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Editorial

Taliban's war on public infrastructures

More and more Afghans are speaking out against the Taliban's continuing campaign of destruction and Afghan development projects and public infrastructure, which undermines the country's economic potential and well-being of its citizens.

The Taliban militants have destroyed dozens of public infrastructures in recent weeks upon seizing control of some districts in different provinces of the country. Infrastructures and public properties that the Taliban have attacked include schools, hospitals, bridges, electricity pylons, telecom towers as well as smuggling of military equipment to Pakistan.

In their recent attack on Andkhoy district of Faryab, Taliban burned the local shops and destroyed the telecom towers. Reacting to Taliban's destructive activities, US Embassy Charge d' Affairs said: "Seeing shocking reports from Andkhoy district of Faryab. The Taliban's burning of shops & govt buildings, detaining of people, & destruction of infrastructure & communication networks demonstrate their extremism & their disregard for the human rights of the Afghan people."

The Taliban has always been the enemy of Afghanistan's prosperity and development. The Taliban groups sets fire to schools to ensure that the new generation who can build the country don't have the opportunity to grow, it blows up bridges and roads so that the country can't achieve any prosperity and development, and it destroys hospitals and telecom towers to stop healthcare and public services.

Attacking public installations and killing innocent civilians are not justifiable acts and can't be forgiven. The Taliban's claim that these attacks are for rescuing Afghanistan is just a lie, and the Afghan people will never forgive it. Such infrastructural projects are not military targets, and the Taliban's attacks on infrastructures are crimes that represents the group's brutality.

Contrary to their remarks for protecting Afghanistan and fighting foreign forces, Taliban has time and again attacked their Afghan fellows, however they made peace with foreigners. Meanwhile in a great betrayal to the country and nation, Taliban has been sending military equipment left on the battlefields to Pakistan.

The Afghan interior ministry says that Taliban sending military tanks to Pakistan via Zabul, however the ministry said that would be targeted such convoys if seen by the Afghan air forces. The group not only killing Afghans and destroying public infrastructures, but also allied with their main supporter, Pakistan, with dispatching Afghan military equipment and public infrastructures.

Indeed, the infrastructure doesn't belong to the government; it belongs to the people, and no one has the right to destroy it. Destroying public sites and everything that belongs to Muslims is a forbidden and wrong act according to the holy religion of Islam. Setting fire to schools and destroying bridges, roads, electricity pylons and other infrastructures are illegitimate and extremist acts.

The Taliban group justifies its destructive and brutal activities with Islam, but these [evil] acts of the Taliban don't have any association with Islam. These claims of the Taliban are no longer acceptable to the public because it can differentiate between right and wrong.

According to Islam teachings, everyone is responsible for protecting public properties and infrastructural projects. The Taliban should not resort to destroying public sites as this is an illegitimate act. The group's recent approaches toward public infrastructures can't be justified in Islam, but if they link it to Islam, it shows their extreme lack of Islamic knowledge.

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Could the Shanghai Cooperation Organization help stabilize Afghanistan after US pull-out?

By: Rachel Zhang in Shanghai

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization may play a more active role in Afghanistan's security after the planned US military withdrawal prompted an upsurge in violence that threatened to spill over into neighboring countries, according to analysts.

Led by China and Russia and created in 2001, the SCO also includes India, Pakistan and four other former Soviet republics: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. It has four observer states – Afghanistan, Mongolia, Belarus and Iran – and six dialogue partners.

As a Eurasian security grouping focusing on anti-terrorism cooperation, member states have conducted multiple joint military exercises.

China has blamed a surge of attacks in Afghanistan on the abrupt withdrawal of US and Nato troops after two decades of deployment. Its embassy in Afghanistan warned its nationals to strengthen emergency preparedness and to leave the country as soon as possible.

Beijing also fears that the resulting instability will pose a security threat to its Belt and Road Initiative projects around the region and in Xinjiang, which borders the country.

Three other SCO members – Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Pakistan – also border the war-torn country.

"The SCO will definitely play a greater role in regional security in the future against the backdrop of the US pulling out its forces out of Afghanistan. The grouping has conducted anti-terrorism military drills in areas including Xinjiang and the border of Tajikistan in the past," said Ma Bin, a research fellow at the Centre for SCO studies at Fudan University.

"China hopes that such cooperation can be enhanced in the future as it can directly aid counterterrorism and extremism efforts in northwest China."

Ma also said the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan and heavy losses – a defeat that may have contributed to the eventual break-up of the USSR – would make Russia and the other ex-Soviet states wary of getting involved.

But he said that because of their geographical location "the instability of Afghanistan will directly affect the security of Central Asian countries and Russia" and they may be forced to act in some form.

"Historical issues determine how they will participate, not whether they will participate at all. Furthermore, what we are talking about is helping Afghan reconstruction through diplomatic and economic means, the nature of which is totally different from the Soviet Union military invasion in the 1980s," Ma continued, adding that the exact role played by the SCO was yet to be determined.

At an event to mark the grouping's 20th anniversary last week, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi called for closer cooperation, saying: "We should build a strong shield for regional security, unite our efforts in fighting terrorism, separatism and extremism."

A liaison office between the SCO and Afghanistan was set up in 2005, three years before Afghanistan was given observer status, to discuss security, peace talks and post-war reconstruction.

"It is time to beef up the role of the liaison office and strengthen coordination between each side to seek a peaceful solution to the Afghan issue," said Pan Guang, director of the Centre of SCO studies at the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences.

He also said members may consider joint counterterrorism operations in future if any SCO member was attacked by terrorist groups based in the country.

Tajikistan and China have staged joint anti-terrorism drills in recent years under the framework of the SCO near Tajikistan's border with Afghanistan – exercises the Tajik defense ministry said were targeting groups based across the border.

The SCO announced in March that member states would hold an anti-terrorism exercise this year without disclosing the specific date and place. The meeting also approved plans to cooperate "combating terrorism, separatism and extremism" from 2022 to 2024. Pan added that Beijing had also tried to tackle terrorism in Afghanistan through economic means, such as inviting the country to take part in belt and road projects.

Earlier this month Wang spoke to his counterparts in Afghanistan and Pakistan and said the three countries had agreed to support the "substantial expansion" of the project to Afghanistan.

"China proposes expanding the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) to Afghanistan, so that the Taliban can also participate in the country's peaceful reconstruction, thus reducing the risk of turmoil," Pan said.

He also said the China Rail Express, an international freight route, which links China and Europe and passes through Central Asia, could help improve economic ties between the SCO countries.

"One of the important reasons why economic cooperation among the member states is rocky is the issue of transport.

The post-Soviet countries and China do not even use the same track gauge. The CR Express can solve the problem," said Pan.

But Ma said its value was more symbolic. "In terms of economic and trade cooperation, it … shows China is willing to make great efforts to promote cooperation with other countries. But the current transport volume of the express is rather low."

This article appeared in the South China Morning Post print edition as: S.C.O. set to focus more on Afghan security