

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



January 16, 2016

Daesh (ISIL-Khorasan) Named as Terrorist Organization

The nature of terrorism and insurgency is now turning into a complex and complicated phenomenon in Afghanistan. The security situation is deteriorating again and the prospects of peace and tranquility are not very clear. Earlier, it was only Taliban who posed a serious threat to the country but now Afghanistan is to face Daesh as well, which seems to be getting stronger with each passing day. Previously, there were claims that the growth of Daesh in Afghanistan may only be an exaggeration but the situation now clearly depicts that the claims were not far away from reality.

The growth of Daesh would mount double challenge for Afghan government and the security forces. There are already doubts and questions about the performance of Afghan security forces against the growing threats of Taliban in different parts of the country, the rise of Daesh would mean their capabilities would be further tested. Daesh has had a history of ruthless massacre and tyranny in Central Asian countries and it largely differs from Taliban the way its militants operate. There have already been certain incidents wherein they have shown inhumane tyranny against innocent civilians and some security forces.

Another major factor that is supporting the growth of Daesh is that many ex-Taliban militants have joined it and they are now fighting under its flag. Moreover, the week security mechanism to have a check on its growth has further deteriorated the situation. Now, Daesh militants are openly operating in certain parts of the country.

The existence of Daesh in Afghanistan and Pakistan is now widely accepted and recently US Department of State has declared Daesh - ISIL - Khorasan (ISIL-K) as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) under Section 219 of the Immigration and Nationality Act.

According to a statement by US Department of State, ISIL-K (Daesh) announced its formation on January 10, 2015. The group is based in the Afghanistan/Pakistan region and is composed primarily of former members of Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan and the Afghan Taliban. The senior leadership of ISIL-K has pledged allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the leader of Daesh. This pledge was accepted in late January 2015 and since then ISIL-K has carried out suicide bombings, small arms attacks and kidnappings in eastern Afghanistan against civilians and Afghan National Security and Defense Forces, and claimed responsibility for May 2015 attacks on civilians in Karachi, Pakistan.

The U.S Department of State has also said that the imposition of sanctions by the United States against terrorists is an important element of their counter terrorism efforts. Designations of terrorists and terrorist groups expose and isolate individuals and organizations, and result in denial of access to the U.S. financial system. Moreover, designations can assist or complement the law enforcement actions of other U.S. agencies and other governments, said the department.

Some analysts believe that this may be a change of policy by the US. It may no longer concentrate on the Taliban insurgents but would focus more on Daesh. However, it is important to see the issue of terrorism and insecurity in Afghanistan as a whole. Taliban or Daesh, whatever, may be the name, the insurgents and terrorists are there to terrorize the people, spread violence and promulgate instability. Therefore, it is imperative that the Afghan government and international community must never lose focus from this menace in its entirety.

So, the optimism about the result of 'transition' in Afghanistan is still premature; as there are clear indications that security concerns are yet to be dealt with. Above all, the so-called war against terrorism has not reached to a decisive position as the terrorism and terrorist networks are yet to be defeated and there are great chances that they may get stronger if the war is left at this particular position. Further, the ongoing situation of peace and tranquility also suggest that there are many things to be done before the victory is considered decisive.

Keeping in mind the concerns regarding the capabilities of Afghan security forces and the strengthening terrorist networks the feared situation is quite possible. There have been many sacrifices to achieve positive outcomes from the war against terrorism; these sacrifices should not go in vain and Afghanistan should be supported so that it can stand strong with dignity against disorder and terrorism. At the same time, the Afghan government and authorities must also strive to do their best in fulfilling their responsibilities and must endeavor to guide the nation towards lasting peace and tranquility.

In the meanwhile, the role and support of international community in Afghanistan must not be underestimated. As the security challenges are rising with the attacks of Taliban and rise of Daesh militants, the security measures and apparatus in the country will be highly tested; and they can only be successful when the unconditional support continues for them. The only condition that can be set is the restoration of peace and tranquility; before that, closing of support by international community may mean isolation of Afghanistan in the quagmire of instability and terrorism.

The challenges of Afghanistan's Education System

By Abdul Ahad Bahrami

Afghan officials do not miss any opportunity to boast of the progresses achieved after Taliban regime in the education sector. The achievements in this sector have been always used as a measurement for the scale of the development of Afghanistan since 2001. Despite the progresses, Afghanistan is still one of the countries where many school-age children have no access to schooling. According to the UN Children's agency (UNICEF), a large portion of the children living in conflict zones are deprived of schooling, with Afghanistan the fourth worst-affected countries after South Sudan, Niger and Sudan. A staggering 40 percent of school-age children in Afghanistan are out of school, the UNICEF says. "When children are not in school, they are at an increased danger of abuse, exploitation, and recruitment into armed groups," said Jo Bourne, UNICEF's head of education. The report is coming after conclusion of a government investigation over large-scale corruption in development of education sector.

With the foundation of the current political establishment in 2001, education sector was envisaged as one of the key backbones for long-term development of Afghanistan. The Afghan government and the international community hoped that development of the education sector would serve for the long-term transformation of the country and help the Afghans get out of poverty and misery. Proper schooling of the young generation would help a transition from conflict and instability to peace, welfare and stability. As the UNICEF's head of education put, "School equips children with the knowledge and skills they need to rebuild their communities once the conflict is over." However, the protracted conflict in Afghanistan deprives a large portion of the Afghan under-age children to go to school, and fails the government's long-term development objectives.

Though that education is one of the least funded sectors in conflict-zone countries, millions of dollars has been spent on education sector in last fifteen years of international funding of the Afghan government. A considerable portion of the international aid funneled for development of key public and government sectors in Afghanistan was spent for development of the country's education sector. No need to say that Afghanistan's education sector has been drastically changed since the fall of the Taliban with over eight million children enrolled now in schools. The education sector in Taliban-era was almost non-existent. However, there is a wide gap between the quality of the Afghan education system and the global standards. Due to the protracted violence and the lagging development efforts, Afghanistan's education sector is still classified as one of the least development among those of other countries.

In addition to the vast number of children deprived of the required schooling, Afghanistan's education sector and the efforts for development of the sector suffer major shortcomings and challenges. The most serious challenge of the sector is that is still far away from being modernized. There have been inconsistent efforts in syncing the Afghan system with the global experiences of education. For instance, there is no use of technology in administration and teaching matters in the vast majority of the schools across the country. While modernized education systems in the world are highly equipped with up-to-date administrative capabilities, educational materials and other digital

equipment, the schools in Afghanistan use outdated and inefficient methods of administration and teaching. The efforts to computerize/digitalize some administrative affairs of the schools and the education departments across the country have been limited and ineffective. Lack of skilled personnel is even more challenging for the education sector in Afghanistan. Despite sustained efforts to train skilled teachers and other staff for serving in the thousands of schools across the country, there are schools still operating with incapable and incompetent staff and teachers.

There are schools in rural areas of the country where the teachers themselves have no proper schooling, set aside having professional training for teaching a specific school subject. There are school teachers whose level of literacy are below grade twelve of school and have no skills in any specific areas of the school subjects. However, there are other factors too involved in the lack of trained school teachers. Most of trained school staff and teachers receive a low wage and other financial advantages with which they are not happy, while other untrained teachers and staff receive the minimum wage compared to the salary scale of public servants in the country. This is highly discouraging for more trained and capable individuals in serving in the education sector.

Insecurity is another key challenge to education sector. This will inevitably remain in place as long as the conflict continues to exist and the insurgent groups target the education establishments along with other government and public institutions. Due the prolonged conflict in the country, a considerable portion of the Afghan children and youths are deprived from their basic educational rights. The officials at the Ministry of Education believe that insecurity, poverty and traditions in the country have deprived three out of 11 million children from getting education in the country. According to Mujib Mehrdad, the spokesman of the Ministry of Education, "in some parts of the country, we have witnessed that schools are open but children are not going to school - due to different reasons". As the UNICEF's figures show, many of the 40 percent out-of-schools children continue to be deprived of having access to education to the direct impacts of wars and violence or the consequences of the conflict such as displacements, poverty and threats of conservative groups. Poverty is also one of the key factors in failing families to send their children to schools, while the conservative culture and traditionalism to all parts of the country to some extent is also a factor behind the high rate of children being out of school.

In the meantime, like many other sectors and public institutions, the education sector is also undermined by corruption. The UNICEF report is coming shortly after conclusion of an official probe over extensive misuse of the international funding in Afghanistan's development of education sector. The probe conducted by the Afghan government found many ghost schools receiving funds while there is no staff or students, or the number of staff and students are fabricated. The issue highly brings the last decade achievements of Afghanistan's education sector under question. The existing challenges to the education sector underscore the need for the national unity government to take actions in addressing the challenges in the sector.

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The Right Incentives for a Low-Carbon Future

By Thomas Fricke

The climate agreement that world leaders reached in Paris last month has been widely celebrated for establishing the ambitious target of limiting the increase in global temperature to well below 2° Celsius above pre-industrial levels. But the agreement is just one step, albeit an important one. Policymakers now must figure out how to achieve this goal - no easy feat, especially given that, contrary to the conventional wisdom, steadily rising costs for conventional energy cannot be counted on to propel the necessary shift toward a low-carbon future.

At first glance, the logic of negative economic incentives seems sound. If, say, driving a gas-guzzling car becomes more expensive, people will presumably be less likely to do it. But the impact of changing fuel prices is partial and delayed. While drivers may purchase a more fuel-efficient car in the long run, they are more likely, in the shorter run, to reduce other kinds of consumption to offset the rise in cost. When it comes to resolving a problem as urgent as climate change, Keynes' famous dictum - "In the long run, we are all dead" - clearly applies.

Moreover, even if consumers did respond efficiently, fossil-fuel prices are dictated largely by heavily financialized markets, which tend to be extremely volatile.

The sharp decline in oil prices over the last 18 months is a case in point. Not only have oil prices themselves failed to spur a reduction in consumption; they have undermined incentives to develop alternative energy sources. Investing in, say, solar power may have seemed worthwhile when oil cost \$100 per barrel, but it looked a lot less appealing when the price dropped below \$50. Conceivably, policymakers could raise taxes to offset such declines. But such hikes sometimes (like now) would have to be huge, and adopting erratic policies that mirror the volatility of the market is never a good idea.

Carbon pricing could experience a similar fate. In the European Union, carbon prices have been low for several years, and for now market participants seem to be following the herd in believing that they will remain so.

But there is no guarantee that free emissions trading will not function like other financial markets, producing sharp fluctuations in CO2 prices. Should expectations suddenly change, the herd might turn and run in the opposite direction, causing CO2 prices to soar.

Yet another problem with the price-based approach to mitigating climate change is that it fails to account for markets' potential to create perverse incentives. When the cost of conventional energy rises, new suppliers see an opportunity; thus, before June 2014, when oil prices were high, investors poured resources into developing shale oil and gas in the United States. The additional supply, however, ultimately causes prices to fall, reducing the incentive to invest in alternative energy sources or energy efficiency. This is a normal market reaction, but it does not advance the fight against climate change, which would require steadily rising costs. The final reason why negative incentives alone are inadequate to mitigate climate change may be the most irrational: after some years of rising taxes, the public is staunchly opposed to any policy that may increase energy prices, regardless of whether current prices are high or low. People are so convinced that energy costs are "exploding," despite the recent oil-price collapse, that any new project implying even slightly higher prices - even if overall energy prices are still lower than they were five years ago - is now exceedingly difficult to initiate.

The implication is clear: When policymakers get to work designing strategies for executing the Paris agreement, they should not rely heavily on rising energy costs to advance their objectives. A strategy that assumes that the market will punish those who do not invest in a low-carbon future is not realistic.

A better approach is possible: Directly reward those who do invest in a low-carbon future, whether by enhancing energy efficiency or developing clean energy sources. For example, governments could implement accelerated depreciation schemes for investment in low-carbon businesses; offer subsidies for investment in energy-efficient buildings; and create policies that favor industrial innovation aimed at reducing emissions and boosting competitiveness.

All of this would make fossil fuels less attractive to both investors and consumers.

While an approach based on such positive incentives would be costlier than tax hikes in the short run, the long-term benefits can hardly be overstated. At a time of strong resistance to higher energy costs, this may well be among the most effective - not to mention politically savvy - mechanisms for advancing the goals set out in Paris. (Courtesy Project Syndicate)

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