



## Centre for Air Power Studies (CAPS)

Forum for National Security Studies (FNSS)

### UNDERSTANDING *Azm*: THE TALIBAN'S 2015 SPRING

#### OFFENSIVE

*Nandita Palrecha*  
Research Intern, CAPS

The year 2015 has heralded the 'Transformation Decade' (2015-2024) in Afghanistan, with the hope that emphasis on the enablement of security during the previous "Transition Decade" (2004-2014) would have laid a favourable foundation for the development of the country. However, the first quarter of 2015 has seen a rise in the level of deaths and injuries to Afghan civilians and troops.<sup>1</sup> Such an elevated level of violence in Afghanistan saw further escalation with the Taliban's launch of the 'Spring Offensive' towards the end of April. Since its commencement, the Offensive has swelled in scale and direction and has therefore become a major concern for peace and stability in Afghanistan.

#### ***Azm* or the Spring Offensive**

As has been seen in the previous years, the melting of snow in April eases the movement of the Taliban. Moreover, the completion of the harvest of the poppy plants towards the end of April provides the Taliban with the monetary resources and time to engage in action.

This year, the Taliban declared its intent to launch the Offensive on April 22 and subsequently initiated it on April 24. This Offensive referred to as *Azm*, has comprised attacks on government institutions, foreign establishments and military targets in the country.



## Centre for Air Power Studies (CAPS)

Forum for National Security Studies (FNSS)

The Taliban claims that *Azm* “portrays [the] jihadi determination and strong will of the Afghan nation against the American invasion and conveys a clear message that our people want to end the occupation.”<sup>2</sup> Thus, *Azm* (which means Resolution in Dari) has been positioned against Operation Resolute Support, which consists of approximately a 13,000 international force, which is stationed in Afghanistan to advise, assist and train the Afghan forces. However, the Taliban have never viewed the presence of foreign troops in favourable light. This becomes evident in the launch of rockets on Bagram Airbase and Kabul Airport, followed by assaults on diplomatic institutions in Kabul in May.

Moreover, *Azm* also “gives out a clear message to the sons of the nation who have been influenced by the futile propaganda of the invaders and recruited in the ranks of the so-called national army, national police and militias to further the interests of the invaders....”<sup>3</sup> Such a perception of the government bodies as “stooges of the foreign invaders” becomes obvious with the attack on a police outpost in Helmand province, a bomb blast in Kandahar, subsequent attacks on multiple checkpoints in the eastern provinces of Paktia, Logar and Ghazni, the killing of the police chief of the Uruzgan province by infiltrated Taliban and attacks on thirteen check points in Badakhshan province.<sup>4</sup> Other instances such as the explosion in Kabul that was targeted at a shuttle bus carrying employees of the Attorney General, a bombing outside the Justice Ministry in Kabul, bombing of the government agencies in Jalalabad district, suicide bombings surrounding the provincial government offices in Zabul province and an attack on a police post in Helmand province emphasize the Taliban’s dislike for government institutions.

A geographical mapping of these acts of violence suggests certain trends. As depicted in Figure 1, the conflict seems concentrated in the southern and eastern provinces, which have traditionally been Taliban strongholds. Yet, despite the concentration of the Offensive in the southern and eastern parts of Afghanistan, it has also



# Centre for Air Power Studies (CAPS)

Forum for National Security Studies (FNSS)

made an uncanny northward move towards the Badakhshan and Kunduz provinces. In Kunduz, the Taliban had advanced within miles of the provincial capital of Kunduz City. Other reports suggest that the Taliban is in the process of making inroads into Tajikistan.<sup>5</sup> Such a northward propelling has not occurred in the past and could be indicative of the Taliban’s efforts to link up with Islamist extremist movements in Central Asia and West China.

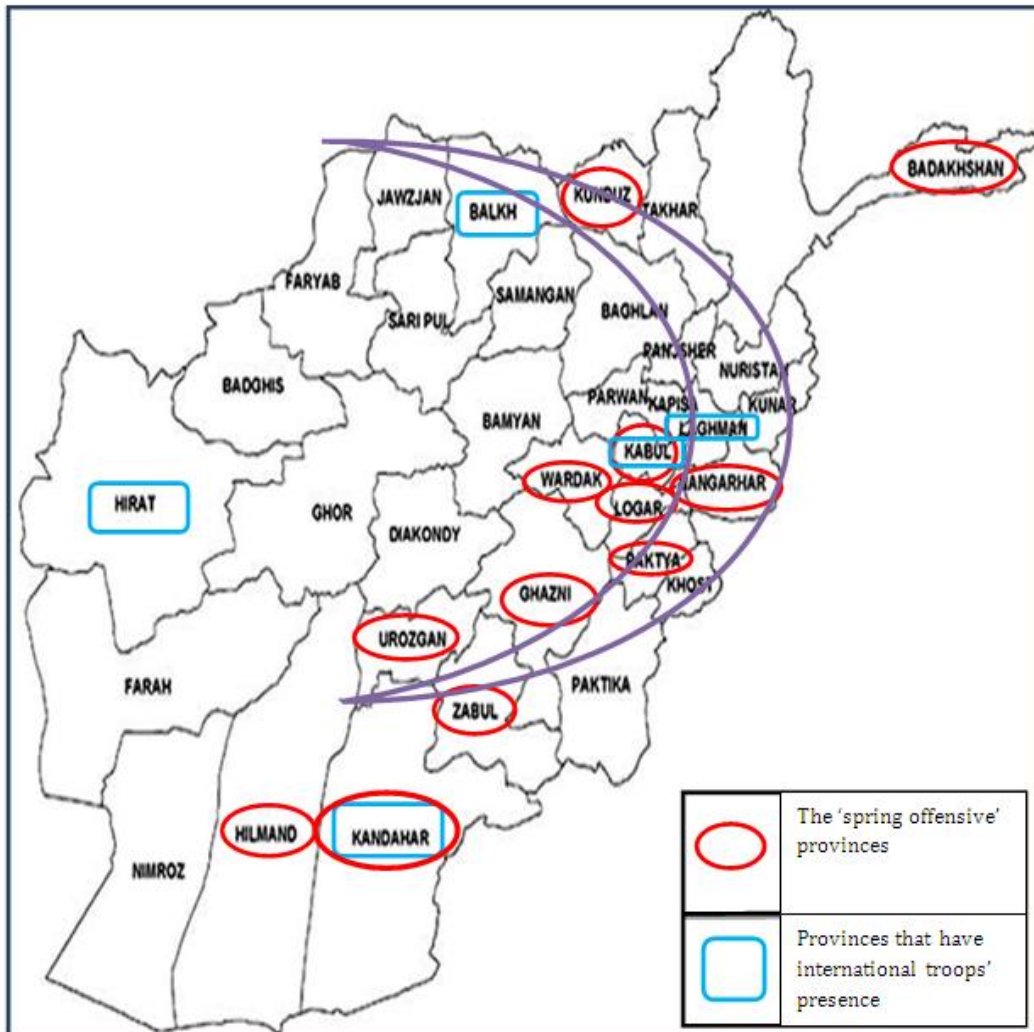


Figure 1. A Geographical Mapping of 'Azm.'



## Centre for Air Power Studies (CAPS)

Forum for National Security Studies (FNSS)

A simultaneous mapping of the bases of the international troops sheds light on the Taliban's inclination to act in regions that are not home to international force, with the exception of Kabul and Kandahar. Assaults on Kabul exhibit the Taliban's opposition to the Afghan government and is also a reflection of Taliban's capabilities to execute attacks within the national capital. The acts in Kandahar province, which has been the birthplace of the Taliban, can be viewed as measures to reassure the other internal and external actors of the Taliban's presence or dominance within the province.

However, on a general level, instead of engaging with the international troops, the Taliban engages in direct combat with the government forces. This is demonstrated in the Taliban's fighting with the Afghan forces in the northern provinces of Kunduz and Badakshan province. The government forces are inadequately equipped and poorly trained as compared to the international troops. Moreover, the former lacks the air and ground-support that the latter possess, thereby placing them at a disadvantage.

This northward drive of the Offensive with a simultaneous focus on the southern and eastern areas can be explained as a crescent-like progression which depicts a possible scenario of the encirclement of Kabul while simultaneous efforts to disrupt the capital city continue. This issue merits scrutiny in the coming months.

### **Conclusion**

The Taliban's 2015 Spring Offensive or *Azm* has consisted of a geographical tactic which portrays a potential encompassment of Kabul. This is combined with the strategic ploy of largely selective engagement with the Afghan forces in the provinces that are devoid of the presence of international troops.





## Centre for Air Power Studies (CAPS)

Forum for National Security Studies (FNSS)

The Offensive's headway, in the light of limited international troops and the under-developed abilities of the Afghan force, paints a deteriorating security scenario in Afghanistan and will therefore remain a threat to peace and stability in the region.

*(Disclaimer: The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Centre for Air Power Studies [CAPS])*

---

### End Notes

<sup>1</sup> Luke Hurst, "Taliban Announce 'Spring Offensive' in Afghanistan", May 23, 2015, <http://europe.newsweek.com/taliban-announce-spring-offensive-afghanistan-324372>, accessed on June 13, 2015

<sup>2</sup> Voice of Jihad, "Azm Operation conveys a clear message", <http://shahamat-english.com/azm-operation-conveys-a-clear-message/>, accessed on June 14, 2015

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

<sup>4</sup> Bill Roggio, "Afghan Taliban announces new 'spring operations', " Long War Journal, April 22, 2015, <http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2015/04/afghan-taliban-announce-new-spring-operations.php>, accessed on June 14, 2015

<sup>5</sup> Joshua Kurcera, "CSTO Troops Drill Against 700-Strong Taliban Invasion Of Tajikistan", Eurasianet.org, May 20, 2015, <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/73536>, accessed on June 15, 2015

---