Increasing concerns over civilian casualties in Afghanistan

Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) in its recent findings said that 24 innocent civilians have been killed and 43 others wounded only in two days between 27 -29 May as a result of continued violence in the country.

Based on findings of the commission, the civilians have been killed in seven separate incidents in Sar-e-Pul, Helmand, Parwan, Nangarhar and Kapisa as well as along Kabul – Herat highway as a result of airstrike, mortar shelling, machinegun firing and IED explosions.

The Independent Human Rights Commission has said the people of Afghanistan are tired of the continued violence and killings; therefore, attack on civilians, education institutions and public infrastructures should be stopped as soon as possible.

This comes amid of increasing violence and Taliban attacks in various provinces of the country. Meanwhile, United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) reported Tuesday there was an urgent need to reduce the level of violence and that all parties to the conflict need to do more to protect civilians.

"Heavy civilian casualties recently documented by UNAMA underscore urgent need to reduce the violence, for progress in Afghanistan peace negotiations and for all parties to do much more to protect civilians from harm," UNAMA said.

According to UNAMA, at least 23 civilians were killed and 49 were injured in just seven recorded incidents that took place over a three-day period last week in Kandahar, Helmand, Uruzgan, Sar-e-Pul, Parwan, and Kapisa provinces.

One of the key issues which has been under discussion between the Taliban and Afghanistan government has been the prevention of civilian casualties in the country. Although both the government of Afghanistan and Taliban are stressing on the protection of civilians during their attacks and operations, civilian casualty is still higher comparing to other time.

Afghanistan defense and security organs are blaming the Taliban group for increasing civilian casualties in the country, saying that Taliban by following new tactic plant mines along public roads and highways; therefore, more civilians are targeted and killed in many IED explosion incidents.

The main reason of increasing civilians casualties in the country is that Taliban has increased their attacks and violence in most provinces of the country following the official announcement of US administration for full US troop withdrawal from Afghanistan. It is also worth mentioning that the group has increased their violence and attacks to get further concessions in peace talks with Afghanistan government.

It is true that close cooperation of the people with the government particularly the country's defense and security forces is very important and a need in such circumstances as no Afghan citizen will be safe without close cooperation between the government and people.

On the other hand, it is the responsibility of the government to make further effort towards protection and safety of civilians and try to not harm civilians upon launching military operations against the Taliban in remote areas of the country as increasing civilian casualties can harm the trust between the people and government.

Currently, the Taliban group by launching IED explosions and targeting public places is responsible for big part of civilian casualties in the country. Although the people of Afghanistan are waiting to hear good news about ending the continued war in the country, no sign for resumption of peace talks between Afghanistan government and Taliban is seen.

Suraya Raiszada

Pakistan's balancing act between US and Taliban to affect India

By: Kabir Taneja

The United States (US) has now expedited its military withdrawal from Afghanistan, with the US Central Command officials saying that 4-6% of the process has already been accomplished with the full withdrawal deadline set for September 11, 2021 by US President Joe Biden. However, as the US leaves after two decades of war, questions continue to linger as to what kind of military capacity, if any, would Washington want to, and be able to, maintain in the future.

Over the past few weeks, more than the composition of the US military presence, its geographic location outside the borders of Afghanistan has become a focal point of debate.

Pakistan, home to almost all the Taliban shuras, is having to now balance its relations and strategic play between the Taliban and the US. While Rawalpindi remains the key driver of both Taliban strength and US–Taliban negotiations, the challenge of giving the US military space post-2021 is not going to be an easy one for Pakistan.

In a recent interview, Pakistan's foreign minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi, hinted that Pakistan could examine American requests for bases in exchange for large economic packages and commitments towards investment.

With the challenge of access to a land-locked Afghanistan going to only intensify for the US, Pakistan is clearly hoping to use its location — once again — to enhance US dependence on it. With Iran on the one side, and Central Asian States such as Uzbekistan and Tajikistan under heavy pressure from Russia to disallow a US military presence, options today seem to be limited, and Pakistan may well benefit once again.

However, the Taliban, as it stamps its authority within the increasingly fractured Afghan political landscape and continues to use violence as a strong and effective leverage parallel to its "diplomacy", has taken a strong position against US presence not just in Afghanistan, but anywhere in the region around it. The Taliban, in a statement published online, hinted towards military action against such bases, and the host countries of such bases, which may be used to launch counterterror and counter-insurgency operations.

This raises questions about the Taliban's capacity to conduct such attacks, its traditional stance of having little interest on what happens beyond the Afghan borders, and finally its relations with Al Qaeda, which has the capacity and experience of such attacks.

Interestingly, the language used in the statement suggests that even Pakistan and its military could be fair game from a Taliban perspective, if they do indeed decide to host the US military for operations in Afghanistan. This, arguably, highlights a level of confidence and autonomy that the Taliban have achieved over the past few years as part of negotiations and diplomacy, and further, over the past 20 years of kinetically countering Western forces.

At the moment, the situation remains fluid. While the US-Pakistan relations are driven more by a military to military equation, the Biden administration has been comparatively cold towards Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan. This may complicate US attempts to leave the Afghan theatre with options in place for future use of force, if needed, in the Afghan theatre.

But an eventual nod by Pakistan to allow US military bases, despite the Taliban threat, would raise concerns in South Asia, specifically New Delhi, which has been pivotal in building the Quad security infrastructure in Asia along with the US.

As analyst Ayesha Siddiqa has said, Pakistan even gaining a standing space in the Quad room, instead of a seat on the table, would be a desirable outcome from its perspective. Calling out the Taliban's threat and allowing US to use its bases may accomplish this.

On the other hand, a failure for US to gain access to Pakistani bases, clandestinely or otherwise, may put more pressure on India to help the US with Afghanistan, something New Delhi has remained non-committal towards for a long time.

The recent shift by the US of its only deployed aircraft carrier from the Asia Pacific to the Arabian Sea to assist in its withdrawal from Afghanistan is a case in point of capacity constraints the US may highlight as it balances its military interests between West Asia and the rest of the region, and push others such as India to step up. Meanwhile, India has looked to integrate at least some of its strategic play in the Gulf with its broader Indo-Pacific outlook, with New Delhi singing up for access to strategic ports such as Duqm in Oman, not far from Bahrain, home to the US Fifth Fleet and Qatar, home to significant US military capacity operating in the larger West Asian region.

The Afghan theatre, despite a US withdrawal, will push strategic and tactical rethink far beyond Washington D.C. Countries such as India, managing multiple active and challenging foreign policy fronts, will be required to divert significant strategic thought and capacity towards the Afghan theatre in the coming months.

This article originally appeared in The Hindustan Times

Public support for environment protection is a must

As an important serviceable body, The Kabul Municipality (KM) has always been endeavoring to keep clean the capital roads and reflect urban order.

In an interview with The Kabul Time reporter, media in charge of KM Ghulam Maroof Alizai said, "Since the outset of 1399

solar year we have started this campaign.

We started to arrange vendors and establish urban facilities. In 22 urban districts we carried out this campaign with relative result.

Alizai went on to say, we managed to remove venders carts and reduce citizens problems. We are determined to continue this process and improve the capital urban order.

He added, unfortunately after clearing of the capital roads and streets we face the problem again. MoI and Kabul Traffic Department have not grantee essential cooperation.

He added, as a step we want to biometric all venders and specifying their permanent location of business and they would pay taxes. We have supplied different carts to venders and some people have rented their carts to vendor and we prevented those people.

A number of vendors are not satisfy with those measures said. We make legal business. We don't theft or don't beg. Authorities should specifying a certain location to us.

Ahmad Shah a vendor in Sara-e-Shamali area said, "We are every day disturbed by police, municipality employers, traffic police, contractors and power mongers in this area. We have to pay every day for several authorities request and take money on different pretexts. Kabul municipality taxes and revenue employees request cash money. We don't know what to do? Where to go? Who would listen to our complaints and cry? Ahmad Jawed a student of Kabul university talking on crowds in the capital roads said, "Every morning whenever we come to Pul-e-Bagh-e-Omomi, we see that the roads and sidewalks are filled and occupied by vendors while the road from Pul-e-Bagh-e-Omomi to Shah-e-Doshamshera is one way street and on the middle of the road venders have lined up and disturb traffic and pedestrians people are fed up with this situation? In the past too similar measures were undertaken by different relevant bodies to improve capital order as they removed some barriers in various places.

Massouda Qarizada

Kabul residents' increasing complains over city transportation services

Kabul residents are not happy with current city transportation services provided by the city municipality. They say local officials have repeatedly promised to provide standard city transportation services to the city residents, but no programs have been implemented for the improvement of the transportation system in the capital city. According to Kabul residents, lack of city buses has paved the way for the private sector to misuse and create problems for the people as they wait hours on bus-stops on regular basis.

For example, private transportation by making use that there is no proper public transportation services in the city charge high taxi fare on the people. Although Kabul municipality has recently put some public buses into use for Kabul residents, the people are asking for increasing of the city buses to deliver services to the people.

Meanwhile, officials for the Kabul municipality say efforts are underway to increase the number of city buses for different locations, stressing that by putting more city buses into use in the city problems of the people will be addressed.

Previously, nearly 1,000 buses have been assisted by various countries to Afghanistan, but most of them have now been broken down due to lack of maintenance. Currently, there are only 205 buses operating in Kabul and some other provinces of the country.

A number of Kabul residents in their interviews with The Kabul Times correspondent while complaining of the public transportation services in the city say most of the people are facing with continued problems in connection with the public transportation in Kabul city.

"Lack of regular public transportation system is one of the main problems facing the people particularly the Kabul residents who are always facing with lack of city buses during the morning and evening time period," said Ahmad, a Kabul resident.

He asked the government to evaluate all the challenges facing the people and address them in a proper way.

Ainuddin, another Kabul resident, says he is not happy with the current public transportation system in Kabul city as the people are facing with serious problems. But, he is optimistic that a number of buses are operating in the city and hopes the number of buses will increase in the future.

"Local officials of the Kabul municipality and ministry of transportation have failed to create a regular and standard public transportation system to address problems of the people," Ainuddin said, asking the government to work on a comprehensive system to make the city transportation system standard and organized.

It is worth mentioning that Kabul municipality created 264 city bus-stops worth 120 million AFG in Kabul city two years ago, but unfortunately the bus-stops have now changed to homes for drug-addicts.

Kabul municipality says it is planning to increase the number of city buses for the people of Kabul. Samira Rasa, a spokesperson to Kabul municipality told The Kabul Times that the number of new buses would soon increase in Kabul city. **Shukria Kohistani**

RSF asks ICC to investigate Afghan journalists assassinations

KABUL: Reporters Without Borders (RSF) has formally asked the International Criminal Court chief prosecutor Fatou Bensouda to investigate murders of journalists and media workers in Afghanistan since March 2020.

In this time, 11 media workers, including journalists, have been killed in targeted attacks.

RSF has asked Bensouda to investigate these murders – which the organization said Wednesday could be regarded as war crimes – under article 15 of the ICC's Rome statute.

The latest media victims were three women working for Enekaas TV in the eastern city of Jalalabad, who were gunned down while on their way home on 2 March.

Before that, Voice of Ghor radio station director Besmellah Adel Imaq was shot dead as he was returning home in Firoz Koh, the capital of the central province of Ghor, on 1 January.

Imaq was the fifth media worker to be killed in the space of two months.

The others were Mohammad Aliyas Dayee of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty's Pashto-language service, who was murdered in Lashkargah on 12 November; Malalai Maiwand, a TV presenter and representative of the Centre for the Protection of Afghan Women Journalists (CPAWJ), and her driver Taher Khan, who were murdered in Jalalabad on 10 December; and Rahmatollah Nekzad, a reporter for international media, who was gunned down in Ghazni on 21 December.

All of these journalists and media workers were targeted because of their work amid an armed conflict that has seen an increase in violence against journalists and civil society in general since early 2020, RSF said in a statement.

"RSF has every reason to believe that armed groups, especially the Taliban or Taliban affiliates, are responsible for this wave of killings," the organization stated.

"RSF has asked the ICC's chief prosecutor to include these murders in the crimes committed in Afghanistan since 2003 that she was authorised to investigate by the ICC's Appeals Chamber in March 2020.

"With a view to prosecuting those responsible, RSF has asked her to determine whether they should be treated as war crimes or as another category of crimes defined by the ICC's Rome Statute, such as crimes against humanity," the organization stated.

At least 100 journalists, including 15 foreign journalists, have been killed in connection with their work in the past 20 years in Afghanistan, while more than 60 media outlets have been destroyed or attacked and hundreds of threats have been made against journalists and media.

The Kabul Times