

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



April 19, 2017

## The Deteriorating Political Situation

The rifts within the ranks of National Unity Government (NUG) are now an open secret. However, the situation has taken a blind turn after President Ashraf Ghani fired Ahmad Zia Massoud, his top advisor for reforms and good governance, on Monday night. Soon after the President's announcement, his spokesman Shah Hussain Murtazawi told that Massoud had been fired due to the weak performance.

Massoud, on the other hand, has said that Ghani's move may further deteriorate the fragile political situation and may even push the country towards a civil war. He has also declared that the President does not have the right to sack him from his position.

This comes at a time when the political situation is already uncertain and there have been many dismissals and appointments in the higher government ranks. The government is already facing serious situation that arose after the dismissals of few ministers by the parliament. Moreover, there are serious allegations of ethnic nepotism in the appointments for different positions in government institutions.

As a matter of fact, internal differences and rifts within NUG has diverted the attentions of the government towards the non-issues and, at the same time, hindered it from performing anything worthwhile for the betterment of the security and socio-political circumstances in the country.

It is important to note that first, the differences within NUG could be found only between the two teams that formed NUG and were led by President Ashraf Ghani and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Abdullah Abdullah; however, now there are rifts among all the members of both the teams, further complicating the fragile political situation. Recently, another dominant rift emerged between the first Vice-President (VP) Gen. Abdur Rashid Dostum and President Ashraf Ghani. The differences first appeared in October last year when Dostum accused President Ghani of ethnic nepotism. He gave similar comments about CEO Abdullah as well. However, the differences were further invigorated when Dostum was accused of ordering the maltreatment and sexual harassment of former Jawzjan governor and tribal elder, Ahmad Eshchi.

Dostum's eight bodyguards were mainly accused in the same case and Attorney General Office (AGO) prosecutors had asked Dostum to hand them over to the office. The situation seems very tense and may easily erupt into a tussle if it is not managed properly. The need of the time is to control the situation through candid negotiations, instead of display of power. A clash between the followers of the NUG leaders at the heart of capital Kabul will have a far reaching consequences and may raise many serious questions about government that has already failed to overcome its differences. In this crucial circumstances when the country is going through a serious juncture, it is important for NUG to maintain unity and discipline among its ranks and rather focus on the issues that benefit the poor people of Afghanistan, instead of running after their own interests and differences.

Since the formation of NUG, there has not been any improvement in security and many other sectors still suffer from lack of attention. As a matter of fact, the arrangements to tackle the security situation are not up to the mark. The government authorities do not see eye to eye with each other regarding the security situation and the measures to control it. As there is no guideline or consensus on the higher level, the operational teams are not sure about what sort of steps they have to take. In most of the cases, they respond only after the insurgents attack somewhere. They, in short, have only a defensive mechanism to follow.

A comprehensive strategy, that should be able to tackle major issues of insecurity in different parts of the country, is the need of time and the government must stand united and committed if it wants to develop such a strategy. Good governance, on the other hand, has never been the focus of the government, nor are there possibilities that it would achieve something in this regard in near future. Still a large portion of Afghan society suffer from poverty and unemployment and lack of rudimentary requirements of life. Education for all, rule of law, justice, gender equality, transparency and participatory government, all these can only be achieved when the very basic problems are solved. Thus, making developments in good governance would really be a Herculean task for the government.

Moreover, the economic situation is not getting better as well since the investment has fallen during NUG tenure. Corruption, on the other hand has remained as the most dominant issue even after clear promises by NUG that it will take tangible steps to control this menace. Keeping in view all these issues, NUG needs to focus more on their solution instead of wasting energy on their own differences. With the issues of rising insecurity, poor governance, declining investments and rampant corruption threatening the stability, security and legitimacy in Afghan society, there is no other option for the Afghan government to take speedy, effective and tangible measures to control the situation. It cannot keep on prioritizing its internal differences and clashes. Doing so would further deteriorate the situation and weaken the government and its authority and legitimacy.



## Violence against Women Lingers

By Hujjatullah Zia

A number of individuals suffer from tribal culture which is in conflict with national law. Tribal councils play the role of local government in villages regardless of the Constitution. The local customs that have outweighed religion inflict indescribable sufferings upon some Afghans. Women are particularly left at the mercy of Talibanic mindsets. Violent mentalities hold strong sway in tribal belts and women do not have the right to act or breathe a word against the restrictive culture of their areas. Throughout the history, Afghan women suffered under patriarchal system and traditional customs.

Their rights were violated and their freedoms were curtailed with impunity. Women's reaction vis-à-vis cultural values ensued death or severe torture. For instance, women's blood was spilt and their bodies were riddled with guns for transgressing the Taliban's radical law.

Life turned to hell for them since they were treated as mere pariah. There were many stereotypes about them, too. For example, women were considered the element that paved the ground for men's sin and broke their temptation. Therefore, they were supposed to wear burqa (a head-to-toe covering Afghan women were forced to put on during the Taliban's regime).

Despite the downfall of the Taliban's regime and establishment of democratic administration, the sufferings of Afghan women did not end. The Taliban have reportedly killed three women and a child in Sare-pul province last week. Similarly, they killed two persons in desert court on Sunday for allegedly having illegal relations.

The Taliban have stoned, killed and tortured people in desert courts in recent years. In addition, the self-proclaimed Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) also tortured Afghan individuals in the worst possible way for one reason or another. Some local mullahs and illegal armed groups resorted to the same action in tribal areas.

The fundamental ideology of the Taliban and ISIL groups, mainly regarding women, is beyond doubt. They seek to impose their warped minds on people with the barrel of gun and radicalize tribal residents. Those who live in the Taliban-dominated areas bear the brunt of their ideology. Afghanistan's Constitutions states, "The accused shall be innocent until proven guilty by the order of an authoritative court." It adds in article 27, "No one shall be pursued, arrested, or detained without due process of law."

However, men and women are killed in cold blood in desert courts without legal process.

The militant fighters are widely involved in such issues. The Taliban still consider the current administration "a puppet government" and do not pay significance to Afghanistan's law. There are many social, cultural and political barriers before Afghan women. The residents of the tribal belts re-

strict the rights and liberty of women and reduce their role within the four walls which are contrary to national laws and religious tenets. In other words, the local residents, who nurture tribal traditions, also play highly negative role regarding women's rights.

Despite democratic administration and immaculate Constitution, the graph of violence against women is on rise. The tragic stories of killing and torturing women, not only by militant outfits but also by their family members, make frequent headlines in national and international newspapers. In fact, women are bleeding as a result of militancy and traditional customs, including parochial mindset.

Besides being killed in suicide bombings and terrorist attacks, Afghan women lose their lives in desert courts which are carried out by the same groups. Secondly, domestic violence, too, prevail across the country. This week, a man killed his wife in Helmand province - this is rife in Afghanistan. Women's voice in support of their rights fall on deaf ears. There are challenges in government's apparatus since law is not enforced properly.

Years ago, a woman who intended to seek justice in the court was called "prostitute" by a policeman. Moreover, reports said that a number of women that lived behind the bar were simply victims of violence rather than being criminal. On the other hand, some citizens wait in prisons for months and perhaps for years without knowing the reason behind this. To put it succinctly, the law is violated not only by simple individuals or militant groups but also by the officials. Under-aged marriage is one of the serious issues in Afghanistan and it is considered violence.

According to the United Nations, more than 46 per cent of Afghan girls get married under the age of 18, this is not contrary to Afghanistan's civil law, and more than 15 per cent under the age of 15. Afghanistan's First Lady Laura Ghani called the early marriage a tragic issue. To prevent from the early marriage, Afghan government has constituted a national working program. This program aims to spread awareness and empower young women.

Two reasons are said to pave the ground for early marriage: poverty and militancy. Indeed, some families force their daughters to marry so that they could mitigate their financial problems.

Secondly, insurgency and political turbulence make some families believe that it is hard for them to protect their young daughters against the prevailing ills.

The government must tackle such issues without delay and should have constituted many programs for eradicating violence and empowering women years earlier.

Moreover, the clergy and Ulema Council should enlighten the rights and dignity of women based on the true spirit of Islam and the negative aspect of violence.

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## The Mullah-Led Development Model

By Nadeem ul Haque

A longstanding debate in economics - and among social scientists more broadly - centers on how best to deliver international aid to developing countries. Should these countries' governments rely on top-down wisdom from donor capitals? Or should they focus more on funding bottom-up solutions dictated by recipients?

With the Trump administration proposing to cut the US State Department's budget and reduce the amount of money various US agencies allocate to the world's poorest, this debate is taking on a new urgency. And a response from the Islamic world - the recipient of much of America's aid in recent years - may hold important lessons for devising the best way forward.

Simply put, Western countries' current approach is not working. This can be seen most clearly in my country, Pakistan. Despite massive increases in aid dollars in recent years, including billions authorized by former President Barack Obama, those of us on the ground are largely cut out of the delivery process. There are roughly 70 separate local aid offices and 40 international NGOs involved in providing aid to Pakistanis. But most decisions about how to spend the money they receive are made outside the country.

Aid recipient countries like Pakistan are at the bottom of the international development food chain. Budgets are prepared in offices far from the intended site of delivery, and bilateral and multilateral programs often establish priorities (like health care, schooling, or poverty reduction) without much input from the receiving country.

Yet, because beneficiary governments are so hungry for aid dollars, they are usually all too eager to follow the agendas prepared by donors and their contractors. They say yes to the conditions and the studies and the evaluations. And they acquiesce when told where and how to allocate funds. Local partners can only pick up the crumbs at the end of a long process involving too many "experts," making recipients feel disenfranchised and unable to see a better future. But, rather than simply cutting aid, as the Trump administration seems intent on doing, what the US should consider is reordering how - not if - it delivers aid. And it is here, in the bottom-up approach being tested in parts of the Islamic world, that important lessons can be gleaned.

The void created by the shortcomings of Western aid programs has produced homegrown solutions in places like Pakistan, where socially minded, entrepreneurial religious leaders - mullahs - are increasingly making their presence felt. These key community members offer Muslims a clearer vision of a better life than Western aid agencies ever

could. People relate to mullahs and believe in what they are offering. This trust is something Western donors have never placed a premium on earning.

In Pakistan, mullahs raise funds from their communities and from official and private donors in the wealthy oil-producing countries. Unlike funding from, say, the US Agency for International Development, recipients are not burdened with consultancy fees or mandatory spending evaluations. There are no policy matrices, controlled surveys, or field reports to file. There is just cash, raised through a religious channel and funneled directly to the programs and communities that need it.

Throughout the Muslim world, self-motivated, entrepreneurial mullahs have operated without bureaucrats and hardship allowances, five-star hotels, or business-class tickets. Not all of their efforts are altruistic; in a few instances, crowd-funding and informal networks have benefited terrorism. Just like American voters who supported Trump, not every Muslim is an assiduous fact-checker. But in the vast majority of cases, mullah-led efforts have raised cash for schools, hospitals, and other services that Western aid money has failed to deliver, while shaping how Muslim communities develop.

Demand for this alternative vision of aid has increased with the evident failure of the modernization-based development paradigm. While Western experts peddling bureaucratized solutions enforced superficial modernity, based on dress, language, and lifestyles, many Muslims saw no real benefit in the form of expanded economic opportunity and greater social mobility. So they sought, and established, their own solutions.

The economist William Easterly has argued that the best way to reform international development is to shift money from top-down "experts" to "bottom-up searchers" - like Nobel Peace Prize winner and microcredit pioneer Muhammad Yunus - who keep experimenting until they find something that works for the poor on the ground.

That, I would argue, is exactly what mullahs are doing in the Islamic world.

Development is most successful when it emerges from solutions that are identified, tested, and sustained locally, not when Western agencies and technocrats spend huge sums on top-down approaches.

Today, a new breed of Muslim "searchers" is offering bottom-up development solutions. As the mullah-led development model continues to spread in the Muslim world, "experts" in the West would do well to understand the reasons for its success.

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