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Editorial

**Taliban to sustain heavy casualties if continue militancy**

Casualties were reported in 13 provinces in the last 24 hours with security forces evacuating two districts in the north while retaking control of one district in the south on Thursday night. The Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that 258 Taliban were killed in security force operations in Nangarhar, Laghman, Pakia, Zabol, Herat, Farah, Ghaz, Faryab, Balkh, Jazjira, Helmand, Takhar and Baglan provinces in the last 24 hours. Defense Ministry officials said that operations have had progress in some of the areas that were evacuated by security forces. Violence has intensified following the start of the withdrawal of US and coalition forces from Afghanistan. A parliamentary committee on Thursday reported fighting on 200 fronts across the country in just a day. Indeed, the Taliban continue spilling the blood of Afghan combatants and non-combatants alike and have intensified their attacks as the US troops have started withdrawing from the country. Reeling from the heavy casualties of their fighters, the Taliban target civilians and carry out attacks on schools as well as target public infrastructures. The Taliban seek to continue their acts of violence and destruction. They kill the people and destroy public infrastructures including roads, schools, hospitals, power plants, etc. They have never respected the international humanitarian laws as they targeted people as well as public properties indiscriminately. The Taliban's acts of violence are contrary to Islamic tenets, moral values, national laws, and international norms. If they continue the tug-of-war, they will be the loser.

Meanwhile upon withdrawal of the foreign forces no justification left for Taliban to continue bloodshed in the country. Afghan ordinary people, civil society activists, Islamic clerics, political parties and the government all have called on the Taliban on multiple occasions to stop violence and bloodshed and declare ceasefire, however, the Taliban turned a deaf ear to the public demands and continued spilling their blood.

With the withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan, the Taliban have resumed their spring offensive, tacitly though, and intensified their attacks. Their offensive attacks have been pushed back by Afghan soldiers and Special Forces, which inflicted heavy casualties on the Taliban fighters. Sustaining heavy casualties, the Taliban may have understood that they will not win through military deal.

Meanwhile, if the Taliban do not reduce their violence, the world will support Afghanistan, which will undermine the Taliban both politically and militarily. US, NATO and the allies have recently reiterated their support for the Afghan forces and even recently an agreement reached with Kazakhstan on bilateral military and intelligence cooperation.

These all mean that there is strong consensus within both the regional countries and international community against any effort by the Taliban to pursue a military takeover. Only a negotiated settlement can end over 40 years of war in Afghanistan.

The more the Taliban intensify their attacks, the more casualties they will sustain. They are never able to collapse a government which has been built through the support of the people as well as international community within the last couple of decades.

The current government is not comparable to that of three decades before. Afghanistan has strong military forces and equipment as well as there are millions of people in the country that unprecedently supporting their security forces.

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India-Taliban connection in the offing: how will it look?

By Dr. Ameena Tahir



A report by leading Indian daily, Hindustan Times, recently stated India has for the first time opened channel of communication with the Taliban leaders, including Mullah Baradar, actually shared everything in a bid to bring peace in the region. The Indian outreach is largely led by security officials and limited to Taliban factions and leaders that are perceived as being "nationalist", wrote the paper. Last week, India's foreign affairs minister S. Jaishankar stopped over in Doha, Qatar's capital, where he held talks with his counterpart. The reporter has also been seen in the context of Taliban as Doha hosted rounds of peace talks between the Taliban and other key stakeholders.

If it is happening, it is by no means a sudden shift from India's stance. India has been in touch with Kabul, there is no doubt that it is open communication with the Taliban as they are the only major power holders in Afghanistan. Even the scale of the engagement — which New Delhi would have going in with — and a desire to keep friendly ties with Kabul, there is no doubt that it is open communication with the Taliban as they are the only major power holders in Afghanistan.

To this end, New Delhi's message during with Mullah Baradar, who was arrested by Pakistan in 2019 and released in 2020, is a clear message.

Another reason that India might have in view before making a change in policy towards Afghanistan is Pakistan. For the last few decades, Pakistan has kept strategic dialogue with the Taliban despite playing front-line role in war on terror. Lastly, however, some reports suggest Pakistan has lost its leverage over Afghan Taliban because of the latter's inclination towards the Indian's military and international cooperation. India has been consistently engaging with the successive Afghan governments after 2001 and spent tens of billions on reconstruction and resumption of the infrastructure. New Delhi also provided security assistance to Afghanistan and trained Afghan cadres and Afghan National Army (ANA) over the years. It is the largest regional donor to Afghanistan with a fresh pledge to initiate US\$4-billion project worth \$80 million in Afghanistan. Given the scale of the engagement, that was a sign of enhanced trust on Indian side in Afghanistan. During, Jaishankar's recent visit to the US and talks with the Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin and during the meetings, Afghanistan came up in all of these meetings and they all realized India is an important part of the future of Afghanistan. With the US backing, India can hence project itself a neutral watchdog, given the American fight relations with regional rivals the Russia and China and suspicion towards Pakistan for the Taliban, coming in terms with India — which historically supported anti-Taliban elements — is a hard pill to swallow.

yet it offers an opportunity for the group to get some support from a regional power. If Taliban make a move, which is highly likely, they would need legitimacy and international recognition which they lacked during their previous stint in power during the 1990s. India can back the Taliban that much needed two-pronged support, to drive financial assistance.

The communication between India and the Taliban is still at the nascent stage, both are nervous in judging each other's motives and have not publicly issued any statement. Yet when makes it clear is that there are greater prospects of cooperation. Islamabad, on the other hand, will also be looking at this budding relationship as a factor for confidence-building in the region, after the Taliban's return to power during the past two decades. A careful analysis of the situation after US withdrawal and a balanced approach can bring about regional peace as no stakeholder would want Afghanistan becoming a pawn of insurgency and a breeding ground for militants, once again.

The writer has completed PhD in South Asian Studies from the South Asian Center in Punjab University, Lahore. This article also appeared in *Early Asia Review* on June 16.

