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The Effects of T-Walls on Urban Landscape and Quality of Life and Anti-Terror Design Concept in Kabul, Afghanistan

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***Abstract*—** Kabul city has suffered a lot in 40 years of conflict of civil war and "The war on terror". After the invasion of Afghanistan by the United States of America and its allies in 2001, the Taliban was removed from operational power, but The Taliban and other terrorist groups remained in remote areas of the country, they started suicide attacks and bombings. Hence to protect from these attacks officials surrounded their office buildings and houses with concrete blast walls. It gives a bad landscape to the city and creates traffic congestions. Our research contains; questionnaire, reviewing Kabul Municipality documents and literature review. Questionnaires were distributed to Kabul citizens to find out how people feel by seeing the T-Walls on Kabul streets? And what problems they face with T-Walls. "*The T-Walls pull down commission"* of Kabul Municipality documents were reviewed to find out what caused the failure of this commission. A literature review has been done to compare Kabul with Washington D.C on how they designed the city against terrorism threat without turning the cities into lock down. Bogota city of Columbia urban happiness movement is reviewed and compared with Kabul. The finding of research revealed that citizens of Kabul want security but not at the expense of public realm and creating the architecture of fear. It also indicates that increasing the T-walls do not give secure feeling but instead; it increases terror, hatred and affect people's optimism. At the end, a series of recommendation is suggested on the issue.

***Keywords*—**Anti-terror design, Kabul, T-Walls, urban happiness.

I. Introduction

AFGHANISTAN has been at war for almost 40 years. After the attacks on the world trade centre in New York City on 11th September 2001, within two months, the United States of America (USA) and its allies invaded Afghanistan and forcefully removed the Taliban from operational power, but the war continued. Taliban and other terrorist groups started a new way to fight like suicide attacks and attacks on Afghan and international institutions; this led to creating fear and terror for everyone. The governmental, non-governmental organisations and even important governments employees surrounded their office buildings and homes with reinforced concrete walls to protect themselves from suicide attacks and the bombs fragmentations. These walls are also called T-walls due to the cross-sectional shape resembling an inverted letter "T". It was first used in Iraq by U.S troops. T-Walls are precast concrete walls resembled jersey barriers with the exception that they stood up to 7 meters and width of 1.4 meters at the bottom, they weigh around 6 tons. Kabul has 22 districts; there are approximately 3000 T-Walls for just one district and 8000 for NATO-led security house compounds [10]. These T-Walls are put outside the boundary wall mostly on footpath and streets, to absorb the initial impacts of explosions and its fragmentation. In addition to creating a bad landscape, militarised look to the city, it also led to traffic jam and encroaching the public spaces. Based on Kabul citizens' complain over the media, we started this research to find out what people feel about the increasing of T-walls and how it affected the quality of life.

Fig. 1 T-Walls in front of one university in Kabul, (located on street and footpaths)

II. Methodology

The method of research contains; questionnaire, reviewing Kabul Municipality documents and literature review. Questionnaires were distributed to 70 people, mostly young, between the ages of 18 to 35 years. The interviewees were government employees (32), private and NGO employees (14), high school and university students (18) and jobless people (6). People were asked about their feeling on seeing the T-Walls and what problem they face in relation with these walls. Kabul Municipality "T-Walls pull down commissions" documents were reviewed to find out the initiative taken by Kabul Municipality. Moreover, a literature review was done to study Washington D.C in anti-terror design, and Bogota city of Colombia for urban happiness movement and compare it with Kabul city.

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III. Results

A. Kabul Citizens' Reactions

How do people feel by seeing the concrete blast walls? It was an open-end question and people responded as shown in Fig. 2.

Based on our research, 35% of people think that T-walls should exist because it helps to secure the city, and it gives the sense of concentration and confidence working inside an area which is surrounded by T-walls because of the attacks happening lately. However, the other 65% think that it does not help to secure the city and it also made their life miserable and creating problems, i.e. Traffic congestion, narrowing of footpath and streets, bad landscape of city, dead end of sub-streets and you must take a long way because T-Walls close the short-cuts.

We asked the interviewees "Do existing and increasing of concrete blast walls gives you secure feeling?". Fig. 3 shows (1) as strongly disagree and (5) as strongly agree. Relatively more citizens responded with strongly disagreed.

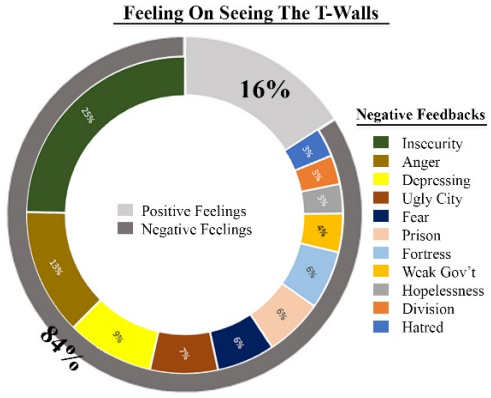

Fig. 2 Feedback on Exposure to T-Walls

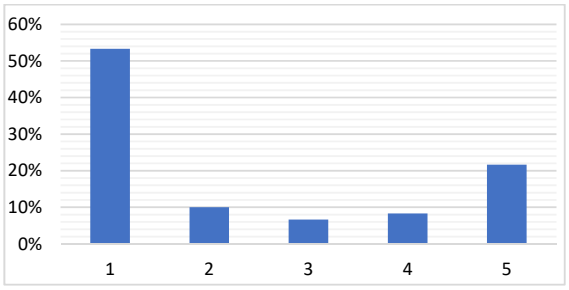

Fig. 3 Likert scale of feeling towards existing and increasing of T-Walls

B. "The T-Walls Pull down Commission" of Kabul Municipality

For pulling down the T-Walls in Kabul, with presidential decree Kabul Municipality organised a commission in 2017, which consists of representative from following organisations; Kabul municipality, Kabul police departments, National Defense Security (NDS), Chief Justice Department, VIP Protection unit and Kabul Guard Unit while pulling down the T-Walls a representative of this commission will be present on site along with the representors from district office [10]. This commission works together for pulling down the T-Walls, they had several meetings to execute the president order of taking down the concrete walls from public spaces. The commission gave three options for T-Walls owners, which are as follows:

- All the T-Walls should be pulled down and should be transported to another site
- The owners can put the barriers inside their property
- If the security threat is more, they can put the Walls outside their boundary, but connected to the property walls.

IV. Analysis of the Results

The results from the questionnaire show that concrete barriers have a bad physiological effect on Kabul citizens. It keeps reminding them that they are always under attack. More people have responded with negative feelings on exposure to T-walls. 25% of negative feedback is insecurity, while the T-Walls are built for protection and security. It means that it created a division; people think that the city is insecure to live, those people who live in an area surrounded by concrete walls are safe.

People face daily problems commuting to work due to traffic congestion, created by concrete barriers. The Likert scale, Fig. 3, indicates that increasing the T-Walls do not give a secure feeling to anyone, but instead, it increases the fear of terror, hatred and division. The result shows that citizens demand protection but not at the expense of the public realm.

"The T-Walls pull down commission" work is more of like a political stunt than a sustainable solution for the problem. It was ordered thrice for pulling down the concrete wall by presidents, in 2006, 2011 and 2017. The commissions failed to implement the task.

After pulling down a concrete wall from a targeted area, every commission member was busier in posting it into social media page of their departments, than finding a sustainable solution.

They failed to pull down the T-Walls of government buildings, foreign embassies, international institutions and strong warlords. When they could not pull down the concrete walls from around the government offices, then others did not trust the government to pull down their T-Walls. Even its written in commission documents, "Kabul Municipality is a civil service of the government body, we are not responsible for what happens after pulling down the concrete walls, the security of the owners is the duty of government security bodies". While Kabul Municipality is the implementer of this campaign and deputy Mayor is the head of this commission.

Ministry of Urban development and housing does not have any involvement in concrete blast walls and pulling down of it.

V. Discussions

A. Washington D.C (Anti-Terrorism Design)

Washington D.C of United States of America is identified in the academic literature as both a target and as an archetype of anti-terrorism planning [1], [2].

Washington D.C. is ideal concerning policy and initiatives taken by the municipality to secure itself. Since the attack of September 11, 2001, Washington Mall and Pennsylvania Avenue have been secured against terrorist attacks through the use of various urban design, and passive/active security measures. They also incorporated security measures into their comprehensive plan.

National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC) is the United States federal government central planning agency for the national capital. "The Commission provides overall planning guidance for federal land and buildings in the region by reviewing the design of federal and certain local projects, overseeing long-range planning for future development, and monitoring capital investment by federal agencies" [11]. The aim of the NCPC is put as "it seeks to preserve and enhance the extraordinary historical, cultural, and natural resources and federal assets of the National Capital Region to support the needs of the federal government and enrich the lives of the region's visitors, workers, and residents" [11]. The commission has 12 members; the member commission represents federal and local constituencies with a stake in planning for the nation's capital. The President of the United States appoints three citizens, including the chair. At least one presidential appointee must reside in Virginia and another in Maryland while the third is at-large. The Mayor of the District of Columbia appoints two citizens. Both must be Washington, DC residents. Remaining members are ex officio, who typically appoint alternates to represent them at Commission meetings. These are:

- The Mayor of the District of Columbia
- The Chair of the Council of the District of Columbia
- Heads of the three executive branch agencies with significant land holdings in the region
- Leaders of the U.S. House and Senate committees with oversight responsibility of Washington, DC [11]

The federal facilities and grounds in United States, especially the capitals are open to the public, it represents freedom and the country democratic ideals. "However, after the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing and the events of September 11, 2001, security needs were elevated and unsightly temporary solutions often restricted access to public space. NCPC led early efforts to develop effective security approaches that also preserve the openness of Washington DC's public spaces and enhance the civic realm and continues to evaluate new methods of perimeter security" [11]. NCPC developed a plan which is called as National Capital Urban Design and Security Plan; the goal of this plan is to restore the beauty and dignity of the Nation's Capital by integrating building perimeter security into an attractive streetscape and by coordinating the design and installation of streetscape projects. [9] A similar commission and plan can be developed at the Municipal and regional level in Kabul city.

Comparing Washington D.C. brings to the surface many deficiencies that exist in security planning method in Kabul. Security officials developed the new Kabul security plan called "Zarghun Belt" which means Greenbelt or Green zone, the priority of the plan is to secure the central and diplomatic area of Kabul city without considering street landscape, or closing more street to the public. Local politicians should consider that the idea that anti-terrorism planning can be conducted in Kabul and can contribute to the security without compromising the necessary and amiable qualities of the city while security threats are becoming increasingly complex and transnational, our means of understanding and responding to them have remained largely unchanged [3].

B. Bogota City Colombia (The Urban Happiness Movement)

Bogota is the capital of Colombia with almost eight million populations. "Toward the end of the twentieth century, Bogotá had become a truly horrible place to live—one of the very worst on earth. Overwhelmed with refugees; seared by a decades-old civil war and sporadic terrorism in the form of grenades and firebombs (deadly "explosive potatoes" being the most common means of attack); and hobbled by traffic, pollution, poverty, and dysfunction, the Colombian capital was regarded both at home and abroad as a living hell" [4]. But on 1998 Bogota city elected a new mayor named as Enrique Penalosa, he decided to transform the city into a happy city, he taught that if we define happiness concerning income per capita, Bogota is too far to achieve that.

"Peñalosa promised neither a car in every garage nor a socialist revolution. His promise was simple. He was going to make Bogotans happier" [4]. He decided to make Bogota happier by boosting their sense of safety, trust and equality. Penalosa ordered that all fence around the neighbourhood parks should be taken down, encourage biking by widening the bike path, a new chain of park, libraries, school and day care centre were built. Despite the ongoing civil war going in Columbia, Murder rates decreased by 40% and traffic moves three times faster during rush hour, and the citizens of Bogota are happier than before.

"International surveys show that more people trust their neighbours, strangers, and their government, the more likely they are to help strangers, to vote, and to volunteer. If better streets, sidewalks, walls, and buildings all improve the ways people engage with one another, then the reverse should also be true: antagonistic architecture can corrode trust and fuel hostility. Kabul might be a laboratory of toxic urbanity" [5].

We can compare Kabul situations with Bogota, the horrible 30 years of civil war has ended the optimism of Afghan citizens, besides the terrorist attacks on Kabul, murder rate and traffic accident are very high. Warlords grab parks and green areas of lands. By putting the T-Walls on the street and footpath, public spaces are encroached by influential people.

An illustration of how the T-Walls are put on the public spaces and how it affects the traffic movement is shown in Fig. 4.

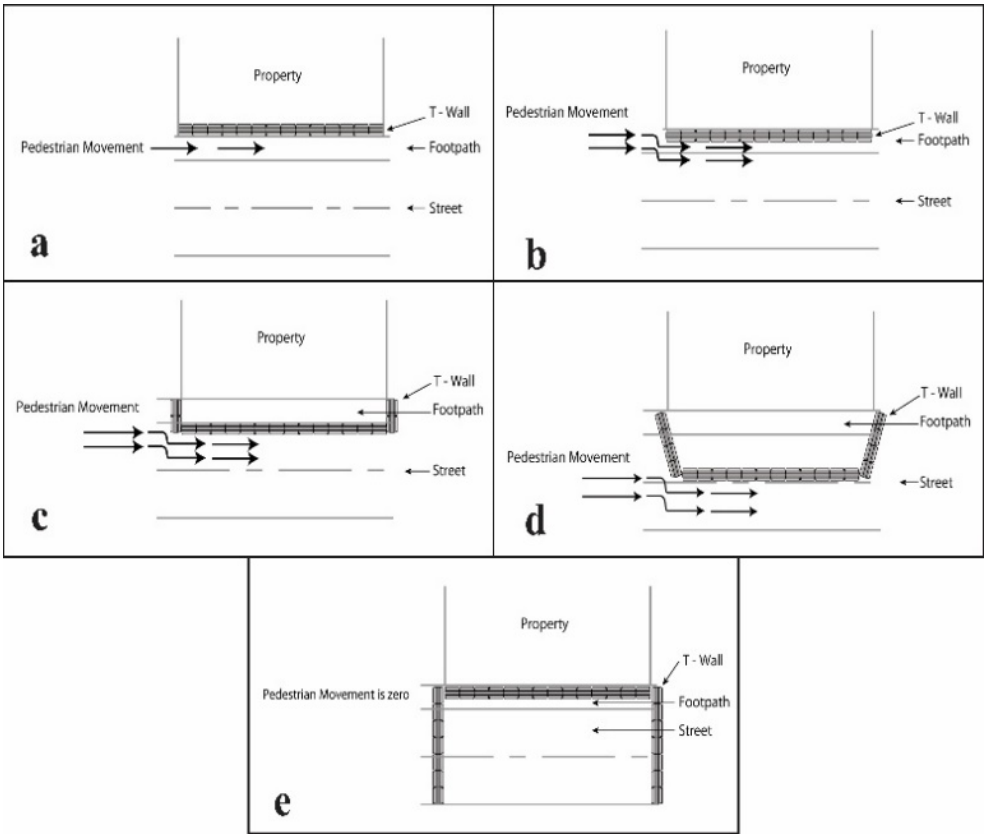

Fig. 4 Type of Illustrations of T-Walls and how it affects the pedestrian movement (The entry of the property is not shown in the sketches)

T-Walls are put on the street and footpath, and even in some areas, streets are entirely closed Fig. 4 (e), this created problem for people commuting to work and other places, the commute time has significantly increased. As we see in Fig. 4 (a), the pedestrian movement is disturbed and people get into the car lane and this caused trouble for the normal flow of the vehicle. In some cases, mostly by VVIP and essential government offices the road is completely blocked Fig. 4 (e). Our surveys show that one of the main problems that people referred to is traffic congestion created by T-Walls. These traffic problems can affect people's happiness. It takes hours to go work for a ten minutes ride, because of the traffic congestions. Charles Montgomery argues that what makes people most unhappy. It is not their work but commuting to work [6]. If the way to work is much longer than usual, it can affect the workers' happiness. Hence one of the reasons for unhappiness of people in Kabul can be traffic congestion created by these barriers.

VI. Obstacles

A. Architecture of Fear as a Political Tool

The paradox is based on the (entirely disputable) presumption that the state wants to transmit feelings of security. The country is, in many regards, symbolically weaken by terrorist attacks, and therefore counter-terrorism responses are attempts to be seen in control – to symbolically react to a threat in order to promote at least the illusion of resilience in the face of terrorism and to demonstrate the state's ability to afford protection to its citizens. [7]

After several attacks of terrorist on governmental organisations the country is weakened, due to all these attacks, there were several riots in Kabul and other provinces of Afghanistan. People were blaming governments for not protecting the city and the citizens, so government increased the visible defense like T-Walls to show the people that government is in control.

It has been 17 years that "War on terror" is going on in Afghanistan and day by day the terrorist groups are getting stronger, and they control more area than before. Hence, to legitimise this concept of the war on terror countries like the USA, their allies and Afghanistan government are using the visible architecture of defense to legitimise the war on terror concept. The T-Walls were first used in Afghanistan around 15 years ago, if they wanted to change the T-Walls with proper security measures and beautiful landscape, they would have done it by now. But day by day the use of walls is increasing, and important buildings look like fords with a terrible landscape. In 2017 following a huge explosion at heart of Kabul, civil societies of Kabul organised a riot. The demands were the resign of top security officials of the country. In the end, one of other demand of protester was removing of T-Walls from Kabul public spaces. Following the demands of the protester, Government created "The T-Walls

pull down commission"; the job of commission was to remove the T-Walls from public spaces, hence the commission creation was more like a political stunt than a sustainable solution, that is why the commission work failed very soon.

Charles Montgomery in an article The Archipelago of Fear published in The Walrus argues "that an aid system guided and blinded by fear was easily perverted. Indeed, the international compounds were part of a system shaped to some degree by opportunism. After the 2001 invasion, Afghanistan was promised billions of dollars for reconstruction, nation-building, and economic development. Some $15 billion in aid has been spent thus far, with an additional $17 billion-plus promised during the summer of 2008—not to mention the estimated $4 billion in annual revenues from the opium trade." [5] Opportunist and oligarchs in the country—the national and international contractors of projects—use this fear to guide the aid as per their choices. Meanwhile, most of the foreign consultants never leave the compounds and guest houses surrounded by T-Walls to understand the local needs; this creates an opportunity for the smart contractors to make big money from good intensions of international consultants [5].

VII. Conclusions

Based on this research, it is concluded that majority of Kabul citizens want security and protection but not by providing more T-Walls. People are getting more liberal than before, so creating this sense of fear and limiting the use of our cities is not conducive to mental health or businesses. By putting more T-walls, we are helping terrorist to accomplish their goals to create more fear. We cannot destroy the sanctity and meaning of our monuments with the architecture of fear and hatred. The past wars which had definite ends and periods of peace, but today's nature of terrorism is far more different; it is required to balance the issue of security with the issue of keeping public space open and aesthetically beautiful. The writers such as Lisa Benton-Short and Jon Coaffee put it out that we should not just design cities for terrorism; the streets must still belong to the people and should inspire and evoke feelings of safety, freedom and endless possibility, not imminent attack [7], [8]. So, there should be alternative security protection rather than T-walls. It is demonstrated that through the implementation of an inadequate security policy by putting more T-walls, the urban landscape of Kabul city is destroyed. These concrete barriers created a lot of problems, the commute time is much increased, public spaces have encroached. All these problems have affected Kabul citizens' happiness; they are not sure about their future in Afghanistan. People do not trust government and citizens do not believe in equality. Security initiatives at the Municipal level are rare and not developed; hence bringing a policy change can make urban areas safer and aesthetically beautiful. Without a proper policy, planning and alternative security measures pulling down concrete blast wall are not advised.

VIII. Recommendations

- Creating a commission on Kabul security planning just like NCPC of Washington D.C. This commission should work on a sustainable solution, which urban planner and architects should also be involved, the aim of the commission is to protect the city from possible attacks without eroding the sense of freedom and landscape.
- Incorporating security measures in to comprehensive plan.
- Creating internal cooperation between the regional and municipal level of government bodies on terrorism mitigation.
- Education of local planners on security planning.
- Providing an alternative for T-walls i.e. new innovations as hydraulic bollards, turn tables, tiger traps, road blockers, proper Closed-Circuit Television (CCTV) and change in design and look of traditional T-Walls i.e. arch shape at the top.
- Plantations and painting on the walls.
- Decentralization of Kabul city; most attacks happen on government institution and foreign embassies which are at the center of Kabul city. Decentralized cities can be safer.
- More research is needed on Anti-terrorism urban planning and public happiness in Kabul
- New policies and initiative should be developed for improving the happiness of Kabul citizens

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