

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



April 09, 2016

## Time for Serious Action

Afghanistan is on the top among the countries producing narcotics and influenced by it. Years of instability and war have incapacitated the attentions to be diverted towards this evil and at the same time wars and instability have strengthened the networks that both produce it and smuggle it. Moreover, the tension and pathetic standard of life, have made the people in Afghanistan among the top users of the different sorts of drugs as well.

Afghanistan requires an urgent and effective strategy to deal with this problem, if it is really serious in putting an end to it. The government authorities in this regard need to take the most important step. Without them taking serious measures, it is difficult to expect others to do it.

Recently, Counter-narcotics Minister, Salamat Azizi, has mentioned that her ministry is working on a plan aimed at creating cooperation to eliminate the scourge of narcotics in northern Balkh province. The ministry had also devised a five-year program named "Action" for elimination of narcotics nationwide.

She said the Action is also supported by the international community and would continue until 2019. The program has three objectives -- implementation of law on all people, fighting against drug workers and providing alternative income sources to farmers.

A comprehensive strategy is definitely vital in this regard; however, more important is to follow the strategy. Any plan that is only in the papers and does get acted upon is useless. Unless tangible measures are taken, promises alone would not do any magic and would not be helpful at all. Previously as well there have been many promises by authorities regarding controlling the production, the smuggling and the use of drugs but no effective action has been taken so far.

We should be alarmed by the fact that the poppy cultivation and its smuggling are linked with the networks of organized crime in the country that further extends to international mafia and drug dealing and they have their strong backers in the international drug market and national authorities who appear to be guardians of the nation. But one of the most alarming and unfortunate facts is that they have their links with the terrorist networks in the country. The growing insurgency and expanding networks of terrorism suggest that the terrorists have strong financial support from drugs. This situation is really very much intimidating. This is going to devastate the lives of the people of Afghanistan in various ways and unfortunately no break in it seems very much likely -- at least not in near future as the statistics show that there has been and there will be increase in the opium production in the country if not handled properly.

The situation would not be difficult to handle if it was limited only to farmers but the fact is that the farmers are not alone to benefit from the rising prices and the rise in production; rather farmers take a negligible part of it while most of the income goes to the networks that manage its filthy business. And it is not concealed from knowing minds that the terrorist networks have a lion's share in such income. So, it means that with the growth in the production of opium, there will be considerable increase in insurgency from the terrorist networks that are already in the process of gaining strength. Moreover, it has also been observed that the cultivations mostly take place in the areas where Taliban seem to have more control. It is believed that most of the cultivation is concentrated in southern Afghan provinces, and heartland of the Taliban-led insurgency, where the government does not seem to have much control.

Unfortunately, the measures that have been carried out to counter the growth of this menace have not been comprehensive and serious. It is even believed that the important figures are involved in backing this business that should, otherwise, have the responsibility to counter them. And the growing corruption and negligence of responsibility in the country does not let the government notice such realities.

So, the menace of poppy cultivation is determined to influence the country in various ways. It, on one side, is making drugs available to a large number of people, who are both intentionally and unintentionally becoming addict to it and becoming responsible for giving birth to different social problems. On the other hand, it is providing the fuel for insurgency as it is bound to benefit the terrorist networks in the country that largely depend on such sources of income after losing support from elsewhere.

Government authorities in this regard have to get very much serious and try to take concrete steps to make sure that the production is reduced to a considerable extent. Destroying the crops is one of the most practical steps at the present scenario and can to a very great extent discourage the poppy cultivation but it has certain complexities with itself.

For the long-lasting solution it is preferable that the government must try to facilitate the farmers and landowners the opportunity of growing alternate crops. Moreover, corruption, in this regard, must not be tolerated in any condition.



## Hizb-e Islami's Motives for Making Peace

By Abdul Ahad Bahrami

As peace talks with the Taliban stalled, progresses in the talks with the Hizb-e Islami of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar seem to come as a minimal success for the government's efforts to persuade the militants to denounce violence and join the political process. After a senior member of Hizb-e Islami announced recently that the group has taken off its demand for withdrawal of foreign forces as a key precondition for negotiations with the Afghan government, the prospect for reaching a deal with the militant group has become clearer. The Afghan government hopes striking a deal with the Hizb-e Islami group would energize the peace initiative and encourage other militants to join peace negotiations with the government.

However, many see Hekmatyar's party as a being an underdog militant group that has been weakened considerably in recent years and has no particular weight in the bloody insurgency. Many are concerned over the possible cost of a peace deal with the Hizb-e Islami and the possible concessions that the government may consider for the militant group to lay down arms and join the mainstream political process. The government's desperation and its helplessness in the efforts to reenergize the peace process further add to the concerns. However, the opportunity for the Afghan government is that Hizb-e Islami is coming to the table of negotiations from a position of weakness. This gives the government an upper hand in the negotiations and to impose terms and conditions for a deal that would see inclusion of Hizb-e Islami in the country's political process. After the relatively surprise withdrawal from one of its main preconditions for talks, it is that now a key demand of the Hizb-e Islami is to obtain judicial immunity for its leaders over the atrocities the group has committed in last fourteen years of conflict in the country. Hizb-e Islami has even abandoned demands for receiving ministerial posts and other political concessions, suggesting how the changed conditions on the grounds of war and peace efforts is forcing Hizb-e Islami to seek a speedy negotiations with the government.

The lowering of expectations suggest how the group is desperately attempting to end its isolation and avoid being a loser again as the Afghan government and its international supporters are rushing for striking a peace deal with the Taliban. The Hizb-e Islami members know well that the group would have no noticeable place in the talks with the government once peace negotiations between the Taliban and the government start. Fear of being left out of the talks or being denied of having a desired share in the further peace talks is propelling Hizb-e Islami into seeking separate peace negotiations. On the other hand, Hizb-e Islami's militant activities have dwindled in recent years as emergence of other groups such as the Islamic State and further resurgence of the Taliban have left little space for militant activities of the Hizb-e Islami.

What is more important in the calculations of Hizb-e Islami group is that its inclusion in the political process will help it revive its lost influence in the Afghan politics and bureaucracy. Hizb-e-Islami is believed to be very influential in the government and the provincial administrations as its loyalists, former members and members of splinter groups occupy key positions both in the central government and local administrations in some southern and eastern provinces. Hizb-e-Islami leaders seem to have come to the realization that it will be able to gain more influence and power through operating as a legal political party rather than fighting as an isolated militant group. Joining the political process would help the militant group to reorganize its scattered forces, who have joined a number of low-profile splinter groups, and even seek reunification of the party.

Still the group's demand to be granted immunity from legal prosecution in the future is too much. The militant party has committed horrifying atrocities in the last fourteen years of anti-government insurgency. All groups that have committed crimes should face justice when the time comes. This should include Hizb-e-Islami and all other groups who had and is having a role in the past crimes and atrocities in the country. The government cannot ignore the fact that justice is crucial for political stability and peace in the country. The government neither can ignore the right for justice of thousands of Afghans who have suffered from the past wars and the atrocities committed by responsible groups including Hizb-e Islami. The existing law providing immunity to mujahedin is a major blow to Afghanistan's attempts for restoring justice.

It may be viable to consider some proportionate political concessions for the groups such as Hizb-e Islami for sake of reaching peace in the country. However, the government should not grant judicial immunity to Hizb-e Islami or any other group and do not allow any groups failing justice like the mujahedin-dominated parliament did by passing the law providing immunity to the mujahedin. The best option to open a way ahead would be to ensure the authorities of the Hizb-e-Islami that it would be dealt the same as other groups and individuals who have been involved in the past events in the country.

This would mean for the group that it would not face prosecution until a national transitional justice is implemented for all parties involved with the past crimes.

Politically, a possible of the talks with Hizb-e Islami party would be a breakthrough for the peace efforts and would be considered as an example of making peace with anti-government militant groups. It would provide a ground for reconciliation with all militant groups by setting a model and clarifying the conditions and grounds for making peace and ending armed conflict.

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## Realism for Europe and Turkey

By Joschka Fischer

Relations between Europe and Turkey have long been characterized by a deep contradiction. Whereas security cooperation (especially during the Cold War) and economic ties have been strong, the vital foundations of democracy -- human rights, press freedom, minority rights, and an independent judiciary to enforce the rule of law -- have remained weak in Turkey. History, too, has divided the two sides, as the dispute over recognition of the Armenian genocide during World War I attests.

After the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) assumed power under Abdullah Gül in 2002 and later under Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, these conflicts seemed to have been resolved. During its first years in government, the AKP wanted Turkey to join the European Union and to modernize the economy. And it delivered real reforms -- particularly in areas, such as the judiciary, essential to progress toward EU membership.

But Erdoğan always kept open a "neo-Ottoman" option, which would orient Turkey toward the Middle East and the Muslim world. That became evident in 2007, when German Chancellor Angela Merkel and then-French President Nicolas Sarkozy together de facto closed the door to EU membership for Turkey, and in a manner that humiliated Erdoğan.

In recent days, however, the fraught relations between Europe and Turkey have taken a bizarre turn. The Turkish government has twice summoned Germany's ambassador to protest against a short satirical clip about Erdoğan shown on regional German television, even demanding that the clip be banned.

There can be no doubt that Turkey's skilled and experienced diplomats understand Germans' relationship with press freedom and freedom of opinion -- fundamental values of the EU which Turkey wants to join. The question is how much of this understanding still filters through to President Erdoğan.

Relations could deteriorate further this spring, when Germany's Bundestag votes on a resolution calling for the mass murder of Armenians in 1915 to be categorized as genocide. The motion will most likely be adopted by a large cross-party majority, aggravating tensions with Erdoğan's government.

But, despite these recent conflicts, the EU and its member states must not lose sight of the fact that the decades-old partnership with Turkey is of paramount interest to both sides. Now and in the future, Europe needs Turkey, and Turkey needs Europe.

The price for this partnership, however, can never be the abandonment of democratic principles; on the contrary, Turkey urgently needs to institutionalize these principles for the sake of its own

modernization. What is required is to focus on sustaining the relationship and reducing tensions as much as possible.

Partnership or not, Europe cannot free itself from its geopolitical neighborhood. Ever since the nineteenth century, Europe has had to deal with the so-called "Eastern question," which at the outset concerned how to address the consequences of the Ottoman Empire's decline. The Ottoman legacy led to several Balkan wars, which ultimately triggered World War I.

Now, a century later, the Eastern question has returned to Europe, and it is just as dangerous, even if it does not currently entail any risk of war on the continent. The Balkans -- an undoubtedly European region -- will remain at peace as long as a belief in a future within the EU remains alive. But the Middle East and North Africa are trapped in a power vacuum, giving rise to political crises, civil disorder, war, terror, and untold losses to the economy and human welfare. America's intervention in Iraq, followed by the weakening (whether real or perceived) of its security guarantee for the region, has led to open strategic rivalry between the leading Sunni power, Saudi Arabia, and the leading Shia power, Iran. Turkey, too, is involved in that game. Meanwhile, most Arab states are unable to provide adequate jobs and opportunities to increasingly young populations, fueling support for religious extremism. The conflict between Israel and the Palestinians is escalating once again, as is Kurdish militancy. And the fighting in Syria (and to a certain extent Iraq), by calling into question the century-old borders established under the WWI-era Sykes-Picot agreement, is destabilizing the region and fueling the seemingly endless flows of refugees making their way to Europe.

Russia's military intervention in Syria, moreover, raised the specter of a direct military clash with a NATO member state, when Turkey shot down a Russian military plane. Should the Kremlin, which has withdrawn its forces, decide to return, the risk of such a conflict, with all its uncertain consequences, would return as well. Today's version of the Eastern question, like the century-old variant, poses enormous risks for Europe's security. And it could easily culminate in a forsaken and alienated Turkey, isolated on the margins of both Europe and the Middle East, with its democratic potential exhausted by the irresolvable Kurdish question. Against this backdrop, a clash of values will almost certainly continue to define relations between Europe and Turkey. But, as has been true for a century, much more -- both sides' fundamental security interests -- will be in the balance as well. (Courtesy Project Syndicate)

Joschka Fischer, Germany's foreign minister and vice chancellor from 1998 to 2005, was a leader of the German Green Party for almost 20 years.



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