

## Siege of terror: on Afghanistan's growing security crisis

With four attacks in 10 days that killed at least 158 people in Afghanistan, terrorists have sent a loud message to the government and its international backers. Of the four, two were claimed by the Taliban — the raid on [January 20 in Kabul's tightly-guarded Intercontinental Hotel](#) and the [January 27 ambulance bombing in a busy street](#). The Islamic State attacked a British children's charity in Jalalabad on January 24 and an army post outside the capital days later. Though the IS and the Taliban are opposed to each other in the complex conflict landscape, both share a goal: to destabilise the state that has been built since 2001, and throw the country into further chaos. In recent years, despite the government's claims of cracking down on militants, threats from the IS and Taliban have only grown. The IS, which lost territory in Iraq and Syria, is trying to build networks elsewhere, particularly in war-torn Afghanistan. From an enclave in Nangarhar in eastern Afghanistan, the group has planned and orchestrated several attacks, mainly targeting Shia minorities. Last year, the IS claimed at least 15 bombings in Afghanistan, while the Taliban is steadily expanding its firepower. Earlier, the Taliban had said it was targeting Afghan military facilities and soldiers, not civilians. As the ambulance bombing that killed more than a hundred people shows, the facts are to the contrary.

The Afghan government is caught in a classic security bind. Over the years, whatever it has done, including stepping up the military campaign against the Taliban, has only deepened the security crises. The protracted war and the indiscriminate use of airpower by the U.S. have turned a substantial portion of the rural population away from Kabul, a resentment the Taliban has tapped into. The group now controls almost a third of the country. And as the war drags on, other militant groups such as the IS have also swept in, making a solution to the crisis even more elusive. The Taliban is now too strong to be defeated outright, but not strong enough to unseat the government in Kabul. This is the stalemate the war has entered. When U.S. President Donald Trump announced more troops for Afghanistan in August, the plan was to break this logjam. But since that announcement, the Taliban has increased its attacks, in an apparent message to Washington that a military solution is not possible. Even the tough line the U.S. has taken *vis-à-vis* Pakistan, which has direct links with the Taliban and its allies in the Haqqani network, by withholding military aid doesn't seem to have had any immediate impact on Islamabad. The problem is the lack of a cohesive strategy. The U.S. focusses too much on the military aspects of the problem, while the Afghan government, plagued by corruption and infighting, remains incompetent in tackling the challenges it faces. In such a scenario, it's advantage Taliban.

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