

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



April 24, 2016

Afghan Women Continue their Endeavors

Though the discriminatory behavior against women in Afghanistan still looms large and there are different incidents of violence against them as well, some among them have been able to rise against the challenges and show the society that they are no way inferior in qualities and capabilities. The male-dominated and male-favoring circumstances have narrowed down the room for them to perform, but they have kept on showing that if they are provided appropriate circumstances they may prove to be very positive members of the society and can, in fact, play a decisive role in its development.

Afghan women have even proved themselves in the fields that are not thought to be for women in Afghan society. They have proved themselves in different sports events. They take part in politics and some among them are heading different organizations within the country. And, they have shown their talents in music as well, which is even considered inappropriate for Afghan men to listen to or to take part in. There are many Afghan female singers who have proved to the country and even internationally that they have extra-ordinary talent.

Afghan women who are in music are thought to be 'characterless' and most of the society members machinate both intentionally and unintentionally that they should be discouraged as much as possible. There are different rumors and fake stories about different Afghan female singers who are famous nowadays. Mostly, these stories are about their affairs which they have never had. Unfortunately, most of the people never try to investigate about such stories and play a part in further promulgating them.

Apart from singing, even if a girl or woman tries to use or play any musical instrument, there are many who start doubting her character and consider her awkward and sinful. Even her own family members stand against her and suggest or even threaten her to leave the 'sinful' task. There is an interesting case study in this regard and that is of Negin Khpalwak.

Negin Khpalwak, a 19 year old Afghan girl from south-east Afghanistan, is the leader of Afghanistan National Institute of Music's (ANIM) all-female orchestra, Zohra, which is first of its kind in the country. She is the senior conductor of the 35-piece orchestra that plays traditional Afghan and western instruments and is about to begin international performances.

However, Negin had to face different sorts of threats to reach to this position. She had started playing music during the reign of Taliban when there was a complete ban over such activities. She, however, continued her work secretly, even from her family members. Finally, she decided to reveal her secret to her father, who, astonishingly, favored her and supported her to continue her skill. The other family members and relatives, however, were not impressed by her passion and stood against her intentions. They did not allow even the male members of the society to play music so how could they accept her. So, she decided to leave her village and travel to Kabul. She, now, lives in an orphanage in Kabul but enthusiastically follows her passion for music. Even now she feels insecure in many ways. She cannot visit her village because recently when she did so, she was threatened to be killed because she had appeared in a television show, wherein she had led the orchestra. Nevertheless, she is determined and recently said in an interview, "I will never accept defeat... I will continue to play music. I do not feel safe, but when people see me and say, 'That is Negin Khpalwak', that gives me energy."

The achievement by Negin is really huge, considering the status of women in the Afghanistan and the behavior of society towards them. Nevertheless, it is a crystal clear fact that Afghanistan, like any other country, has many talented women who can play their role in earning a respectable name for the country and introducing the necessary positive changes within the society. Unfortunately, the circumstances and the misconducts of our political and so-called religious leaders have made the situation unsuitable for such individuals and they are not able to utilize their talents and help themselves and their society appropriately.

It is really important that government takes tangible measures against the discriminatory ideas and behavior against women. Government can prove to be a hope for the women. If it itself encourages the intentions that may undermine the rights of women, it would be very difficult to expect the same from common people.

Moreover, the international community in this regard can also play an important role. Though it has mentioned on almost all the important occasions that human rights, especially women rights, have to be given top priority by the Afghan government if it wills to have the support of major countries, it has not been able to convene practical, comprehensive and consistent strategy regarding the issue.

By looking at Negin's case, it is easy to accept that if given their due rights, Afghan women have all the potential and prudence to inspire the world with their abilities and prove that they are not inferior to men at all.



The Fourth Jihadist Wave

By Carl Bildt

Muscular language has become increasingly prevalent in the debate about how to counter the threat of jihadist terrorism. Television talk-show hosts speculate about when control of Raqqa in Syria or Mosul in Iraq might be wrested from the Islamic State (ISIS), implying that these cities' liberation will mark, at the very least, the beginning of the end of the problem. And in December, Ted Cruz, a Republican contender in the US presidential race, went so far as to raise the specter of nuclear strikes: "I don't know if sand can glow in the dark, but we're going to find out," he said. Such simplistic sound bites understate the severity of the challenge. As the International Crisis Group highlights in a recent report, the jihadist threat we are facing is the fourth in a series of increasingly perilous waves. If we are to avoid creating an even more powerful fifth wave, it is imperative that we learn from the mistakes we made in seeking to counter the previous three.

The first jihadist wave occurred when volunteer fighters from the war against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan returned home and started attacking regimes they considered un-Islamic. This led to the second, far more deadly jihadist wave, as Al Qaeda launched spectacular attacks against the "far enemy," seeking to draw Western powers into violent confrontation and outright war. The attacks on the United States, on September 11, 2001, marked the crest of this wave.

The global counterterrorist offensive that followed largely succeeded in eliminating Al Qaeda's ability to launch large-scale attacks. But the 2003 invasion of Iraq created the conditions for the third wave, triggering a vicious sectarian war between Sunni and Shia that allowed Al Qaeda to exploit the chaos of an increasingly fragmented state.

Eventually, the so-called Sunni Awakening broke the back of Al Qaeda's efforts in Iraq, and the 2011 Arab Spring redirected the region's political development. But the failure to build an inclusive government in Iraq, together with the violent repression of protesters in Syria, offered battle-hardened jihadist leaders an opening to initiate the fourth wave.

This wave is by far the most dangerous. Tens of thousands of recruits have joined the effort to build a caliphate in the Fertile Crescent. Meanwhile, ISIS has expanded into numerous other crisis zones and recruited or inspired terrorists within Western societies, as demonstrated by the attacks in Paris, Brussels, and San Bernardino.

Countering this threat will require a vigorous ideological battle

against the forces of intolerance and hatred, building on Islam's history of openness and tolerance. But ideological struggle, on its own, will not be enough.

We must also recognize the true origins of the jihadist threat: the conflicts and state failures ranging from West Africa across the wider Middle East to South Asia. It was not jihadism that created today's crises. On the contrary, bad governance and state failure provided jihadism with the opportunity to flourish. Addressing these root causes will be a daunting, decades-long task. Much of the region entered the twenty-first century in a deplorable state; and in most places, things have only gotten worse. Trying to meet the jihadist challenge with repression, as Egypt is doing today, risks exacerbating the problem. And incarcerating Islamists often means providing them with an ideal environment for recruitment, indoctrination, and training. Instead, openings must be created for democratic Islamic political forces to operate.

Despite the scale of the challenge, the West lacks a clear policy on what to press for and how to obtain it. Clearly, military force must be used. But retaking Raqqa or Mosul is only the easiest of the tasks facing us. How many times have Western forces retaken Afghanistan's Helmand province or Anbar province in Iraq, and with what result?

Far more difficult - and far more important - will be ensuring that legitimate structures of inclusive governance are set up in the places from which ISIS is driven out. These must address feelings of persecution among Sunni Arabs as well as the victimization of large segments of the population that has fostered rage across the region.

Without such a strategy in place, retaking Raqqa and Mosul will merely be a prelude to an even more violent fifth wave of jihadism, which its committed and experienced practitioners will seek to portray as the final epic battle with "crusaders" in the West. It is no coincidence that ISIS has named its slick propaganda magazine Dabiq, for the name of the place where this Islamic version of Armageddon is prophesied to take place. We must not hand our enemies what they want on a silver platter. We must instead wage an ideological battle against them, treat them as the terrorists that they are, and address the conditions that allow them to flourish. The jihadists are seeking escalation in order to drive us into total confrontation. If we have learned anything since 2001, it is that we must not fall into their trap. (Courtesy Project Syndicate)

Carl Bildt was Sweden's foreign minister from 2006 to October 2014 and Prime Minister from 1991 to 1994, when he negotiated Sweden's EU accession.

Kabul Attack and the Future of Afghan Conflict

By Muhammad Mehdi Rezaie

On Tuesday April 19, 2016 upwards of armed men stormed into security establishment that protects government VIPs in Kabul. After a suicide attack killing 70 people and wounded 347 others.

Since then, the sense of unease and uncertainty is palpable among the denizens of Kabul. It is also evident that the government and the security forces were caught by surprise. The relatively long period of calm in Kabul had made them slip into a false sense of lull. However, that proved to be the lull before the storm.

The line repeated by the government has been the usual one. One wonders how they have failed in creating a sense of panic and confusion and conveying the idea that they remain powerful and are able to attack anywhere and anytime at will. These were, by and large, the objectives sought and they were indeed successful at getting what they wanted. The message they intended to put across has gone down well with the government as well as the people at large.

It would not be difficult to ascertain who has been behind the audacious attacks in Kabul. The attacks bear the hallmarks of the Haqqani network. With its reach far and wide across eastern Afghanistan and northwards as far as Kabul, the majority of attacks in Kabul have been the handiwork of the Haqqani network.

It is apparent that these audacious attacks on a large scale had been planned much earlier and were intended to mark the beginning of the Taliban's spring offensive. In the U.S. military documents released by the Wikileaks, the Haqqani network is said to have a special unit created specifically to target and organize campaigns in Kabul city. This special unit has been in operation for at least six years and has the responsibility for planning, coordinating and executing attacks in the national capital.

The Tuesday attack, as audacious as they were, on the one hand, are an indication that the capabilities of the Taliban to counter Afghan and international security forces have been degraded. Taliban are no longer able to take these security forces head on and are forced to rely on IED and suicide bombings and occasional attacks on urban centers as seen in Kabul.

On the other hand, these attacks were a forceful demonstration by them conveying the message that they remain powerful and can present themselves as a challenge to the political and military order in Afghanistan.

Though Taliban claimed responsibility of the deadly attack

but National Directorate of Security said that Haqqani network orchestrated the attack. Analysts and observers as well are of the view that Haqqani network organized and executed the attacks and not the Taliban (although the two entities remain ideologically and operationally very close), shows that the Taliban do not have the operational and logistical capabilities that can match those of the Haqqanis. Haqqanis, being based in North Waziristan, maintain close links also with Pakistan-based militant groups such as the Lashkar-e Tayyba. It was the Lashkar that, in 2008, planned and executed the Siege of Mumbai. Now the same modus operandi is being increasingly replicated in Afghanistan. For the militant networks and their benefactors, the waves of media publicity that such high-profile attacks create are simply too valuable to be ignored.

The main objective sought in Kabul attack was creation of a sense of fear and hopelessness however much temporary in the Afghan and foreign public opinion.

Afghan government, UN and International community strongly condemned this attack. However, it is, primarily, the duty of the Afghan security and intelligence agencies to be able to gather and provide "actionable" intelligence that can help thwart such attacks. The intelligence failure in Afghan agencies was glaring in the lead-up to these attacks.

The attacks are also significant in the context of the ongoing talks and negotiations. Representatives from the Hizb-i Islami had arrived in Kabul just before the attack. The Taliban have proclaimed that they are no longer talking with the government of Afghanistan. Since the attacks were organized and executed by the Haqqani network, we are going to see increasing efforts on the part of the U.S. and the government of Afghanistan to engage also the Haqqanis. Amid reports, the United States has pressed Pakistan to follow up on Islamabad's expressed commitment not to discriminate between terror groups.

"We have consistently expressed our concerns at the highest level of the Government of Pakistan about their continued tolerance for Afghan Taliban groups such as the Haqqani Network operating from Pakistani soil," Elizabeth Trudeau, Director of Press Office for the US State Department said. Most probably, we are going to see renewed American efforts to seek paths of talks with this group. The efforts of the government of Afghanistan are, however, unlikely to produce any results as far as the Haqqani network is concerned.

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