

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



December 21, 2016

## Taliban must be Pressurized for Negotiations

There are serious concerns regarding the prospects of peace in Afghanistan. Insecurity is on the rise with many other social and political issues and there are no clear indications regarding any peace negotiations with Taliban and other militants. There are no clear indications even about what is the strategy of Afghan authorities regarding the future of talks with Taliban. Afghan people and the international community and organizations are really worried in this situation and they show their concerns in different ways.

On Monday December 19, Gerard van Bohmen, Chief of the UN sanctions committee briefed the UN Security Council on the Afghan peace process, and suggested the 15-member body ensure the complete implementation of sanctions against the Taliban within the legal framework that exists. Bohmen suggested that the UN sanctions committee and Afghanistan's Central Bank jointly work to terminate the Taliban's access to their financial resources and that countries implement travel sanctions against the group's leaders.

Briefing the UNSC members, meanwhile, Afghanistan's permanent representative to the UN Mahmoud Saikal also urged the world body to include the names of Taliban leaders on its blacklist - as they continue to avoid joining purposeful peace negotiations with the Afghan government. "Any type of outside contact with the Taliban, or other such groups, without the prior knowledge and approval of the Afghan government, was seen as a legitimization of terror, a direct breach of sovereignty, and a clear contravention of the sanctions regimes. Effectively enforcing existing resolutions, including the sanctions regimes, could have a significant impact. The timely inclusion of select irreconcilable Taliban leaders in the sanctions list and more meaningful interaction between counter-terrorism bodies and Afghan security agencies is essential," said Saikal in his remarks to the UNSC members.

The tactic of exerting pressure on Taliban leadership in the form of sanctions is an effective option and must be followed in a proper manner so that Taliban leaders must get ready for meaningful talks. Taliban have been avoiding talks so that they are able to keep on pressurizing Afghan government through promoting insecurity in different parts of the country. They will keep on doing so unless, there is true pressure upon them to change their attitude. Afghan government must enter the peace negotiations from a point of strength and that is only possible when there are pressures on Taliban in different ways. Taliban must start believing that they have no other option except coming to the negotiation tables for peace talks.

It is also imperative that any sort of peace talks with Taliban must be led by Afghan government and Afghan representatives, so that Afghan people are able to own the process and they should also be able to see that their concerns are actually met during the process. Isolated peace negotiations with Taliban without the involvement of true representatives of different factions of Afghan society would ultimately face failure. For Afghanistan the peace talks are of great importance. If there is any lasting peace in the country, it will only be possible through negotiations with Taliban; there is no other option. Especially fighting is no more an option as it has already led to myriads of killings and destruction. Nevertheless, the important factor is that Afghan government should be able to have a comprehensive strategy regarding how to proceed in talks with Taliban, especially when Taliban are not in the mood to talk with the Afghan government.

In the times to come, Afghanistan would be faced with myriads of security challenges. Already the security incidents have become the order of the day. Every day there are tragic news from different parts of the country regarding bombings and ruthless killings. The prospects of peace and tranquility are becoming darker with each passing day. Coupled with that is the fact that the promises of negotiations and reconciliation do not seem to be turning into tangible steps and within such a scenario Afghan civilians are the ones who are suffering the most. Neither there are steps being taken for paving the way to development that could guarantee providence of basic requirements to the people; nor are there arrangements to guarantee their security. Government authorities mostly blame insecurity as a hurdle towards development and claim that most of their energies and funds are utilized to provide security to the people; therefore, the attentions cannot be focused on other areas. However, the facts and figures show a different picture - the security sector remains unattended as well and insecurity is rampant throughout the country.

Afghan government, as a top priority, needs to reach to a conclusive position and peaceful solution to the issue of insecurity and terrorism, if it wants to continue its journey towards a democratic and peaceful state. President Ashraf Ghani has indicated on various occasions that he is serious about the issue and has always called for a regional and global cooperation to eradicate terrorism. Nonetheless, it is more important that Afghanistan must have its strategy bold and clear regarding the issue and must follow the same through actions, not words alone, as there is no more time for words.

## Are we Failing or Retreating?

By Muhammad Zahir Akbari

Recently, The US Department of Defence has expressed that the progress of Afghan National Defence and Security Forces (ANDSF) had been unstable, highlighting that although they have denied the insurgency any strategic successes, they have failed to reclaim the territory they lost to the Taliban. According to Pentagon, Afghan forces are also most often unsuccessful in holding areas captured from the militants. The recent Pentagon report beset with questions about the capabilities of Afghan National Army (ANA) indicates US failure because it has spent billions of dollars on the force over the past decade and half, yet the country has not been able to create a capable Afghan force.

Also during a briefing in the United Nations Security Council, the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Afghanistan Tadamichi Yamamoto said this year thousands of Afghans have been killed in the conflict and that "such human suffering and tragedy is unacceptable." He said the conflict also erodes the living conditions of people and deprives the country's opportunities for development and growth. He pointed out that there has been a 50 per cent decrease in economic investment, and that financial resources spent on the conflict could be utilized for the economic prosperity of Afghanistan. Yamamoto once again called on the Taliban to enter direct talks with the Afghan government without preconditions. "We all know that the conflict in Afghanistan has no military solution," he said. 'Considering ground realities in Afghanistan and these expressions raising questions if we really failed against Terrorist or retreating? What was wrong in past 15 years fights if we failed? It is right that corruption and partisan treatment at the leadership level of Afghan forces is a barrier to having a strong military force, was it really all of the reasons? Was there enough attention and effort to eliminate terrorist from Afghanistan? In fact, there are dozens of such questions which remained unanswered to Afghan citizens. Apparently, the main objective of foreign assistance with Afghanistan was to build an Afghan forces able to defend the country without foreign support and prevent Afghanistan from turning into a terror haven once again; however, the past two years showed the goal is yet to be accomplished as Afghan forces are grappling with enormous challenges, from training to funding and equipment. They even suffer heavy casualties due to logistic problems.

Backing to the past, it was a decade and half ago that The United States of America invaded Afghanistan after Al-Qaeda suicide bomber targeted the World Trade Centre in New York. On Contrary to their nature, the people of Afghanistan who are viewed as the destroyers of empires welcomed Americans for deposing the Taliban and their slogans. Afghans accepted the UN Security Council Reso-

lution on Afghanistan, and joined the democratic process with the hope of a bright future. Afghans, which were tired of war and oppression, expected that the US involvement in Afghanistan would liberate them from the evil of terrorists, while also helping them have a prosperous life. Afghan side also had vested interests in the goals America was pretending for its presence in Afghanistan. The fight against terrorism and narcotics, and the rehabilitation of infrastructure destroyed by war were the seeming international community goals in Afghanistan. These were the very issues that Afghans also wished, and thought to be in their interests. Afghans, and even according to former diplomats, the Taliban did not want their country to be used against other countries. Furthermore, Afghans traditionally do not like the illegal drugs, and view opium as haram (forbidden in Islam) so that is why the US motto of poppy eradication was welcome. The renovation of infrastructure ruined in wars, and becoming an economically self-sufficient nation were the wishes of the war-stricken Afghans, which encouraged them to accept the American presence in their country.

Consequently, the American presence lasted for 15 years under these three slogans and commitments: counter terrorism, narcotics and reconstruction of war-torn infrastructure while there is no tangible and fundamental improvement at all. Afghanistan is more insecure than it was during the initial years of the US-led international coalition, and there are more terrorist groups active than ever. The cultivation of narcotics has increased by many folds, and Afghanistan is considered as the world's biggest producer of drugs. Although there is a little progress made in economic infrastructure and welfare, it is not fundamental because more than half of people are sunk in poverty and millions are involved in additions.

On the whole, growing Insecurity, poverty, refugee problems, administrative corruption etc are considered as an achievement of past 15 years. Yes, Afghan people welcomed and will come again if international partners act upon the commitments and pursue its interests in Afghanistan through peaceful means.

On the other hand, the government of Afghanistan must understand that the first biggest problem of Afghanistan is insecurity. So, the establishment of a strong independent national military and advanced security system must be the first priority in Afghanistan. This should not necessarily mean that conflicts in Afghanistan have only military solution rather it means that the policy of imploring for peace cannot reach the goal from a weak position. It is really shameful when we hear that our national army is lacking food, clothes or weapons in the battle field.

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## Stalking a Killer Fungus

By Melvin Sanicas

Warnings of the rise of so-called superbugs - disease-causing microbes that are resistant to many (or all) antibiotics - have been coming thick and fast in recent years. What many people seem not to realize is that superbugs are already here - and they are already killing people. A prime example is *Candida auris*, a multidrug-resistant fungal infection that is emerging as a serious global health threat.

*C. auris* was first identified in Japan in 2009, in the ear of a patient who complained of an infection. (*Auris* is Latin for ear.) Since then, *C. auris* has been documented as the cause of wound infections, bloodstream infections, ear infections, and respiratory infections in countries across four continents, including India, Kuwait, Pakistan, South Africa, South Korea, and countries in South America.

In the United States, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that the fungus infected 13 people from May 2013 to August 2016, four of whom have died. While it remains unclear whether those deaths were due to the *C. auris* infection or to underlying health conditions, the need to address the scourge of *C. auris* - which has led to the deaths of up to 70% of those infected - cannot be disputed. There is evidence that *C. auris* is spread in health-care settings. Indeed, the fungus seemed to have a greater effect on people with serious long-term conditions. As they frequent hospitals, and nursing homes, they come into contact with many health-care professionals, caregivers, and pieces of medical equipment, all of which could spread the fungus onto their skin or into their bodies.

In the United Kingdom, 50 *C. auris* cases were reported at London's Royal Brompton Hospital alone from April 2015 to July 2016. Of the 13 US cases, four - two in Illinois, one in Maryland, and one in New Jersey - occurred at the same health-care institutions at different times, and genome sequencing showed that patients treated in the same hospital in New Jersey had nearly identical strains.

Not only are *Candida* infections particularly common in hospitals, but their fatality rates also seem to be higher among patients in hospitals and, specifically, intensive-care facilities. After all, such patients are already in an immune-compromised state, and have been using antibiotics, which can kill off healthy bacteria.

But the main reason *C. auris* represents such an acute threat is that treatment options are severely limited. While most *C. auris* infections are treatable with a class of antifungal drug called echinocandins, some have demonstrated vary-

ing levels of resistance to echinocandins, as well as to the other two classes of antifungal drugs, azoles and polyenes. Even when the drugs do work, they are relatively toxic: azoles and polyenes are nephrotoxic (damaging to the kidneys), and echinocandins are hepatotoxic (damaging to the liver). Most are also fungistatic, meaning that they stop fungi from replicating, but do not kill them. And they interact with drugs that patients may be taking for other long-term conditions, such as chemotherapy agents and immunosuppressants.

Moreover, developing new antifungal drugs is not a priority for pharmaceutical manufacturers. Antifungal drugs are more difficult to develop than antibacterial drugs, because fungal cells are eukaryotic, like human cells, rather than prokaryotic like bacterial cells. As a result, drugs must be selective enough to work on the fungal cells, without damaging human cells. And, while the global market for human antifungal therapeutics is worth over \$6 billion and growing, owing to population aging and growing risks from fungal infections, generic competition is strong. So even if companies do invest in breakthrough drugs, cheaper options will soon be available, reducing profit margins considerably.

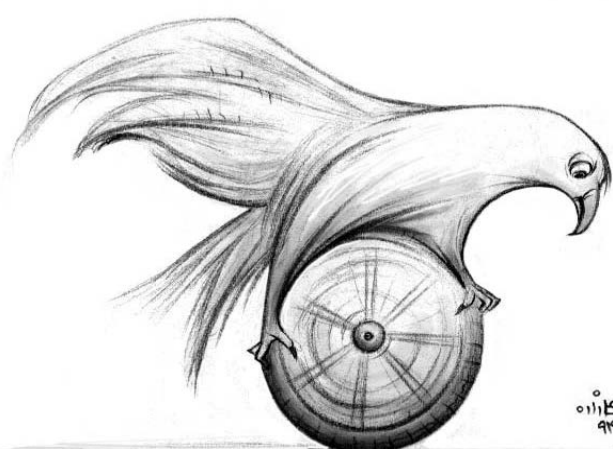
In lieu of effective treatments, controlling the spread of *C. auris* becomes all the more critical. This requires, first and foremost, better diagnosis.

*C. auris* is not easy to identify. Because biochemical-based tests cannot differentiate between *C. auris* and other invasive *Candida* infections, several cases of *C. auris* were initially misidentified as *C. haemulonii*. Many microbiology laboratories currently do not routinely differentiate *Candida* isolates or use yeast identification methods. Hospitals and medical centers need molecular techniques to identify *C. auris* accurately.

Once diagnosed, *C. auris* patients need to be isolated; medical equipment must be thoroughly disinfected; and strict precautions need to be enforced for health-care workers. Otherwise, outbreaks among already vulnerable people could become even more common.

The spread of *C. auris* highlights the need for coordinated local and international public-health initiatives to address the emerging problem of drug-resistant infections in hospitals. If private pharmaceutical companies are not going to invest in the development of novel or more effective drugs and new and better diagnostics, the public sector has to step in. The rise of the super-fungi must be stopped. (Courtesy Project Syndicate)

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