

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

Daily Outlook

AFGHANISTAN

The Leading Independent Newspaper

April 15, 2017

Consensus Needed in War against Terrorism

United States (US) forces in Afghanistan dropped the largest non-nuclear bomb on a series of cave-fighters loyal to Islamic State-Khorasan or ISIS-K (Daesh) group in Achin district of eastern Nangarhar province on Thursday, April 13. As per the official statements both by US and Afghan officials, the bomb, also called as 'Mother of All Bombs', was used as part of ongoing efforts to defeat the Daesh in Afghanistan, as it is believed to be getting stronger. The US Central Command (CENTCOM) said that US forces took every precaution to avoid civilian casualties with the strike and that American forces would continue offensive operations for such purposes until Daesh was destroyed in Afghanistan.

Afghan government has also given a statement that it was aware of the operation and knew that the bomb was being used against Daesh. As per a comment on twitter by Presidential Palace or ARG, "The air strike was designed to support the efforts of the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) and U.S. Forces as well as minimize the risk to ANSF and the U.S. Forces conducting clearing operations in the region." Whether the bomb was used with the consent of US and Afghan President is a different issue; the important question is whether the use of this bomb fits in any sort of long-term strategy adopted by the US and Afghan decision makers, or it is just an effort in isolation.

It is imperative to comprehend that the nature of terrorism and insurgency is now turning into a complex and complicated phenomenon in Afghanistan. The security situation is deteriorating again and the prospects of peace and tranquility are not very clear. Earlier, it was only Taliban who posed a serious threat to the country but now Afghanistan is facing Daesh as well, which seems to be getting stronger with each passing day. Previously, there were claims that the growth of Daesh in Afghanistan may only be an exaggeration but the situation now clearly depicts that the claims were not far away from reality.

The growth of Daesh has mounted double challenge for Afghan government and the security forces. There are already doubts and questions about the performance of Afghan security forces against the growing threats of Taliban in different parts of the country, the rise of Daesh has put their capabilities in further test. Daesh has had a history of ruthless massacre and tyranny in Middle East and it largely differs from Taliban the way its militants operate. There have already been certain incidents wherein they have shown inhumane tyranny against innocent civilians and some security forces.

Daesh is believed to be in a process of hasty recruitment. According to many reports, the group is operating in different parts of Badakhshan, Kunduz, Farah, Faryab, Logar and also in the eastern regions, especially in Nangarhar.

Daesh has shown its true face in Iraq and Syria and has shown to the world the extent of its barbarism. The group needs to be observed properly in Afghanistan; otherwise, it would be really difficult to control it in insecure circumstances.

Another major factor that is supporting the growth of Daesh is that many ex-Taliban militants have joined it and they are now fighting under its flag. Moreover, the weak security mechanism to have a check on its growth has further deteriorated the situation.

US Department of State, under Obama administration, had earlier declared Daesh as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) under Section 219 of the Immigration and Nationality Act. According to a statement by then US Department of State, Daesh announced its formation on January 10, 2015. The group is based in the Afghanistan/Pakistan region and is composed primarily of former members of Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan and the Afghan Taliban.

The senior leadership of Daesh has pledged allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the leader of Daesh. This pledge was accepted in late January 2015 and since then ISIL-K has carried out suicide bombings, small arms attacks and kidnappings in eastern Afghanistan against civilians and Afghan National Security and Defense Forces. It also claimed responsibility for May 2015 attacks on civilians in Karachi, Pakistan, and the attacks on the Enlightenment Movement Protest and Muharram procession in Kabul.

The U.S. Department of State had claimed that the sanctions imposed by the United States against terrorists was an important element of their counter terrorism efforts. Designations of terrorists and terrorist groups would expose and isolate individuals and organizations, and result in denial of access to the U.S. financial system.

Now, this current bombing of Daesh hideouts is a clear indication that the US wants to get serious about controlling Daesh in Afghanistan or at least it wants to give this impression.

However, it is important to see the issue of terrorism and insecurity in Afghanistan as a whole. Likewise, it is vital to design a comprehensive strategy wherein the international and national governments and forces see eye to eye with each other and there is full consensus on every major step that is carried out against the insurgents; whether Daesh or Taliban.



Terrorism Remains a Threat to Afghanistan and Pakistan

By Hujjatullah Zia

The Taliban's splint groups, which triggered a sense of mistrust between Kabul and Islamabad, have been hot recently. The militant fighters seek to intensify their attacks in Afghan-Pak borders. Within the last two years, the Taliban inflicted heavy casualties upon Afghan nation under "Spring Offensive" and "Omari Operation". Although no special name has been declared for the Taliban's heavy offensive this year, the spirit of the war is not changed and the militants will continue violence and bloodshed as ever before.

Pakistan, similar to Afghanistan, also came under the Taliban's heavy offensive in recent months. In February, 88 people were killed when a suicide bomber targeted one of Pakistan's most well-known shrines in the southern town of Sehwan. The attack, the worst in Pakistan since the 2014 attack on a school in Peshawar, was claimed by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). Moreover, the custodian of a shrine and two others have been arrested after murdering 20 devotees in Pakistan's Punjab province. Abdul Waheed, custodian of the Ali Muhammad Gujjar shrine, drugged the devotees before beating them with sticks and stabbing them to death and handed himself over to Pakistani authorities. Police was unclear if the men had any affiliation with armed extremist groups such as the Pakistani Taliban, who often carry out attacks targeting shrines and Pakistan's minorities.

The ISIL and Jamaat-ur-Ahrar seek to stoke sectarian violence in Pakistan and kill ethnic minority groups on the grounds of their race and beliefs. For instance, at least 22 people were killed, days earlier, when the Pakistani Taliban's Jamaat-ur-Ahrar faction targeted a Shia Muslim mosque in the northwestern town of Parachinar. In the wake of a string of suicide bombings and attacks that killed at least 130 people across Pakistan in February, Pakistan has launched Operation Radd-ul-Fassad (Elimination of Chaos) against the Pakistani Taliban.

Pakistan has launched a series of military operations since 2007 targeting the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and its allies, mostly in the country's tribal areas. The last operation, Zarb-e-Azb, was launched in 2014, and targeted TTP bases in their northwestern stronghold of North Waziristan. Over the course of two years that operation expanded from North Waziristan to include military raids in towns and urban centers across the country. Operation Radd-ul-Fassad, Pakistan's military says, aims to continue to consolidate gains made during Operation Zarb-e-Azb.

Taking military action against the Taliban will be a positive step for dismantling warring factions or weakening their networks rather than pointing the finger at other countries. The operation should be carried out without dividing the Taliban into the good and bad. It is believed that Zarb-e-Azb failed to bear the desired result since

warring factions are still able to carry out large-scale attacks. No wonder the militant fighters seek to create gap between Afghanistan and Pakistan and have been successful in this regard. The escalated militancy put both the countries at the verge of military action against each other as Pakistan fired missile at Afghanistan's soil following the terrorist attacks at Sehwan in February.

Moreover, Afghanistan's refugees were put under pressure in Pakistan. In 2014, after a Tehreek-e-Taliban-claimed school attack in Peshawar killed more than 143 people, including 132 children, the Pakistani government announced a decision to deport registered and unregistered Afghans on the grounds of national security, accusing some refugees of posing a threat.

Since then, incidents of police abuse, beatings and extortion against Afghans has reportedly skyrocketed, prompting many to return to war-torn Afghanistan, according to US-based rights group Human Rights Watch.

Under the UN refugee agency's (UNHCR) scheme, which was launched in 2002, as many as 370,000 registered Afghan refugees had repatriated voluntarily by the end of 2016. Citing donor shortfalls, the UNHCR last November said it would end cash support to returnees in mid-December - but the incentive resumed on March 1. According to recent report, the UN has cut in half a cash incentive for Afghan refugees in Pakistan to return to their country. The reduction - from \$400 to \$200 - comes as a voluntary repatriation operation has reportedly resumed, with 16,000 people based in Pakistan's Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa province registered to head home.

To be honest, it is not only Pakistan that suffers from militancy but Afghanistan bears the brunt of insurgency as the International Crisis Group (ICG) said that the future of Afghanistan's unity government is "shaky". Terrorist groups try to destabilize the entire region and have been changed into a regional and global crisis. Therefore, Moscow hosted a conference about peace in Afghanistan that was attended by regional countries, however, the US refused to attend the meeting saying that Russia legalize the Taliban group through bringing it to the peace process. Russia said that it supported peace under the leadership of Afghanistan.

Whether or not such conferences bear the desired result, the victims of terrorism, mainly Pakistan and Afghanistan must not let the militants to fish in the troubled waters.

Both the countries are targeted by Taliban and many other warring factions. Normally, the warm weather paves the ground for the Taliban's heavy offensives. To mitigate the insurgency, Kabul and Islamabad must launch not only defensive but also offensive attacks against the Taliban. Meanwhile, the gap between the two countries should be narrowed instantaneously.

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Saving Asia's Mothers

By Anderson Stanciole and Federica Maurizio

With all the talk about the impending "Asian century," one might imagine that the region had moved beyond what are often viewed as poor-country health challenges, like high rates of maternal mortality. The reality is very different.

In 2015, an estimated 85,000 women died of complications related to pregnancy and childbirth across the Asia-Pacific region - 28% of the global total. Up to 90% of those deaths, which were concentrated in just 12 countries, could have been prevented through quality antenatal, obstetric, and perinatal care.

In the absence of such care, the average maternal mortality rate (MMR) in the Asia-Pacific region is extremely high: 127 per 100,000 live births, compared to the developed-country average of 12 per 100,000. The 12 countries with the highest MMRs, exceeding 100 deaths per 10,000 live births, are Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Laos, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, and Timor-Leste. These countries, together, accounted for about 78,000 known maternal deaths in 2015. The actual figure is probably higher. In fact, MMRs are notoriously difficult to estimate, with conflict, poverty, poor infrastructure, weak health systems, and inadequate resources causing many deaths to go unreported.

MMR data do, however, provide an indication of general trends, which are not promising. Indeed, if they persist, hundreds of thousands of mothers in those 12 high-MMR Asia-Pacific countries alone could lose their lives by 2030.

To be sure, substantial progress has been made in the last 15 years, and efforts are being made to sustain it. The United Nations development agenda, underpinned by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), aims to reduce the MMR to 70 deaths per 100,000 live births by 2030. If that target is met, up to 100,000 lives could be saved across the Asia-Pacific region.

Achieving the goal presupposed faster progress, with annual rates of MMR reduction particularly low (2%) in Papua New Guinea and the Philippines. On current trends, only four of the Asia-Pacific region's 12 high-MMR countries will be able to meet the SDG target for maternal mortality. The remaining eight will require an average of 26 years.

[Chart]

At a time when family-planning policies are becoming increasingly restrictive, accelerating the pace of progress could prove difficult. Indeed, for some countries, progress is at risk of slowing. The UN Population Fund (UNFPA) is working hard to counter this trend. We are committed to ensuring that all pregnancies are safe and wanted, and that all women and girls are empowered not just to make their own choices about their own families and bodies, but also to contribute more to poverty reduction and economic development.

In the 12 high-MMR Asia-Pacific countries, the UNFPA advocates the development of responsive and inclusive health systems with sufficient numbers of trained personnel, from midwives to community-health workers. And we are already working to advance that objective.

In Afghanistan, the UNFPA and its partners have supported the expansion of community health services, including the

creation of 80 family health houses and nine mobile support teams. Those initiatives had reached more than 420,000 people by 2015.

In Lao PDR, the UNFPA has helped the Ministry of Health train midwives and village health volunteers to provide basic sexual and reproductive care, providing the information that women need to avoid unwanted pregnancies. This contributed in a steep drop in the MMR, from 450 to 220 per 100,000 live births, between 2005 and 2015.

In Fiji, the UNFPA, with the support of the Australian government, pre-positioned thousands of dignity and reproductive-health kits. Following the devastation caused by Cyclone Winston in February 2016, these strategically placed supplies help to address women and girls' immediate reproductive-health needs, saving the lives of mothers and children.

But, while such initiatives are already having a powerful impact, more investment must be channeled toward ensuring that comprehensive health services are available and accessible to all, especially the most vulnerable groups.

In particular, additional resources must be allocated to sexual and reproductive-health services - and to ensuring access to them. Strengthening the provision of antenatal care, ensuring safe delivery through skilled birth attendance, and expanding emergency obstetric care are all key interventions that can reduce MMRs across the region.

Of course, women also need access to family-planning services, to help them avoid unwanted pregnancies and reduce the number of unsafe abortions. The rights of all women and their partners to choose the family-planning method that is appropriate for them must be respected, and a full range of quality contraceptives must be readily available to all.

When women have full control over their sexual and reproductive health, society as a whole reaps enormous benefits. In fact, every \$1 invested in modern contraceptive services can yield as much as \$120 in social, economic, and environmental returns. Such investment should come partly from international development assistance, which must place a higher priority on sexual- and reproductive-health services, and partly from national governments.

But money is not all governments can offer. They can and must develop inclusive policies that address the needs of vulnerable and marginalized groups, including in ways that go beyond the health sector. This includes fighting harmful practices such as child marriage and gender-based violence; removing legal barriers to contraception; and working with communities to address misconceptions around sexual and reproductive health. Safe pregnancy and childbirth should be a top priority for all societies, as it is for the UNFPA. If we are to meet the SDG target for maternal mortality, we must work together to advance targeted, tailored interventions that respect the rights of women and girls to make decisions about their sexual and reproductive health. (Courtesy Project Syndicate)

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