

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



A CLOSER LOOK WITH 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.

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.

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

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.

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As of writing this column, the death toll stands at more than 103—at least 90 Afghans, including children, and 13 American service members.

country has been significantly reduced, as has been their ability to gather intel effectively. Their network of informers has also been affected—if not fully dismantled—following the Taliban's re-emergence. The foreign troops are mostly focused on the evacuation of foreign nationals, their allies and aids. At best they can tighten security at the Kabul airport and the evacuation handling centres. In their current capacity, more cannot be expected of them either.

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 denied 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

PROJECT SYNDICATE

The Danger of 'Nothing to Lose'



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.

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

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

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 was 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. William L. Silber, a former professor of finance and economics at the Stern School of Business, New York University, is currently a senior adviser at Cornerstone Research. He is the author of The Power of Nothing to Lose: The Hail Mary Effect in Politics, War, and Business (Morrow/Harper 2021).

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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.

YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS. JEST AT OZ, POLKA BORIS, AVAIL SWIPE, RIPPED OPT, MASS RIFLES, ALETRIDIED, TROOPS CAB, LIABLE SAGA, APT DIPPED, OPTIC SLING, SELMA LATTE, DEPT ARTAS.

গণপ্রজাতন্ত্রী বাংলাদেশ সরকার. সমাজসেবা অফিসারের কার্যালয়. শহুরে সমাজসেবা কার্যালয় পটুয়াখালী. মারক নং: ৪১.০১.৭৮০০.০৪১.০৭.০০১.২১.১৬৯. তারিখ: ১১ ভাদ্র ১৪২৮. ২৬ আশ্বিন, ২০২১. দরপত্র বিজ্ঞপ্তি.

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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