

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



February 19, 2018

Afghanistan's Ethnic Conflicts: as a Result of the Failures of a Weak State

To talk frankly, Afghanistan has an ethnicity problem. It is clear in high-profile cases of sometimes violent tensions. The tension on Electronic National ID Card is one of them that clearly explain the ethnic politics in the country. However, perhaps most damagingly, it is also manifested in the low-profile everyday mistrust and discriminations with which many Afghans view fellow citizens of ethnicities other than their own. The pervasive ethnic stereotyping and myth-making that goes on between ethnic leaders, government high ranking officials, and ordinary civilians have the capacity to destroy the very fabric of Afghan society. Afghanistan's ethnicity problem is at least one of the reasons why it maintains its pro conflicts nature in any major developments including the presidential election in the country.

Inspired by the systematic ethnic settlement when the country just was established, — the governance system has rarely ever spurred the economic or political development of the incumbent's region, let alone the entire regions of the country. Yet the system is maintained in a deface manner, because there would be either critical ethnic tensions or losing the ethnic superiority of a specific ethnic over the other ethnics which is not in the favor of relevant ethnic leaders.

Even ethnicity is far from being an exceptionally Afghan phenomenon; it poses a strong challenge to the stability of the country. If the Afghans are to believe Robert Putnam's thesis on national cohesion, trust is at the core center of any dynamic and successfully functioning society. But this trust is an issue that government after government, has always had to build in Afghanistan. And in Afghanistan, an unwillingness to take nation-building seriously has enabled the persistence of the country's ethnic divisions; a fundamental factor of fueling the ethnic tensions in the country rooted in the historic context of Afghanistan ethnic politics. The main cause of ethnic divisions in countries like Afghanistan is not because of just the 'culture of the dominant ethnic is predisposed to ethnic strife, but its main cause is a weak state in these countries. It is a weak state that has, up until now, been unable of capitalizing on policies that can strategically enhance and benefit a singular Afghanistan national identity.

Weak Central Government and Strong Local Players

In some academic understandings, the problem of the countries like Afghanistan with ethnicity is entirely accounted for by the fact that they simply have a weak central government and many strong local players that can challenge the authority and legitimacy of the central government in different parts and regions of the country. If we even have a look at past 18 years, we can recall the tensions between the central government with Ismail Khan in Herat province in the west of the country, General Dustum and Atta Mohammad Noor in the North of Afghanistan, Gen. Raziq and Gul Agha Shirzai in the South of Afghanistan and Haji Qadir in the east of Afghanistan; this trend is going on in the country and it will continue until up the time when the national government develops a broad based national cohesion policy and there is a strong and sincere political will to meet its ends.

Countries like Afghanistan, which has about 20 ethnic groups and several spoken languages, are repetitively explained to simply be very "culturally mixed" but has the potential to be cohesive. It does not help that often 'culture' takes on any and whatever meaning the user wishes to imply but the government political will can be considered the main barrier to realize the social cohesion in such societies because most societies have always been, and continue to be, composed of multiple ethnic groupings. Those societies where the state has been successful at lessening the political and economic importance of ethnic attachment have been able to establish and implement their social cohesion and nation building policies successfully and has formed a singular national identity through the education system and the dissemination of standardized public goods.

Based on the process that the political scientist and anthropologist, James C. Scott, terms "internal colonization". A strong state can reach all parts of its geographical domain in the form of formal taxation, the provision of public services, and the physical and legal protection of citizens equally, without needing to oppress or suppress challenges from civil society. In this context, the government is weak, in Afghanistan while there are strong local players at the local level. What it means is the state literally does not reach or touch large parts of the geographical population. It is the major characteristic of a weak state that we experience it here.

The failures of a weak state

States like Afghanistan are actually not very well equipped to realize the basic functions of a state. And despite the National Unity Government's laudable goals to improve economy and eliminate the geographical restrictions, the state shall develop effective and efficient mechanisms of formal national public service delivery and economic inclusion to reach all parts and ethnics of the country in a practical manner. Weak justice system is the cause of lack of the provision of justice in many parts of the country felt by a great many. Where it is made to operate, it is to the abridgement of the legal rights of all citizens of Afghanistan. Afghanistan is a country with several ethnic groups and languages. The ethnic politics is a common phenomenon here and as a result an ethnic tension is one of the main political characteristics of the political system of the country. To overcome the ethnic tensions, the Afghan government shall devise and implement broad based national cohesion policy and distribute the opportunities equally among all the ethnics and citizens of Afghanistan to win their trust as the main social cohesion ingredients.

Afghanistan: Violence against Women

By Mohammad Zahir Akbari

In spite of overmuch advocacy against women violence since 2001 it remains one of the most challenging problems in Afghanistan. It occurs everywhere and in various forms such as physical violence, sexual, economic, and psychological violence. It seems that with rise of poverty and insecurities, the violence against women also increased. More often Media reports horrible cases of such as suicide, self-ignition, and sexual abuse and the conduct of desert trials by irresponsible people in different parts of the country. While the number of violent cases is undoubtedly greater than what is reflects in the media, but due to lack of trust of on the government practices, especially the law enforcement organs, have caused hopelessness among the victims of violence to launch their cases. On the other hand, there are lots of obstacles in front of human rights observers to document these cases in the remote parts of the country.

Last Wednesday, Afghan women's right groups expressed their support to the global movement One Billion Rising Revolution 2018 — under the banner of Solidarity Against the Exploitation of Women. It was held under the motto Rise!, Resist! Unite! And is bringing millions of women together around the world to raise their voices against rape and sexual violence against women. One Billion Rising is a global movement, founded by Eve Ensler, to end rape and sexual violence against women. It was started in 2012 as part of the V-Day movement. The "billion" refers to the UN statistic that one in three women will be raped or beaten in her lifetime, or about one billion. Afghan women came together in the Afghan capital Kabul in support of the movement. The initiative was organized by the Afghan Women's Network.

"We call on the National Unity Government and its international partners to fully support the institutions which are helping the victims of violence. We also reiterate our call for removing all kinds of discrimination against the women in the work place," said Roshan Mashal, coordinator of a women's network. "We see that there are plans, procedures such as citizen charters and other programs, but they must not remain on paper, they need to be implemented," said Shakila Nazari, media advisor to Afghan Women's Network.

The event shows that one of most common violence which globally practiced is sexual violence against women. According to studies carried out last year, from every 11 women 10 of them confronted street harassment in Afghanistan while the victims took no action. This indicates that a large number of women and girls become victims of this crime in work places, streets and universities but as sexual violence is considered as a taboo in Afghan society it remains unseen. Thus, it occurs in form of sexual assault, uncommon sexual relations, insult and sexual humiliation, forced prostitution, forced abortion, etc. therefore, they try to conceal cases of sexual violence and not

to be registered. Sexual assault is the most serious and concerning sexual violence in Afghanistan. In most cases, sexual assault is combined with other type of violence, which usually ends up with the death of the victim.

The other common types of violence against women which have received the least attention is verbal and psychological violence; verbal and psychological violence is the most common type of violence. Such types of violence exert negative effects on the psychology and spirit of the victims. Humiliation, insult, and threat are the common types of violence that, inflict serious negative impacts on the characteristics and spirit of women. Verbal and psychological violence against women may occur at home or public places in the form of harassment on the streets and puts women in a difficult and dangerous situation. However, violence against women is not limited to the above-mentioned violations. There are several other types which have negative social, cultural and economic effects on the life of Afghan women, affecting health, self-esteem and social status, living conditions and welfare of women, and prevent their development and growth, causing them to be isolated.

There blamable factors consist of failure to deal decisively with the perpetrators, culture of impunity; corruption and abuse of state positions; the involvement of influential people in addressing violence against women, and resolving of cases of violence against women by non-official and informal authorities; hiding of the crimes and lack of referral to judicial authorities for fear of and mistrust upon government agencies; lack of proper coordination between judicial authorities; women's limited access to justice; existence of illegal weapons and illegal armed groups; lack of security and weakness of state authority in districts and provinces; lack of necessary support for the victims of violence against women; considering violence against women as a normal action; illiteracy and low levels of public awareness; Traditional patterns of marriage in Afghanistan; poverty and unemployment; increased drug addiction.

By and large, the current condition of women in Afghanistan not only shows a weak justice system but also shows huge retrogressions a Muslim country. Historical evidence indicates that women contributed significantly to the early development of the Muslim community. They were to run businesses and benefited from their heritage and dowry rights while most often they are deprived now. They had active and heroic presence in social and political events such as Zainab the daughter of Ali who strongly denounced and finally overthrown the oppressive government of Yazid. The Prophet often consulted women and considered their opinions seriously. His first wife, Khadija, was his chief adviser as well as his first and foremost supporter.

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China's Step into The Maelstrom of The Middle East

By James M Dorsey

The Middle East has a knack for sucking external powers into its conflicts. China's ventures into the region have shown how difficult it is to maintain its principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of other states.

China's abandonment of non-interference is manifested by efforts to mediate conflicts in South Sudan, Syria and Afghanistan as well as between Israel and Palestine and even between Saudi Arabia and Iran. It is even more evident in China's trashing of its vow not to establish foreign military bases, which became apparent when it established a naval base in Djibouti and when reports surfaced that it intends to use Pakistan's deep sea port of Gwadar as a military facility.

This contradiction between China's policy on the ground and its long-standing non-interventionist foreign policy principles means that Beijing often struggles to meet the expectations of Middle Eastern states. It also means that China risks tying itself up in political knots in countries such as Pakistan, which is home to the crown jewel of its Belt and Road Initiative — the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

Middle Eastern autocrats have tried to embrace the Chinese model of economic liberalism coupled with tight political control. They see China's declared principle of non-interference in the affairs of others for what it is: support for authoritarian rule. The principle of this policy is in effect the same as the decades-old US policy of opting for stability over democracy in the Middle East.

It is now a risky policy for the United States and China to engage in given the region's post-Arab Spring history with brutal and often violent transitions. If anything, instead of having been 'stabilised' by US and Chinese policies, the region is still at the beginning of a transition process that could take up to a quarter of a century to resolve. There is no guarantee that autocrats will emerge as the winners.

China currently appears to have the upper hand against the United States for influence across the greater Middle East, but Chinese policies threaten to make that advantage short-term at best.

Belt and Road Initiative-related projects funded by China have proven to be a double-edged sword. Concerns are

mounting in countries like Pakistan that massive Chinese investment could prove to be a debt trap similar to Sri Lanka's experience.

Chinese back-peddling on several Pakistani infrastructure projects suggests that China is tweaking its approach to the US\$50 billion China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. The Chinese rethink was sparked by political volatility caused by Pakistan's self-serving politics and continued political violence — particularly in the Balochistan province, which is at the heart of CPEC.

Similarly, China has been willing to manipulate Pakistan against its adversaries for its own gain. China continues to shield Masoud Azhar (who is believed to have close ties to Pakistani intelligence agencies and military forces) from UN designation as a global terrorist. China does so while Pakistan cracks down on militants in response to a US suspension of aid and a UN Security Council monitoring visit.

Pakistan's use of militants in its dispute with India over Kashmir serves China's interest in keeping India off balance — a goal which Beijing sees as worthy despite the fact that Chinese personnel and assets have been the targets of a low-level insurgency in Balochistan. Saudi Arabia is also considering the use of Balochistan as a launching pad to destabilise Iran. By stirring ethnic unrest in Iran, Saudi Arabia will inevitably suck China into the Saudi-Iranian rivalry and sharpen its competition with the United States. Washington backs the Indian-supported port of Chabahar in Iran — a mere 70 kilometres from Gwadar.

China is discovering that it will prove impossible to avoid the pitfalls of the greater Middle East. This is despite the fact that US President Donald Trump and Saudi Arabia's powerful Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman seem singularly focussed on countering Iran and Islamic militants. As it navigates the region's numerous landmines, China is likely to find itself at odds with both the United States and Saudi Arabia. It will at least have a common interest in pursuing political stability at the expense of political change — however much this may violate its stated commitment to non-interference.

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