

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



January 14 2017

“Erosion in Afghanistan Reconstruction”

The war against terrorism that was started by U.S. in Afghanistan does not seem to have generated the results that were expected. Even after spending so much in blood and money, U.S. is still faced with many issues that remain unaddressed. Major of those issues have been highlighted by the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan (SIGAR). SIGAR has recently mentioned that within last 15 years, U.S. has made an investment of around \$115 billion USD. Adjusted for inflation, the U.S. has spent more on Afghanistan's reconstruction than it did on the Marshall Plan to rebuild Western Europe after World War II and that reconstructing Afghanistan has been the largest expenditure to rebuild a single country in U.S. history.

Unfortunately, Afghanistan still shows a High-Risk List. SIGAR has identified eight high-risk areas that point at systemic problems faced by U.S.-funded reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan. These high-risk areas include Afghan security forces capacity and capabilities; corruption; sustainability; on-budget support; counter-narcotics; contract management; oversight and planning and strategy.

It is important to note that it is not only the monetary support that U.S. has offered to the war against terrorism in Afghanistan. Some precious lives have also been lost in this war. According to the data by SIGAR, since 2001, 2,247 U.S. military personnel have died and more than 20,000 have been wounded in Afghanistan. However, there are still some serious challenges that Afghanistan faces regarding security. Since, most of the U.S. and international troops have withdrawn from the country, Afghan security forces have not been able to show complete confidence in facing the challenges put forward by the insurgents and resultantly many parts of the country have come under the control of Taliban and Daesh. According to SIGAR's statement, "Despite a \$70 billion U.S. investment in the Afghan security forces, only 63 percent of the country's districts are under Afghan government control or influence, which shows a reduction from the 72 percent as of November 27, 2015."

Now with such situation in hand, there are prognostications that this year the security challenges would further increase for Afghanistan security forces, as some recent attacks in major cities of the country have already given the indications. Therefore, it is really vital that there should be serious developments as far as the capacity building of Afghan security forces are concerned. Moreover, another aspect of the problem lies in the absence of a proper security strategy to deal with the ongoing and future security challenges. Afghan leadership, in this regard, has not shown any considerable potential. Resultantly, security forces mostly react defensively instead of being proactive.

In addition to that, Afghan government as a whole is suffering from many other major issues, which are hindering it to develop an effective mechanism against the terrorists. Erosion of legitimacy of the government is a dominant one among these issues. The government has not been able to deliver services to the people; therefore, people have lost their confidence on the government, which has given rise to the issue of illegitimacy. Another major concern in this regard is the persistent corruption among the ranks of the government. As SIGAR has mentioned that corruption has eroded the legitimacy of the Afghan government, limiting its effectiveness and bolstering support for the opposing insurgency. Unless Afghan government tackles the issue of corruption, it cannot design any strategy that can prove to be effective and helpful in supporting its legitimacy.

Another key issue that has been highlighted by SIGAR is the evil of opium production. SIGAR has mentioned that despite a U.S. investment of \$8.5 billion USD in counter-narcotics, Afghan opium production is at an all-time high. If such huge investment and support is not able to produce the desired results, it is very difficult to expect effective outcomes in the sectors that are not supported sufficiently.

This also points at the fact that the utilization of such investment has not been supported through an efficient and honest mechanism. In fact, there is no effective institutional mechanism in Afghanistan to control the production of opium and its use. And, it is the basic reason that the opium smuggling has been fueling and funding terrorism and insurgency to a great extent.

SIGAR has also mentioned that Afghanistan is still in a position where it cannot support itself financially and functionally; therefore, it would require long-term financial assistance to survive. Unfortunately, the U.S. and international community cannot keep on supporting the country after certain point. Moreover, the changing nature of international politics and international political considerations and interests shows that it would be difficult for them to keep on assisting Afghanistan indefinitely. Therefore, it is vital for Afghanistan to start relying on its own self. Afghan authorities need to take some important and honest decisions and make determined efforts. They can at least start by being honest to their country and their people - taking a strong and united stance against insecurity and corruption.

The Violation of Humanitarian Law

By Hujjatullah Zia

Annually, thousands of Peace Day events take place around the globe, many programs are held to promote peace, and Nobel Peace Prize laureates make speech to show the world their work has not been finished, however, peace still remains elusive and warring factions continue spilling the blood of innocent individuals and violate their rights and liberty flagrantly.

Afghanistan is one of the war torn countries which bears the brunt of militancy and democracy is undermined by terrorism. The strong-willed Afghan administration left no stone unturned to bring the Taliban to the bargaining table and called all warring parties to join peace process. The constant peace offerings by Afghan government have been refused and the Taliban guerillas, along with the affiliates to the self-styled Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), play their destructive role in the country via shedding the blood of men, women and children for ideological reasons or on the basis of one's race and religion. It is most likely that the current year (2017) will be more deadly than the two last years in which a large number of Afghan soldiers and civilians lost their lives in terrorist attacks and suicide bombings.

No wonder, only fourteen days have elapsed in the New Year, more 100 people have been killed and wounded by terrorist attacks. For instance, more than 10 individuals, from ethnic minority group, have been gunned down on Friday by the affiliated to ISIL in Baghlan. Similarly, 30 people were killed and at least 80 more were wounded in twin suicide bombings on Tuesday in Kabul for which the Taliban claimed responsibility. Meanwhile, some others also lost their lives, including five Arab diplomats, and were injured in terrorist attacks in Helmand and Kandahar on the same day.

The lack of acceptance and religious tolerance are believed to be the main reasons for the escalated militancy. Warring factions shed the blood of people voraciously due to their warped minds and aggressive ideology. They claim racial and religious superiority and believe that killing would be the only choice - this mentality necessarily belongs to the ideologues. On the other hand, the mercenary fighters practice upon no ideology and play with the life of individuals for the hack of it.

In other words, there are some natural evils as violence runs in their blood. Such ilk of fighters seeks to violate the rights of mankind and harm people in one way or another. Afghan administration played its role positively through establishing the Peace High Council (HPC) to bring the Taliban to the peace table so as to strengthen democracy and protect the rights and liberty of the citizens. In addition, the constitution of the country was approved on the basis of Islamic tenets and moral standards and the Tali-

ban elements are urged to stop bloodshed and practice upon this constitution. Now, the ball is in the Taliban's court whether to join the reconciliation process or continue targeting Afghan nation. With the appointment of Mansour's successor, political pundits made a ballpark estimate that Haibatullah Akhundzada would be more radical than his predecessor and a greater obstacle before peace talks for being known as a radical clergy.

President Ghani's administration still reveals strong will for peace talks and the door for negotiation is open for all warring parties. Recently, before Obama's last speech, his administration wanted Indo-Pak dialogue to include Afghanistan. "We do think that any regional dialogue between India, Pakistan for including Afghanistan and others to counter terrorism would be desirable," Peter Lavoy, senior director for South Asian affairs, is cited as saying. "Terrorism is a threat to all of us and no country will be safe, unless terrorism is irradiated in every other country, especially in the neighborhood."

According to him, even though the Pakistani government and security apparatus were trying to diminish terrorist strength in Pakistan, Islamabad had prioritized its fight against the outfits that target the country first and had placed less priority on the terrorists targeting its neighbors. For tireless efforts within a decade for peace and stability in the country, Afghanistan will have to be involved in all talks regarding the peace issues in its soil. Similarly, the US troops paid sacrifices along with Afghan soldiers and invested billions of dollars on "war on terror", no countries are to hold talks with the Taliban elements without the presence of Afghanistan and the US or else the talks will remain as futile as ever.

In a nutshell, there is a need for unanimous agreement for holding talks, the Taliban also should reveal a bona fide intention otherwise it will never bear the desired result.

If the Taliban do not hold talks, the international community must put pressure on them so as to consider the humanitarian law and stop killing the civilians, mainly the women and children.

In another item, murdering civilians is allowed neither in religion nor in international law or moral standards. Therefore, warring factions will have to stop targeting non-combatants, who have nothing to do with war.

It is publicly believed that men are born with fundamental rights, i.e. the rights to life, liberty and property and no parties are to violate these rights.

Hence, since the militant fighters are concerned with no law and trample upon the public rights without hesitation, the world will have to pressurize them to stop such inhuman practices - it is possible through launching a strong global campaign against terrorism.

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Water as a Force for Peace

By Sundeep Waslekar

The changing of the guard on the 38th floor of the United Nations building in New York, with António Guterres taking over for Ban Ki-moon as UN Secretary-General, has taken place at a time when notions about peace and conflict are undergoing a subtle change. In particular, the role of resources - and especially water - is getting the recognition it deserves.

This has been a long time coming. Both Ban and his predecessor, Kofi Annan, have argued for some two decades that protecting and sharing natural resources, particularly water, is critical to peace and security. But it was not until last November that the issue gained widespread acknowledgement, with Senegal - that month's UN Security Council president - holding the UN's first-ever official debate on water, peace, and security.

Open to all UN member states, the debate brought together representatives of 69 governments, which together called for water to be transformed from a potential source of crisis into an instrument of peace and cooperation. A few weeks later, Guterres appointed Amina Mohammed, a former Nigerian environment minister, as his deputy secretary-general.

The growing recognition of water's strategic relevance reflects global developments. In the last three years, the Islamic State (ISIS) captured the Tabqa, Tishrin, Mosul, and Fallujah dams on the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. ISIS subsequently lost control of all of them, but not before using them to flood or starve downstream populations, to pressure them to surrender.

Many analysts hope that ISIS will finally be eliminated from Iraq and Syria in the next few months. But that does not mean that the group will disband; on the contrary, it may well relocate to the border areas between Libya and Chad, putting West African cities and water installations at risk.

This tactic is not exclusive to ISIS. Extremist groups in South Asia have also threatened to attack water infrastructure. And of course state actors, too, can use water resources to gain a strategic advantage.

The importance of water in the twenty-first century - comparable to that of oil in the twentieth - can hardly be overstated. Yet some strategic experts continue to underestimate it. The reality is that oil has alternatives like natural gas, wind, solar, and nuclear energy. By contrast, for industry and agriculture as much as for drinking and sanitation, the only alternative to water, as former Slovenian President Danilo Türk once put it, is water.

The same is true for trade. Consider the Rio Chagres. While it may not be widely known, it is vitally important, as it feeds the Panama Canal, through which 50% of trade

between Asia and the Americas flows. There is no risk of the natural depletion of the river flow for the next hundred years, but, in the event of a security crisis in Central America, it could be taken over by rogue forces. The impact on the global economy would be enormous.

The consensus on the need to protect water resources and installations in conflict zones is clear. What is less clear is how to do it. Unlike medicines and food packets, water cannot be airdropped into conflict zones. And UN Peacekeeping Forces are badly overstretched.

The International Committee of the Red Cross does negotiate safe passage for technicians to inspect and repair damage to water pipes and storage systems in Iraq, Syria, and Ukraine; but each passage needs to be negotiated with governments in conflict and rebel commanders - a long and cumbersome process.

A better approach would be for great powers, with their considerable influence, to negotiate short-term ceasefires in areas experiencing protracted conflict, specifically to repair and restore water systems.

To pave the way for such an approach, however, the UN Security Council will have to declare water a "strategic resource of humanity" and adopt a resolution to protect water resources and installations, similar to Resolution 2286, adopted last May to protect medical facilities in armed conflicts. In the longer term, countries that share riparian systems will need to establish regional security arrangements to preserve and protect their resources. With collaborative management underpinning collective protection, water, often a source of competition and conflict, could become a facilitator of peace and cooperation.

Denis Sassou-Nguesso, President of the Republic of the Congo, is at the forefront of this movement, by leading a group of eight governments toward the establishment of the Blue Fund for the Congo Basin.

If successful, the Fund will help to mitigate climate change, create new avenues of river-based employment, and promote collective security in an unstable region. The Africa Action Summit in Marrakesh two months ago described the Fund as one of the four key ideas that can transform the continent.

Last March, on World Water Day, Jordan's Prince Hassan bin Talal and I called for the establishment of a Marshall Fund for the world's shared river basins.

The Blue Fund for the Congo Basin is a step in that direction. Now, we need similar funds to emerge to protect all of the world's 263 shared river basins and lakes. It is a huge challenge; but, given the power of water to sow conflict and support peace, we must confront it head-on. (Courtesy Project Syndicate)

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