

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



August 28, 2017

'War Crimes' Continue

Friday's attack on Imam Zaman Mosques in Kabul has been labeled as a war crime by Human Rights Watch (HRW). As per the statement by HRW, the attack is called as serious violation of the laws of war, and an apparent war crime. The attack was carried out in Qila-e-Najara neighborhood in Kabul by 4 to 5 attackers who entered the mosque by throwing grenades at the entrance and then started shooting people during Friday prayers, killing more than 40 innocent people, including women and children. Patricia Gossman, Senior researcher at HRW said in a statement, "An attack on a place of worship during prayers is a horrific crime meant to maximize civilian deaths," said Patricia Gossman, senior Afghanistan researcher at Human Rights Watch. The statement by HRW also said, "Under the laws of war, deliberate attacks on civilians or civilian objects such as houses of worship are war crimes."

Dressing as civilian police to carry out a military attack is also a war crime. Criminal acts such as murder committed by state security forces or armed groups as part of a widespread or systematic attack on a civilian population such as a religious minority are crimes against humanity." Attacks on minorities seem to be on rise in Afghanistan. Such attacks are mostly claimed by Daesh, which because of their extremist ideology, considers Hazaras infidel. Friday's attack is not the first of its kind; recently, there have been many such attacks. During the second week of August, more than 50 people were killed in Mirza Olang village of Sar-e-pul province; the victims were mostly Hazara Shia.

On August 01, more than 20 Hazaras were killed in an attack on mosque in Herat province. As a matter of fact, the list of such attacks seem to be getting lengthier; unfortunately, there is no serious arrangements in place to stop such attacks.

A couple of months earlier, in June, Al-Zahra Mosque, situation in Dasht-e-Barchi, where mostly Hazaras reside, was targeted by a suicide bomber. The attack resulted in the death of at least 10 people and injury to 15 others. In November last year, 27 Hazaras were killed and more than 30 others were wounded through a suicide attack at the Baqir-ul-uloom mosque in District 6 of capital Kabul, where the people were commemorating 'Arbaeen'. That had in fact followed the tragic attack on the Sakhi Shrine in the capital which was carried out during Ashura procession and had killed 18 people. A similar type of attack was carried out in Balkh province that had also targeted Shia Hazaras who were worshipping during Ashura and had resulted in deaths of 14 innocent people. In July last year, three attackers with suicide vests attacked the Hazara protestors who were raising their voice for changing Turkmenistan-Uzbekistan-Tajikistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan (TUTAP) power project route through Bamyan. Two of the attackers blasted themselves among the protestors while the third one was killed by the security forces. The attack resulted in death of more than 85 people and injury to over 400 others and thus marked one of the most tragic incidents in Afghanistan's history. The attack was also claimed by Daesh.

Moreover, who can forget the tragic incident when seven innocent civilians belonging to Zabul province were kidnapped on a highway and later killed brutally, which included the 9-year old girl Shukria, whose throat was slashed by the kidnapers.

Just few months earlier to that incident, at least 13 Hazaras were killed by gunmen in Zari district of Balkh province, while they were travelling in a minibus. And in February same year, 31 Hazara passengers were abducted from Zabul province while they were travelling from Herat to Kabul, most of whom were later released.

Most of these incidents have been linked to Daesh, and mostly they have even claimed the responsibility but, unfortunately, there have not been tangible measures to stop the situation. The government authorities have kept on insisting that the threats of Daesh are not serious and Afghan forces have control over them; however, the claims have not proved to be right until now. And if the security arrangements remain as they are, Hazaras will keep on suffering such brutal attacks.

As the government authorities are not able to secure different parts of the country and important highways, the insurgents create their own checkpoints, stop the vehicles, search the passengers and even loot them on various occasions. On some occasions, Hazara passengers have been selectively segregated from others and then taken away or later killed.

With such a situation prevailing, it is really tragic to find the government authorities unconcerned. They mostly claim that they make efforts to ensure the security of the civilians without any distinction but different incidents, every now and then, show that they either do not have the capability to do so or they lack the motivation. Their efforts are mostly observed after the incidents take place and the poor civilians are killed.

Thus, the government requires taking practical and tangible measures to control the security situation and ensure the security of everyone without any distinction of ethnicity or race. There are fears that if the security situation remains fragile another civil war may erupt in the country and may once again push Afghanistan towards a quagmire of instability and chaos.



The US New Strategy and its Challenges in Afghanistan

By Mohammad Hasan Faqiri

Following four months, the US President Donald Trump declared his strategy regarding Afghanistan which included: First, calling the withdrawal of US troops from Iraq in 2011 an error and refusing its repetition. Second, considering the number of US soldiers and its strategy based on the political condition of Afghanistan. Third, backing Afghan army within the limited time. Fourth, warning Pakistan to stop supporting the militant groups. Fifth, keeping the enemies in dark from its programs.

A general view to the issue suggests that there has been no change in the US strategy about Afghanistan. It was self-explanatory that with spending more than one hundred billion dollars in Afghanistan, the US will not withdraw from Afghanistan in near future. Having several objectives in the region in general and in Afghanistan in particular, the US will have long-term presence in the region. Within the three recent decades, the US made error twice with withdrawing from Afghanistan and Iraq which led to emergence of the radical group of the Taliban in 1990s and self-styled Islamic State (IS) in recent years. This horrible experience for the US prompted its officials not to leave Afghanistan in the lurch. Therefore, Trump reiterates presence in Afghanistan so as to combat the Taliban and IS group. The next point which comes to the limelight is the number of the US soldiers and their sort of support that will be explained from two perspectives:

The first speculation is that Trump's administration lacks a specific strategy about combating terrorism in Afghanistan. Therefore, it articulated its support generally and without further detail.

The second view is that the Trump's administration tactfully declared its strategy without detail so as to be able to decide with considering the condition of Afghanistan. In short, the US, in such a way, will justify its presence in the country without obstacles.

The US restricted support to Afghan army was discussed during Trump's presidential campaign. He constantly reiterated that the US support will not be "a blank check" and the US limited support aims to reinforcing Afghan forces and will not interfere in Afghanistan's building nation or rehabilitating its economic and political infrastructures. According to him, it is Afghans to struggle for a good governance. This indicates that Afghan government

should manage its internal affairs not the US. Despite this fact, America's indifference towards Afghanistan's internal affairs does not seem logical.

Trump's warning to Pakistan is not a new issue either. In spite of being the US close ally and being paid financial aid for combating terrorism and radicalism, Pakistan had hand in glove with terrorists. Surprisingly, the trip of Pakistan's foreign minister to the US was delayed following the declaration of recent strategy and even Pakistan held dialogue with China regarding the new strategy of the US. For winning war on terrorism, the US is in dire need of Pakistan; however, Pakistan has not proved its genuine fight against terrorism yet took credit from the international community. In addition, Pakistan's close relationship with China will be the next bone of contention. Perhaps, the US will seek to restrict the role of regional powers and their coalition may not be acceptable for it. Supporting India, which is a Pakistan's rival, is likely to be a proof in this regard.

The next point which was mentioned above is the secrecy of the US plans in terms of combating terrorism in Afghanistan. Stating that the enemies should be kept in dark about their plans and tactics, Trump claims that their victory in combating terrorism will come to fruition in Afghanistan. This fact has been disregarded that countries are able to predict political issues based on some signs and documents. Hence, this issue is not really effective.

Although the US strategy regarding Afghanistan includes no new issue, yet its decision not to leave Afghanistan in the lurch is positive considering the internal issues in the country. That is to say, this strategy will be able to create fresh hope for Afghan government in combating terrorism. But on the other hand, with the discontent of neighboring countries and their probable support to the Taliban, the proxy war might be intensified in the country. Afghanistan's attitude will be highly crucial in the current time. With the current opportunity, if the government decides with iron will to create stability, the country will experience a progress in this respect. But if the past does not be an eye-opener, the future of Afghanistan will be ambiguous. So, the government needs to learn from the past and combat terrorism fearlessly as it is doing so. Indeed, the role of Afghanistan is instrumental.

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The Cul-de-sac of War on Terror Leads to Further Casualties

By Hujjatullah Zia

Human catastrophes are seriously horrible in Afghanistan. Nothing is sacred for the militant fighters - particularly for the self-proclaimed Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). Human life does not amount to anything. The nonstop carnage and bloodshed are the ugly face of terrorist activities which result in outpouring of grief. Afghan soldiers bled constantly to protect the rights and freedoms of the nation. However, the nation was killed in cold blood and underwent great sufferings and there seems to light at the end of the tunnel with the escalated militancy.

Trump's strong rhetoric against terrorist groups is less likely to be a panacea for the bleeding wound of Afghan nation or to revive their shattered hope. The US strategy regarding "war on terrorism" has been fluctuating with the successive presidents.

The deployment and withdrawal of US soldiers was deemed the only strategy for counterinsurgency from Bush's administration up to now. In his inaugural address in January 2017, Donald Trump said, "We will reinforce old alliances and form new ones and unite the civilized world against radical Islamic terrorism, which we will eradicate from the face of the Earth." He declared strong resolution for combating terrorism saying that "the time for empty talk is over. Now arrives the hour of action." His words were received with great delight and triggered a strong sense of hope not only for the American nation but also for the world, including Afghanistan.

Declaring his new strategy regarding Afghanistan in Monday evening, Trump talked about the America's longest war in history (16-year war after the Sept. 11 attacks), and said that "the consequences of a rapid exit" from Afghanistan "are both predictable and unacceptable 9/11, the worst terrorist attack in our history". According to him, increasing the number of US soldiers in Afghanistan will win the war on terrorism and the country will change into second Iraq with a hasty withdrawal of US troops. It is rightly said that deciding "behind the desk in the Oval Office" is much different.

Trump's inaugural address was too strong and sentimental. For instance, eliminating terrorism from the face of earth, which was said by Trump in his inaugural speech, is beyond one's imagination with the escalated insurgency and emergence of greater number of terrorist networks - this was simply said from "behind the desk".

Despite Trump's big claim, the Taliban and ISIL group have intensified their attacks in Afghanistan to show a backlash against his statements and send a lukewarm

message to peace talks frequently offered by Afghan government, High Peace Council (HPC) and US officials. Nonetheless, Afghan and US authorities still persist warring factions to stop violence and bloodshed and hold peace talks. Trump also stated that only military power will not be the panacea for terrorist issue.

This indicates that the door to negotiation is open for the militants. In brief, two options have been constantly put before the militant fighters: either join peace process or face the consequence of military action. The former has been refused up to present.

Unlike Afghan government, militant fighters have changed their war strategy; i.e., sowing the seed of sectarianism through targeting ethnic-religious groups. On the other hand, notwithstanding their diverse ideologies, the Taliban and ISIL allied with each other against Afghan soldiers and foreign troops. So, warring parties change their tactic of war to inflict further casualties and loss on Afghan soldiers and civilians and as well as foreign troops.

The gory incidents and hemorrhage reflect the Taliban's strong will for continuing war and violence. The spate of terrorist attacks in recent months has added to public disappointment. The tragic story repeats itself on daily basis. Recently, the ISIL group which stokes sectarian violence through targeting minority group in the country traumatized people to a great extent. In the current year, militant fighters targeted six mosques for which the responsibilities were mostly claimed by ISIL. Indeed, nothing - including human life or holy sites - are sacred for ISIL group which makes no bones about desecrating holy places.

The heart of stone will melt with the tragic aspect of human catastrophes in Afghanistan. Warring factions trample upon the rights and dignity of people in the worst possible way. That is to say, their cruel practices are against religious tenets, moral values and humanity. The carnage and gory videos recorded and released by militant fighters for filling the air with horror and terror put an adverse effect on the minds of people.

The US, which was in a quandary about Afghanistan's strategy, released its decision last week. So, as Trump said in his inaugural speech that "the time for empty talk is over. Now arrives the hour of action," he needs to usher in his decision as soon as possible so as to stop the nonstop violence and casualties in Afghanistan or else rooting out terrorism "from the face of the Earth" will be impossible.

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