
IS WEAKENED IN AFGHANISTAN, CLAIMS UNSC REPORT

- 09.12.2016

The Times OF India, 08 Dec 2016

Despite impressions to the contrary, the presence of terror group Islamic State (ISIS/Daesh) in Afghanistan has significantly weakened from 2015 to end 2016. This is the observation by the UN Security Council's 1267 monitoring committee, which recently issued its seventh update on the security situation in Afghanistan. The 1267 monitoring committee's findings on ISIS is distinctly different from the Pakistan-Russia narrative which is pushing ISIS as the greatest threat in Afghanistan.

"The position of ISIL in Afghanistan has distinctly weakened since 2015." Quoting Afghan government officials, the report said, "at the high point of its influence in 2015, the group had been able to temporarily control up to nine districts in Nangarhar Province. Currently, however, the most active part of the group has been reduced to influence in, at most, three and a half districts within the province." The growing number of ISIS-Taliban clashes had contributed to their denuded control over territory.

The committee noted the "number of ISIL fighters in eastern Afghanistan had dropped to about 1,600 ... located mainly in the districts of Deh Bala, Kot, Achin and Naziyan in Nangarhar Province. About 200 ISIL fighters were based in Kunar province."

The UNSC panel observed that around half of ISIS members in Afghanistan were foreign, "with a large portion of fighters hailing from the Afghanistan-Pakistan border" and returning Afghan fighters. ISIS pays its fighters a joining fee of around \$500, and offer \$1000 to Taliban fighters willing to switch over. ISIS, the report says, runs a fairly effective propaganda programme, apparently led by a professional video producer and journalist, a graduate of the University of Jalalabad, Sultan Aziz Ezan. But ISIS' core funding in Afghanistan still comes from the parent body in Iraq and Syria, through hawala channels.

As Ashraf Ghani, Afghan president clarified in Amritsar last week, Afghanistan's precarious security situation is mainly foreign-fuelled, with the largest coming from Pakistan. The UNSC report appears to bear him out, listing four kinds of foreign fighters. The first group of over 7,500 comprises those "who had fled Pakistan owing to the military operation Zarb-e-Azb and were currently fighting alongside the Afghan Taliban. Those fighters hail from the Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan (TTP), Lashkar-e-Tayyiba, Lashkar i Jhangvi, Jaish-i-Mohammed, Harakat ul-Mujahidin, etc." LeT fighters, the report says provide training to new Taliban recruits in Kandahar, while HUM fighters are working with the Haqqani network.

The second group, according to the report, comes from China, Russia and Central Asia. "Those

militants are currently fighting with IMU, the Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM), the Islamic Jihad Group, Jundallah and Jamaat Ansarullah." Then there are "fighters of Uzbek and Tajik origin" who may be "members of the Katibat Imam Bukhari group who took the oath of allegiance to the new leader of Taliban, Haibatullah Akhundzada."

The third group is about 1,600 fighters, mainly of ISIS persuasion, located in Nangarhar and Kunar provinces. They mainly come from three agencies in Pakistan: Orakzai, Khyber and Bajaur.

The fourth group is mainly Al-Qaida, but these have lost a lot of relevance in Afghanistan, the report notes. "The members of al-Qaida are not significantly engaged in fighting in Afghanistan but act mainly as embedded trainers and advisers to the Taliban, the Haqqani Network, Lashkar-e-Tayyiba and IMU."

Speaking to journalists last week, Gen John Nicholson, commander of US-NATO troops in Afghanistan said, there was concern about the malign influence of external actors, particularly Pakistan, Russia and Iran.

"We're concerned about the external enablement of the insurgent or terrorist groups inside Afghanistan, in particular where they enjoy sanctuary or support from outside governments," Nicholson said. The convergence of terrorist groups is also a continuing issue, he said. "[With] 13 [terror groups] in Afghanistan and seven in Pakistan, the morphing of these groups into more virulent strains or the fact that sometimes they cooperate ... the whole becomes greater than the sum of the parts," Nicholson said, adding the groups participate from complementary alliances, capabilities and networks, which requires continuous pressure to prevent them from becoming "something worse."

Kaynak/Source: