

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Most Kind

Daily Outlook  
AFGHANISTAN  
The Leading Independent Newspaper

September 05, 2019

## Threats Posed by ISKP Loom Large

Threats posed by the self-proclaimed Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP) loom large in Afghanistan since they seek to foment sectarian violence through targeting people on the basis of their beliefs. The ISKP's recent attacks on a wedding hall in Kabul, which killed and wounded dozens of civilians including women and children, suggests its strong foothold in the country.

The ISKP has carried out large-scale attacks in the past. In the evening of 11 October, 2016, two attackers wearing police uniforms and equipped with grenades and machine guns opened fire on Ashura mourners in Kabul's Kart-e Sakhi Shrine, the most popular gathering place in Kabul for mourners marking Muharram, the martyrdom of Imam Husain (A.S). The second attacker, who apparently fled the shrine after joining the first attacker in shooting, fought the security forces in a nearby mosque in Kart-e Chahar. There were no casualties to civilians there as the mosque was not being used, at the time. Witnesses said the attackers in Kart-e Sakhi "indiscriminately shot everyone they faced. They wouldn't even spare women and children."

These attacks indicate that the group has an operational presence in Kabul that is beyond the "nascent" stage. The group seems to have gained the capability of carrying out fatal attacks on an occasional basis in the capital, although not at a sophisticated level yet. Sending two bombers to blow themselves up in a crowd of civilian demonstrators, or two attackers dressed as police and equipped with hand grenades and guns, or a suicide attacker to carry out attack on a wedding ceremony do not require a high level of complexity. However, the execution of such attacks does need some level of confidence and precision of planning, as well as adequate logistics and surveillance. These attacks are also an indicator that the group has recruited a certain number of dedicated and experienced fighters in the capital.

What has sharpened concern among Afghans is both ISKP's capability and its willingness to implant sectarianism into the conflict in Afghanistan. In recent decades, compared to most conflicts in the Muslim world, Afghanistan has stood out for the absence of such fratricide. ISKP, during the short period since its emergence, has, however, showed no hesitation in stepping into this un-mined area. While the Ashura and July 2016 attacks in Kabul are the most remarkable examples of sectarian violence by ISKP, the overall sectarian trend that is emerging since the group's advent has been much wider. Since the group's emergence, there have been a number of attacks and assassinations targeting Sufi, Hanafi and Shia entities. Salafis have also had their share of victims, in what appear to be revenge attacks. Fermenting sectarian hatred would complicate the Afghan conflict with new motifs and grievances, and put it onto a more unpredictable trajectory. If a sectarian tone did become ingrained in the violence, it would be hard to easily reverse it. Any sectarian projects of the Afghan conflict would carry long-term consequences for the stability of Afghanistan. It is relatively easier to recover from political violence once there is a political settlement and reconciliation. However, it is harder to recover from sectarian strife, as it shatters the community's social cohesion.

Based on agreement signed between the Taliban and the US representatives, the Taliban have vowed not to harbor any terrorist networks in the country. However, some view the Taliban's capability of fulfilling this commitment with doubt, mainly since the ISKP has gained a foothold in some districts. Worst of all, the ISKP is likely to have been highly successful in its recruitment and even penetrated deep in the heart of the most well-known government academic center, Kabul University. Reports said earlier that two clerics, who taught in sharia department of Kabul University, was accused of having affiliation with ISKP and arrested by Afghan police. Later, it was rumored that the two had key role in radicalizing sharia students, who carried out the most fatal attacks in Kabul. Such news are highly shocking.

With this in mind, the government should have a strong control over seminaries across the country and monitor them on regular basis. After all, seminaries in tribal belts need closer scrutiny by the government side.

Afghan nation should be cautious enough not to fall for the militants' trickery and have to practice religious tolerance towards one another. The clergy and the Ulema Council are responsible to preach against the radical ideology and inhumane practices of the extremists - who trample upon the rights and liberty of the people on the grounds of their race, sex, sect and creed. Moreover, the media are to reflect the militants' intentions and spread awareness regarding their schismatic projects so as to prevent from widening gaps among people.

In the current month of Muharram, as Shiites hold mourning ceremonies as religious rituals, the government has to adopt strict security measures in all provinces so that they could perform their religious rituals without fear for casualties.



## Ramifications of US Policy on Kashmir and aftereffects

By: Rajkumar Singh

In a historic decision the present BJP-led government under the Premiership of Narendra Damodar Das Modi, who succeeded to the throne second time in continuation, scrapped Articles 370 and 35A of the Constitution of India. The said provisions gave several rights and privileges to the Kashmiri peoples against the national unity and integrity of this country. However, in recent decades the succeeding governments of Pakistan have also misused and abused these provisions for fostering proxy war in Jammu and Kashmir, particularly since the early 1990s. Now, the government of Pakistan is more worried about the part of the territory called PoK which the latter had illegally occupied at the close of 1947 as a result of a mini war between the two countries. The ill-frustrated Pakistani government and the people as well are thinking about moving to the International Court of Justice and raise the issue of Plebiscite in the State of Jammu and Kashmir. As on the issue Islamabad has been failed miserably at global level except some partial/indirect support from China, there is no likelihood of making it a hot cake of world politics. The earlier governments of India had also tried to handle the issue, however, in their own way, with soft methods.

Unsuccessful Quiet diplomacy of UPA

In a recent attempt during the period of United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government, a new term 'quiet diplomacy' was discovered and propagated as a possible solution to the Kashmir problem. Speaking to journalists on the sidelines of an All India newspaper editor's conference India's home minister P. Chidambaram disclosed, 'We are working on quiet diplomacy and added that such efforts are essential to take the process forward'. Earlier in April 2006 too India and Pakistan agreed on quiet diplomacy to further the solution of Kashmir issue. Under it, major initiatives will be taken up at the top level, rather than being discussed in the media. According to The Dawn (Karachi), 'Back-channel diplomacy will be used to debate proposals like self-government demilitarisation and independence. In the process some intellectuals and former bureaucrats and general of the two countries will meet and discuss various solutions. They would later brief their government about the outcome of their meetings and various proposals for resolving the dispute. However even at the beginning the initiative was criticised by pro-freedom leader and Hurriyat Conference chairman Sayed Ali Geelani who said that the offer is aimed at forcing a compromise solution on the people of Jammu and Kashmir against their aspirations, sacrifices and over six-decades long struggle. 'Quiet diplomacy is secret diplomacy where people will decide things and force a solution on Kashmir.' He urged the people to be cautious and remain firm on their resolve and added that if we compromised at this juncture we will always have to move backwards. In the context the separatists bullet that killed the moderate Hurriyat leader, Fazl Haque Qureshi had also, to a great extent, wounded the prospect of quiet diplomacy for settling the Kashmir problem.

Failure of Indian policy in Kashmir

At large the concept of peace suggests not only the absence of conflict, violence and hostility but it also signifies an ambience of prosperity, be that economic, social or cultural. Without delving and getting stuck into the ruins of history, Kashmir, in the most recent times has been showing some semblance of peace. But, the million dollar question is, is this really an era of peace or just another short-lived phase of calm before it could once again turn into the storm of conflict that we got

to witness on several occasions in past? In Kashmir, the psycho-social fallout of the lingering conflict situation has not been diagnosed appropriately, nor have they been tested with keen interest. In the context India's key failure has been to eradicate its culture of exclusion, which privileges religious identity over citizenship. Each bomb represents an idea and each idea, in turn, is rooted in a larger political and cultural context. Policing can arrest perpetrators, not the historical processes which create them. Even though ideological sources and material resources of the Indian Jihad are global, the specific conditions in which it grew are local. India in the decade since 9/11, has failed to engage with, and address, those conditions. India's key failure has been its inability to hold honest national conversation about communal violence, and the ways in which it is embedded in our cultures: a key cause of the persistence of the Jihadist movement.

Coming of BJP in 2014

The general elections to the 16th Lok Sabha held in April - May 2014 proved a watershed in the political history of independent India. For the first time a non-Congress political party, the Bharatiya Janata Party, was able to get an absolute majority on its own in Parliament. The present victory is unprecedented as it has given the opportunity to BJP to form government without dependence on allies. Narendra Damodar Das Modi was first named a year ago by BJP as its chief election campaigner and later as the Prime Ministerial nominee who took the oath of office on the evening of 26 May 2014. In comparison to his earlier pro-Hindu image, during the election campaign and on becoming Prime Minister of the country, Modi was said to have totally changed himself into a moderate. His approach towards politics and political ideology reminded his vision of a secular India as he declared in a Chintan Baithak at Jaipur in 2004, 'I do not treat citizens as minority or majority. I treat them as equal citizens of a modern state with equal rights and equal opportunities.' Now he is the Prime Minister of the country and the world powers, one by one, turned towards him and all are set to re-engage with an India, which is, energised, rooted, and self confident.

With the coming of new government in India in May 2014 people at large expressed mixed reaction to the Problem of Jammu and Kashmir. Congratulating Narendra Modi for his Party's landslide victory in Lok Sabha polls, Peoples Democratic Party patriarch Mufti Mohammad Sayeed hoped that the new BJP government would take tangible steps in finding a lasting solution to the Kashmir problem. In a statement issued in Srinagar the PDP leader expected that the Modi government would pursue an agenda which would be politically - inclusive and developmentally - intensive. Earlier the BJP has all along been calling for greater integration of Jammu and Kashmir with rest of India. Party's manifesto issued on the eve of 16th Lok Sabha election also mentioned the abrogation of Article 370 after discussion, return of Kashmiri Pandits and working on their resettlement, equal and rapid development of all the three regions of the State - Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh, good governance, better infrastructure, educational opportunities for people of Valley as its target in coming years. In August 2014 Narendra Modi paid a visit to Jammu and Kashmir, although he refrained from touching any political issue facing the State and said that his government intended to win hearts of people through development.

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## The World Can't Ignore Kashmir. We Are All in Danger

If the world does nothing to stop the Indian assault on Kashmir and its people, Two nuclear-armed states will get ever closer to a direct military confrontation.

By: Imran Khan

After I was elected prime minister of Pakistan last August, one of my foremost priorities was to work for lasting and just peace in South Asia. India and Pakistan, despite our difficult history, confront similar challenges of poverty, unemployment and climate change, especially the threat of melting glaciers and scarcity of water for hundreds of millions of our citizens.

I wanted to normalize relations with India through trade and by settling the Kashmir dispute, the foremost impediment to the normalization of relations between us.

On July 26, 2018, in my first televised address to Pakistan after winning the elections, I stated we wanted peace with India and if it took one step forward, we would take two steps. After that, a meeting between our two foreign ministers was arranged on the side-lines of the United Nations General Assembly session in September 2018, but India canceled the meeting. That September I also wrote my first of three letters to Prime Minister Narendra Modi calling for dialogue and peace. Unfortunately, all my efforts to start a dialogue for peace were rebuffed by India. Initially, we assumed that Mr. Modi's increasingly hard-line positions and his rhetoric against Pakistan were aimed to whip up a nationalist frenzy among the Indian voters with an eye on the Indian elections in May.

On Feb. 14, a few months before those elections, a young Kashmiri man carried out a suicide attack against Indian troops in Indian-occupied Kashmir. The Indian government promptly blamed Pakistan. We asked for evidence, but Mr. Modi sent Indian Air Force fighter planes across the border to Pakistan. Our Air Force brought down an Indian plane and captured the pilot. We struck back to signal we could defend ourselves but chose not to strike a target that would cause loss of life. I made a conscious decision to show that Pakistan had no intent of aggravating the conflict between two nuclear-armed states. We returned the captured Indian pilot, with no preconditions.

On May 23, after Mr. Modi's re-election, I congratulated him and hoped we could work for "peace, progress and prosperity in South Asia." In June, I sent another letter to Mr. Modi offering dialogue to work toward peace. Again, India chose not to respond. And we found out that while I was making peace overtures, India had been lobbying to get Pakistan placed on the "blacklist" at the intergovernmental Financial Action Task Force, which could lead to severe economic sanctions and push us toward bankruptcy.

Evidently Mr. Modi had mistaken our desire for peace in a nuclear neighbourhood as appeasement. We were not simply up against a hostile government. We were up against a "New India," which is governed by leaders and a party that are the products of the Hindu supremacist mother ship, Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, or the R.S.S.

The Indian prime minister and several ministers of his government continue to be members of the R.S.S., whose founding fathers expressed their admiration for Benito Mussolini and Adolf Hitler. Mr. Modi has written with great love and reverence about M.S. Golwalkar, the second supreme leader of the R.S.S., and has

referred to Mr. Golwalkar as "Pujiniya Shri Guruji (Guru Worthy of Worship)."

Mr. Modi's guru wrote admiringly about the Final Solution in "We, Our Nationhood Defined," his 1939 book: "To keep up the purity of the race and its culture, Germany shocked the world by her purging the country of the Semitic Races - the Jews. National pride at its highest has been manifested here. Germany has also shown how well-nigh impossible it is for races and cultures, having differences going to the root, to be assimilated into one united whole, a good lesson for us in Hindustan for us to learn and profit by."

I had hoped that being elected prime minister might lead Mr. Modi to cast aside his old ways as the chief minister of the Indian state of Gujarat, when he gained global notoriety for the 2002 pogrom against local Muslims on his watch and was travel to the United States under its International Religious Freedom Act - a list of visa denials that included associates of Slobodan Milosevic.

Mr. Modi's first term as prime minister had been marked by lynching of Muslims, Christians and Dalits by extremist Hindu mobs. In Indian-occupied Kashmir, we have witnessed increased state violence against defiant Kashmiris. Pellet-firing shotguns were introduced and aimed at the eyes of young Kashmiri protesters, blinding hundreds.

On Aug. 5, in its most brazen and egregious move, Mr. Modi's government altered the status of Indian-occupied Kashmir through the revocation of Article 370 and 35A of the Indian Constitution. The move is illegal under the Constitution of India, but more important, it is a violation of the United Nations Security Council resolutions on Kashmir and the Shimla Agreement between India and Pakistan.

And Mr. Modi's "New India" chose to do this by imposing a military curfew in Kashmir, imprisoning its population in their homes and cutting off their phone, internet and television connections, rendering them without news of the world or their loved ones. The siege was followed by a purge: Thousands of Kashmiris have been arrested and thrown into prisons across India. A blood bath is feared in Kashmir when the curfew is lifted. Already, Kashmiris coming out in defiance of the curfew are being shot and killed.

If the world does nothing to stop the Indian assault on Kashmir and its people, there will be consequences for the whole world as two nuclear-armed states get ever closer to a direct military confrontation. India's defense minister has issued a not-so-veiled nuclear threat to Pakistan by saying that the future of India's "no first use" policy on nuclear weapons will "depend on circumstances." Similar statements have been made by Indian leaders periodically. Pakistan has long viewed India's "no first use" claims with skepticism.

With the nuclear shadow hovering over South Asia, we realize that Pakistan and India have to move out of a zero-sum mind-set to begin dialogue on Kashmir, various strategic matters and trade. On Kashmir, the dialogue must include all stakeholders, especially the Kashmiris. We have already prepared multiple options that can be worked on while honouring the right to self-determination the Kashmiris were promised by the Security Council resolutions and India's first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru.

Mr. Khan is the Prime Minister of Pakistan.

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