**Afghan Taliban versus the ISKP**

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A sharp increase in the incidents of militancy and violence in the last few days in Afghanistan is an alarm bell for both regional and international players. The bloodshed at Kabul airport, the barbarism in Kunduz, the suicide bombings in Kandahar and some other incidents of violence in Jalalabad and Mazar-i-Sharif are more than enough to take stern action against the miscreants responsible for killing hundreds of innocent people.

There are credible reports of the involvement of the Islamic State in Khorasan Province (ISKP) in these incidents of brutality. The ISKP wants to destabilise the region only to defame the Afghan Taliban who are now governing the country.

The militant ISKP represents the Islamic State in Afghanistan and it is using a multi-faceted strategy to damage the Taliban. It was launched first to weaken the Afghan Taliban and later to be used as a spoiler and miscreant group after the withdrawal of foreign forces from Afghanistan. There are solid proofs that ISKP got support from Afghan intelligence agency NDS and Indian intelligence agency R&AW as both of them played their role secretly in the growth and training of ISKP. It is a matter of satisfaction that the Afghan Taliban are taking actions against the ISKP while conducting special operations in which some arrests and killings were also reported.

ISKP had emerged in 2015 in the aftermath of ISIS declaring Iraq and Syria as its caliphate. It failed to be a potent force for four long years till 2020 due to sustained and continuous action of the Afghan Taliban, the former Afghan government and US’ military forces. However, it re-emerged itself in 2020 while focusing on urban areas where it started militant activities both against the Afghan Taliban and international forces present in the country.

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It is now crystal clear that India is supporting the terrorist outfits in Afghanistan even though international forces are taking actions against their brutality. According to a report of the UN Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team that appeared in 2020, there are individuals from India who are part of ISIS in Afghanistan.

If there is any loser in the region after Kabul’s takeover by the Afghan Taliban, it is undoubtedly India. New Delhi is nowhere to be seen in the international forums where there is a discussion on bringing peace to Kabul. India is nowhere in the “Extended Troika” group of the US, Russia, China and Pakistan. It also couldn’t make it to the Quad group that includes the US, Pakistan, Uzbekistan and Afghanistan. India was once considered to be a close ally of Kabul but its stakes met a huge blow after the Taliban’s takeover. It lost in the region and, therefore, India started pointing fingers at Pakistan for its failures. Left with no option, India started supporting the ISKP in Afghanistan through its intelligence agency. And thus, the rapid increase in the militant activities of ISKP in major parts of Afghanistan, including Kandahar, that is considered to be the spiritual heartland of the Taliban.

There is a long list of brutalities claimed by ISKP in Afghanistan since the takeover by the Taliban. The brutal ISKP claimed responsibility for a bombing at Kabul’s Hamid Karzai International Airport that killed more than 180 people while injuring hundreds of others and it got happened just days after the Afghan takeover. The suicide attacks in Kunduz and Kandahar are also glaring examples of ISKP’s massacre in the stronghold of the Taliban. The crackdown launched against the ISKP by the Taliban shows that they are considering them a serious threat to peace in the country.

Achieving peace in Afghanistan is not possible without the support of the international community as the Taliban cannot do it alone. It is need of the hour to support the current regime in Afghanistan wholeheartedly to ensure peace in the region. The dream of ISKP for destabilising the region shouldn’t be materialised because it will not be in the interest of the world. The attacks of ISKP on various parts of Afghanistan indicate that they want to create mistrust in the capabilities of the Taliban government because they are the only organised force that can ensure the safety and security of Afghanistan.

Therefore, the international community should try to engage with the Taliban in Afghanistan on an immediate basis. The failure of the Afghan Taliban will be tantamount to the failure of peace in the entire region. Pakistan is playing a positive role in Afghanistan based on the principle of humanity but it is being portrayed negatively by the spoilers and miscreants. We are also bearing an increase in militant attacks in our tribal belt since the Taliban’s takeover in Kabul. Our Foreign Minister just flew to Kabul to ensure peace in the whole region. But we are well aware of how isolating the Taliban would aggravate an already deteriorating situation. The world should engage with the Taliban to ensure peace in the whole region. Violence cannot be afforded anymore.

*The writer is an old Aitchisonian who believes in freedom of expression, a freelance columnist, entrepreneur and social activist.*