

# Twin blasts in Kabul: A crisis made in security vacuum in Afghanistan



**A CLOSER LOOK**

**W**ITH the day coming to an end on Thursday, desperate Afghan citizens waiting at the Kabul airport for a safe passage to the US had hoped for a respite from the stifling heat. Some of them were even standing in the

knee-deep water of a sewage canal, waiting for the formal departure processes to be completed. But there would be no respite for them, as lurking in the twilight were the terrorists of Islamic State in Khorasan Province (ISKP), waiting to detonate the suicide vests they were wearing. As time for the evening prayers neared, the first explosion happened. It was near the Baron Hotel—close to the airport—that was being used as a centre to gather foreign nationals to be taken to the airport for evacuation.

The blast was followed by open gunfire by the terrorists, and then a second blast near the Abbey Gate, where the Afghans waiting in the knee-deep canal became the target. What followed afterwards was a scene of utter chaos and devastation as panic spread in the surrounding areas, and the Taliban along with the locals scrambled to take the injured to hospitals.

As of writing this column, the death toll stands at more than 103—at least 90 Afghans, including children, and 13 American service members. It was a total disaster but not so much of a surprise, however. Terror attack alerts had been issued by several countries including the US and the UK prior to the ISKP attacks on Thursday.

As recently as August 22, the US president's national security advisor, Jake Sullivan, had asserted on CNN's "State of the Union" that, "The threat is real. It is acute. It is persistent. And it is something that we are focused on with every tool in our arsenal." The attack modalities were anticipated to be ranging from missile attacks to bomb-laden truck explosions to the use of suicide bombers. And the authorities—both the Afghans and the international community—knew that an attack(s) was imminent.

The Taliban, in its response, "strongly condemned" the attacks, and added that they had warned the US. The US had also shared limited information with the Taliban to help it secure the perimeters around the Kabul airport. The question is: Despite all

the warnings, terror alerts, and the security measures deployed by both the US and the Taliban, how could such a ghastly and brutal attack take place, and right under their very noses?

The are two ways to look at it—from the Taliban perspective and from that of the US. The Taliban has only recently taken control of the country, and that too with their ruthless use of muscle power. Having ousted the former Afghan government, the Taliban resources are mostly engaged in ensuring stable governance. Fighting the US and capturing towns was one thing, but running a country is a different ball game altogether. With their hands full trying to establish a new governance system and, more importantly, with an intel and security system that is still not well-organised, the Taliban cannot do much on its own to hunt down the ISKP and prevent their well-orchestrated terrorist attacks. A stable security mechanism could have mobilised resources to go door-to-door, search every hideout seeking out the terrorists, but under the current circumstances, one cannot expect this from the Taliban.

Now, if we talk about the international community, their military presence in the



**Volunteers and medical staff bring an injured man for treatment after two powerful bomb explosions killed at least 103 people outside of the Kabul airport on August 26, 2021.**

PHOTO: AFP/WAKIL KOHSAR

forces, the sudden rise of the Taliban and fall of the corrupt Afghan government, and the hurried evacuations have all combined to create a void in the Afghan national security mechanism, which the ISKP leveraged to make this bloody show of a comeback. After a relatively tough phase in 2019 and the first half of 2020, when the ISKP had been pushed to Nangarhar and Kunar provinces, their attacks have become more frequent in 2021. Between January and April this year, the ISKP had launched 77 attacks across Afghanistan, as opposed to 21 during the corresponding period in 2020, according to UN counterterrorism officials.

The fear is, the ISKP will take advantage of the prevailing disconnect between governance and security in Afghanistan and carry out more such attacks to create a position of influence within the country. While fighting the ISKP will pose a new set of challenges for the Taliban, it will also expose the region to further risks of terrorist presence.

While the Taliban itself is regarded by many governments as a terrorist organisation, they are now seeking political legitimacy and acknowledgement from the international community. The ISKP, on the other hand, is a hard-core terrorist organisation that feeds

on violence and is likely to attempt further attacks to create a sense of fear in Afghanistan and among its neighbours.

**So, what now?**

In response to Thursday's attacks, US President Joe Biden—whose authority has been dented by this incident exposing him to criticism from both the Republicans and Democrats—has vowed revenge: "We will not forgive. We will not forget. We will hunt you down and make you pay," he said, and asked the military commanders "to develop operational plans to strike ISIS-K [or ISKP] assets, leadership and facilities". How this will be done remains to be seen. Does this mean the US will strike strategic Afghan locations to root out the presence of the ISKP? Would they have the moral courage and appetite for this, especially as they are only just trying to pull out from this "never-ending war"? Perhaps.

The Taliban spokesperson Zabihullah Mujahid has also reiterated their commitment to the international community that they will "not allow terrorists to use Afghanistan as a base for their operations." This incident, however, has taken away from the Taliban's reputation that they have made through their trailblazing gains against the foreign forces in Afghanistan, and has put them in

a precarious position where even those who might see them as a potential ally—including China and Russia—might now question their ability to neutralise internal security threats.

Rooting out the ISKP, however, would be difficult, especially since the mountainous and semi-mountainous terrains of both Kunar and Nangarhar would make it hard for the US to target and eliminate ISKP elements. One must not forget the US' Tora Bora failure.

On the other hand, for the Taliban, hunting down individuals in such rough terrains would also be difficult, although they are better-equipped with the knowledge of the geology, since they had also used similar hideouts not so long ago. But without additional intel and logistics, it will be a tough challenge for them.

**How does one eliminate the ISKP threat?**

One way of dealing with this problem is through strategic collaboration. While having to form a strategic alliance with the Taliban might seem distasteful to many Western countries, this might be a potential solution to address the threat of ISKP's rise. With no presence on the ground after the planned August 31 pull-out, the US and its western allies might have to consider forming strategic security partnerships with the Taliban so that both parties can leverage and combine their strengths to make ISKP pay for this heinous crime.

While Afghanistan being ruled by the Taliban is not a desirable outcome for anyone, it being used as a base by ISKP is a more horrifying prospect. US Centcom Commander Marine Gen. Frank McKenzie has already said that the country is sharing some intelligence with the Taliban for security reasons: "They don't get the full range of information we have. But we give them enough to act in time and space to try to prevent these attacks" (CNN). However, to eliminate ISKP, this limited-scale collaboration between Afghanistan and the West needs to go on for some time. It cannot be a stop-gap measure, otherwise the ISKP will leverage the current chaos to turn it to its advantage.

There is no alternative to collaboration to neutralise ISKP, and the world powers must come together in this fight against the Islamic State offshoot in Afghanistan. Both the Taliban and the international community are responsible for the rise of the ISKP, and both now must work together to eliminate it.

## PROJECT SYNDICATE

# The Danger of 'Nothing to Lose'



**P**RESIDENTS, generals, dictators, and ordinary people take big risks when they have nothing to lose, similar to a quarterback in American football throwing a so-called Hail Mary pass. But the consequences of such a strategy in politics, war,

Washington, DC, that the "enemy's continued stolid resistance" comes, in part, from "Nazi propaganda which is convincing every German that unconditional surrender means the complete devastation of Germany and her elimination as a nation."

Hitler relied on that spin to motivate his troops for a desperate counterattack in December 1944 (the Battle of the Bulge), saying beforehand, this is "really a kind of Hun battle in which you either stand, or fall and die."

But Israel must also deal with Palestinians who just want a state of their own, rather than Israel's destruction. As Riyad Mansour, the Palestinian observer at the United Nations, noted in response to the latest conflict in Gaza this past May, Israel has "failed in defeating Palestinian consciousness and in breaking apart our national belonging... We all stand at a crossroad."

At the same time, Tzipi Livni, a former Israeli vice prime minister and justice minister, wrote,



**An Israeli police officer stands in position as a stun grenade explodes by the gate to Jerusalem's Old City during clashes in Jerusalem on April 24, 2021.**

PHOTO: REUTERS/AMMAR AWAD

and business are usually more serious than the outcome of a football game. In the Middle East, for example, it has produced continuous conflict because the warring parties feel as though they have nothing to lose.

The brokerage firm TD Ameritrade's annual collegiate stock-market contest illustrates the incentives when there is "nothing to lose." Each team begins with a paper allocation of USD 500,000, and a final cash prize goes to the team whose portfolio earned the highest profit in the space of a month. In 2015, students from Southeast Missouri State University beat 475 other entrants by turning USD 500,000 into USD 1.3 million. None of the winning students knew anything about finance, so how did they do it? According to the team captain, "We had nothing to lose. If we end up losing all USD 500,000, oh well. We basically just decided to be as risky as possible."

This go-for-broke approach exploited the rules of a contest that rewarded only the biggest gain, while ignoring all the losses. The students were protected against losing money, so they devised their strategy accordingly. This anecdote may sound trivial, but that same logic is often followed by protagonists in real-world conflicts. For example, the pursuit of "unconditional

Hitler's roll of the dice—his Hail Mary pass—did not change the outcome of the war, which was already lost. But it did produce the worst atrocity inflicted on US troops in Europe: the massacre at the Belgian town of Malmedy.

A similar nothing-to-lose attitude drives the continued war between Israel and Palestine. In 1973, when Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir met Joe Biden, then the freshman US senator from Delaware, to discuss Israel's security, she said, "don't look so worried... We Israelis have a secret weapon. We have nowhere else to go."

More recently, Israel has felt it has nothing to lose in fighting Hamas, because the organisation's founding charter denies the right of the Jewish state to exist. Article 11 of the charter begins: "The Islamic Resistance Movement believes that the land of Palestine has been an Islamic Waqf throughout the generations and until the Day of Resurrection, no one can renounce it or part of it, or abandon it or part of it." And Article 13 fully closes the door on peace: "The so-called peaceful solutions, and the international conferences to resolve the Palestinian problem, are all contrary to the beliefs of the Islamic Resistance Movement."

"The two-state solution... seems as important as ever. Even if peace is not around the corner, the point of no return is closer than ever before. We must not go there. The most important thing for now is to keep the road open."

In other words, beware of enemies with nothing to lose.

Martin Luther King, Jr., a little over a year before he was murdered in Memphis, used a similar idea for avoiding armed revolution: "Riots grow out of intolerable conditions. Violent revolts are generated by revolting conditions, and there is nothing more dangerous than to build a society with a large segment of people who feel they have no stake in it; who feel they have nothing to lose."

In a world beset by new and old zero-sum conflicts, this lesson remains as timely as ever.

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General Dwight D. Eisenhower, the Allied commander in Europe and future US president, agreed with Goebbels. In November 1944, he warned the Combined Chiefs of Staff in

**CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH**

**ACROSS**

- 1 Squander
- 6 Skill
- 11 One with a record
- 12 Phone greeting
- 13 Behave in a silly way
- 15 Finger count
- 16 Join the crew
- 17 Senator Cruz
- 18 Crew members
- 20 Close, as a jacket
- 23 Coffee bar order
- 27 Good pair
- 28 Roman garment
- 29 Danger
- 31 Energy
- 32 Rustic home
- 34 Hotel amenity
- 37 Maple fluid

**DOWN**

- 1 Cried
- 2 Car bar
- 3 Checkout act
- 4 Gift from Santa
- 5 Catch
- 6 Like old rawhide bones
- 7 Game official
- 8 Scads
- 9 Frozen chunk
- 10 Related

**ACROSS**

- 14 Spicy
- 18 Band output
- 19 Become prevalent
- 20 Microwave, in slang
- 21 Water cooler
- 22 Pricing word
- 24 Machinery part
- 25 In the past
- 26 Way off
- 30 In conclusion
- 31 Venomous snakes
- 33 Scrooge cry
- 34 Used the pool
- 35 Skin opening
- 36 Diva's piece
- 38 Muscle quality
- 39 Diner order
- 40 Band boosters
- 42 Boxer Norton
- 43 Lab animal

**YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS**

JEST ATOZ  
POLKA BORIS  
AVAIL SWIPE  
RIPPED OPT  
MASS RIFLES  
ALE TRIDIED  
TROOPS CAB  
LITABLE SAGA  
APT DIPPED  
OPTIC SLING  
SELMA LATTE  
DEPT KATAS

WRITE FOR US. SEND US YOUR OPINION PIECES TO [dsopinion@gmail.com](mailto:dsopinion@gmail.com).

**গণপ্রজাতন্ত্রী বাংলাদেশ সরকার**

সমাজসেবা অফিসারের কার্যালয়  
শহর সমাজসেবা কার্যালয়  
পটুয়াখালী।

তারিখ: ১১ ভাদ্র ১৪২৮  
২৬ আশ্বিন, ২০২১

স্মারক নং: ৪১.০১.৭৮০০.০৪১.০৭.০০১.২১.১৬৯

**দরপত্র বিজ্ঞপ্তি**

০১ মন্ত্রণালয়/বিভাগ : সমাজসেবা অফিসার  
০২ সমাজসেবা অফিসার, শহর সমাজসেবা কার্যালয়, পটুয়াখালী।  
০৩ বেস কার্যের দরপত্র : ২০২১-২০২২ অর্থ বছরে সমাজসেবা অফিসারের কার্যালয়, পটুয়াখালীর আওতাধীন দক্ষতা উন্নয়ন প্রশিক্ষণ কেন্দ্রের জন্য প্রোগ্রামার (ইউপিএস সহ), ল্যান্ডসিপ ও মাল্টিমিডিয়া প্রোগ্রামার কাম।

০৪ দরপত্রের স্থান, নম্বর ও তারিখ : শহর সমাজসেবা কার্যালয়, পটুয়াখালী।  
০৫ দরপত্রের আবেদনের তারিখ : ২৮/৮/২০২১ খ্রিঃ  
০৬ প্রোগ্রামারের পদবী : উচ্চ দরপত্র পদবী (OTM)  
০৭ বাজেট এবং তথ্যের উদ্দেশ্য : রাজস্ব বাজেট জিআইবি  
০৮ দরপত্রের প্যাকেজ নং : ১ (এক) টি  
০৯ দরপত্রের আবেদন নাম : (০২)-২০২১-২০২২ অর্থ বছরে সমাজসেবা অফিসারের কার্যালয়, পটুয়াখালীর আওতাধীন দক্ষতা উন্নয়ন প্রশিক্ষণ কেন্দ্রের জন্য প্রোগ্রামার (ইউপিএস সহ), ল্যান্ডসিপ ও মাল্টিমিডিয়া প্রোগ্রামার কাম।

১০ দরপত্র দাখিল বিচারের শেষ তারিখ : ১০/৯/২০২১  
১১ দরপত্র দাখিলের শেষ তারিখ ও সময় : ১১/৯/২০২১ তারিখ দুপুর ২:০০ টা  
১২ দরপত্র খোলার তারিখ ও সময় : ১১/৯/২০২১ টিঃ দুপুর ০১:০০ টায় দরদালা বা তার সমোচিত প্রতিদ্বন্দ্বিতা উপস্থিতিতে খোলা হবে। যদি কেহ উপস্থিত থাকেন।

১৩ অবেদনের এর নাম ও ঠিকানা : শহর সমাজসেবা কার্যালয়, পটুয়াখালী।  
ক. দরপত্র দাখিল কেন্দ্র : শহর সমাজসেবা কার্যালয়, পটুয়াখালী।  
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১৪ দরদালায় যোগাযোগ : (০১) বেস কম্পিউটার সফটওয়্যার প্রোগ্রামার (০২) কম্পিউটার সফটওয়্যার প্রোগ্রামার (০৩) টিঃ) বছরের অভিজ্ঞতা থাকতে হবে। অভিজ্ঞতার ৭-শতাংশ প্রোগ্রামার কাম প্রোগ্রামার দাখিল করতে হবে।  
(০৪) অভিজ্ঞতার সনদপত্র, হালনাগাদ ট্রেড লাইসেন্স, অফিস সনদ, এবং প্রতি প্রার্থী (২০২০-২০২১) সনদের অন্তর্ভুক্তি হতে হবে।

১৫ দরপত্র দাখিলের মূল সীমানা এর মাধ্যমে কোট-১-২০০১-০০০০-২০০৬ টি (অফিসারের) কাম দিতে হবে।

১৬ শর্তাবলী :  
০১. সি.পি.এ-২০০৬ এবং সি.পি.এ-২০০৮ (সফটওয়্যার সহ) এর জন্য সফটওয়্যার প্রোগ্রামারের পদবী রাখতে হবে।  
০২. দরদালায় অবেদন দাখিল করে ৩০ দিনের মধ্যে অবেদনকারীকে বাতিল করে দিতে হবে।  
০৩. দরপত্রের আবেদন দাখিলের সময় প্রোগ্রামারের পদবী রাখতে হবে।  
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(সহকারী হিসাব) সমাজসেবা অফিসার শহর সমাজসেবা কার্যালয়, পটুয়াখালী।  
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আপনার মূল্যবান মতামত জানাতে চাই।  
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তারিখ: ১১-০৯-২০২১