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SUBJECT: (Threat Assessment) Threat Networks' Dynamics in Afghanistan

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REFERENCES:

- A) C-IED CoE S156/2020 "Summary of Tactics, Techniques & Procedures (TTP) from Threat Networks", dated 12 August 2020.

1. BACKGROUND

After the withdrawal of multinational forces from Afghanistan, and counting on the establishment of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA, also known as "Taliban") as the current government, DAESH in Khorasan Wilayat (ISKP/ISIS-K) remains as the main threat network in the territory (among other minor ones).

Several facts and circumstances are conditioning/showing the ongoing role of ISKP, as follows:

- (15 August 2021) Taliban took Kabul city.
(26 August 2021) Suicide person borne IED (PBIED) against Hamid Karzai International Airport in Kabul.
(September 2021) Audio by acting Defence Minister Mullah Mohammad Yaqoob warned of potential infiltration of rival elements including ISKP.
(18-29 September 2021) 22 ISKP's attacks against Taliban forces and civilians took place.
(03 October 2021) Eid Gah mosque in Kabul (during the funeral of the mother of Zabiullah Mujahid, Taliban spokesperson) suffered a suicide person borne IED (PBIED) attack.
(08 October 2021) PBIED attack against Sayed Abad (Shiite) mosque in Kunduz
(14 October 2021) "An Naba" 308 editorial urges attack Shiites from Baghdad to Khorasan.



- Editorial from digital magazine "An Naba" #308 as published on October 14th 2021 - (Source: www.archive.org)

- (15 October 2021) Attack on Bibi Fatima mosque in Kandahar (2 PBIED against Shiite Hazara “heretics”)
- (22 October 2021) IED attack on electricity tower in Shakarkada area of Kabul
- (02 November 2021) Violent action against Sardar Daud Khan hospital in Kabul (PBIED plus small arms fire SAF against Shiite).
- (02 November 2021) An ISKP’s fighter disguised as Taliban soldier killed Maulvi Hamdullah Mokhlis (senior Taliban strategist) along with other Taliban members arriving at the hospital after the IED attack.
- (05 November 2021) “An Naba” digital magazine issue 311 reports last operations in Afghanistan, with special references to the attack on the hospital in Kabul.



- (04 November 2021) Social Media message by Haibatullah Akhунzada (Supreme Leader) warned about insider threat on Islamic Emirate Afghanistan (IEA) structures.
- (22 November 2021) United States of America’s Department of State (USA DoD) designates three leaders of ISKP as Specially Designated Global Terrorists (SDGT):
 - o Sanaullah Ghafari (also known as Shahab al-Mujahir), current Emir of ISKP.
 - o Sultan Aziz Azam (also known as Sultan Aziz), current ISKP spokesperson.
 - o Maulawi Rajab (also known as Malauwi Rajab Salahudin), ISKP senior leader in Kabul province.
- (22 November 2021) USA DoD officially consider Ismatullah Khazolai as ISKP’s international financial facilitator, which makes him open to sanctions and financial measures.
- (01-28 November 2021) Although IEA only reported 2 attacks on them, DAESH has officially claimed about 35 attacks by ISKP through their “Khilafah News” at Halummu channel.

2. SITUATION

Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (Taliban) members are not accomplishing with the promise of a global amnesty, so they are pursuing those collaborating with foreign forces.

Although the current absent of combats in those territories as fully controlled by Taliban is appreciated by local population, Taliban are showing their huge lack of counter intelligence & counter terrorism capabilities. DAESH is fully conscious about their attacks are seriously eroding the legitimacy of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan.

Taliban are also showing their previous lack of planning about how to manage the country after their military victory over former government.

Due to the military occupation of the capital, and not willing to share the Afghanistan's governance with the rest of Afghan actors, the agreement with USA was broken by Taliban: that cuts the potential economic support from USA & allies (about 43% of the national gross domestic product GDP, and 75% of public expenses).

Additionally, Taliban are prioritizing the payment to their fighters over the public servants, which is not contributing to improve the governance of the country.

As expected, Taliban are exclusively blaming former government and international community of the current situation, although it was strongly deteriorated by Taliban's military campaign.

Apart from competing with Taliban for resources, DAESH in Khorasan Wilayat accused Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan of:

- Abandoning Jihad.
- Negotiating and cooperating with United States.
- Apostasy.
- Basing their legitimacy on a narrow ethnic and nationalistic approach.
- Not joining an aim of a universal Islamic caliphate.
- Willingness to collaborate with China.
- Interaction with Iran (e.g. the Iranian-backed militia Fatemiyoun Division, financial support...).
- Collaborating with Pakistani government.

In adaption to 2020's losses, ISKP seems to maintain its core group based in Afghan & Pakistani nationals in Kunar and Nangarhar provinces, along with some other decentralized autonomous cells composed by local ethnic Uzbeks & Tajiks in Kunduz, Badakhshan, Sar-e-Pol, and Balkh provinces: all groups in Khorasan area (Central & South Asia) are reported as coordinated by DAESH's Al-Sadiq office.

In addition to their traditional internal and external (e.g. Pakistan, India, Myanmar, Bangladesh, Malaysia...) sources of fighters, several reports indicate that ISKP is gaining recruitment from:

- Militants from Afghan & Pakistani Taliban who were opposed to talks with USA.
- Taliban cadres who prefer more extreme understanding of Islam.
- Military ranks from former Afghan National Security Forces (not confident of any amnesty).
- Fighters from external separatist movements (e.g. Uyghur, Baloch).
- Components from ethnical minorities.
- Fighters of groups splintered from Quetta Shura (e.g. High Council of the Islamic Emirate).

ISKP reported to utilize Uyghur and Baloch martyrs in the attacks on October 8th & 15th 2021.

Last Taliban operations on ISKP did not have big effects on them but caused civilian casualties, which could move some local population to repudiate them and indirectly support ISKP.

3. ASSESSMENT

It is estimated that current leadership of ISKP (directed by Shahab al-Mujahid) is intentionally exerting pressure on IEA in the concurrent aim of undermining current government's legitimacy, distracting them from other operations, facilitating internal disputes/fragmentation, sabotage public services (e.g. power infrastructure), and eroding local communities' trust on Taliban.

Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan is trying to desperately conduct governance, blame externals of their own failure, and to hide the increase and relative success of ISKP attacks, but it looks like the situation is not going to improve in the line of benefiting their aims in a short term.

Although USA's indirect efforts against ISKP, the IEA's reluctance on receiving direct external support in countering terrorism would impede the effective financial support which could allow some reconstruction and governance in Afghanistan.

Nonetheless, and against Western interests, the situation could alternately force the Taliban to negotiate with China and Pakistan, based on ISKP influence on Uyghur and Baloch separatism.

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