

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



February 28, 2017

The Demise of Mullah Abdul Salam

It is very important for Afghan authorities and forces to show their strength against Taliban and other insurgents, as they are not ready to stop war and come to negotiation table. They should be taught clearly that they are not in a position of strength and can be subjugated by Afghan forces easily. If Taliban and other insurgents continue threatening poor Afghan citizens through their cowardly attacks and intend to spread terror within the country, Afghan forces must respond in an aggressive manner so that they realize their blunders. Reaching the top leadership of Taliban in the same manner would be an important tactic in this regard and would have lasting impact on the overall insurgency that has been launched by them.

The recent strike that Afghan forces carried out in Kunduz to target Taliban shadow governor for Kunduz, Mullah Abdul Salam, will support the view that aggressive tactic when carried out properly and timely would really prove to be influential to discourage Taliban's insurgency.

On Sunday, the Afghan air force attacked a Taliban base in Nahr-e-Kohna village of Dasht-e-Archi district in Kunduz killing at least nine Taliban insurgents, including Salam. Salam was known as Taliban's war machine in Kunduz and in the eastern regions. Under Salam as Taliban war strategist, Taliban insurgents last year, managed to capture the center of Kunduz. According to some sources, Salam spent jail terms in Guantanamo and Pakistan and he played a significant role in the expansion of Taliban in the north and eastern regions of Afghanistan. His demise is a great achievement by Afghan forces and would teach a lesson to insurgency leaders that their wars would not last for long and the only way they can survive is through peace and negotiation.

Though Salam's death is an achievement, it can only prove to be a small episode in the war against terrorism. Afghan authorities need to develop a comprehensive strategy regarding security. It can be observed that Afghan security forces mostly react to the assaults and operations carried out by Taliban.

They should be proactive enough to make preparations before such assaults and operations are carried out. The assaults by Taliban are not something on a small scale that cannot be observed before they happen. They require preparedness and logistic movements, which take place long before the assaults are carried out and Afghan security forces and intelligence agency should be in a position to detect all these preparations and movements and act proactively. However, that can happen when there is a proper strategy in place, not a mechanism that runs on ad-hoc basis.

Moreover, it is also important in such cases that the authorities should understand their responsibilities and they should know what they have to do. They, in many cases, seem so unprepared as if they have forgotten their duties.

In some cases, as can be observed nowadays, they keep on blaming each other or avoid responsibilities in awkward ways. The same attitude was adopted by authorities when Kunduz was attacked last time. Governor of Kunduz, Assadullah Omarkhail had said that the death toll during the war in Kunduz was part of a divine order. He also blamed past action by security officials as the reason of the fall of Kunduz city, particularly that of deputy chief of staff for the army. His desperation was clear from his statements and same was the case with many other officials - they did not know whom to blame for the situation and what to do to change it for better.

The security situation in the country demands that there should be a comprehensive strategy. The complex networks of the terrorists and their growth and expansion cannot be eradicated only through defensive approach. The security authorities must develop an approach where they are able to press the insurgents and bring them to the point where they understand that there is no solution through violence and terrorism and they should come to negotiation table. Without being dominated by the Afghan security forces, it is very difficult that Taliban insurgents get ready for any sort of negotiation.

Moreover, Afghan authorities are not sure about how to coordinate the different fights that are taking place in different parts of the country. The insurgency in the country has turned complex, with ISIS posing even more threats. The different Taliban factions have different ways of fighting with the government. And, the main issue in such circumstances is that different authorities themselves are not on the same page on how to face the situation. In certain cases, they even favor some of their factions for their own interests. Therefore, the government needs to design a clear strategy, involve all the authorities in the decision making and improve the coordination. Only a clear, united and well-coordinated approach can defeat the insurgents in today's situation.



Our Soldiers – Our National Heroes

By Hujjatullah Zia

Combating terrorism, Afghan soldiers paid high sacrifices and triggered an outpouring of national grief. Warring factions, mainly the Taliban guerilla fighters, are widely involved in war crime and violated the humanitarian law. They sought to spill the blood of both combatants and non-combatants without an iota of humanity. Their warped mind filled them with a strong sense of atrocity. Their cruel practices reveal their ideology which suggests accepting their dogma or die.

The escalated militancy, within the last two years, inflicted heavy casualties upon Afghan soldiers and civilians which shattered the hope of the public for a civil society in which individuals could exercise their rights and liberty without fear. No wonder, the democratic discourse and human rights and freedoms were hotly debated in the post-Taliban administration and filled the air with hope and optimism. Afghan nation dreamed of breathing a sigh of relief in a violence-free society after the downfall of the Taliban's dictatorial regime.

The establishment of democratic government liberated women from restrictions imposed by the Taliban. Women took active part in social and political issues.

For instance, Masouda Jalal was the first female presidential candidate; Habiba Sarabi became the first female provincial governor (2005-2013) and Auzra Jafari became the first female mayor (2008-2013) in Afghanistan which was a milestone in the country's history. A number of women became members of parliament through elections.

The establishment of Afghanistan's Constitution based on democratic views boosted the public confidence for a peaceful country. The Constitution, which is unique in the country's history, entails equal rights for men and women and denies discriminating one on the basis of their sex, race, color or creed. Article 22 states, "Any kind of discrimination and distinction between citizens of Afghanistan shall be forbidden. The citizens of Afghanistan, man and woman, have equal rights and duties before the law."

Considering these facts, Afghan nation believed to taste the fruition of democracy and live their utopia, in which there were no violence and bloodshed.

They flocked to ballot boxes to elect their president and representatives. In other words, the colorful queues of men and women who were waiting impatiently to cast their votes for changing their society and history were really heartening. To the nation's unmitigated chagrin, insurgency resurfaced and some of the voters' fingers were cut by the Taliban fighters. The Taliban's ragtag militants were reorganized to carry out attacks against Afghan government.

They spread fear and disappointment through spilling the blood of men, women and children wherever they could. Women's freedoms were curtailed and people's rights and dignity were trampled upon in one way or another. Life

turned cheap. Members of Parliament and other political figures, including men and women, were ambushed by the militants, which undermined democracy.

In addition to insurgency, corruption in the government's apparatus also hampered democracy and law enforcement. Some high-ranking officials broke the law with impunity. The judicial system failed to parallel to the legislative power. On the other hand, tribal leaders and the Taliban put self-styled law in practice in the Taliban dominated areas such as conducting desert court and flagellating the women who had transgressed the tribal traditions.

However, terrorism remained the main challenge for both the former and the present governments. The Taliban intensified their attacks with the establishment of the National Unity Government (NUG). Last year, Afghan nation left a deadly year behind. As a result, the UN reported that war had caused more than 8,000 civilian casualties, including nearly 2,600 deaths, in the first nine months of 2016.

The current year is most likely to be hard for the nation. As a result, within the two first weeks of the current year, more than hundred people were killed and wounded by the attacks carried out by warring factions, including the self-styled Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and the Taliban. It is a bitter pill for the government to swallow that Afghan soldiers also sustained large casualties, mainly within the last two years.

The soldiers, who seek to protect the rights and dignity of the nation and defend national sovereignty, lose their lives but will be forgotten soon. Afterwards, it is their families to suffer from economic constraints and their children will abandon schools. It is an undeniable fact that military forces are the backbone of a society and defend their national values. That is to say that, without the blood of soldiers, a nation will never ever breathe a sigh of relief in a relatively peaceful atmosphere.

Afghan soldiers have shown their bravery and gained national honor for the country throughout the history and will do so in the future as well.

They must be paid enough heed and the life and dignity of their families should be ensured forever. The government will have to pay them decently so that they can fight the battles without economic dilemmas. Moreover, the state must reinforce the soldiers and equip them with strong arms in order to mitigate the insurgency.

Our soldiers, who fight not only to protect nation's rights but also to root out radicalism, should be considered the national heroes and heroines. Their sacrifices are highly appreciable and their names should be eternal in our history. Hence, the government is to prevent from further casualties of Afghan combatants and non-combatants through developing effective strategies.

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The Threat of Threats

By Dominique Moisi

Tell me what you fear and I will tell you what has happened to you," the psychologist D.W. Winnicott wrote in the early twentieth century. It sounds straightforward, until one considers how much has happened - and how much there is to fear.

The sheer diversity of the threats facing the world today evokes the tragic farces of Luigi Pirandello. In the West, some focus on religious extremism - in particular, the terrorism supposedly being carried out in the name of Islam. Others point to Russia, warning of a new cold war, already apparent in Eastern Europe and the cyber realm. Still others, highlighting the rise of virulent right-wing populism in the United States and parts of Europe, declare that the real danger lies within.

Even those who recognize all of these threats struggle to prioritize them - which is vital to addressing them. If, say, Islamist terrorism is the principal threat, then it might make sense for the West to align itself with Russia in the fight against it.

But what if right-wing populism, which the Kremlin actively supports, is the biggest menace? In that case, aligning with Russia could prove destructive for Western liberal democracy. In fact, exaggerating the threat of Islamist terrorism, while downplaying the threat of right-wing populism, could well play directly into Russian President Vladimir Putin's hands.

The struggle to prioritize threats is not exclusive to the West. In the Middle East, countries are trying to figure out who should be contained. Among the frontrunners are the Islamic State (ISIS), Iran, and Israel.

For Israel (and Saudi Arabia), the answer is clearly Iran. For Iran, the answer is Israel (despite high tensions with Saudi Arabia). The West, too, has opinions on the matter: the European Union is convinced that ISIS should be the top priority.

A few months ago, the US might have agreed, but President Donald Trump, despite citing the eradication of ISIS as a major policy goal, may also be prepared to fight in Israel's corner to contain Iran.

In Asia, too, countries are finding it difficult to sort the dangers they face. Should they focus on a North Korean regime that is as volatile as ever, and that recently launched a ballistic missile toward the sea off its eastern coast? Or should they be keeping their eyes on China, which has gradually expanded both its regional influence and its revanchist claims?

For Japan and South Korea, North Korea seems to be the top priority. But for Vietnam, Indonesia, and Singapore, it is difficult to discern whether North Korea actually poses a greater threat than the giant and increasingly nationalistic China. This is to say nothing of other acute risks, such

as strains between two local nuclear powers, Pakistan and India. When it comes to prioritizing today's threats, there are no easy answers. But unless we find them, we risk repeating some of history's great mistakes.

The French philosopher Paul Valéry believed that history teaches nothing, "for it contains everything and furnishes examples of everything." But, at this point, it is difficult not to make historical comparisons, particularly in Europe.

In the late nineteenth century, surging nationalism underpinned an era of revolutions and civil wars. In the 1930s, the rise of populism in Europe opened the way for disaster. Many Europeans, so fearful of the "reds," were prepared to compromise with the "browns." It didn't take long to find out the true threat the Nazis posed.

The lesson is clear. Rather than attempting to prioritize the threats we face - compromising on one goal to advance another - we must tackle them all at once. As the assassinated prime minister of Israel, Yitzhak Rabin, used to say, we should "fight terrorism as if there is no peace process, and pursue peace as if there is no terrorism."

The battle against Islamist terrorism is important, but it should not overshadow - much less undermine - the imperative to protect our democracies from the threat of right-wing populism.

To accept, for example, the victory of the National Front's Marine Le Pen in France's presidential election, arguing that it is at least better than allowing radical Islamism to proliferate further, is to ignore the lessons of history - and, indeed, to ignore reality.

ISIS may be born of a culture of humiliation and driven by a spirit of revenge, as was Nazism, but it does not possess anything like the industrial and military resources of Germany in the 1930s. ISIS is not the "modern Nazism" we should fear; it is the terrorism that, in the spirit of Rabin, we should fight.

The peace we should pursue, meanwhile, is within our own countries. To allow right-wing populism to continue to advance is to succumb to fear, rather than behaving according to a clear-headed analysis of our interests and, above all, our values. It is to compromise with the brown shirts for fear of the reds.

There was a time, not so long ago, when the EU - a model of reconciliation, peace, and prosperity - inspired countries from Latin America to Asia. Today, Europe, along with the once venerated US, is a model of fear - and it is scaring others.

If Europeans cannot develop - with lucidity, firmness, and dedication - enlightened solutions to the threats they face, who can? (Courtesy Project Syndicate)

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