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

The Need for a More Robust War Leadership

With the Taliban set to start launching the group's spring offensive this year, there are growing concerns over how Afghanistan is going to cope with the Taliban insurgency in 2016. Speaking at a counter terrorism meeting organized by Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process initiative in Kabul, United Nations Special Envoy to Afghanistan, Nicholas Haysom said: "Afghanistan continues to face a difficult security environment, with the presence of both indigenous and foreign terrorist groups". In the meeting, Afghan Deputy Foreign Minister, Hekmat Khalil Karzai warned that terror threats were on the rise in the region and it would require regional cooperation to resolve them. The warnings over a difficult year ahead is coming at a time when the peace efforts have stalled and the Taliban are expected to announce seasonal offensive.

The authorities at the Ministry of Interior predict rise of security challenges this year; however, insist that the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) are ready to lead aggressive counteroffensive operations against the Taliban. The spokesman of the Ministry of Interior, Sediq Sediqi, said on Sunday April 03, 2016 that the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) would try to take advantage of the rift among the Taliban factions and launch invasive operations against the militants. However, he admitted that there would be a tough fighting season ahead. The officials are talking of plans to launch a far-reaching military offensive to deter the Taliban and counter the group's spring offensive.

Despite assurances given by the security agencies that ANSF are ready for repelling the upcoming Taliban offensive, the Afghan government needs to do more to plan a robust counterterrorism offensive and mobilize forces and resources required to win the tough battle ahead. Government cannot merely rely on its current approach to the war and the way it has led the counter-insurgency campaign so far. There have been many setbacks in terms of maintaining security and containing the resurgence of the Taliban and other militant groups. The counter-insurgency led by the national unity government has been flawed in many ways. The government needs to heed the calls for improvement of its handling of the security agencies and the campaign against the Taliban.

In 2015, when the ANSF took responsibility of security from NATO, the counterinsurgency operations of the Afghan army and police forces were undermined by shortcomings and limitations such as lack of proper management of the war and thus low coordination and mobility among the security forces. Lack of leadership has been perhaps the biggest factor that has failed the security agencies to organize a robust and efficient counterinsurgency operation against the Taliban. The Afghan government is yet to resolve the gap in leadership of the country's armed forces while the ANSF are preparing for another bitter season of fighting. Lack of leadership would continue to remain the ANSF's Achilles heel in the fight against the Taliban in 2016 if the national unity government fails to resolve the stalemate over leadership of the security agencies.

Despite resiliency and bravery of armed forces in 2015, the ANSF suffered a high rate of casualties in the campaign against the militant groups. In recent years, the authorities have stopped releasing monthly briefs revealing the casualties. If the trend of such high casualties of the armed forces continues, it would be potentially harmful to the morale of the security forces battling the Taliban. The struggling leadership of the ANSF has resulted to flawed counterinsurgency tactics while the Taliban keep shifting war tactics aim to gain more territory and stretch the strength of the Afghan army and police forces.

Analysts and NATO commanders believe that remaining in a defensive position with assigning thousands of troops for guarding vulnerable outposts in the remote areas across the country would not help the ANSF to win the battle on the frontlines. NATO commanders have made several recommendations for improvement of ANSF capabilities in the battle against the Taliban which include removing many of the thousands of checkpoints and outposts in the cities and across the country and mobilizing forces to take the battle to the grounds of the militant groups. NATO also advised broad changes in the mid-level leadership of the army and police forces.

The national unity government has taken concrete measures on implementing some of the recommendations including to bring changes to the senior ranks of command of the army and police forces. However, the government needs to waste no time to fill the vacant positions for the ministers of the security agencies and devise a broad and robust transitional counterinsurgency strategy. The ANSF have some potential advantages which can turn the tide in favor of the security forces if they are backed by strong leadership overseeing the security and defense agencies. Afghanistan's fledgling air forces now can play a role in providing aerial firepower for the ground forces that desperately need air support from both NATO and the Afghan air force. Overall, the challenges outweigh the means that are available. Government forces last year combated various militant groups including the Islamic State group and other groups fighting under one or another faction of the Taliban. This year however, many of the smaller militant groups have weakened in the face of fierce attacks of the dominant Taliban faction under Mullah Mansoor and ANSF are to fight against a more powerful and bolder Taliban who are determined for having more gains and taking more grounds. The government needs to act immediately and demonstrate higher political will to lead a more robust counterinsurgency campaign.

Social Justice!

By Asmatyari

You are frequently subjected to grave discriminations; given you are ethnic minorities, presumed inferior sex, religious minority or a teenaged youth. The fallacious and duplicitous trend pursued equates human dignity and values on the basis of flawed social and economic status, meant to earn personal gains at the cost of execution of talents and human capabilities. The society we dwell in is solely based on aristocratic and autocratic temperament –meritocracy finds no space instead is pushed to state of absolute denial. If you belong to an inferior gender, class, ethnicity and sectarian group, you are left underprivileged and denied access to fundamental rights to life, equality, liberty and happiness. These social injustices constitute principle reason behind many political and social problems we face.

Social justice is an underlying principle for peaceful and prosperous coexistence within and among nations. We uphold the principles of social justice when we promote gender equality or the rights of indigenous peoples and migrants. We advance social justice when we remove barriers that people face because of gender, age, race, ethnicity, religion, culture or disability.

Every year February 20 is commemorated as "World Day of Social Justice". For the United Nations, the pursuit of social justice for all is at the core of our global mission to promote development and human dignity. The role of the Afghan state justice institutions in maintaining rule of law and social orders is relatively weak. This particularly applies to rural Afghanistan, where majority of the Afghan population lives in. Traditional justice system is active by default in many parts of the country, being more powerful in southern, eastern and central parts of the country where state justice institutions have nominal existence. The system is composed of customary/tribal institutions of decision-making and dispute resolutions that incorporate the prevalent local customary law, institutionalized ritual and remediation. The members of these entities are village elders, influential leaders and religious leaders.

Due to the weakness of the formal justice system in Afghanistan, however, in many communities traditional justice systems operate by default as the only justice system. Community leaders are sometimes uncertain about how certain practices have come to be accepted in their communities elders will say that the values are religious values, and religious leaders identify the same values as cultural, coming from the elders. This can occur particularly with harmful cultural practices, such as forced marriage, or payment of a girl as compensation or restitution.

The delayed, denied or plagued legal justice system has left people with a single option of consulting traditional justice system. Many people view the formal justice system as foreign, corrupt, ineffective, expensive or geographically difficult to access.

For these reasons, in many communities, traditional justice systems are used exclusively or at least far more frequently than the formal justice system. The fallacious perception preaching traditional justice can be an effective way of managing disputes and maintaining peace and stability within communities, in the absence of a genuine alternative legal system can't be ruled out.

Some human rights activists believe that corrupt government officials, unemployment, poverty, lack of development, economic problems and insecurity are challenges that need to be overcome to improve social justice in Afghanistan.

Social justice means an equal and fair opportunity for everyone to live in just conditions of the society. It envisages rights regarding social, economic and political matters for the all over development of a person to live a healthy social life.

It is preliminary that the essence of Social justice based on the values of fairness, equality, respect for diversity, access to social protection, and the application of human rights in all spheres of life, including in the workplace is publicized both in words and action. Lack of social justice anywhere is an affront to us all.

Social justice provides the foundation for a healthy community. It grows out of our sense that each person and each created being has value. Only as we recognize the value and dignity of each person can we build a healthy community, so it's a slow, painful process of learning and growing. To help the process along we develop attitudes of respect for one another.

We also shape policies and patterns of behavior to protect and enhance the worth of each person. We do this by building governmental and economic structures, educational and reformed religious institutions, and all the other systems that provide for health and social welfare. This justice is not a goal that we'll ever reach, but a process, a struggle in which we can be engaged through all the pain and all the joy. It should also be pledged promoting equitable distribution of income and greater access to resources through equity and equality and opportunity for all.

The government must recognize that economic growth should promote equity and social justice and that "a society for all" must be based on social justice and respect for all human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Social justice is exercised within a society, particularly as it is exercised by and among the various social classes of that society. A socially just society is based on the principles of equality and solidarity, understands and value human rights, and recognizes the dignity of every human being.

The call for a major push putting a country on track to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) must be responded, by seeking to slash a host of social ills, from extreme poverty and hunger to maternal and infant mortality, to lack of access to education and health care, which are United Nation's key means of bringing social justice and development together to benefit the poorest and most vulnerable. A prosperous Afghanistan's dream can be transformed into reality ascertaining social justice's underlying principle for peaceful and harmonious coexistence within communities and among nations. The government should uphold the principles of social justice to promote gender equality or the rights of indigenous peoples including minorities.

The government should advance social justice to remove barriers that people face because of gender, age, race, ethnicity, religion, culture, disability and replacing traditional with legal justice system. The noteworthy is that only legal justice saves a person from arbitrariness of course and ensures provision of justice to anyone, anywhere.

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The Online Fight Against ISIS

By Colin P. Clarke and Isaac R. Porche III

Even as the United States and its allies carry out aerial bombardments in Iraq and Syria, their target, the Islamic State (ISIS), may be preparing to retaliate on another front. By taking the battle into cyberspace, ISIS would gain many of the advantages of asymmetric warfare – unless the US organizes itself to counter the group's efforts.

The entry barriers to cyber warfare are remarkably low, even for non-state actors. Even if ISIS does not currently have the capability to carry out cyber-attacks, it is unlikely to find it difficult to recruit followers with the requisite expertise; in the past, other terrorist and insurgent organizations, including Al Qaeda, have done just that. There are bound to be cyber mercenaries, sympathizers, and freelancers available if the price is right.

Experts have cautioned that ISIS could strike unprotected infrastructure or private residences. Hundreds of thousands of industrial and commercial control systems, including the rapidly growing Internet of Things, are leaving ever-wider swaths of everyday life vulnerable to disruption. And far more troubling is the warning by the Nuclear Threat Initiative, a nonprofit devoted to strengthening global security, that many civilian and military nuclear facilities are inadequately protected against cyber-attacks.

Late last year, computer and network security researchers revealed, to little surprise or fanfare, that ISIS was active on the so-called dark web.

These websites, which are invisible to search engines and accessible only through specialized software, are often havens for purveyors of child pornography, drugs, or other illicit products, including hacking services and malicious software. This development was the first sign that ISIS was actively seeking to develop a cyber capability that it could deploy even if it loses its footing on the ground.

So far, terrorists have lagged behind their criminal counterparts in adopting virtual currencies like the peer-to-peer currency Bitcoin. But this could change if Western countries are successful in countering ISIS's current sources of funding, including oil smuggling and extortion. Indeed, ISIS has allegedly already solicited Bitcoin donations.

The group is also using the dark web to recruit and disseminate its propaganda to aspiring jihadists. For sympathetic audiences, an online push can sometimes be enough to spark violent action. This is especially true for individuals who are already radicalized, such as Syed Farook and Tashfeen Malik, the husband and wife who opened fire on a holiday party in San Bernardino, California, in December.

Perhaps most troubling from an operational perspective is the possibility that ISIS could use the dark web to coordinate with operatives to plan and plot a major attack in Europe or the US. Terrorists are always seeking to stay one step ahead of law enforcement and intelligence services; so ISIS can be expected to seek software that encrypts a user's IP address and routes Internet traffic through a series of anonymized servers.

To be sure, ISIS's foray into cyberspace creates opportunities for Western law enforcement and intelligence agencies to conduct surveillance, if they can develop the capacity to do so. Just as ISIS has proved far from omnipotent on the physical battlefield, it can also be defeated in cyberspace. To fight effectively in this borderless domain, the US will have to work closely with its international partners. But there are steps that it can take on its own.

Recently, Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter urged US Cyber Command – the arm of the military dedicated to cyberspace operations – to "intensify the fight" against ISIS. But the US would be wise to consider expanding the fight by recruiting civilian volunteers.
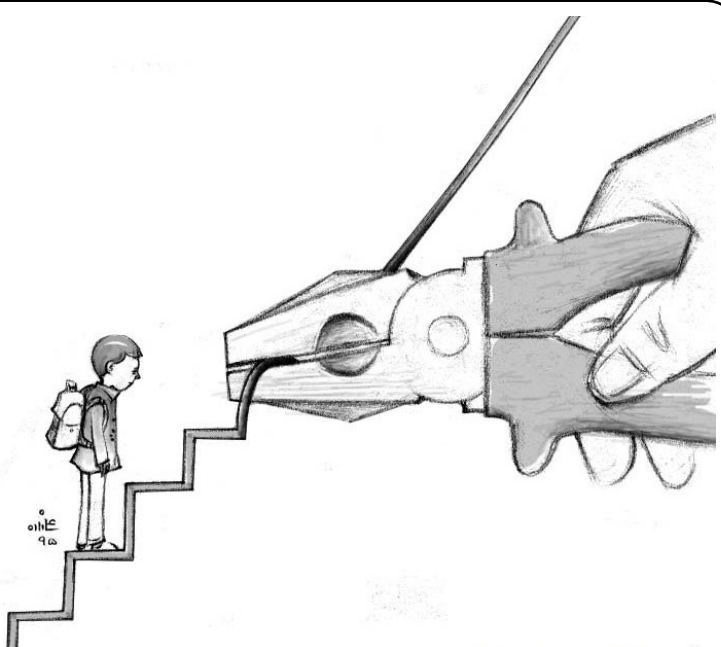
When it comes to cyber-attacks, numbers matter. Other countries, such as Iran, China, and North Korea, already boast large cyber armies, with tens of thousands of recruits who can monitor, track, counter, and mitigate threats to the country.

In the US, the Michigan Cyber Civilian Corps has organized itself to respond to cyber-attacks. Replicating this program – described as something between a "volunteer fire department and the national guard" – on a national level could bolster US capabilities.

The Department of Homeland Security has already considered creating a "cyber reserve" of computer experts, and a report by Booz Allen Hamilton, a technology and security firm, suggested similar efforts to provide the US with more cyber warriors in the event of an attack.

To prevail against ISIS, the US and its cyber soldiers will have to be capable of reacting quickly, while being guided by an overarching strategy. Countering ISIS online will require a continuously adaptive response. And it will require the manpower to make that possible. (Courtesy Project Syndicate)

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