

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



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## Challenges for Women Peace Building in Afghanistan

If we want to do justice to peace, we must do justice to resolution 1325. To many people, peace is an vague, or even a mere corollary of conflict, but such a vague notion does not lead to a clear understanding or definitions of what it is that people are trying to promote or achieve in peace building. Most approaches to peace building have either ignored or marginalized issues of gender and women in Afghanistan. Afghan women consistently remain a minority of participants in peace building initiatives receiving less attention than men in policies; and gender analysis rarely informs peace building strategies.

While women and peace is a topical issue and has been for a very long time, it continues to demand from the world a more genuine attention and clarity of purpose if we are to fully enjoy positive peace for all.

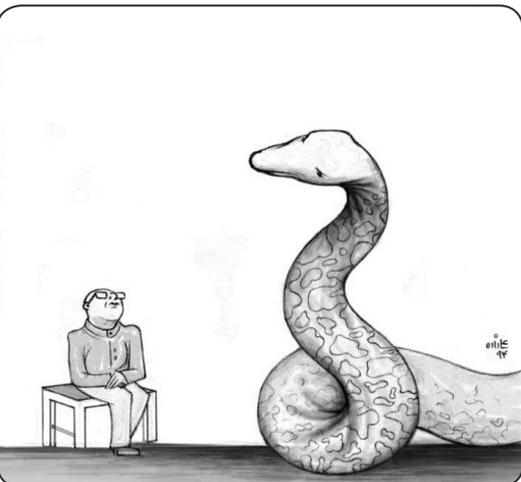
### Peacebuilding from Gender-Aware Perspectives

It is not uncommon to assume that Afghan women have special qualities which equip them better than men for peace, and better for peace than for war. For instance, International Alert's draft Code of Conduct stated that, "We explicitly recognize the particular and distinctive peace-making roles played by women in conflict afflicted communities. Women and women's organizations are often reservoirs of important local capacities which can be used in peace building activities". The common association of women, and the female gender with peace, suggests that policies to work with women ought to be fundamental to peace building. There are many examples where women have courageously intervened in battles to force peace. Women have also taken up opportunities for peacemaking between groups of warring men. Under such circumstances they sometimes call on and express values, behavior and codes which are explicitly associated with their gender.

Indeed, both men and women have the potential for peace-making and the responsibility to build and keep peace. The women, however, seem more creative and effective in waging peace. It is the women's emotional strength to transcend pain and suffering, and their predisposition to peace that provide them with greater potentials for peace-making. It is therefore often the case that ideas about some of women's distinctive qualities become identified with the way forward in peace building, and strategies therefore focus on ways to enhance, support and extend the work that women are thought to be well-equipped to undertake.

The challenge to gender relations often becomes too great for patriarchal societies and institutions to maintain in times of peace, and women find their historical contribution marginalized in both official and popular accounts of conflict, and their freedoms in peacetime restricted or removed. This type of peace settlement might be called a "gendered peace, where governments or warring parties establish new constitutions or peace processes which marginalize the needs of women or effectively limit or restrict the rights of women.

An inclusive approach to security means that peace processes must include women who, although they are key actors, are often overlooked and underestimated. In most conflict situations, women constitute more than 50 percent of the adult population and are actively engaged in peace building while addressing the basic survival needs of their families and communities. Their contributions at local, national and international levels are critical to sustainable peace. Yet historically Afghan women have been portrayed as passive victims with little regard given to their actual and potential roles in promoting peace and fostering security. In October 2000, for the first time in its history, the United Nations Security Council acknowledged that women have a key role in promoting sustainable peace by unanimously adopting Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. It calls on all actors to ensure women's participation in peace processes from the prevention of conflict to negotiations to post war reconstruction.



## Recent Reshuffle in the Leadership of Defense & Security Institutions, though belated, is Welcome

By: Mohammed Gul Sahibzada

Appointments of Mr. Assadullah Khalid as Minister of Defense and Mr. Amrullah Saleh as Minister of Interior are welcome signs in the process of the efforts undertaken by Afghan Government to improve efficiency and performance of defense and security institutions. Both these men had been part of previous Government headed by President Hamid Karzai, and both were Chief of Afghan Intelligence Agency the NDS in their turn. In addition, these figures are known for their anti-Pakistan and anti-Taliban stance. Their hands-on experience in Afghan government system and their knowledge, familiarity and access to sensitive information and operations during their tenure with the Government give them an edge over previous incumbents who had held these portfolios. Since last four years the National Unity Government has badly failed to put in place national agenda with a viable war strategy and plans to give definitive directions to defense and security institutions in the ongoing war against insurgent Taliban and their outside supporters i.e Pakistan and terrorist organizations dwelling in that country. This pathetic situation prevailed and as a result Taliban insurgents expanded their grip over Afghan territory from seventeen percent during the reign of the then Afghan President Hamid Karzai to more than forty percent during last four years. As a result, Taliban insurgents have gained greater diplomatic recognition with the help of their protectorate i.e. Pakistan and by virtue of their sweeping run over a large swath of Afghan territory in the country, which in turn has given them more leverage in the process of ongoing peace negotiations! This domino effect has taken immense toll on the people and Government in term of human lives - including military and police personnel and civilians - and resources, let alone lasting stain on credibility and ability of government to respond to present challenges facing the country and the Government of Afghanistan. It is believed that these appointments can turn things around in the defense and security organizations of the country, which can have direct and positive impacts in the battlefields with Taliban insurgents and other international terrorist groups operating in the country. Leadership always matters whatever the nature and task of the organization be.

Afghan defense and security institutions bear the most important responsibilities of defending citizens, country and face the challenge of defeating / containing an entrenched insurgency for last seventeen years now. Afghanistan has been unfortunate enough to have come under persistent interference and attacks by her hostile neighbor right after toppling of Taliban regime US and NATO forces and establishment of an interim Government in Kabul. It is inherent that establishing post-war working government and building national institutions in a country that has been in war since last four decades, is a difficult job. Compounding this problem was the urge to

rebuild defense and security institutions at a time when there was nothing - utterly nothing - remaining of these organizations after toppling of Taliban regime. A hotchpotch of armed groups, who had sided with US and NATO militaries in the war against Taliban regime, were the only available option to fill the void and recruit them in the Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Interior and in the ranks of National Directorate of Security (NDS). Mujahideen, as these armed groups were called, belonged to more than fourteen different organizations, which were founded / established in Pakistan and Iran aimed for the destruction of the then Afghan Government and its institutions back during the invasion of ex-USSR of Afghanistan in 1980s. The decades of 1980s and 1990s have proved fateful for Afghanistan as two streams of campaigns were underway for destabilizing the state of Afghanistan: the one harbored by US and Western block was aimed for defeat of the ex-USSR and the expulsion of the then red army from Afghanistan, which had been part of global anti-ex-USSR campaign; and the second steam - which was underground and pursued secretly - was unleashed by the Governments of Pakistan and Iran to pursue their vested interests and settlement of old scores with the Afghan states (including Durand line demarcation, water share and Shia support) under the cover of campaign to defeat and expel red army in Afghanistan. The later stream was not given due diligence and attention by major players in this entire campaign at the cost of people and the country of Afghanistan. Things had not shaped well after ex-USSR departed from Afghanistan as armed members of these organizations started to fight one another, turning the whole country into a fighting field. Fearing loss of control over Afghanistan, Pakistan founded and supported another armed group called Taliban and unleashed military campaign against the previously supported group, Mujahideen, to establish control over the country. Then came the 9/11 incident, which dragged the foot of US and NATO member countries in Afghanistan.

Major tasks before these two newly appointed officials is to thoroughly overhaul both Ministries in Kabul and in all thirty-four provinces to remedy deviations, check background and record of all senior officials, surf through the logistics and support mechanisms and services for soldiers in battle fields and establish a strong command, control and response mechanisms throughout the chain of command of both ministries. In addition, cooperation and coordination among all security and defense institutions should be put in place and all parallel organizations and / or departments performing the same tasks under respective Ministries should be abolished in as soon as they are identified. Most importantly, people's trust and delivery of good governance should equally be given due attention to remove existing distance between people and the Government.

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## The Bitter Experience of Governmental Paramilitary Militias in Afghanistan

By: Hamidullah Bamik

Over the course of several decades, Afghans have been suffering from militias who have a wide range of uncontrolled armed forces. These militants include groups that engage tribal leaders, private security companies, groups of gangs, and insurgent groups. The most obvious term for the paramilitary militias in Afghanistan is the word "arbaki". The term also includes non-responsible armed forces that have been created within the framework of official governmental military programs under Afghan Local Policy (ALP). The militias have been involved with any kind of group that has been involved in deadly tribal repressions, assassinations, smuggling, and extortion. Raping women, boys, and girls is a common practice by the militants. Therefore, many of them have been accused of committing human rights violations.

After the US-led military intervention in Afghanistan following the 9/11 attacks in 2001, the Taliban-led rebellion has been intensified in the country. To deal with along with the insurgency, the Afghan government and its international supporters expanded the Afghan National Police by creating paramilitary militias in the form of the Afghan Local Police. This policy led to the reactivation of various armed and non-responsible groups, especially in the north of the country. Moreover, this policy indirectly paved the way for powerful local elders to create their own small militia groups to counteract the deteriorating security situation in their communities.

The Afghan government approved the establishment of ALP in July 2010, and this force was established on August 16, 2010, by presidential decree. According to the US Army and the Afghan Government, the Afghan Local Police were set up throughout Afghanistan to defend those areas in rural communities where the Afghan National Police and the Afghan National Army are inadequate. In other words, paramilitary forces were established for short-term tactical needs, such as working with the counter-terrorism team at border areas. ALP was a major effort to correct strategic problems in the war against the Taliban. It was argued that Afghan security forces are sent to areas whose inhabitants view them as foreign because of their ethnicity and race. Thus, how the Afghan government with the support of the US founded ALP.

Initially, the Afghan government decided to recruit about 10,000 people as ALP, but the US Congress has approved funds for 30,000 ALPs. In August 2011, 7,000 were recruited as local police. They receive almost 60 percent of the National Police salary, which is 165 euros, and dress differently. They serve on the front lines of the violence.

One of the key hypotheses that have laid the foundation of the Afghan Local Police is that, despite the existence of weak command structure hierarchies, the Afghan National Police (ANP) will control ALP. The key point here is that the number of local police in the districts they operate is higher than the official police officer in that district. In addition, the local police are supported by separate and informal networks of powerful government officials and local authorities that do not allow them to be questioned.

Moreover, the instructions given to the local police are not clear on the competencies of ALP. Similarly, it is unclear whether ALP follows the internal regulations of the Afghan National Police framework on interrogations, detention, and the process of handing over detainees to the ANP. On the other hand, ALP units are trained for three weeks, while ANP officers have six weeks of elementary education. Apart from this, after the end of ALP's mission, there are no clear guidelines on the process of integrating and consolidating the ALP units within the ANP.

A recent report by the International Crisis Group on the controversial issue of mobilizing village people in the form of Afghan Local Police to fight against the Taliban groups and ISIS echoes that in most cases the local police program has led to the empowerment of local militias who are not accountable to the Afghan government. The report says that the local police program did not reduce violence, and instead of improving security in Afghanistan where they operate, the security situation has been worsened.

The International Crisis Group adds that although the local police program was considered as a temporary solution to the recruitment and escape of the Afghan security forces, in 2014, the Afghan government decided to increase the number of ALP from 29,000 to 45,000. The report of the International Crisis Group refers to cases of harassment by local police and illicit tax evasion by them. In the report of the International Crisis Group, allegations of sexual assault, looting, and imprisonment of people in torture chambers in dry wells filled with snakes by non-militias are also mentioned, for instance, in Faryab Province.

Before the US intervention in Afghanistan in 2001, Afghan people have experienced the establishment of similar paramilitary militias by the Afghan government, too. The first paramilitary forces refer to the ruling People's Democratic Party - during the Soviet Union supported governments in Kabul in the late 1980s. The Kabul People's Democratic Party backed by the Soviet Union founded its own paramilitary militias to fight against the Mujahidin and other rebels. It was one of the most terrible experiences that Afghan people tasted during in the late 1980s.

On the other hand, the US government also provided money and weapons to various groups of the Mujahidin to fight against the Soviet Union and its so-called governments. After the withdrawal of Soviet Union forces in 1990, neither the United States nor the Soviet Union took up the bloody Mujahideen wars. And left these militias to fight with each other for gaining the power. The US and Soviet Union backed governmental warlords and strongholds were lawless factions and ready for another armed conflict in Afghanistan.

The current paramilitary militias operating in Afghanistan are controlled by people who are called local power or warlords. These are the major warlords to former Mujahideen commanders who, at the time of the jihad against the Soviet Union, created a power base. And now their sources of power and support have expanded deep into the institutions of governance in the center and in the neighborhoods. Extremely inaccurate behavior of the militias has driven people from the national government and in some cases contributed to the expansion of the rebellion.

From its inception, the plan of arming local people against the Taliban was nothing but strengthening the local warlords on a wider scale. The Afghan government policymakers did not think that one day these warlords become uncontrollable powers that the government should enter into a bloody war to subjugate them later on. The US government is not at all worried about the fact that these ALPs are entering illicit drug trafficking and economic mafia and land usurpation because the US government only thinks about weakening the Taliban groups.

After the formation of the Karzai government in 2002, the Afghan government and its international supporters have pledged to disarm illegal armed groups and return them to civilian life. But such efforts have been largely demonstrative and ineffective. The personal interests of latent and powerful individuals in the Afghan government, as well as the financial, logistical and military support of the United States and other international forces from the militias, have undermined the process of disarmament.

Political experts argue that the Afghan Local Police and pro-government militias are dangerous, and the Kabul government should stop the call for their expansion. Instead, the Afghan government should take steps and measures to improve stewardship and supervision over ALP in areas that they operate. Additionally, the Afghan government should adopt serious measures to integrate ALP forces into Afghanistan National Security Forces (ANSF) so that they can be held accountable to the Afghan government authorized entities. Now that the Trump Administration wants to withdraw its troops from Afghanistan, the paramilitary forces can pose more serious threats to the stability of the Afghan central government if they are not disarmed and controlled.

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