

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



June 09, 2016

## The Rise of Taliban Attacks on the Afghan Judiciary

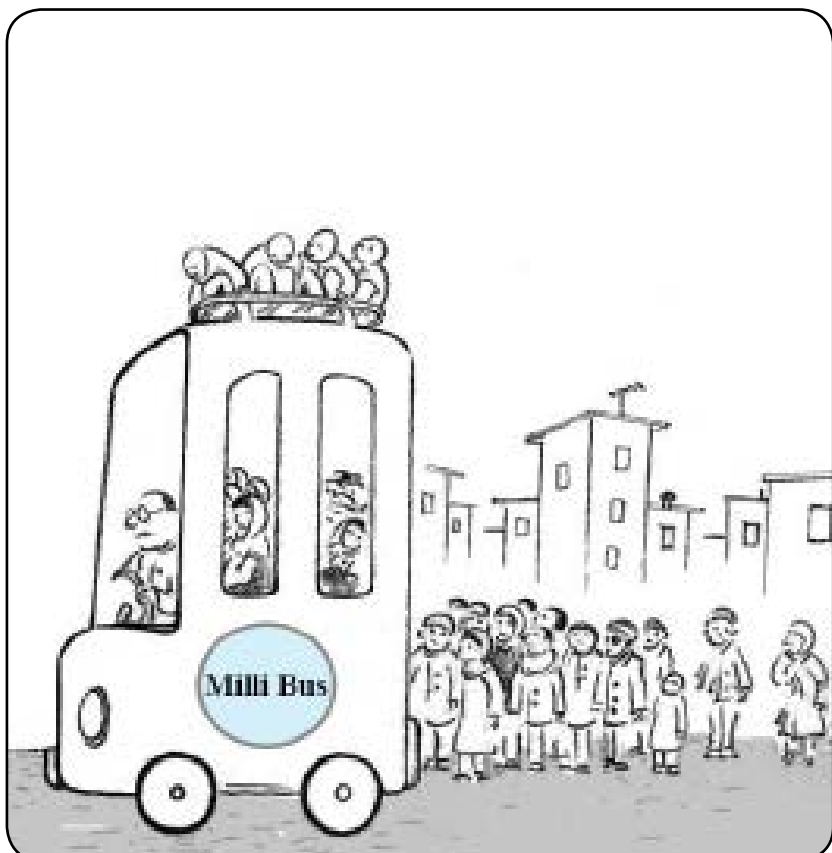
The Taliban have been heightening its attacks on the Afghan judiciary and government employees as well as members of the security forces. The spike of attacks by the militant groups is coming as a suggestion that the group is attempting to further escalate violence after the group named a new leader Mullah Haibatullah. This is while the Afghan government and the United States had expressed hopes that the death of the Taliban leader would help to persuade the group to denounce violence and come to the table of peace negotiations. However, not only the optimism came true, but the Taliban has further intensified violence. In recent instances of Taliban attacks, the militants organized attacks on a courthouse and a local attorney office in Ghazni and Logar respectively, leaving a dozen of people dead and injured. Attempting to escalate violence, the Taliban is apparently shifting their approach to use tactics aimed at spreading fear among the public. Despite the calls on the Taliban to join peace talks and stop violence at least for the month of Ramadan, the group has refocused on organizing attacks on government institutions, security personnel travelling as civilians and other people serving the state. The Taliban's abduction of the around 200 passengers travelling on the highway to the Northern provinces came as a shock to the whole nation. The militants then killed about a dozen of the passengers while the fates of some others remain unknown. While according to reports on Wednesday June 08, 2016, militants kidnapped almost 50 bus passengers in Kunduz.

On the other hand, the sharp increase in Taliban attacks on the judiciary is an avenue by the Taliban for execution of a number of the group's members who were convicted of terrorist activities. The executions marked a change of policy by the government of Afghanistan against the militant groups. The government's previous policy of leniency towards the militant groups did not work as the release of hundreds of Taliban prisoners in past years did not help persuading the Taliban to join peace talks or ease attacks across the country. The very same prisoners released from government prisons used to join the Taliban on the battlefields. In response to the government's tougher stance against the Taliban and execution of its members, the group has threatened to consider those relevant with the decision as legitimate military targets. Nonetheless, the government's stance against the Taliban is helpful for the overall campaign against the insurgency. In many provinces that have been vulnerable to Taliban's large-scale attacks, the Afghan National Security Forces have been on the offensive, repelling the Taliban's assaults and taking the war into the enemy's ground. So far this year, the Afghan security and defense forces have managed to repel the Taliban's ongoing offensive and foil the group's attempts to have major gains on the ground and capture important towns and districts. The government's determination to suppress the insurgency and put aside leniency towards the militant groups who refuse to join peace talks has undoubtedly helped the Afghan National Security Forces to better manage the anti-insurgency campaign. With the government demonstrating greater will to fight the militants, the security agencies have now clearer guidelines and a more robust plan to fight the insurgency.

The death of the Taliban leader has not helped resuming the peace process or easing the Taliban's campaign of violence. However, the killing of the Taliban leader was not something new coming into the calculations of the peace and war efforts. Despite the national unity government's leniency towards the Taliban and Kabul's outreach to Pakistan for helping the peace process through the four-nation peace initiative, the Taliban refused to join the peace talks and instead intensified offensives against Afghan National Security Forces. The people of Afghanistan paid the price of the government's failed policy of appeasement towards the Taliban. Not only the policy did not help the peace process, but the Taliban continued to target civilian-populated areas and kidnapping civilian.

The Taliban is determined to wage war. The government needs to respond decisively and will full strength. The increased attacks are clearly indicating that the peace process is virtually ended and cannot resume for an unforeseen period of time. The government needs to refocus on winning the war through a more robust anti-insurgency campaign rather than focusing on a failed endeavor to make peace with the Taliban. With the Afghan National Security Forces leading a robust campaign against the Taliban, the militant group's spring offensive is failing.

Afghanistan needs to consider the anti-insurgency campaign a long-term endeavor that could possibly take years and even decades. The Afghan government needs to develop resiliency against the pressures of the militant groups to become sustainable in the long run. There are high chances that the Taliban - or at least the core hard-line part of the group - do not join peace as the group has never been prepared to denounce war and violence. Only military wins by the government would help persuading the militant groups to negotiate a peace deal.



## A Silver Lining?

By Hujjatullah Zia

The recent systematic killings and unmitigated militancy reflect the Taliban's lukewarm response to peace and security. The Taliban guerillas have intensified their offensive and target political figures to send a terse message of war to Afghan government. According to Afghan officials, the warring factions enjoy safe havens across the border - as al-Qaeda's founder Osama bin Laden was killed in Abbottabad of Pakistan on May 2, 2011 and Mullah Akhtar Mansour was killed in the Dalbandin area of Balochistan on May 21, 2016 - will orchestrate deadly attacks against Afghan nation in order to challenge the national unity government for two major reasons.

First, President Muhammad Ashraf Ghani does not exercise the forbearance of his predecessor towards the Taliban. He neither calls the Taliban "discontented brothers" nor release them from prisoners with impunity. Unlike Afghan former President Hamid Karzai, Ghani speaks frankly about Pakistan and uses serious tone towards the Taliban faction. The mounting civilian casualties prompted Ghani frequently to change his strategy towards the Taliban and, therefore, signed the execution of six Taliban prisoners last month in response to their heavy offensives.

Secondly, Ghani shares a close tie with the Afghanistan's strategic aide the United States and signed security pact, which was held out against by Karzai despite the agreement of consultative Loya Jirga. Signing security pact triggered Taliban's anger as they persist on full withdrawal of US forces. Similarly, Mullah Mansour's death also enraged the Taliban fighters more than ever before.

Of late, the Taliban have ushered in targeting political figures systematically. As a result, the newly appointed attorney general of Logar province, Akram Nejat, was assassinated on Sunday when two insurgents attacked as his inauguration ceremony was ending, in which four other government employees and two civilians lost their lives and twenty more were wounded. This untoward incident marked the third court-related attack in Afghanistan within the past two weeks. The Taliban immediately claimed responsibility for the Logar attack. Zabihullah Mujahid, a Taliban spokesman, said the attack was revenge for the government's execution of six Taliban prisoners last month, the first such executions in years.

Last week, Taliban insurgents, dressed in burqas, attacked in a courthouse in Ghazni Province, killing six people, most of them civilians. The Taliban also attacked a minibus carrying court employees in Kabul on May 25, killing 10 officials.

In a second attack on Sunday, a prominent member of the Afghan parliament, Sher Wali Wardak, was killed by a bomb planted in the electric meter box on the wall outside his home in Kabul. People suffer bitterly from violence and bloodshed carried out by members of warring factions, mainly the Taliban. Civilian mortalities have, reportedly, increased by 55 per cent last

month, compared to March, since more than 120 civilians were killed in conflict. The report adds that the latest anti-security incident in May was the abduction of more than 200 passengers by militants in Baghlan-Kunduz highway.

The Taliban have violated humanitarian law more than thousand and one times through spilling the blood of non-combatants and curtailing the freedom of passengers. Likewise, insurgents seek to split up the nation via stoking sectarian violence and fueling ethnic sensitivities.

It is believed that a fruitful negotiation with Hezb-e-Islami Gulbuddin (HIG), which was founded in 1977 by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, will not be a panacea for our nation either. HIG, which resurfaced as an aggressive militant group after being sidelined by the rise of the Taliban in the mid-1990s, claimed responsibility for many bloody attacks against Coalition forces and Hamid Karzai's administration.

By and large, Hekmatyar apparently opened the door to talks, in 2008, with the Government of Afghanistan, in part through a spring 2008 letter addressed to President Karzai. Some suggest that there may be some potential for drawing Hekmatyar away from the insurgent fight and into a constructive role but others felt mistrust.

Kabul reached out to Hekmatyar as early as 2008 in the hope of working out a peace deal. Meanwhile, Hekmatyar had a complicated relationship with the Taliban, voicing support for Mullah Mohammad Omar while coordinating attacks with the Taliban spiritual leader against foreign and Afghan forces. But at the same time, Hezb-e-Islami clashed with the Taliban, particularly in eastern Afghanistan, over territory.

On February 16, 2014 the group announced it would formally participate in the upcoming presidential elections in Afghanistan. The announcement to participate in the election by the faction was seen as a blow to the Taliban-led insurgency in Afghanistan.

By March 2016, Afghanistan managed to bring Hekmatyar to the negotiating table after he dropped demands that all foreign forces leave the country. Kabul must consider whether Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's offer to end a 15-year insurgency campaign in exchange for involvement in the government is a workable proposition can be struck. Any deal would come with a price, however. At this stage, Hezb-e-Islami was seeking to become a government partner by seeking positions in civil and security institutions. Now it is said that peace agreement was signed between NUG and HIG and Hekmatyar will return to Afghanistan. Although it is the only achievement made by the Afghan High Peace Council (HPC) the question remains is that will this achievement bring peace in the country and mitigate civilian casualties. It is the readers to judge over the case by considering the mentioned facts.

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## Fenugreek Has Great Opportunities for Farmers in Afghanistan

By Saikat Kumar Basu

Fenugreek (*Trigonella foenum-graecum* L.) is an important but less known ingredient of the globally famous South Asian curries. The specific name 'foenum graecum' refers to the corresponding meaning as Greek Hay. Fenugreek is an ancient crop and has been found to be associated with major civilizations across Asia and Africa. Commonly known by its Hindi vernacular name 'methi' is an annual legume crop and a traditional spice plant. Although widely cultivated across South Asian nations including India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh as a spice crop; it is better known in other parts of the world as an annual forage legume belonging to the same Fabaceae family as alfalfa, the queen of forages. The crop is more commonly grown in India and Pakistan compared to other South Asian nations. The crop is also grown in neighboring Iran and China. Across the globe the crop is grown in varied amounts in parts of the US, Canada, Argentina, the UK, Russia, Mediterranean Europe, North Africa, Middle East, South East Asia, Taiwan, Japan and Australia. Several species of fenugreek (over 25) are reported across the globe; however, *Trigonella foenum-graecum* is the most agriculturally well known species.

The herbaceous plant has indeterminate growth habit with trifoliate leaves and legume pods containing 10-20 golden brownish seeds. This plant species has been used both in Ayurveda and Traditional Chinese Medicine in treating a number of human diseases. Both leaves and seeds have rich medicinal properties due to presence of steroidal saponin (such as diosgenin, yamogenin, tigogenin, dihydroxy-sapogenin etc), alkaloids (example fenugreekine), flavonoids, complex carbohydrates (most well reported being galactomannan) and essential amino acids (best known is 4-hydroxy isoleucine). Due to the presence of such important phytochemicals the seeds have been found to have significant properties in reducing blood sugar and blood cholesterol levels. As such in addition to its traditional use as a spice and forage crop, the plant has attracted the pharmaceutical, nutraceutical and functional food industries around the globe.

The crop is however reported to demonstrate strong Genotype X Environment interaction; and as such locally adapted cultivars of fenugreek will be suitable for optimal production or yield in different agro-ecological conditions. Fenugreek is suitable for short term crop rotations and grows without major agronomic challenges under both dry land and irrigated conditions suitable for semi-arid regions. However, the crop grows well without irrigation directly under rainfed conditions. Forage production in case of fenugreek has been found to both qualitatively and quantitatively better in semi-arid regions of the world. The crop is bloat free unlike alfalfa. The fenugreek forage quality with respect to both protein and fiber contents are similar to alfalfa. It is an excellent chemurgic crop

and has been the centre of several global medical trials exploring the medicinal properties of its leaves and seeds. This fast and easy growing annual forage legume has been found to be suitable for the low input agricultural systems of the dry areas of the Sub Saharan Africa, Asia, and Latin America. This low water requiring climate resilient crop has the potential to be grown as forage crop or medicinal herb or even as spice crop. Fenugreek can be mixed with hay or fodder for feeding cattle and livestock. Lactating animals can be given a diet mixed with fenugreek seeds to help milk letting as the fenugreek has been well documented as an important galactagogue (substance promoting flow of milk in lactating animals).

Dry, arid and semi-arid parts of Asia, Africa and Latin America will be suitable for the cultivation of this crop that has great demand in the international markets. Although, India is the largest global producer of fenugreek as a spice crop and Pakistan too is a well known producer of the crop; however the internal demands for the crop is so high within these nations that the majority of the produce is consumed internally. Hence it does not have a major global share of the lucrative fenugreek international market as a chemurgic crop. As a result there is opportunity for other South Asian nations to capture the international market. Furthermore, being a nitrogen fixer (as a legume crop), it could be grown in fallow lands or lands otherwise unsuitable for regular agronomic production. The crop being low in water requirement and as a nitrogen fixer can be effectively incorporated in crop cycles as well as used in reclamation of non-productive soils across Afghanistan. The extensive use of synthetic chemical fertilizers and pesticides is making modern industrial agriculture susceptible to serious impacts of pollution. Hence as an alternative; Organic Agriculture has become extremely popular around the globe. Being a natural nitrogen fixer, fenugreek crop has the potential for use in Organic Agriculture as a healthy, chemical free, green manure for growing other crops like small and large grain cereals, vegetables or even ornamental plants. The low agriculture inputs necessary for the crop has the potential for being picked by poor and marginal farmers of Afghanistan and thereby making the crop suitable for the low input agricultural system in operation in South Asian nations including Afghanistan. I humbly request the Government of Afghanistan to increase the acreage for fenugreek (or methi) production in dry, arid and semi-arid parts of Afghanistan as a green manure, spice and forage crop; and also for capturing international markets for the pharmaceutical, nutraceutical and functional food industries. New locally adapted cultivars of fenugreek will be suitable for production in the dry and semi-arid parts of Afghanistan.

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