Incident Update

Bomb Blasts at Hazara Demonstration in Kabul Cause Fatalities

July 23, 2016

Factual Updates

On Saturday, July 22, 2016, at least 80 people were killed while 231 others wounded when two suicide bombers detonated their explosives during a protest demonstration by the Hazara community in Deh Mazang area of Kabul.1 Islamic State (IS), a terrorist outfit with its stronghold in eastern parts of the country, have claimed the responsibility for the successive explosions. According to initial reports, the attack was staged by three assailants; however, the third suicide bomber was killed by the security forces prior to explosion.2 Apparently, the attack was executed to disseminate the sectarian rifts as IS, while claiming the responsibility for the blasts, labeled it as an attack against the Shia community. The Afghan Taliban, who are comparatively more powerful than the IS and are, currently, carrying out their annual summer offensive, have denied any involvement in the attack.

Situational Background

The bomb explosions took place when the Hazara community, largely belonging to the Shia sect, was staging a protest demonstration to demand a powerline pass through the Bamiyan province. It was the second similar demonstration over the powerline issue by the community as it also staged a protest in May 2016.3 The electricity-starved Bamiyan province, located in the central Afghanistan, is included among the most divested and poverty stricken areas of the country and is largely inhabited by the Hazara community. On the other hand, according to the original project of the TUTAP (Turkmenistan-Uzbekistan-Tajikistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan) powerline, backed by Asian Development Bank, the powerline was routed through the province.4 However, the project

was rerouted through the Parwan province by the previous administration which sparked discontent among the Hazara community, the poorest ethnic group in the country.\textsuperscript{5}

**Analysis**

It was the most lethal attack in the capital city in the past 15 years of civil war since 2001.\textsuperscript{6} IS had been attempting to expand its foothold across the country; however, it was predominantly confined to the eastern Nangarhar province in the past where it had regularly been targeted by Afghan and the US forces to wipe out their loyalists.\textsuperscript{7} This was the first major attack by the terrorist outfit in the capital city. The incident not only highlighted that the conflict was augmenting in the country but also indicated that the IS was growing its strengths and capabilities. The sectarian rifts, between Shias and Sunnis, are uncommon in Afghanistan;\textsuperscript{8} nonetheless, the recent incident highlights that it was aimed at enhancing the sectarianism in the country. Conversely, the President Ashraf Ghani has expressed his resolve to eliminate IS from the country and declared to intensify military offensive in Nangarhar province, a stronghold of the militant outfit.

On the other hand, a worldwide surge in the IS linked terrorist attacks has been observed in the near past. About 350 people were killed in IS connected terrorist attacks in eight different countries during the month of Ramadan which ended in the start of July. On the other hand, IS has been losing battlefields in Syria and Iraq resulting in the shrinkage of self-styled caliphate in the locality.\textsuperscript{9} The recent attack highlights that the terrorist outfit is intensifying its maneuverings in South Asia in order to strengthen its footholds in the region following its projected fallback in Syria and Iraq. The militancy ravaged South Asian region not only provides safe havens to the terrorist outfit but also helps in recruitment as a number Afghan Taliban commanders have declared their allegiance to IS in the near par past.\textsuperscript{10}


\textsuperscript{9} Tribune News Services, 2016.

Implications

The twin blasts indicate that the conflict isn’t winding down in Afghanistan. The Kabul attack not only brought a condemnation by the international community but also led the Afghan government to intensify the counteractions against IS as enunciated by the Afghan President. On the other hand, the attack will intensify clashes between Afghan Taliban, who have condemned the attack, and IS as both of the terrorist outfits have been locked in recurrent battles in the country since January 2015. Keeping in view the recent expansion of IS in the capital city and Afghan government’s resolve to eradicate the militancy, an intensification in security maneuverings by Afghan security forces is highly likely.

Location Map
Photo Gallery


Volunteers helping the victims at the sight, Dawn News, July 24, 2016.