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Ahmadullah's Death – A Whistle-blowing Act on Peace Talks

The death of Hafiz Ahmadullah, brother of Taliban leader Mullah Haibatullah, at a mosque in southwestern Pakistan appears to be related to the ongoing peace talks between Taliban leadership and the US representatives. Organizers of the attack most likely wanted to blow the whistle on the Taliban about peace talks.

Although Ahmadullah's death could not disrupt the peace talks, it indicates that the whistle-blowers are seeking to derail the process.

Last year, Maulana Sami ul-Haq known as the "father of the Taliban" was assassinated in Rawalpindi adjacent to Islamabad, which was condemned by Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan. His death came as an Afghan delegation met him one month before and asked him to play a mediating role in peace talks with the Taliban. It seems that the motives behind both Ahmadullah and Haq's death was to disrupt the negotiations.

Ahmadullah's death further indicates an internal rift within the Taliban leadership. Some disenchanted insurgent leaders, including Mullah Muhammad Rasul's splinter group, are against negotiations and seek to continue their insurgency.

Years before, when some Taliban high-ranking political figures sought to hold talks with the Afghan government, they were killed in Pakistani soil. For example, two high-ranking Taliban officials Molavi Abdul Raqib and Mullah Agha Jan Mutasim, who pursued informal talks with the Kabul government in Dubai, were shot in Pakistan in unclaimed attacks. Sources claimed Quetta Shura had been behind the assassinations of the two Taliban members. Sourced also added that the assassinations were in retaliation for their attempts to make peace with former Afghan President Hamid Karzai administration. The involvement of Pakistani intelligence in the death of Mutasim and Raqib were also reportedly claimed by some sources. In short, those Taliban leaders, who signaled for talks with the Afghan government, were killed by unknown gunmen in Pakistan. Within three months, five Taliban commanders, including Molavi Noorullah Hotak, were shot dead, which stalled the informal talks between the Taliban and the Afghan government.

Peace talks have been highly rocky road. Although the US and Taliban representatives held several rounds of talks, peace still remains elusive. There have been many obstacles before the talks and the Taliban yet to negotiate with the Kabul government to find a political settlement. Signing a peace agreement between the Taliban and US negotiators are said to be imminent, the aftermath of the agreement is still viewed with both fear and optimism.

If peace talks initiate between the Taliban leadership and the Kabul government, the ifs and buts will continue and the Taliban will haggle over higher price. Meanwhile, whistle-blowers will be in pursuit of opportunity to derail the talks in one way or another. With this in mind, negotiators have to be cautious not to stall the talks at any cost.

It is believed that the more the peace process is prolonged, the more obstacles will appear. The US-Taliban negotiators have to wrap up their talks with signing an agreement. Meanwhile, the Taliban should reach an agreement with the Kabul government, which is a win-win situation for both the Taliban and Kabul.

On the other hand, prolonging the conflict will lead to further casualties and create space for other militant outfits, mainly the IS group, to continue their terrorist activities. In such a case, Afghan civilians will bear the brunt of casualties. As a result, the IS group is seeking to target civilians through carrying out suicide attacks in crowded areas. The recent attack on a wedding ceremony in Kabul suggests that the IS group is targeting civilians, including women and children, purposely.

But if talks with the Taliban reach an agreement and ceasefire is declared, other militant groups will be weakened as the government focuses its energy on combating them.

The role of regional stakeholders is very crucial in the peace process. Regional states have to use their leverage on Taliban leadership to reach an agreement and end the 18-year conflict since a stable Afghanistan is in the interests of the entire region.

Since the Taliban political office, rather than an individual or a splinter group, is continuing the peace talks, whistle-blowers are unlikely to succeed in derailing the negotiations despite the fact that an internal rift is felt within the Taliban leadership. But the Taliban should pursue the talks with genuine intention and reduce their violence, particularly against civilians. They should also stop targeting public infrastructures such as mosques, schools, hospitals, hotels, etc., either. In short, although there will be many obstacles before the peace process, genuine intention for talks and the constructive role of regional stakeholders will overcome the challenges.

Weak Rule of Law as the Main Cause of High Crime Rate

By: M. Aria

Currently, Afghanistan is suffering from myriads of problems and among them the rising rate of crimes is a dominant one. The persistent insecurity and instability have provided the opportunity to the criminals to take full advantage. Moreover, the prevailing circumstances – the snowballing poverty and unemployment, growing injustice and unreliable law and order system – are further pushing the people towards crimes and corruption. It is always important to see that there is a prominent link between poverty and crimes. There are many people who commit crimes only because they are not able to feed their families or they are capable of fulfilling the ever-growing necessities of life.

The important point is to realize that though poverty is one of the basic reasons of why people commit crimes, it is not the only reason. It can be observed that the criminals are mostly rich and have connections with authoritative people in the society. Moreover, there are criminals among the ruling elite and they commit huge crimes and never brought to justice.

Thus, there are different reasons behind the crimes that are committed within a society and they are not always evident to us. What is evident is the outcome of the crimes as it directly influences the people. Whether there is a murder, robbery or a kidnapping, the effect is very direct and can be felt by the victims, their relatives and other people who come across those crimes. These impacts of the crimes disturb the normal social life and may prove to be a ripple that can generate more crimes and disturbances within the society. Therefore, it is important to safeguard the society from these influences and control the crimes in the best possible manner.

Two types of strategies can be effective in this regard – short term and long term strategies. The short-term strategy is basically carried out by the law-enforcement system in the society that works through the institutions of courts and police. Law-enforcement system within a society basically works on the principle of identifying the criminals, bringing them to the justice and punishing them. The countries with weaker law-enforcements systems suffer to a large extent in providing justice to the alleged criminals. Such societies also suffer from lack of providence of timely justice. The system of courts is not very efficient. There are many cases that take many years in courts and yet remain undecided. The people who are influenced by such cases experience a complete change in their lives, which is from bad to worse and by the time

they reach to justice, their lives are already destroyed. It has been also observed that the cases that belong to influential people are pursued immediately while the ones that involve the ordinary people are kept in files and they never reach to the courts.

And then there are detention centers that, in fact, do not transform the criminals into useful citizens, which is the basic philosophy of them. They, on the other hand, turn them into bigger criminals and if unfortunately, which mostly happens, there is a person who has been punished wrongfully; such a person becomes a true criminal after leaving the detention center. Unluckily, Afghanistan is one of the same types of countries that suffer from weak law-enforcement system. Though there has been much development in this regard, serious concerns still prevail and raise questions about the system. The police force in Afghanistan is still in the preliminary stages and it really requires years of attention and support to reach to a truly professional stage. There are many areas in the country where the police do have enough penetration and where they cannot reach to crimes and criminals. Then there are many areas wherein the people still go to traditional courts, which are dominated by religious and tribal leaders instead of going to the courts that are established by the government.

There is a great margin of tireless efforts for the improvement of detention centers as well. The basic facilities that the prisoners get are in no way enough and the environment is not very much healthy. Even within the detention centers the criminals are able to keep their communication with the outside world and are able to lead or to participate in their unlawful activities.

It is really imperative to keep in consideration that the law-enforcement system can provide short-term solution to the crimes. If a society is really interested in controlling them there should be a long-term strategy that must deal with the basic reasons of the crime and try to nip the evil in the bud. There should be efforts to work on efficient administration, better economic condition, political stability, good governance, providence of basic human rights and control of corruption. Justice should reach to all the people of the society alike and the citizens must not feel alienated from the society. Moreover, there should not be discrimination as far as practical implementation of the criminal law is considered. Law should not serve the rich alone as is happening in many societies of the world; rather all should be treated equally in this regard.

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A Geoengineering Trojan Horse

By: Silvia Ribeiro

Although the effects of climate change are becoming increasingly apparent, the progress toward reducing greenhouse-gas emissions remains as disappointing as ever, leading some to tout new technological solutions that could supposedly save the day. Harvard University's David Keith, for example, would have us consider geoengineering – that is, deliberate, large-scale, and highly risky interventions in the Earth's climate system.

This past March at the United Nations environmental conference in Nairobi, Kenya, the United States and Saudi Arabia blocked an effort to scrutinize geoengineering and its implications for international governance. Meanwhile, Keith's Stratospheric Controlled Perturbation Experiment (SCoPEx) in the US – which aims to test a form of geoengineering known as Solar Radiation Management (SRM) – seems to be moving forward.

SRM depends on so-called Stratospheric Aerosol Injection, whereby a high-altitude balloon sprays large quantities of inorganic particles into the stratosphere with the goal of reflecting some sunlight back into space. SCoPEx would send a balloon equipped with scientific instruments some 12 miles (20 kilometers) above the ground to test the reflectivity of various substances.

But these technical aspects of the experiment are far less important than its political, social, and geopolitical implications. After all, the risks of geoengineering could not be more serious. If deployed at scale, SRM could disrupt the monsoons in Asia and cause droughts in Africa, affecting the food and water supplies of two billion people. The use of sulfuric acid – the most studied option, and the one SCoPEx initially intended to test – could further deplete the ozone layer. (More recently, SCoPEx has been mentioning only carbonates.)

The recent launch of an independent advisory committee for SCoPEx seems to be aimed at lending legitimacy to a kind of experiment that the rest of the world has agreed is too dangerous to allow. Moreover, the panel's membership is exclusively US-based, and mostly linked to elite institutions, which raises questions about whose interests are really being served.

These concerns are reinforced by the fact that the SCoPEx pitch is fundamentally manipulative. The results from a "small-scale" experiment would not amount to a credible assessment of the effects of deploying SRM at the scale needed for geoengineering. As climate scientists have made clear, the only way to know how SRM (or any other geoengineering technique) would affect the climate is to deploy it over several decades on a massive scale. Otherwise, its effects could not be distinguished from other climate variables and "climate noise."

Given that geoengineering is, by nature, not testable, all experiments like SCoPEx can do is create momentum for larger and longer experiments. Once millions of dollars have been sunk into creating

the relevant institutions and employing large numbers of people, it becomes easier to argue that even more data should be collected and, finally, that the technology should be deployed.

In this sense, projects like SCoPEx set a new and dangerous precedent for the unilateral implementation of geoengineering technologies by billionaires and vested interests. Indeed, as the Center for International Environmental Law and the Heinrich Böll Foundation's recent report, Fuel to Fire, points out, fossil-fuel companies have been investing in geoengineering for decades. For them, the promise of a technological get-out-of-jail-free card is an ideal pretext for continuing their highly profitable, destructive activities.

In fact, Keith's own company, Carbon Engineering, recently received \$68 million from Occidental Petroleum, Chevron, and the coal giant BHP (Billiton) to develop another potentially dangerous geoengineering approach – Direct Air Capture, which takes CO₂ from the atmosphere, to be used or stored. Among the company's original funders is the oil sands financier N. Murray Edwards (as well as Bill Gates).

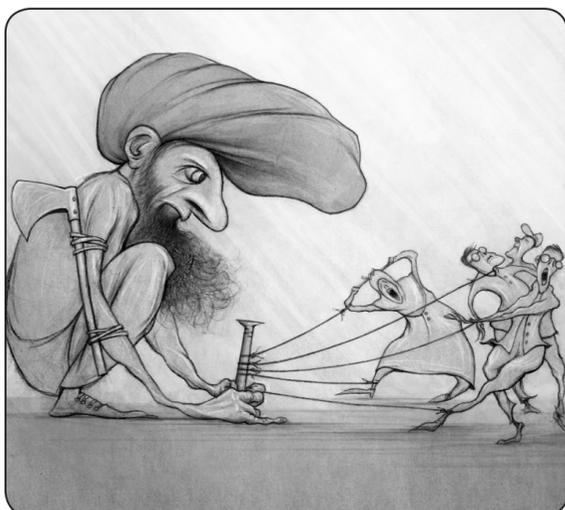
Allowing such projects to move forward with no political mandate or institutional oversight could entrench a system of self-regulation that is grossly inadequate for technologies as consequential as geoengineering. That is why the UN Convention on Biodiversity (CBD) has asked governments not to allow any geoengineering activities to be carried out until "a global, transparent, and effective control and regulatory mechanism" is put in place – a mechanism that adheres to the "precautionary approach."

The CBD decision made an exception for small-scale experiments, but only under certain conditions, which SCoPEx doesn't meet: among them, carrying out experiments in "controlled settings" and acquiring the free, prior, and informed consent of indigenous peoples and local communities that may be affected. Furthermore, in the case of SCoPEx, no critical voices from civil society or developing-country governments seem to have been considered.

SCoPEx's promoters appear determined to take advantage of the US's failure to ratify the CBD. The fact that the SCoPEx advisory committee is chaired by a California government official, Louise Bedsworth, also raises the question of whether a state that has positioned itself as a climate leader is now embracing the most controversial form of geoengineering.

Rather than allow fossil-fuel companies that have ravaged our planet for profit to continue to act in their own interest, the world must establish a strong, multilateral democratic regulatory mechanism, which includes the option to ban certain technologies outright. Until such an international system is in place, experiments like SCoPEx – which threaten to act as a Trojan horse for deploying dangerous technologies at scale – must not be allowed to move forward.

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