

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



January 01, 2019

Afghans Long for Perpetual Peace

The year 2018 is taking its last breath, but peace still remains elusive in Afghanistan and the public fluctuate between hope and fear. Afghans confirmed their strong desire for peace and reconciliation with exchanging hug with the Taliban insurgents, who reciprocated Kabul's three-day ceasefire in June.

Despite sustaining heavy casualties and bearing the brunt of insurgency, Afghans did not repress their smiles with their killers, who only accepted a three-day ceasefire and would resume spilling the blood of the same individuals who smiled and shot selfies with them. The Taliban's hearts did not melt with the three-day smiles of men, women and children which filled Kabul streets on Eid Days. But Afghans desired for a perpetual smile.

Being intolerant to the public smile and peace of mind, the Taliban insurgents resumed their militancy and put an end to the smile.

Everyone has heard the heartbreaking stories of war and violence in Afghanistan, but those who resurface with hope and determination from the ashes of war have been neglected. The children who go to school for a better future, the women who compete in presidential and parliamentary elections to protect the rights of people, and the individuals who flock to ballot boxes with twinkling eyes despite the life-threatening danger and inspire confidence in me and make me optimist about future life.

Insurgency has also taken heavy toll on Afghan soldiers but could not deter them. To view the country's history, Afghan soldiers fought long battles with strong determination. The Taliban insurgents should know that Afghan soldiers seek to prove their commitment to the nation through their blood. So, the soldiers' indomitable spirit is another source of hope for people.

The Taliban will not be able to rule Afghanistan with the barrel of gun. The Taliban's regime was one of the darkest point in the country's history and, after breathing the relative air of freedom, no individual will accept a regime with Taliban's ideology. The Taliban have already confessed that they would not win through war. It is self-explanatory that the Taliban have also sustained heavy casualties and lost their high-level figures, especially in 2018. Therefore, they target civilians and wage attacks on public places to trigger fear. That is, through indiscriminate attacks and suicide bombings, insurgents intend to increase the level of public dissatisfaction with the government. This act will increase dissatisfaction but never prompts the public to support insurgents. Since it cannot be won through war; negotiation is the only alternative for peace.

Both Afghan nation and state urge the Taliban to stop their insurgency and resolve their issue through negotiations. It is crystal clear that war will only lead to casualties and destruction, which will benefit neither sides. What is the benefit of a weak or destroyed Afghanistan to the Taliban? It shows that the Taliban are used as pawns in the war against government.

Afghans understand that since Afghanistan was beleaguered with decades of war, bringing in peace and security will take time. What is undeniable is that the hearts and minds of Afghans are with the government. For example, people flock to ballot boxes to cast their votes for a democratic government. They support the constitution and other national laws so that they will be able to exercise their rights and freedoms in a better way.

With this in mind, the ragtag militant group will not win through war and should not seek to impose their will on people by the gun. The current bloodshed clearly reflects the Taliban's ideology and their cruel attitude. Similarly, their harsh practices during their regime still haunt people's mind. So, the Taliban are able neither to win the public support nor satisfy their needs for freedoms, rights or democracy. Thus, they had better stop seeking to foist their mindset on Afghans through killing them. To cut the long story short, with the approach of 2019, the Taliban have to come to the table with Kabul government and stop inflicting further casualties on people. Afghans will again cast their votes to ballot boxes in presidential election with hope for peace and security. It is now time for peace and reconciliation. The insurgents have to use the current platform for negotiations with Kabul government and resolve their differences on the table - this is the most logical way. We wish Afghans have a happy year ahead and smile for the entire year.

Ministers of Defense and Interior Should Overhaul Afghan Defense and Security Institutions to Match / Defeat Existing Security Challenges

By: Mohammed Gul Sahibzada

After their appointment as Minister of Defense and Minister of Interior, both Ministers Assadullah Khalid and Amrullah Saleh have respectively took on stage and boasted high profile slogans by issuing new directives and setting up new goals. Mr. Khalid has said that 'we will hit the enemy hard and root them out of their positions' and that 'Afghan defense and security forces will no more remain in defensive position and will go on offensive against the enemy'. Mr. Saleh has said that 'he will be merciless on criminals and enemy of the country and will serve the people' and has issued a number of directives to officials of Ministry of Interior about their conducts. So far so good as it comes to intent and willingness to achieve, but it is also true that both these gentlemen were leading figures at their turn as chief of Afghan Spy Agency, the National Directorate of Security (NDS) and held different other portfolios in the previous Government headed by Hamid Karzai so they must be aware and should have deep knowledge about weaknesses and strengths of Afghan security and defense institutions. It is no secret that defense and security institutions need long due overhaul and structural reforms in areas of command & control, logistics and battlefield operations, de-politicization, professionalization and setting up an effective mechanism for coordination and synchronization of information and operations between security agencies in the country. Without fixing flaws and weaknesses in these institutions, it will not be possible to draw optimal results and achieve high profile goals in the face of prevailing challenges posed by an entrenched insurgency, international terrorist groups and pockets of armed men associated with strongmen across the country who engage in criminal activities including opiate economy and plunder of country's national treasures such as precious gemstones and minerals, and contributing to worsening law and order situation.

Out of few areas mentioned above, the most important tasks before these new leaders are to de-politicize and professionalize both Ministry of Defense and Ministry of Interior. It has been an established custom that political leaders who take charge as senior Government official - especially in security and defense institutions - have attempted to meddle in the appointment of senior security officials including generals and all other ranks below the line of command. There are rumors that ex-National Security Advisor 'has appointed many senior officials in the ranks of Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Interior and NDS' and that 'these appointments are meant to manipulate and serve vested individual political interests when time for such manipulation arrives'. The same is true for all previous political leaders during their tenures at defense and security institutions. This whole phenomenon has taken immense toll on the performance, unity of purpose, disarray in chain of command & control and professionalism at defense and security institutions, which in turn has resulted in the absence of a national security agenda and comprehensive war strategy in the face of ongoing insurgency and war against international terrorism - not to mention security and law & or-

der issues posed by criminal gangs operating in cities under government control. In addition, huge losses in battlefields incurred on Afghan security personnel are mostly because of lack of knowledge and experience of field commanders in battlefields to engage in such fights, hence number of casualties including death and injuries have been consistent at one thousand five hundreds to two thousands per month, turning this 'war on terror' a 'war of attrition' waged by insurgents. Reports of soldiers dying due to lack of information and intelligence gathering, timely reinforcement, ammunition, food and water in battlefields have checkered record of performance of our defense and security institutions. Worse is the fact that such incidents, which have been so rampant and local populations have reported them with authentic amateur photos from the sites and shared them in social media, have totally been blacked out by Government news outlets! There is nothing wrong in approach to restrict the dissemination of these but the Security forces have to win the dwindling confidence of people in their capabilities.

The situation is unprecedented as no insurgency in any country got spread over the whole country as in Afghanistan. This insurgency is distributed with guerrilla tactics and access to sophisticated operational tools and access to dedicated canon-fodder. Upendra Baghel, an analyst on Afghan situations says 'Afghanistan needs sustainable and harmonized counter insurgency measures dismantling their operational capability, support and logistics base and distorted ideological narrative. In the absence of these, the promise would not result into wonders.'

Other factors that contribute to this ongoing pathetic condition in our defense and security institutions include failure of Government officials to depict reality and challenges on the ground to their international donors / supporters, and instead draw rosy pictures of 'progress and successes' in battlefields simply to pave the way for lavish funding. Corruption has been the number one cause paving the way for present status of these institutions, but as a lot have been said about corruption I will not stretch this factor.

The points mentioned above are tips of the iceberg as there have been reports that agents / spies of neighboring countries' intelligence agencies are currently on duty as senior officials in the ranks of Ministries of Defense and Interior - and even at NDS. These reports may not be true but the leadership should embark upon strict adherence to recently announced code of conduct which will improve professional conduct of our armed forces and their individual accountability. This is a task not easy laid bare before the new leadership of both Ministry of Defense and Ministry of Interior to handle, and it isn't easy without showing a strong resolve and consistent efforts to wipe out our defense and security institutions of this scourge of unprofessional conduct. Before embarking on any major undertakings, the newly appointed leaders should fix our security and defense institutions to ensure success.

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How to Stop Losing the Fight Against Malaria

By: Andrea Boggio and Colin Ohrt

When it comes to fighting infectious diseases, progress cannot be gauged by the availability of resources; the most important metric is the number of lives saved. By this measure, the world is on the verge of losing its battle with malaria.

After years of impressive gains, global efforts to combat the mosquito-borne illness have stalled. According to the World Health Organization's most recent malaria report card, 219 million cases were reported in 2017, an increase of three million from the previous year. Moreover, while total annual deaths remained steady at about 435,000, declines in some regions reversed.

More alarming, the death toll could climb far higher. Data from the Consortium for Health Action - a nonprofit group committed to eliminating incurable malaria in Southeast Asia - shows a high risk of drug-resistant malaria spreading from Asia to Sub-Saharan Africa, the world's most malaria-affected region. This is not an unprecedented concern. In the late 1950s, resistance to the anti-malarial drug chloroquine emerged in Cambodia and spread to (and throughout) Africa during the 1980s, resulting in a two- to sixfold increase in malaria-related mortality. Without urgent and coordinated interventions, it could happen again, but much faster this time.

Fortunately, there are ways to reduce this likelihood; one of the most important is to expand prevention, screening, and treatment programs for those at high risk. These include regional peacekeepers, a common if often-overlooked source of transmission of malaria parasites between Asia and Africa.

Security personnel in Southeast Asia are infected at high rates with plasmodium falciparum, a parasite that causes a deadly form of the disease. In 2016, for example, research led by the US Armed Forces Research Institute of Medical Sciences (AFRIMS) in Bangkok found that 10% of military personnel in Northwest Cambodia were carriers. When infected Cambodian soldiers were deployed to Africa, as many may have been between 2010 and 2016, virulent strains of malaria were at risk of being spread.

From Cambodia, the malaria parasite strains may move across Myanmar to India and Bangladesh, which account for about 15% of the current United Nations peacekeeping force. When Indian and Bangladeshi soldiers are stationed in Africa without malaria screening, the risk of deadly disease transmission may increase dramatically.

With pre-deployment testing, medication, and widespread use of insecticide-treated uniforms, this source of malaria migration could be contained. At the moment, however, most governments and aid organizations are maintaining a status quo that largely excludes these high risk groups. For example, we have observed that treated mosquito net-

ting, which is an effective means of disease prevention, is not distributed in high-transmission areas, and there the use of available netting is extremely low.

In 2015, the WHO set 2020 as a deadline for halting the transmission of plasmodium falciparum in Cambodia, and called for total elimination of malaria from Southeast Asia's Greater Mekong Subregion by 2030. These ambitious targets are still achievable, but only if three key challenges are addressed.

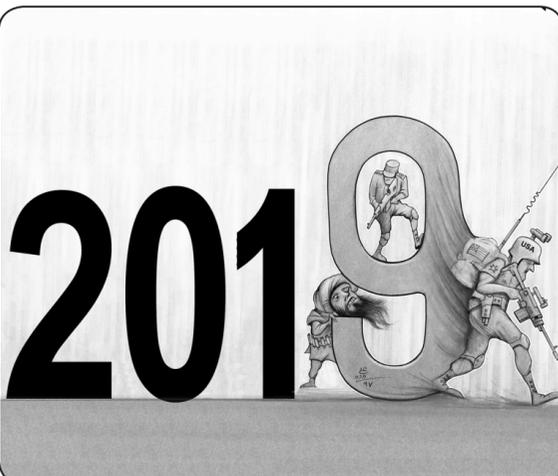
First, a coordinated strategy is needed to target the disease in areas where transmission rates are highest, the so-called malaria islands. While many of the resources to accomplish this are already available, flexible funding and new partnerships will be essential to reduce infection rates among military, forestry, and police personnel, as well as other at-risk populations.

Second, the international donors must recognize the urgency of the looming malaria pandemic. At the moment, their commitment is still insufficient. For example, The Global Fund, one of the world's most important anti-malaria supporters, suffers from a lack of funding effectiveness. Aid recipients in the region complain that the Fund's money cannot be used for several unmet needs, including pay-for-performance incentives to motivate staff. The Global Fund justifies its approach as necessary to ensure long-term program sustainability and host-country participation. But, faced with a public-health emergency in Southeast Asia, and by extension, Africa, insisting on rigid adherence to the standard funding rules may be penny wise but pound foolish.

And, finally, we need new sources of money. A natural place to look is the United States military, for whom malaria is the number one infectious disease threat in the region. Unfortunately, the US Department of Defense has declined to offer anything more than research support, which may lead to a few extra publications, but will not help eliminate this malaria threat. Barring a change of heart, philanthropic organizations - especially the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation - will be essential to filling the effective funding void, especially by offering financial incentives for implementing effective elimination operations.

With the right level of support and coordination, we can eliminate multidrug-resistant falciparum malaria in Southeast Asia. The alternative - poor implementation, ineffective spending, and misdirected research - will mean that still-evolving malaria parasites will eventually reach Africa, a deadly scenario that would turn back the clock on decades of progress.

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