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Editorial

Int'l community shouldn't watch Taliban brutality

Afghan forces battled on Monday to stop major Taliban's offensives as the United States and Britain accused the insurgents of massacring civilians in a town they recently captured near the Pakistani crossing.

Taliban fighters assaulted at least three provincial capitals overnight - Lashkar Gah, Kandahar and Herat - after a weekend of heavy fighting that saw thousands of civilians flee the advancing militants.

Fighting raged in Helmand's provincial capital Lashkar Gah, where the Taliban launched coordinated attacks on the city center and its prison - just hours after the government announced the deployment of hundreds of commandos to the area and could push back the militants.

This comes as President Ghani addressed an extraordinary meeting of the General Assembly on Monday, calling for a national mobilization against the insurgent group. Soon after President remarks, the Wolesi Jirga (Lower House of Parliament) and the Meshrano Jirga (Upper House of Parliament) jointly declared their support for the country's Republic system, the Constitution, freedom of expression, women's rights and government's security forces.

In addition, the two houses called on the United Nations and other international organizations to continue their financial and political support to Afghanistan and to assist in the peace process.

Taliban have continuously been killing the innocent people indiscriminately in Afghanistan. They even using civilian houses as military shelters and in fight against the Afghan forces. Religious scholars from their Islamic countries including Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Kuwait and Palestine and OIC have condemned the war in Afghanistan and called as illegitimate. However, Taliban have continued violence and killing the innocent people against the call of the Islamic scholars and their commitment to the peace agreement with the US.

Contrary to western media campaign in favor the militants, the signs that the Taliban have not reformed are increasingly clear. Assassination campaign against government workers, civil society leaders and security forces prove that Taliban has never changed, but as per the President remarks, they have become crueler and savage.

The group' attacks on civilians including women and children show that they are not committed to peace and purse their terrorist goals by violence. Although, Afghans, the international community and neighboring countries have ruled out the revival of the Emirate in Afghanistan, Taliban have violence in the country to overrun Afghanistan again.

Meanwhile contrary to the US claims that they have achieved all their goals in Afghanistan, Taliban and al-Qaeda will strengthen their cooperation in the country to fight Afghanistan government and attack the US and its allies' national interests. The recent attack on UN compound in Herat city is the clear example.

To stop Taliban offensives and their brutal campaign, the international community shouldn't watch the Afghan miseries, but should take practical steps for lasting peace in the war-torn country.

UN, US and their allies should pressure the Taliban and their backers to stop human rights violations and hosting international terrorism. The militants should be pressured, and their economic channels should be identified, so that they surrender to peace and harmony in Afghanistan.

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US has no feasible strategy to protect its diplomats in Afghanistan

By: Saaransh Mishra ORF

Most American combat troops have now left Afghanistan, with the remaining scheduled to depart by the end of August. Amongst a plethora of other concerns, withdrawal has caused serious apprehensions about the security of the diplomats that will stay back in Afghanistan post the withdrawal.

Considering the lack of a foolproof strategy to protect these diplomats, combined with the necessity of their presence in the country — given that America wants to continue its engagements with Afghanistan — the United States (US) faces multiple conundrums with regards to their safety that do not have any uncomplicated solutions. The US has to devise a way to balance the security of its own diplomats along with the overall well-being of a future Afghanistan, which seems herculean and almost impossible at this point.

Securing embassy officials and future engagements with Kabul

The US embassy in Kabul is one of the largest embassies in the world and is primarily responsible for maintaining contacts with the Afghan government and other allies, along with reporting on political and security developments and, most importantly, overseeing billions of dollars of aid budgets. Since 2002, the US has provided nearly US $88 billion dollars to Afghanistan in security assistance; US $36 billion in civilian assistance, including US $787 million specifically devoted towards supporting Afghan women and girls; and nearly US $3.9 billion in humanitarian assistance. Moreover, to ensure a peaceful and stable future Afghanistan, the US has said that it will continue to provide COVID-19 vaccines through COVAX, critical emergency medical assistance to respond to the COVID-19 crisis, assistance through aid to help mitigate the pandemic's impact, life-saving humanitarian assistance to Afghans in need, and also security assistance (Congress appropriated US $3 billion to the Afghanistan Security Forces Fund in 2021) to combat all kinds of violence within the country.

Even though the US embassy officials are making plans to majorly downsize the number of contractors and other personnel amidst worsening security concerns, since all assistance is going to be routed through the embassy, the US must maintain an on-ground diplomatic presence in the country. The failure to maintain an American diplomatic presence would only lead to a deterioration in the lives of Afghan civilians and also decimate the economy further, which is heavily aid-dependent. This would intensify the scrutiny that the US has faced since 2001, being considered responsible for the predicament that Afghanistan finds itself in today, which would be highly detrimental to their national interests.

Recognizing the importance of continually supporting Afghanistan to secure its national interests while also safeguarding the security of its diplomats, the US has decided to keep about 650 troops in Afghanistan post-withdrawal. But, the Taliban Spokesperson, Suhail Shaheen, has warned that America leaving any forces behind at all would be in contravention to the Doha Agreement of 2020, and would give the Taliban an excuse to act in whatever way considered appropriate by its leadership. While Shaheen said that the diplomats, NGOs, and other civilians would never be attacked by the Taliban, they have done very little since the Peace Deal of 2020 to demonstrate their commitment to it.

The Taliban have continued to keep ties with terrorist outfits such as the Al-Qaeda, boycotted the crucial peace talks, ramped up violence across the country and recently also started capturing different districts of Afghanistan and now reportedly control approximately 85 percent of the country. Therefore, irrespective of how much reassurance the Taliban provides to the US, it would be unfathomably risky to leave these diplomats behind, without a military complement. But the Taliban's explicit threat against any military forces whatsoever would only mean that they would continue flouting the commitments made under the Peace Deal and increase violence, which would lead to Afghanistan descending into more chaos. Besides, the death of former US Ambassador to Libya Chris Stevens in 2012, along with three other American diplomats, when an unidentified mob attacked the unguarded US embassy in Benghazi should definitely serve as a deterrent to the current administration from leaving an unprotected or feebly protected diplomatic mission behind.

Securing Kabul airport

Yet another issue that America is currently tackling with respect to a diplomatic presence in Afghanistan is the security of the Hamid Karzai International Airport. A possible Taliban takeover of the airport could make it impossible for the American and allied personnel to safely evacuate the country, in case of any contingencies. US military officials have also said that without a secure airport, the US embassy complex in Kabul would have to shut down and all personnel would have to leave the country. The US is currently in talks with Turkey, a country that has long provided airport security as a part of its contribution to the NATO mission in Afghanistan.

Turkey has also said that it is prepared to keep its forces in Kabul to protect the airport, but the Taliban has warned Turkey of severe consequences should they do so, claiming that this would be construed as a violation of their sovereignty and would be considered as a continuation of Afghanistan's occupation. So far, the Taliban has seized a lot of territory that includes important provinciial capitals, but have clearly stated their absence of intentions to seize Kabul militarily. However, the continued presence of foreign troops in the capital will give rise to the potent threat of the Taliban trying to move close to Kabul and control it. The US will be majorly concerned about this because it would severely jeopardize the security of the Americans on-ground whose lives it will be responsible for.

Reliance on the ineffective Afghan Defense Forces

The Taliban has said that instead of foreign troops, the security of airports and embassies should be an "Afghan Responsibility." This underlines the role that the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces must play in ensuring peace in the country while also perpetuating American security interests. Nevertheless, despite almost two decades of extensive training and investment by the US and NATO, the Afghan Defense Forces remain highly incompetent, unmotivated, poorly trained, corrupt and riddled with deserters, according to various US, NATO and Afghan Officials that have worked with them in the past.

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