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INTELLIGENCE

*Tactical Intelligence Report*

# MIRRORING GUANTANAMO

PENTAGON'S ABANDONED PANOPTICON IN

*Afghanistan*



# *Executive Summary*

This report assesses the suicide bombing carried out by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) affiliated Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP) on the Monday of this week. It sketches an overview of the situation and plows through the ideology and motives that prompted the current flare up. It takes us through the key leadership of the militant group and provides a brief analysis of the regional and global implications of the event. It discusses the threats involved and makes suitable recommendations to water down the situation.





# Situation Overview

- Location : Southern Qala Bakhtiar area (6th district of the capital city Kabul), near the Taliban Prosecutor General's Office building
- Coordinates : 34°28'37"N 69°07'06"E (approx.)
- Timeframe : Monday, 2nd of September, 2024.
- Parties involved : The Taliban Government, the Islamic State of Iraq and Levant (ISIL), the Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP).
- Background : ISKP pledges allegiance to ISIL and is a known adversary to the Taliban government that has been in power in Afghanistan since 2021. They both share the background of being a radical jihadist group aimed at ridding the world of the western Satan that poses a cultural threat to Islam. Nonetheless, they have different goals and have often had a bone of contention between them. The Taliban recognizes Sunni Islam and wants to legitimize its authority over Pashtun areas of Pakistan and Afghanistan through the Sharia Law. ISIS-affiliated ISKP follows the extreme version of Wahhabi-Salafist tradition and have carried out a number of attacks in recent years in the age-old quest of regional dominance and influence over Afghanistan, Pakistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Iran to establish a global caliphate.



# ***Analysis of the Situation***

A suicide bomber on 2nd of September killed 6 people and injured another 13 in Kabul, who were all claimed to be civilians by the Kabul Police spokesperson, Khalid Zadran. On Tuesday, ISIS claimed the responsibility of the attack. A statement was issued on a news outlet called Amaq, run by the terrorist organization. The statement painted a different picture, among the 45 casualties claimed by ISIS were Taliban members working with the judicial service. The acting head of prison administration under Taliban Government, Mohammad Yusuf Mestari said on Saturday that the prison at Bagram was being reactivated. This led to the suicide bombing.

Since Taliban's takeover in 2021, ISIL's affiliate ISKP has operated in Afghanistan. The last suicide attack claimed by ISIL was in March, in the southern city of Kandahar (Taliban's Stronghold).







Bagram Prison is an airstrip built by the Soviet Union in the 1950s and was extensively used thereafter as its base to defend its invasion of Afghanistan. It was used by the Moscow-aided Afghanistan government before falling into the hands of the Mujahideen administration and later Taliban. The Americans bequeathed the same after toppling the Taliban in 2001. The US built it to a 77 square kilometers base with 2 runways (where large cargo and bomber aircraft could land) and a prison for people detained by the US forces. It was one of the sites recognized in a US Senate Report on the CIA's interrogation of al-Qaeda suspects which the Obama administration acknowledged it as torture.

## ***ISKP: Coparceners of the Extremist Ideology***

ISKP was conceived in 2014, when a disintegration of the Tehrik-e-Taliban (TTP), al-Qaeda and Taliban took place. 2015 saw the official announcement of the “Khorasan” militants when the ISIS emir, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi appointed Hafiz Khan Saeed as the first ISKP emir who prior to this, had served in Pakistan’s Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA).

- Leadership: Shahab al-Muhajir (since June 2020 when his predecessor, Aslam Farooqi was captured by the Afghan forces in the Kandahar province).
- The senior leadership consists of a Shura Advisory Council.
- Commanders at provincial level and bureaucratic leaders.

From January 2020 to July 2021, ISKP conducted 83 attacks targeting civilians, NATO troops and Afghan forces.





# Threat Assessment

ISKP, through its various and recurrent attacks, wants to remind the world of its existence and capabilities. These small-scale suicide bombings is a means to stay relevant and maintain a reputation among its adversaries. They are mobile in the region and intend to remind their supporters that they have not abandoned their cause. Ever since the US pulled out of the country, it has had a very grim and volatile political environment. With the whole world gripped in regional conflicts, and having a hard time to dilute the escalations, this becomes a preferable time to try and regain power in Central Asia since all the major powers that could intervene or have an influence over the region are already involved in wars that are not subsiding. Most governments would be apprehensive to get involved should an escalation happen because of the tricky predicament of Taliban being an authoritarian regime that is still not recognized as the legitimate government by many countries. China and Russia have strategic interest in the region since the militant groups present there are hostile towards the US.



# Recommendations

There needs to be a mechanism of sustained counter-terrorism operation in the region which has become a hub of extremist ideologies and mass human rights violation. The US/NATO should focus on policy making to diminish the power vacuum caused by their hasty withdrawal, thus giving breathing space to the militants which facilitated their strategic planning. Countries should consider making targeted and temporary channels of diplomatic relations to voice their concern to counter the terrorism in the country.







# *Conclusion*

Afghanistan is of great strategic importance. It forms a key aspect of the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC). Terrorist attacks and potential coups exacerbate the already delicate balance of power in the region. The attacks are likely to continue and increase given the global scenario of conflicts unless steps are taken to reduce the twitchiness that accompanies uncertainty. Peaceful measures should be implemented to showcase diplomatic wisdom.



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