigon and surrounding areas in 1968, the Afghan Security Forces----unlike their South Vietnamese counterparts--- have shown a remarkable agility to recover quickly from the surprise and retaliate and repulse the attacks. Whereas the South Vietnamese Army---with odd exceptions---literally folded up before the Vietcong's wave of attacks, the Afghan security forces stood and fought valiantly thereby denying a spectacular victory to the Taliban and its associates. This speaks highly of their training, reflexes and motivation.

6. Whereas the US failed to train and mould the South Vietnamese Army into an effective fighting force, they have done a better job of their training in Afghanistan. The Americans should slow down their pull-out from Afghanistan and spend more time and money for further training the Afghan security forces.

7. It may not be a walk-over for the Taliban and its affiliates in Afghanistan as many of us fear it would be. The Afghan security forces could still prevail if they maintain their unity. It is the lack of unity among soldiers of different ethnic origin that had in the past proved the bane of Afghanistan. After the withdrawal of the Soviet troops in the late 1980s, the Soviet trained Afghan Army headed by Najibullah fought valiantly against the Mujahideen and repeatedly repulsed their attacks.

8. But once Najibullah, a Pashtun, and Rashid Dostum, an Uzbek, fell out and many Uzbeks deserted from the Army, the effectiveness of Najibullah's Army evaporated, paving the way for the Mujahideen take-over. Pakistan is hoping a similar scenario will be repeated after the US troops withdraw, but this should not be allowed to. The ability of President Karzai to maintain inter-ethnic unity will determine whether history will be repeated in Afghanistan.

9. The other ever-worrying danger is the infiltration of the Taliban into the security forces and intelligence agencies and the creation of sleeper cells which can be activated at short notice. This has to be guarded against by strengthening the Karzai Government's counter-intelligence capability.

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