

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Most Kind



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## ACJC and Corruption in Afghanistan

The persistence of the issue of corruption or graft in Afghanistan is not a good sign. It is not only responsible for bringing bad name to the country but has also made the international community skeptical of supporting the country. Besides that, almost all walks of life have been influenced by the negative impacts of uncontrolled corruption as Afghanistan is listed among the top 8 in the most corrupt countries of the world. This has hampered the development initiatives in different parts of country to a large extent.

International community, on many occasions, has emphasized that there should be a comprehensive strategy and effective institutions that should be responsible for controlling graft in Afghanistan. It has even conditioned its support on a strong stance of the Afghan authorities against the corrupt individuals and institutions. Nevertheless, a great deal of work needs to be done to make any contribution against corruption a success. Particularly, a determined and honest stand has to be taken against the strong and influential personalities who have been involved in different sorts of corruption.

Establishment of Anti-Corruption Criminal Justice Center (ACJC) is an important step against the reign of corruption in Afghanistan. International community is hopeful that something worthwhile can be achieved through ACJC if it is provided with enough authority and it keeps on pursuing the corruption cases with determination and consistency. British ambassador to Afghanistan Dominic Jeremy, commenting on ACJC's role and corruption in Afghanistan, said recently, "My key message for the government is that fighting corruption is not optional it is an absolute requirement. The Afghan people demand it comes up continuously in the conversation that we have with the ordinary Afghans and civil society organizations and we the international community strongly support the efforts of the government to tackle corruption. Now it is the time to end the impunity... I am expecting to see more and more cases of corruption going through the court. And I am expecting to see bigger cases of corruption going through court (ACJC), what is really exciting about what is happening so far over last six months is that the concept has been proven right and it is possible to tackle impunity."

Up to 70 corruption cases are under investigation by ACJC; of these, ten cases have been referred to the court. Ten primary courts, two appeal courts and two final court sessions have organized their sessions and at least 34 individuals, including some high level officials, have been sentenced. But there are concerns that the ACJC is still facing challenges within its structure. A source at the ACJC has said that the concerned body is still short of at least 50 attorneys.

One of the major reasons that there has not been any considerable achievement regarding fight against corruption is the fact that the authoritative institutions and individuals have lacked true commitment; which ultimately provided them the room and the opportunity to benefit from the situation and make their own bank balance. So much has been said and so many instances, examples and data have proved that corruption has devoured much of the assistance funds that were for the purpose of improving the life standards of the poor and deserving people, yet there has not been any tangible measure taken to stop the situation.

No strategy for fighting corruption in Afghanistan can be successful unless it starts making the strong individuals and institutions accountable for any sort of corruption that they commit. The norm has been that the rich, powerful and influential people easily dodge the justice system, while the poor have to receive the negative consequences. In fact, the poor are influenced in two different ways by corruption.

First, if they are alleged in any case of corruption they have to go through inefficient and most unjust process of the justice system. Second, they are the ones who have to pay bribes and search for recommendations in order to get their works done in the departments and organizations that are corrupt in their dealings. While the rich through their influence, get away with their corrupt activities and at the same time get their works done from different organizations without any difficulty.

Therefore, it stands paramount that the rich and influential people, both in public and private sectors, who are involved in practicing corruption and promulgating it through their actions should be brought to justice. It is important in so many ways; first it will support in identifying the huge cases of corruption that involve large sums of money; second, it will set example for others - finding the influential people brought to justice and held accountable for their corrupt deeds would send a message to the people and to other officials that they cannot run away from justice if they practice corruption. Such initiative definitely requires support and determination to fight against the whole system; particularly, fighting influential and powerful individuals; nevertheless, there is no other option available.

Therefore, it is important that the government and the international community must address this particular issue if something worthwhile is required to be achieved.



## Any Room for Democracy?

By Hujjatullah Zia

The escalated militancy fills the air with a strong sense of fear and disappointment. The Taliban outfits have intensified their attacks which undermined democratic bases in Afghanistan. Mansour's death did not pave the ground for peace talks and his successor remained more serious obstacle before the talks. Afghan soldiers and civilians sustained large-scale casualties with the unmitigated militancy. Warring factions, except for Hezb-e Islami Afghanistan (HIA), turned down Afghanistan's offer of peace and continue their offensives against the National Unity Government (NUG). So, there seems no room for peace and negotiation.

With the downfall of the Taliban's regime, Afghan nation hoped for the best and celebrated democracy through flocking to ballot boxes. Men and women posted their pictures on Facebook, with big smile on their lips, while standing in queue to cast their votes. They believed that their rights and freedoms would be protected, afterwards.

To one's unmitigated chagrin, the public dream for a civil society, void of violence and bloodshed, did not come true and Taliban guerilla fighters re-emerged. They are wreaking record-breaking casualties on the Afghan civilians and security forces. As predicted, Afghan policemen are surrendering in hordes after the withdrawal of US-led NATO forces, and allowing the Taliban to make crucial gains across Afghanistan. Similarly, non-combatants are widely targeted.

Terrorism and instability have plagued the country tremendously. To the Afghans' unmitigated chagrin, the civilian casualties increase with each passing day in indiscriminate attacks and suicide bombings carried out by the Taliban insurgents - women and children are also among the victims. Moreover, unemployment and economic stagnation - which rule the individuals' life - are the products of the current turbulence. It is the nature of war to propel a society towards stagnation and greater deadlock. Therefore, Afghan people are wrestling with a number of formidable challenges which root in militancy.

There isn't a single Afghan family that hasn't been affected by the daily acts of brutal and deadly terrorism carried out across our cities, towns, and villages. Our children - girls and boys - are attacked on their way to school and our mosques and public spaces are blown up all in the name of a noble religion, which in reality stands for peace and peaceful coexistence.

The victim families simmer with a sense of indescribable pain and anguish. "The pain is still there, it never ebbs. They say time heals a wound but I disagree. It merely covers the open wound with a thin scab which, when peeled away, reveals the flesh anew, exposed, lacerated and oozing with pain. I look at other mothers with their children, holding them close, protecting them as they pass me, my eyes well up and the emptiness

returns. How lucky are those women who can put their hands through their children's hair and feel each strand falling between their fingers."

Worst of all, the Taliban elements seek to spread warped ideology in Afghanistan via founding seminaries. With a new wave of privately run seminaries/madrasahs being opened across the country, there is a growing feeling among women's rights groups that these freedoms are again under threat. Reportedly, there are now 1,300 unregistered madrasahs in Afghanistan, where children are given only religious teaching. This is increasing fears among those involved in mainstream education. Arguably the most controversial of these madrasahs is Ashraf-ul Madares in Kunduz, founded by two local senior clerics, where 6,000 girls study full time.

It is likely that war against militancy is a national war that will ebb and flow until the state has both a winning strategy and the relentless determination to implement it. In the war against terror, the state has not really gone beyond the disruption and dismantling of terrorist cells. I believe that this approach does little to address the militancy threat in its many dimensions. Terrorist networks do not exist in isolation - from funding to transport and from hideouts to indoctrination; any given militant group exists and operates with the help of a number of supporting actors. That much-needed support often comes from various elements.

Seemingly, the country will sustain turbulence and economic recession unless a thorough and serious counterterrorism strategy is planned by regional and international communities. The foreign officials have confessed that the US-led NATO anti-terrorism strategy failed in Afghanistan. But I believe that the "war on terror" gave counterproductive result - the emergence of the self-styled Islamic State (IS) group reflects the very bitter fact. Prior to 9/11 attacks, Afghanistan was in the grip of the Taliban's militancy, however now it is threatened by both Taliban and IS insurgents.

The national unity government has been beleaguered and under pressure from all sides. The growing violence of the conflict, slow progress on forming a government, emerging political rivalries and a sinking economy - all make a quick peace deal attractive. However, seeking a quick fix may ruin the chance of getting a real peace process going. The most essential element of a peace process is building trust among the warring parties. An external force intimidating one party into coming to the table can be no substitute for genuine interest in seeking a negotiated end to the conflict.

Violence and violation of rights are the inveterate genre which continues relentlessly. To put it succinctly, the escalation of terrorism, aggression and carnage is a matter of great worry which has raised the public concerns.

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## The October Revolution in Post-Truth Russia

By Andrei Kolesnikov

Russia is locked in a battle between official history (the story of the state) and counter-history (the story of civil society and the memories of the people). With the centenary of the October Revolution this year, the clash will move to the center of public life.

President Vladimir Putin is the embodiment of nostalgia not so much for Soviet times as for that period's sacralization of the state, which enabled the government to use, in modern parlance, "fake news" to advance its own ends. In fact, the October Revolution is remembered with no small amount of ambivalence and trepidation. Just the word "revolution" is abhorrent to modern Russian elites, tending as it does to be preceded by the epithets "orange" or "color" - the bête noire for Putin's regime. At the same time, the revolution was an important moment in Russia's history, and thus a source of national identity.

For the Communist Party, the anniversary is a clear opportunity to present itself as the successor of a great and enduring anti-capitalist tradition, albeit one that now brings together Marxist-Leninist teachings and the teachings of the Russian Orthodox Church. But the Communist Party is no longer in power, and for those who are, it's much harder to articulate a coherent approach to the centenary.

Given the revolution's historical importance, the Kremlin cannot avoid commemorating it. But rather than pursue the needed reconciliation of adversaries - the reds and the whites - the regime will probably take a side, in order to spin the story to its own benefit. That spin is likely to be imperial. According to the empire narrative, Vladimir Lenin was an evil genius who disrupted the Russian empire at a moment when it was flourishing and brimming with spirituality. Joseph Stalin then rebuilt the empire ostensibly on the foundation of Marxism-Leninism, but really on the foundation of traditional Russian conservative values.

Nikita Khrushchev's post-Stalin "thaw," when repression and censorship were relaxed, undermined the empire's fundamental values, carelessly handing Crimea to Ukraine. But, from the end of 1964, when Khrushchev was deposed, things got better, with Russians living quietly and happily. The fall of the Soviet Union, which amounted to another disruption of the empire, was a great geopolitical catastrophe in Russia's history.

In this interpretation, ice ages in Russia's history - periods when cold-blooded leaders ruled with an iron fist - were good for the country. Thaws - periods of democratization and modernization - were bad, characterized by disruption and violence. All allusions by the Putin regime to the Stalinist era must reinforce Putin's own image as a modern benev-

olent dictator, capable of restoring Russia's global influence and bringing it prosperity.

This discourse has driven some local authorities to build monuments to Stalin and Ivan the Terrible, while the federal authorities have ceremoniously erected a monument to Vladimir the Great, who brought Orthodoxy to Kievan Rus. How fortuitous that he even shares a name with today's president.

In a sense, history is more powerful than policy. Propaganda focuses on the military victories of Russia's "1,000-year history" (copyright: Vladimir Putin), in order to reinforce the image of Russia as a fortress besieged by the hostile West. World War II, from which 70 years of liberal democracy emerged in Western Europe, is used in Russia to legitimize the current autocratic regime.

Glorifying the past can even offset the political ramifications of poor economic performance. Consider how Putin's standing benefited from the annexation of Crimea - a move that he defended in historical terms - despite the devastating impact of that move on Russia's economy. Because that impact was delivered largely via Western sanctions, it fit the guiding hand of Putin's imperial narrative like a glove.

But, beyond the biography of a state - the stories of wars, cannonades, military commanders, statesmen, administrative hierarchy, and empire building that comprise Russia's official history - there is another history. It is the history of freedom, encompassing the stories and memories of ordinary people, dissidents, and independent thinkers.

In its struggle with this counter-history, the regime is trying to nationalize personal stories and biographies. When Putin joined the ranks of the informal "Bessmertnyi Polk" (Immortal Regiment) march, in which citizens commemorate loved ones who died in WWII, he turned it into a Kremlin initiative. But such efforts cannot obscure the clash between these two histories, reflected perhaps most clearly in the divide between conservatives and liberals on condemning Stalinist repression. It is also apparent in discussions about WWII - or the "Great Patriotic War," as Russians call it - and the turbulent 1990s. In that sense, the anniversary of the October Revolution may be viewed as a second-tier event, despite its symbolism. Nonetheless, the centenary will offer Putin an opportunity to strengthen his preferred narrative: that Russia, which has always been greatest under powerful national leaders, is now returning to greatness, thanks to the power Putin himself has consolidated. This is history, Russian-style: a past made serviceable for present purposes. (Courtesy Project Syndicate)

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