

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



December 10, 2016

The Rampant Corruption in Afghanistan

Yesterday, December 09, was celebrated as the International Anti-Corruption Day around the world. The objective of the day is to highlight the evils that are related to corruption and emphasize on the measures that may prove helpful in putting an end to this menace. Basically, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the United Nations Convention against Corruption and requested that the Secretary-General designate the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) as secretariat for the Convention's Conference of States Parties (resolution 58/4). The Assembly also designated December 09 as International Anti-Corruption Day, to raise awareness of corruption and of the role of the Convention in combating and preventing it. The Convention entered into force in December 2005.

This year the theme of the Day was 'United against corruption for development, peace and security'. There is no doubt in the fact that corruption hampers development, peace and security and Afghanistan stands as a clear example. Rampant corruption in the country has hampered development work and given rise to many social evils. It has also fueled instability and supported the insurgents; particularly through drug production and smuggling. It has incapacitated Afghan institutions and made them rely on nepotism and favoritism. The skills and capacities of the talented youngsters have not been utilized and, therefore, the trust and confidence on the institutions have further receded. Unfortunately, the government has been reluctant to take any considerable measure and resultantly this menace has kept on rising. National Unity Government (NUG), in its initial days, promised that it would play a definitive role in curbing the menace of corruption, but unfortunately, it soon forgot its promises and little has been achieved so far. Therefore, the situation has further deteriorated for the country and raised further concerns. Although the time was ripe for the leadership to carry out honest and determined efforts to tackle the social problems.

The Integrity Watch Afghanistan (IWA), on International Anti-Corruption Day, said its findings showed corruption was the third major challenge after insecurity and unemployment in Afghanistan, as bribery has increased by 50 percent in two years. IWA executive director, Sayed Akram Afzali, presenting 2016 Financial Survey on the occasion said that the organization had interviewed 7,800 people, almost half of them women, as part of the survey, in the capital Kabul and all provinces of the country and the survey shows that nearly 80 percent of people believe that corruption has been on the rise and the situation has deteriorated compared to the past two years. IWA findings show Afghans paid \$2 billion in bribe in 2014 and a billion extra, nearly \$3 billion, in 2016. This amount of money is equal to the Afghan government revenue it collects from customs and other sources each year, the survey said.

IWA statement also said political will to fight corruption existed but efforts made in this regard had no positive impact on people's lives and that was why people were dissatisfied with the government.

Today, corruption has penetrated into our social behavior. It is now a part of routine life to be corrupt. From a very minor to the most major matter, we find corruption ruling the roost.

One of the major problems in tackling with corruption in Afghanistan is that the controlling mechanism itself is involved in it. The government that should be on the forefront to curb this menace, itself has been a major contributor in this regard. There have been many major occasions of corruption when current administration has been blamed for being directly involved in the matter. On most of the occasions the government has blamed the Western supporters to be generating corruption in the country. Western allies, on the other hand, have kept on insisting that Afghan authorities must carry out serious measures to curb the overgrowing corruption; however, the outcome is yet to be produced in this regard. The Western allies have spent billions of dollars in supporting the Afghan government and people but the outcomes have not been satisfactory as they have not been very much careful in this regard. And already much of the money has been misused by corruption.

Nevertheless, in the process, the supporters of Afghanistan have lost their trust from the Afghan authorities and are mostly disappointed from what has been achieved after more than a decade of expenditure and hard work. Corruption in Afghanistan is now a complex phenomenon that requires extensive efforts from both national and international authorities to be comprehended and resolved. Definitely, the anti-corruption institutions, equipped with authority and facilities can be major contributors in curbing it and Afghan government needs to support them appropriately.

International community on other hand must also ensure that the aid they provide through different NGO's should not be misused. There should be strong control and monitoring mechanism and it should be made sure that the aid money must reach the needy and deserving people of Afghanistan; otherwise, the aid would further deteriorate Afghan society instead of doing it any good.



Fall of Aleppo may Initiate End of Revolution

By Manish Rai

Exclusive for the Daily Outlook

After reclaiming almost all of Aleppo, Syria's former commercial capital, President Assad has got his biggest prize of the war. It would put his forces in control of the country's four largest cities as well as the coastal region, and cap a year of steady government advances. It should be remembered that more than half of Syria's population lives in its four great cities- Damascus, Homs, Hama and Aleppo. And Aleppo used to be its biggest city before the uprising. So by gaining the control of Aleppo Syrian regime got total control of urban Syria which means controlling the heart of the nation. It also would also bolster Syrian government position and momentum just as a new U.S. administration is taking hold, freeing thousands of his troops and allied militiamen to move on to other battles around the country.

Eastern Aleppo was the last urban stronghold of the Syrian moderate rebels. With the fall of eastern Aleppo to the regime forces and allied militias the backbone of the non-Jihadist opposition to Assad has been broken. With the loss of Aleppo the opposition has lost control of its only lifeline for resupply. Aleppo represents the essence of the conflict between the regime and the Syrian armed opposition.

The collapse in Aleppo is a devastating blow to the morale of rebels in other parts of Syria. With Aleppo secure, Assad will be able to turn his attentions to the Damascus countryside and Idlib, the province next to Aleppo. When eastern Aleppo falls, it's only a matter of time before the remaining pockets of resistance will fall, either by fire or capitulation. And it may mark the end of the uprising against the Assad regime which Syrian moderate opposition called revolution.

The opposition, always a hodgepodge of often mutually hostile groups united only by their enmity of the regime, hold only scattered and shrinking pockets of territory around Damascus, Homs, Daraa and Aleppo, with the only sizable area still under their control in Idlib province.

Turkey supports factions of the Free Syrian Army along Syria's northern border, and the United States backs the so-called Syrian Democratic Forces in the northeast, but both those groups are focused on fighting ISIS, not the regime. The rebel groups that emerged from the popular uprising against Assad's dictatorship in 2011 now face an existential threat after losing the key territories. The Syrian revolution which was started by the moderates since its beginning lacked strategic vision because

it began without any objective beyond reforming or replacing a regime that had nurtured as many allies as enemies. But because of deep resentment against the repressive Assad regime opposition got success in the initial phase of the uprising and was able to take Aleppo. But after the loss of this city which was considered as the heart of the Syrian revolution the moderate opposition which positioned itself as the mascot of the revolution has been vanished.

This crushing defeat of moderate rebels has one obvious consequence. That it has left the jihadist, Salafist and Tafkiri factions of the rebellion practically alone on the battlefields, granting them near monopoly over the revolutionary discourse. This will be a disastrous for the original moderate, secular, democratic goals of the Syrian revolution. The fall of Aleppo will cripple much of the rebel activity in the northern part of Syria. With Aleppo wrapped up, the regime and its friends would be able to start squeezing the rebels' Idlib stronghold from Aleppo in the east, Latakia in the west, and Hama in the south a move that could eventually escalate into a full-blown siege of the last major province held by rebels.

The fall of Aleppo would have lethal repercussions on the ongoing war and on the post-war Syria it will result in radicalisation and sectarianisation. In an interview with Syrian newspaper al-Watan Syrian President Bashar-Al-Assad said "It's true that Aleppo will be a win for us, but let's be realistic - it won't mean the end of the war in Syria," he said. "But it will be a huge step towards this end."

Surely the fall of Aleppo does not mean immediate end to this bloody war in Syria. But the Syrian revolution, which started with the promise of overthrowing one of the most enduring and brutal dictatorships in the region and for establishment of free Syria based on democratic values. Is faced with the prospect of being reduced to a rebellion striving through disruptive acts of insurgency to break out of containment and marginality. Rebel forces will mount classic guerilla hit-and-run attacks, assassinations, armed raids and roadside bombs on areas under government control. Syria's civil war will linger on low intensity. Innocents will keep dying some parts of the country will remain outside the control of Damascus. However but one thing is clear that the Assad regime has prevailed, thanks to Moscow. It is also, perhaps, the final death knell for that string of revolts or revolutions or uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Syria, Bahrain and Yemen, which have ended in catastrophe.

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Ending Religious Violence in the Middle East

By Moha Ennaji

The escalation of radicalism, violence, and civil wars in the Middle East since the so-called Arab Spring revolts began in 2010 has exacted a massive toll in human lives and welfare. The need to build effective states that support peace, provide greater opportunity and prosperity, and protect human rights could not be more urgent.

Already, the violence that has surged in the last few years has left more than 180,000 Iraqis and 470,000 Syrians dead. Moreover, 6.5 million Syrians have been internally displaced, and another 4.8 million driven from the country altogether. They have often been tortured in prisons and humiliated in refugee camps. An estimated 70-80% of the victims are civilians, most of them women and children.

In fact, according to the Syrian Center for Policy Research, half of the refugees and internally displaced people are under the age of 18. This has a major impact on their future prospects. UNICEF reports that 2.1 million children in Syria and 700,000 Syrian refugee children are out of school. A total of 80,000 child refugees in Jordan lack access to an education. But all of these human costs are symptoms of a deeper problem - and, contrary to popular belief, that problem is not Islam. The fact that radical Islamists or jihadists are Muslim does not mean that their religion, not to mention their ethnicity or culture, is inherently violent.

Watching Western news, it is easy to see why so many blame Islam. From the brutality of the Islamic State (ISIS) in Syria and Iraq to the terrorist attacks carried out by al-Qaeda to the stoning of adulterous women under Sharia law in Afghanistan, Middle East violence is almost always attributed to the religion. As a result, Islam is often viewed primarily as a threat. But, as the Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor explains, the real threat is not Islam itself, but "block thinking." Islamic extremists comprise less than 0.5% of the global Muslim population, yet their worldview dominates media coverage not just of Islam, but also of political developments in the Middle East. By erasing the huge differences among Muslims, such coverage reinforces a single, simplistic perception of Islam. That is block thinking. And, as Michael Griffin documents in his book *Islamic State: Rewriting History*, such thinking is gaining ground in the United States and Europe. As a result, many have embraced Samuel Huntington's theory of a "clash of civilizations," which assumes that Islam is at odds with modernity. But that assumption ignores the ideas and impact of Islam's early reformers - figures like Muhammad Abduh and Jamaledin al-Afghani - who continue to influence Muslims everywhere.

The most lasting impact of the first reformist wave was the establishment of a salafi (conservative traditionalist) movement, which came to regard the modern state as a means to improve the lot of Muslims. Today, Muslim thinkers - such as Iran's Abdolkarim Soroush, Tunisia's Tahar Haddad, Pak-

istan's Fazlur Rahman, Morocco's Fatema Mernissi, Egypt's Qasim Amin, and Sudan's Mahmud Muhammad Taha - continue to explore the connections between Islamic thought and modern values. While radical Islamists strongly oppose their work, these thinkers have had a huge influence on generations of Muslim intellectuals worldwide.

None of this is to say that religion does not play a role in Middle East violence. On the contrary, such violence - including sexual assault and arbitrary deprivation of individual and public freedoms - is widespread and multifaceted, owing to the combination of religious beliefs, cultural tradition, race and ethnicity, war, and politics that influences it. Even the recruitment of jihadist fighters can be viewed as a form of religion-based violence, much like child marriage and honor killings.

But none of that means that Islam is inherently violent. Resorting to fuzzy - and often bigoted - cultural, religious, or ethnic explanations is a recipe for ill-advised action, or no action at all.

What the Middle East needs are effective social and economic strategies and policies that tackle the complex non-religious reasons behind the violence - and its decidedly non-religious effects. While cultural, ethnic, and religious factors may need to be considered, they are not the main causes of unemployment and marginalization.

Middle Eastern governments must commit to pursuing bold and creative policies that address the inadequate education, high unemployment, and pervasive corruption that are helping to fuel violence and unrest in the region. Such efforts should aim to advance democratization, economic development, and the emergence of a strong civil society and progressive media. The key is not to "Islamize" every issue, but rather to develop real policy solutions that meet people's needs. Education is of course critical to success: school curricula must become more inclusive, to broaden students' knowledge of religions and cultures.

More broadly, schools should also embody the separation of church and state - and well-protected religious freedom - that will be needed to end religion-based violence in the Middle East. Large-scale violence like that occurring in the Middle East causes devastating harm to individuals, erodes the capital base, hampers productivity, and undermines economic growth. Its impact on political, social, and economic structures needs to be addressed, and the capacity of the state to do so should not be underestimated or overlooked. But so long as the state frames or seeks to legitimize its policies in religious terms, the violence will not stop. (Courtesy Project Syndicate)

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