

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



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Corruption is Threatening Afghan Society

One of the most frustrating issues for Afghanistan is corruption. Today, it has penetrated deep within Afghan society and there are no tangible measures to control it. Unfortunately, it is also one of reasons that despite so much assistance and aid, Afghan society has not been able to make considerable development. Most of the money has gone to the authoritative personnel or the warlords, while the poor and needy people have remained thriving. Ill-fatedly, fighting corruption has not been on the agenda for the US as well. It has been ignored, in several cases, even strengthened by them.

Recently, John F. Sopko, the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR), addressing students at the University of Pittsburgh Graduate School of Public and International Affairs, said, "After insecurity and unemployment, corruption was the most important reason that Afghans felt their country was moving in the wrong direction... Corruption was not always at the top of the US agenda in Afghanistan. In fact, some would argue that it still is not given the importance it deserves. SIGAR has created an office on Lessons Learned from Afghanistan and is preparing a report on how the US government understood corruption there and sought to combat it. It will show that the US government initially had little understanding that corruption could threaten its entire security and state-building mission... Indeed, during the US invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 and for some years to follow, the United States partnered with abusive warlords and their militias to pursue al-Qaeda and the Taliban, and supported the installation of these warlords and their militias at high levels of the Afghan government. The United States also failed to recognize that vast sums of money injected into the Afghan economy, with limited oversight and pressures to spend, created conditions for corruption."

It is really difficult to think of any decisive victory in Afghanistan without beating corruption. It will always stand as a wall and needs to be destroyed before moving ahead. US, must now, at least, make efforts to tackle it before it is too late. The reconstruction and reintegration of the Afghan society largely depends on the efforts directed towards curbing the growing corruption. There is no other way out. If US is really interested in making real development works in Afghanistan it must deal with the issue of corruption first.

In the words of Sopko, "Corruption poses a deadly threat to the entire US effort to rebuild Afghanistan,"

Afghan authorities, themselves, require making efforts to control the serpent of corruption. However, they themselves have been on the advantageous side. The previous government made little efforts to do anything worthwhile. And, the current government also seems reluctant to take any decisive step. Though in its early days National Unity Government (NUG) made some promises that it would do something regarding corruption but it seems that the promises have been forgotten.

Mostly, NUG blames insecurity for the lack of attention towards other issues particularly corruption, but it fails to realize that controlling corruption should be one of the main steps towards improving security. Without defeating corruption or controlling it, it would be really difficult to fight insecurity. Any effort for confronting insecurity would end up in smoke if the intentions, processes and personnel are corrupt and this has been happening in most of the cases. NUG, therefore, needs to understand the link between the two and prepare itself to eradicate the cause first.

It also needs to do the same as far as political and economic stability are concerned. Afghanistan cannot continue its journey towards a politically and economically stable society unless it takes a bold step against corruption. As Sopko says, "It is true that the governing coalition in Afghanistan remains fragile. As Director of National Intelligence James Clapper recently testified, in 2016, the Afghan government faces the risk of a political breakdown. But we at SIGAR are convinced that the dangers of letting corruption run rampant are greater than the risk of disrupting the entrenched practices of Afghan officials."

Afghan government, therefore, needs to have a comprehensive strategy in dealing with the situation; otherwise, it would further destabilize the society. Corruption basically generates a sort of injustice within the society and adds to the grievances and difficulties of the people. Those who deserve are not awarded because of corruption and they ultimately take steps to make up for their rights through illegal ways. The large bulk of assistance that were given and received in the name of the poor and needy people of Afghanistan, never reached them and their lives still remain miserable. Finding government officials gaining advantages that are meant for the poor people, make the people question the legitimacy of the government and they, ultimately, decide to join the opposing forces.

With the rampant corruption threatening the stability, security and legitimacy of Afghan society, there is no other option for the Afghan government to take quick and effective measures to control it, while US must make serious efforts in this regard as well. Otherwise, expecting any progress without curbing corruption would be nothing more than a day dreaming.



The Growing Discontents among Afghan Political Class

By Abdul Ahad Bahrami

A spate of resignations of high-ranking officials from their government posts in recently seems to be appearing as a new challenge for the National Unity Government (NUG). The resignations have further compounded the trend of influential political figures including jihadi leaders and former ministers coming out opposing NUG and calling it as incompetent for leading the country in a difficult period of time. A number of MPs in the upper house of the parliament expressed concerns on Tuesday March 29, 2016 over the recent trend resignations of government officials, demanding explanations to the National Assembly. Many of the officials resigned have expressed exhaustions with pressures and interferences in their works.

The increasing resignations of government officials seem to put pressures on government that have been facing growing discontents from a broad spectrum of politicians in the country. In recent months, a number of weighty government officials including the head of National Directorate for Security (NDS), Minister of Mines and Petroleum and Minister of Interior affairs resigned from their posts. However, the resignation of the Minister of Mines is not confirmed yet by the government. Explaining the reasons for quitting his job, the head of the NDS had complained of differences over issues and enormous pressures from within the government. This is while the Minister of Mines is said to have been unhappy with his restriction of authorities and powerful people meddling the works of the ministry and 'plundering' Afghanistan's natural resources.

There have also been unconfirmed reports in recent days suggesting resignations of some provincial governors and heads of independent directorates. Yousof Nuristani, the chairman of Independent Election Commission resigned a few days ago, though his resignation was expected after the President Ghani issued a presidential decree opening the way for bringing reforms to the two key election commissions. These high-profile resignations have further put the internal divisions in NUG under spotlight with questions hovering why the officials are quitting their jobs at a difficult time when the government is unable to fill some key ministries that are already vacant.

The recent resignations are particularly signaling a stalemate within the government where the NUG leaders are unable to make consensus over key appointments and other issues. The stalemate seems to have had far-reaching impacts on key activities and plans of the ministries and virtually crippled many decision making processes within the ministries. In recent months, there have growing opposition to the government over its inability to make key appointments and bring reforms as pledged. Even some top advisors and other serving authorities have come out in criticizing the government for its inability to run the administration effectively. It is said that even the weekly cabinet meet-

ings have been lackluster and dull as officials tend to be disinterested in regularly participating the meetings. Perhaps the most notable of the cases were the resignations of the authorities of the key security ministries. While NUG leaders unable to reach a consensus over a minister for the defense ministry, the resignations of the NDS director and the minister of interior were another blow. After the resignations, now the security agencies are all led by caretaker officials at a time when they need robust leadership in order to effectively deal with the deteriorating security situation and confront the upcoming seasonal offensive of the Taliban. While the Taliban are bracing to launch their springtime offensive, there is a major gap in leadership of the Afghan security agencies to lead this year's fight against the Taliban.

The government has been facing growing oppositions since its formation and the height of the power struggle between the two key stakeholders of the national unity government. However, discontents both among politicians within the government and others in the political spectrum have been on the rise in recent months. Many supporters of one of the two electoral camps in the 2014 presidential elections joined the critics of the national unity government in openly criticizing the government and its leaders. Maybe it is true that some of election-time supporters of one of the electoral camps are now unhappy for not receiving their expected posts. However, the discontents over the NUG performance are far beyond the election dealings and expectations.

In recent months, some key political alliances and parties were formed with the main aim of pressurizing the government for bringing changes and making political reforms or being an opposition. Some politicians even have been labeling the unity government as incompetent, calling for snap presidential elections to be held for a new government. The growing discontents signify an eroding political cohesion while the country is going to face the challenge of the Taliban insurgency and a shrinking economy that would increase the burdens on the government. Very recently a top UN official called the lack of political cohesion as one of the most daunting challenges for Afghanistan in 2016.

NUG leaders need to realize that they would not be able to afford unforeseen and unexpected challenges as result of the fragile political environment in the country. NUG need to demonstrate that is well functional and headed to the right direction in order to have support from the public and the political community. For this, the leaders need to end the deadlock of the administration by making consensus over leadership and management of key government ministries and issues of national importance such as the electoral reforms, fighting corruption and implementing the agreement that led to formation of the unity government.

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When Things Fall Apart

By Anatole Kaletsky

All over the world today, there is a sense of the end of an era, a deep foreboding about the disintegration of previously stable societies. In the immortal lines of W.B. Yeats's great poem, "The Second Coming":

"Things fall apart; the center cannot hold
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world...
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity..."

And what rough beast, its hour come round at last
Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?"

Yeats wrote those lines in January 1919, two months after World War I ended. He instinctively felt that peace would soon give way to even greater horrors. Almost 50 years later, in 1967, the American essayist Joan Didion chose Slouching Towards Bethlehem as the title of her collection of essays on the social breakdowns of the late 1960s. In the 12 months following the book's publication, Martin Luther King, Jr. and Robert Kennedy were assassinated, inner cities across the United States exploded in riots and French student protesters began the rebellion that toppled President Charles de Gaulle a year later.

By the mid-1970s, America had lost the Vietnam war. The Red Brigade, the Weather Underground, the Irish Republican Army, and Italian neo-fascist terrorists were staging attacks across the US and Europe. And President Richard Nixon's impeachment had turned Western democracy into a laughing stock. Another 50 years have now passed, and the world is again haunted by fears about the failure of democracy. Can we draw some lessons from those earlier periods of existential self-doubt? In the 1920s and 1930s, as in the late 1960s and 1970s, and again today, despair about politics was linked to disillusion with a failed economic system. In the inter-war period, capitalism seemed doomed by intolerable inequalities, deflation, and mass unemployment. In the 1960s and 1970s, capitalism appeared to be collapsing for the opposite reasons: inflation and a backlash by taxpayers and business interests against the redistributive policies of "big government." To note this pattern of recurring crises is not to claim that some law of nature dictates a near-collapse of global capitalism every 50 or 60 years. It is, however, to recognize that democratic capitalism is an evolving system that responds to crises by radically transforming both economic relations and political institutions. So we should see today's turmoil as a predictable response to the breakdown of one specific model of global capitalism in 2008. Judging by past experience, a likely outcome could be a decade or more of soul-searching and instability, leading eventually to a new settlement in both politics and economics.

This is what happened when the elections of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan followed the great inflation of the early 1970s, and when the American New Deal and the "rough beast" of European rearmament emerged from the Great Depression. Each of these post-crisis settlements was marked by transformations in economic thinking as well as politics. The Great Depression led to the Keynesian revolution in economics, alongside the New Deal in politics. The inflationary crises of the 1960s and 1970s provoked Milton Friedman's monetarist counter-revolution, which inspired Thatcher and Reagan.

It therefore seemed reasonable to expect the breakdown of deregulated financial capitalism to trigger a fourth seismic change (Capitalism 4.0,

I called it in 2010) in both politics and economic thinking. But if global capitalism really is entering a new evolutionary phase, what are its likely characteristics? The defining feature of each successive stage of global capitalism has been a shift in the boundary between economics and politics. In classical nineteenth-century capitalism, politics and economics were idealized as distinct spheres, with interactions between government and business confined to the (necessary) raising of taxes for military adventures and the (harmful) protection of powerful vested interests.

In the second, Keynesian version of capitalism, markets were viewed with suspicion, while government intervention was assumed to be correct. In the third phase, dominated by Thatcher and Reagan, these assumptions were reversed: government was usually wrong and the market always right. The fourth phase may come to be defined by the recognition that governments and markets can both be catastrophically wrong. Acknowledging such thoroughgoing fallibility may seem paralyzing - and the current political mood certainly seems to reflect this. But recognizing fallibility can actually be empowering, because it implies the possibility of improvement in both economics and politics. If the world is too complex and unpredictable for either markets or governments to achieve social objectives, then new systems of checks and balances must be designed so that political decision-making can constrain economic incentives and vice versa. If the world is characterized by ambiguity and unpredictability, then the economic theories of the pre-crisis period - rational expectations, efficient markets, and the neutrality of money - must be revised.

Moreover, politicians must reconsider much of the ideological superstructure erected on market fundamentalist assumptions. This includes not only financial deregulation, but also central bank independence, the separation of monetary and fiscal policies, and the assumption that competitive markets require no government intervention to produce an acceptable income distribution, drive innovation, provide necessary infrastructure, and deliver public goods. It is obvious that new technology and the integration of billions of additional workers into global markets have created opportunities that should mean greater prosperity in the decades ahead than before the crisis. Yet "responsible" politicians everywhere warn citizens about a "new normal" of stagnant growth. No wonder voters are up in arms.

People sense that their leaders have powerful economic tools that could boost living standards. Money could be printed and distributed directly to citizens. Minimum wages could be raised to reduce inequality. Governments could invest much more in infrastructure and innovation at zero cost. Bank regulation could encourage lending, instead of restricting it. But deploying such radical policies would mean rejecting the theories that have dominated economics since the 1980s, together with the institutional arrangements based upon them, such as Europe's Maastricht Treaty. Few "responsible" people are yet willing to challenge pre-crisis economic orthodoxy.

The message of today's populist revolts is that politicians must tear up their pre-crisis rulebooks and encourage a revolution in economic thinking. If responsible politicians refuse, "some rough beast, its hour come at last" will do it for them. (Courtesy Project Syndicate)

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