

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



February 11, 2018

## Afghanistan: The Management Challenge of Ethnic Diversity

Ethnic diversity is one of the main characteristics of the Afghan society. It is both the strength and weakness of our society. And it depends on the government management approach how to define and use it. Unfortunately, the creation of a sense of national unity among the diverse people of Afghanistan has long been a challenging issue to its rulers. Afghanistan is a tribal society, consisting of about 20 ethnic groups having different backgrounds and cultures. And what tie up all these ethnic groups is their observance of Islamic law and martial tradition. Some scholars hold that there is a third common element among them: A distrust of government.

In Afghanistan, issues of identity, economic and social marginalization of ethnic minorities and discriminatory practices in the past have fueled conflicts between ethnic groups and government since the time the country has been created.

In the context of history, this trend has witnessed a paradoxical approach; during the reign of Abdul Rahman Khan, Afghanistan witnessed the worst ethnicity marginalizing policy, while during the reign of Amanullah Khan it witnessed one of the most liberal and democratic approach in term of government measures to ensure ethnic diversity in the country.

Since the formation of the New Afghan Administration based on the Bon Agreement, the Afghan government has made bold decisions including the approval of the new constitution, formation of democratic institution, conducting presidential, national assembly and provincial council's elections. These initiatives are the means to ensure public participation in decision making and realizing the ethnic equal inclusion in the broad national and international decision making processes affecting the Afghan citizens in terms of policy making. However, the origins of conflicts and their drivers have remained more or less the same in practice and they require to be addressed in a more comprehensive manner considering the complex ethnic politics in Afghanistan.

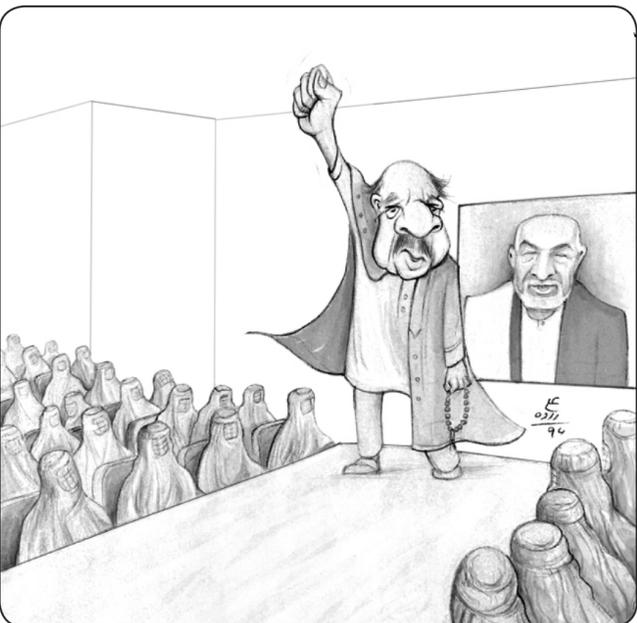
The ethnic conflict management initiatives including the national reconciliation process supported by international, regional and internal actors to put an end to the internal conflicts and secure sustainable peace in the country have not achieved much. According to the experts, the conflict resolution efforts have failed because they have mainly focused on conflict control rather than conflict elimination. Unfortunately, research findings show managing the Afghanistan conflict has been scattered and weak.

To address the ethnicity diversity and managing it in a sound manner to ensure the national interests of Afghanistan, it is crucial to devise methods, strategies and mechanisms not to falter in these pursuits.

In managing ethnic conflicts, according to Mansfeld and et al, an increasing number of studies conclude that political institutions of fairness and participation are crucial for mitigating conflict situations. Institutions are generally explained as formal and informal behavioral rules for social integration. As puts them, institutions are the rules governing the behavior of a set of individuals within a given human collectivity.

The first step to broad based conflict management, is accepting ethnicity not to be blocked from politics consociation. Blocking or denying members of an ethnic group to articulate their interests leads to marginalization. According to the history of Afghanistan and many other countries, this is not the solution to the problem, but a strong force to ignite ethnic tensions. Because, this approach will make the other ethnic groups to resort to violent and other extra-legal forms of articulation. To avoid such responses, the Afghan government shall focus on guarantying fair and adequate representation of ethnic groups in the government and ensure they can enjoy their legitimate power according to the constitution. Further, recognizing that repression of identity often leads to violent conflict, particularly in tension between minorities and majorities, domestic institutions must be backed by strong minority right regime, including effective discrimination free laws-citizenship, language, religion, educational policies, and effective and efficient mechanisms.

Ethnic conflict management is one of the vital issues that require to be addressed in a comprehensive manner by the Afghan government. It is both a strength and weakness point in the context of conflicts in Afghanistan. The past ethnic conflicts in Afghanistan show that the Afghan governments have not addressed this issued in many cases based on a political consensus and as a result it has fueled a resilient cycle of conflicts in the country. Therefore, the Afghan government shall manage this issue through effective anti-discrimination mechanisms to create a fair condition for political participation of all citizens of Afghanistan in a manner that the rights of all ethnic groups of the country is ensured according to the constitution.



## 2018 - A Terrible Ordeal for the Taliban

By Hujjatullah Zia

Spilling the blood of the Taliban fighters has been considered a panacea for the ongoing violence and bloodshed after peace talks came to unbreakable stalemate. Afghan and the US soldiers have intensified their attacks against the Taliban to send them the message of death in the wake of their deadly attacks against combatants and non-combatants.

The series of attacks in Kabul, which were claimed by the Taliban and self-styled Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), aggravated the sense of mistrust of a fruitful negotiation and shattered the public hope for a peaceful year in 2018. The diplomatic strategy for reducing violence, which was suggested widely, does not seem to be instrumental anymore.

The Taliban did not show tendency towards peace talks within the past years. For example, they carried out large-scale attacks on Afghan soil to demonstrate their power and show that they are the winner in the bloody game. The Afghan government's message of peace and reconciliation was misconstrued. After the death of Mullah Akhtar Mansour, his men and Haqqani network pledged to intensify their attacks against Afghan nation and the US troops. Hence, they were deaf to the message of peace.

Declaring the US strategy in Afghanistan and South Asia in August last year, Donald Trump sought to pursue military action against the Taliban and their safe havens. He said, "America and our partners are committed to stripping terrorists of their territory, cutting off their funding and exposing the false allure of their evil ideology. Terrorists who slaughter innocent people will find no glory in this life or the next. They are nothing but thugs and criminals and predators and - that's right - losers."

As part of this strategy, the Trump administration recently increased drone strikes at alleged terrorist safe havens in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (Fata) and reports from the region suggest that several 'commanders' of the dreaded Haqqani network were also killed in those attacks. Similarly, Khan Saeed Sajna, the Mehsud splinter group leader of Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), along with his nine close associates, was killed in a US drone strike on Wednesday.

In late January, the White House released that the US commanders had the authority to deal with terrorist safe havens whether inside or outside Afghanistan. "President Trump's conditions-based South Asia strategy provides commanders

with the authority and resources needed to deny terrorists the safe haven they seek in Afghanistan and Pakistan," it stated.

To further pressure terrorist networks, the United States has named three Pakistani militants as key "terrorist facilitators", saying they worked closely with a well-known backer of Al Qaeda, Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and the Taliban known as Shaykh Aminullah, who has been on international terror blacklists since 2009 and allegedly turned the Ganj seminary in Peshawar into a training and recruiting base for Al Qaeda, the Taliban and LeT. The US Treasury placed Rahman Zeb Faqir Muhammad, HizbUllah Astam Khan and Dilawar Khan Nadir Khan on its blacklist of "Specially Designated Global Terrorists," in an effort to disrupt the group's ability to obtain and distribute financing.

In December 2001, with Operation Enduring Freedom barely underway, President George W. Bush declared it America's purpose "to lift up the people of Afghanistan." Bush vowed that American forces would stay until they finished the job. In December 2017, during a brief visit to Kabul - unannounced because of security concerns - the US Vice President Mike Pence affirmed that commitment. "We're here to stay," he told a gathering of troops, "until freedom wins."

The protracted war in Afghanistan inflicted heavy casualties on Afghan civilians and soldiers and the US troops. The US lost over 2,400 of its soldiers and expended an estimated trillion dollars. However, peace remained elusive and the Taliban militants chose to carry out more deadly attacks against Kabul administration without considering negotiation an alternative. For example, the two last years have been highly deadly for Afghan people as a result of escalated militancy and Afghanistan was ranked the second worst country, out of 163, in terms of terrorism in the world. In short, the number of deaths recorded in 2016 was the second highest recorded from terrorism incidents in Afghanistan since the ousting of the Taliban regime in 2001.

Following the futile attempts to bring the Taliban to negotiating table, Ghani and Trump's administrations have decided to increase military action against the Taliban outfit and its militant counterparts. The Taliban have sustained heavy casualties in recent attacks carried out by Afghan government and its international allies. Under this ordeal, the public hope that the Taliban will be disintegrated.

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## Asia at the crossroads: Are we observing a march towards an uncertain future?

By Saikat Kumar Basu

The geopolitical situation across Asia is hitting the nerves across the globe; and possibly standing at an unique crossroads of modern history. The ancient landmass of Asia is the largest and most populous of all the continents; enriched with tremendous diversity of numerous races, languages, ethnicities, faiths, creeds and cultures. The geographical, geological as well as biological diversity of the continent from the vast Siberia in the north to the super natural archipelagos of Indonesia, Malaysia and Papua New Guinea in the southern reaches of the continent; and from Turkey in the west to the island of Japan represents in itself a world of its own. Several ancient civilizations marks the glorious history of the continent like the Assyrian, Sumerians, Chinese and the Indus Valley civilizations to the reign of the Sasanids, Kushanas, Persians, Mongols, Huns, Guptas, Mouryas, Mughals to name only a handful.

The birth place of all the major and minor global religions like Judaism, Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, Taoism, Confucianism and Shintoism have all originated in Asia; and then spread across to the other continents over time. The majestic tundra and taiga in Asia's north to the uniquely biodiverse archipelagos, atolls, coral islands and remote island groups stretching from the Indian to the Pacific Oceans, the spectacular deserts across Arabia, China and South Asia, the gigantic mountain chains with the world's youngest fold mountain the Himalayas and the vast Tibetan plateau, the vast steppes of Eurasia, dominant river valleys across Central, South and South East Asia, virgin forests and wildlife, unbelievably rich biodiversity and other natural resources, vast seas and oceans make Asia on of the most unique landmasses of our planet. Several smaller tribal populations with their unique and distinct cultures and anthropological characteristics are spread across different landmasses and unique localities across the vast continent.

Unfortunately though, Asia has been at a perpetual crossroad of several serious regional conflicts among bordering countries, witnessed two bloody World Wars and devastating regional wars like the Korean war, Vietnam war, Gulf war, Iraq-Iran, Indo-Pak and Israel-Palestine wars, the Afghan war, Bangladesh Liberation war; Genocides in Indo-China (Viet Nam, Cambodia and Laos) and the current war and conflict hit Middle East. Thus Asia continues to be one of the most highly discussed conflict zones in the world. Together with Africa and Latin America; Asia also represents one of the poorest, war torn, politically destabilized, insurgency impacted, under developed, high conflict areas of the world that do not show any sign of resolution in the near future.

The continent has seen some of the worst forms of human migrations fleeing conflict zones into the European Union from the war hit Middle East, Rohingya communities in Myanmar to adjacent countries to mention only a handful. Asia has been a volatile conflict zones with millions of lives lost over decades in war and ethnic violence and in territorial wars. Almost all countries in the continent have been exposed to such form of war and destabilization in some parts of their modern history and socio-economic life. Territorial

disputes among several countries across the continents is the most conspicuous character of Asia; the most prominent being the conflict between Israel and Palestine over West Bank, Gaza and Jerusalem; and between India, Pakistan and China on their Himalayan front, between Japan and Russia over the Kuril islands and between Afghanistan and Pakistan over the Durand Line has remained perpetual with zero resolution achieved till date. Numerous conflicts over ownership of islands between China and countries like Japan, Viet Nam, the Philippines, Brunei and Malaysia has been hitting frontline news across the globe. Regular geostrategic conflicts between global powers like the US, Russia, India and China is further deteriorating the peace and stability process that is much needed for the entire continent.

Lack of coordination, cooperation, communication, mistrust and proper diplomatic channels have been hampering the process of peace and stability between several countries. Insurgency in the worst forms have been observed across the Middle East and South Asia impacting trade and commerce, livelihood, tourism, environment, infrastructural development, education and training and modernization of vast areas of several under developed and developing countries located in the region. The changes in the foreign policy of most global powers are also impacting the process of peace negotiations, political stability and economic development in several countries of the Middle East, Central, South, South East and Far East nations in Asia. To add the last nail to the Asian coffin; the region also has one of the most highly sophisticated, legal as well illegal concentration of nuclear weapon systems that could prove to be a future catastrophe.

Hence, it is quite pertinent to ask if the volatile and destabilize areas of the continents like the Middle East, the Gulf region, Gaza, West Bank, Jerusalem, South Asia, Korean Peninsula, South and East China sea will continue to observe deteriorating situations. The perpetual conflicts between Israel-Palestine, Saudi Arabia-Iran, Afghanistan-Pakistan, India-Pakistan, South Korea-North Korea as well as between India, Japan, China and Russia and the US will raise more questions than answers we may have in the not so distant uncertain future. If all the major global powers do not come and discuss the destabilizing issues observed across Asia; and find comprehensive, humanitarian and acceptable solutions for the regional conflicts, Asia will continue to serve as global high flash point with serious implications for the rest of the world.

A peaceful Asia will mean a better and resilient world; and a disabled and disintegrated Asia with huge power vacuums can seriously catalyze our own demise, no matter where we live. Asia represents the core of current global conflicts and needs highest attention and support for timely resolution of conflicts. If these continue to go out of proportion as we have been observing over the decades a very dark future awaits the continent as well as the planet. If the global powers and the regional and local governments do not work with another with mutual trust and respect; we are probably pushing the continent and her unfortunate people in slowly but steadily marching towards an uncertain future.

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