

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



January 24, 2015

## Death of Saudi King Abdullah

Saudi state television revealed early Friday morning that Saudi King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz had passed away. He was 90 years old and was hospitalized for the treatment of pneumonia; however, he could not survive. King Abdullah was officially announced as King of Saudi Arabia in 2006, nonetheless, prior to that he had led the country for about a decade as de facto regent when King Fahd underwent an incapacitating stroke.

His long rule in the country had many aspects to it and was, no doubt, positive for the people of the country but, at the same time, controversial to certain extent. He remained as staunch ally of US and also supported certain reforms, but was not able to introduce bold changes as Saudi society has remained parochial to a large extent and it is really difficult to introduce modern changes, for example, the changes regarding the rights and status of women within the country.

Women in Saudi Arabia, even today, are not permitted to drive and require having the consent of a male in order to work, travel outside the country and even to have a bank account or go through a surgery.

Though US has been an ally to Saudi Arabia but its role and reaction to the status and rights of women in Saudi Arabia has been controversial, as well. It has never emphasized, in a true sense, that there should be changes as per the modern concept of rights and status of women within a state.

King Abdullah, in continuation of its alliance with US supported western war against Al-Qaeda and at the same time kept checks on Iran. He started battling Al-Qaeda a decade earlier when Al-Qaeda militants launched a string of assaults in the kingdom, which was to topple the monarchy. Saudi Arabia, with support of US was able to respond with enormous onslaught and was able to detain suspected militants and sentenced others to death. This crackdown was important in a sense that it broke the stronghold of Al-Qaeda to a great extent and foiled their conspiracy for expansion.

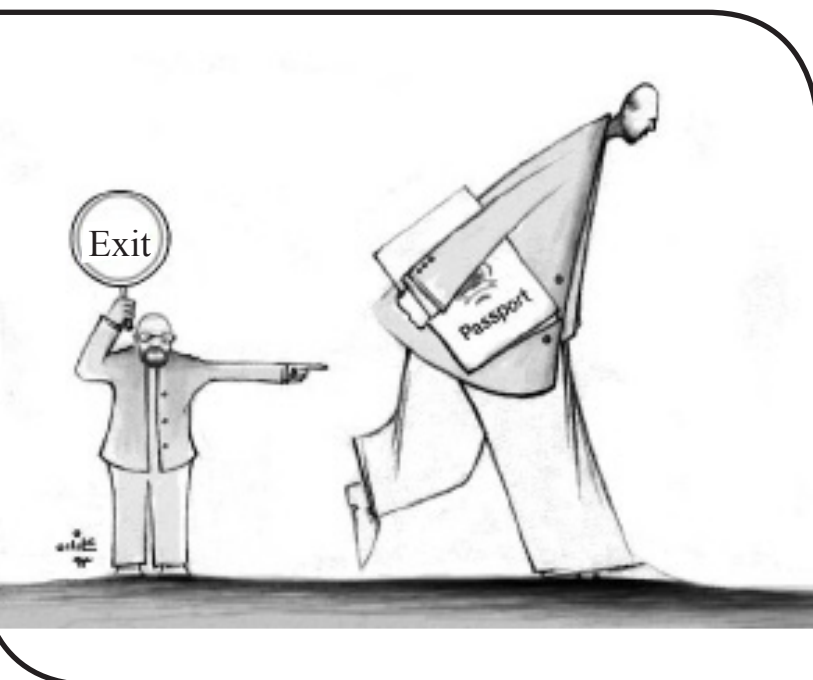
US president Barack Obama, appreciating the close ties with the King, saluted the late king's commitment to close US - Saudi ties and offered condolences. "As a leader, he was always candid and had the courage of his convictions... One of those convictions was his steadfast and passionate belief in the importance of the US-Saudi relationship as a force for stability and security in the Middle East and beyond... The closeness and strength of the partnership between our two countries is part of King Abdullah's legacy," Barack Obama said in a statement.

Nonetheless, analysts believe that the role of King Abdullah was not very active in tackling with the growth of ISIS in the region. ISIS could expand in Iraq and Syria like a wild fire and before the countries in the region and international community could think of any measures to control them, they had already spread their terror throughout the world. Some analysts even believe that the Jihadist movements that were supported by Saudi Arabia gave rise to ISIS but that remains debatable. Nonetheless, US had planned to further their ties with Saudi Arabia so as to fight ISIS in the region. It is not, at the moment, clear how those ties would proceed with the next Saudi King - King Salman. However, there are no serious concerns regarding this issue as King Salman also appears to be having similar approach as King Abdullah.

Islamic militants and their supporters, on the other hand, celebrated the death of Saudi King Abdullah on social media, wherein many of them described him as a "servant" of the Americans who conspired with the West to kill Muslims. This shows that King Abdullah did actually have intentions to support US in their fight against ISIS, therefore, he was seen as enemy by them. However, it can never be neglected that he could have played a very important role in war against ISIS if he would live to be a part of it.

The new Saudi King now has to shoulder this important responsibility. How the growth of ISIS can be controlled largely depends on the stand of King Salman. Therefore, it can be said without any doubt that it is one of the main challenges for him as the new Saudi King. On the other hand, the new King will also face some other major challenges as well, among which the low oil prices is the most important one. Saudi Arabia is the largest oil exporting country and its GDP largely depends on the prices of oil. It basically leads the business but it is important to curb the situation so as to control the oil prices and make maximum profit for the country.

At the same time, the other challenges for the new King include the stand of Saudi Arabia regarding citizens' rights and privileges. Currently, Saudi citizens are unable to vote except in municipal elections and beheading by sword remains a standard feature of the judicial system. Moreover, the political parties are banned and as mentioned above there are serious concerns regarding the rights of the women. How the new King will face these challenges remains a question that can only be answered in the times to come.



## Emergence of ISIS in Afghanistan is a Fear Propaganda!

By Muhammad Rasool Shah

The increasing news of the emergence of ISIS in Afghanistan is adding to the concern of many. In some of the provinces, like Helmand, Badakhshan, Kapisa and some others, some criminal acts have been done on the name of ISIS. A number of months before, the literature was distributed in Afghan refugee camps in Pakistan and in areas bordering Pakistan and Afghanistan in which people were invited to join ISIS and take practical part in Jihad. After that, there has been silence in this regard.

In the same way, lot many things can be found on internet and social networking sites. In Facebook and Youtube, so many videos and pictures can be found where people are found to be talking in favor and against ISIS. It simply means that there are efforts being made to establish grounds for the existence of this group on Afghan soil as well. But before doing so, it can be called the strategy of the group to work on the minds of people so that people should be willing to accept it when it emerges in reality. The case of ISIS is not like that of Taliban. Though Taliban are considered against the state and masses but this perception mostly stays valid in the major cities of the country but in remote areas and villages, they still enjoy the support of a mass population. It is also on record that almost all the suicide and other terror attacks of Taliban were carried out in cities and in a sense, Taliban have not inflicted any kind of harm to people living in villages or remote areas. In the same way, the public awareness due to their increased access to internet and media is not available to the people living in villages due to which the level of hate and opposition against Taliban found in cities, cannot be expected in remote areas. The next important factor is the religious root of Taliban according to which they are considered to be pious people who are working for the promotion of religion and protect the faith of the people of country from any kind of foreign invasions and occupations. In such circumstances, Taliban still have a good hold in remote areas and as claimed by international forces, they are getting majority of their financial and moral support from the rural areas of the country.

However, in fact, there has not been found any clear evidence of the emergence of ISIS in Afghanistan. Till now, it is not confirmed as if the terror acts carried by certain groups actually had any link with ISIS or they were trying to draw increased media attention by using the name of ISIS. In the same way, it might be their strategy to terrorize people in the area and increasing their influence on other groups by claiming their association with a group that is more dangerous and organized comparing to other terror organizations functioning in the country. It is similar to many situations when criminal groups or even big business groups use the name of Taliban for their own commercial benefits. In the same way, a number of criminal groups carry out their activities in the name of Taliban as this is the safest way to avoid legal or judicial complications and investigations.

It is unanimously accepted that ISIS is one of the worst forms of radicalism and extremism and its only purpose of existence appears to be destruction. It is the reason why, it has not gained the acceptance among the majority of public and they don't accept them as representative of the Muslims which they keep claiming. The videos and photos being circulated in the social networking sites like Facebook, Youtube and others have given birth to a kind of perception where

people find this extremist group not parallel with the teachings and true identity of Islam. The reports that the group was founded by a number of international players of the world to meet their objectives and it is still funded by some international powers have made people reserved and concerned about this militant group. Its acts of terrorism and mass genocide and mass destruction of the shrines and other holy sites of Islamic saints and elders have added to the public anger against them.

However, the group acquired for itself the name of 'Islamic State' and then 'Islamic Caliphate' to win the support of the large number of Muslims of the region. This tactic is not new that many groups use the name of Islam in order to bring about their own dangerous ambitions. In the presence of such facts, it is of no surprise that the intellectual class and the majority of the educated members of almost every society are against this group.

This is the case in the urban areas and cities of our country but it is not necessary to be the case with the villagers and dwellers of far-flung remote areas who have very less access to the actual sources of news and information. At the same time, they are under the strong influence of the local religious scholars who become much emotional with such bombastic claims as made by ISIS. There are reports that majority of the religious scholars of the remote areas are very much impressed from the motto of ISIS and they are much delighted that long-awaited and ideal caliphate of Islam has been established in Iraq and Syria and they feel their religious duty to put their share in their religiously important work. It is the reason why, they not only rear a soft corner for the group but they are also increasing the public acceptance of the group.

In the light of above facts, any kind of activity of ISIS to increase its influence in the region would be successful in the remote and far flung areas of the country. ISIS would never dare to initiate any such campaign in cities where civil society and media is much aware and educated people are also able to distinguish between the good and the bad. Similarly, the security forces are also alert and active enough to get into action against any such propaganda group. However, in the villages and remote areas, the situation is absolutely different. There, public awareness is very low and people blindly believe in and follow the sayings of religious scholars who can easily become the victims of the shining image of ISIS. Similarly, the security forces are not so strong in these areas that they should be able to take any action against any local or foreign group that should be busy in propagation of ISIS. If this propagation is left unnoticed, it would provide our foreign enemies with a golden opportunity to hire more and more people in the name of Islamic caliphate to destabilize the country and disrupt the general order and security in the country. Most definitely, when these motivated youngsters, being under the strong spell of the magic of ISIS, will not be able to reach Iraq and Syria to join their fellows, would definitely open a line of terror acts against our security forces. In this way, our enemies would be able to meet their objective of keeping the country backward. However, it remains a fact that in absence of financial support, strategic link with its foreign masters and lack of support by people would not make happen the emergence of ISIS on Afghan soil. It is a relieving factor that this menace is only a part of international propaganda and we need not to be much afraid of this.

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## Afghanistan-Turkmenistan Relationship Revitalized

By Asmatyari

President Ashraf Ghani has made visits to countries owing potentials to help out Afghanistan on security and economic fronts. He paid visit to Pakistan to revitalize its resolve undoing the battered relation and work together fighting the menace of terrorism. His visit to Pakistan has led to fruition to certain extent, seeing a joint venture launched against terrorism on the troubled Af-Pak border. Subsequently, he paid a visit to United Arab Emirates, in a bid to earn the confidence of potential investors that would create employment opportunities. Formerly, Mr. President paid a two-day visit to Turkmenistan which is one of the world's fastest-growing economies. President, Ashraf Ghani and his Turkmen counterpart have stressed the need for cementing economic relations, trade and cultural links between Kabul and Ashgabat. According to concerned official the two premiers hoped that bilateral trade volume between the two neighbors, which stood at \$1 billion in 2014, would double this year. The Turkmen president, Berdymukhamedov, renewed his resolve to extend support to peace and stability in Afghanistan and promised continued support for Afghan-led reconciliation.

Afghanistan at present is facing extreme power shortages. It relies on imports from its neighbors to meet its needs. The Turkmen premier afforded willingness to export 500 megawatts of power to Afghanistan. It's indeed a great step ahead, to cope with increasing power demand. In the meanwhile, the Turkmen head of the state, also hinted at plans to construct maternity home in Torghondi district, an orphanage in Jawzjan and two mosques in Aqina and Andkhai. Turkmenistan is largely a country with intensive agriculture irrigated areas, and huge gas and oil resources. In terms of natural gas reserves, it is ranked 4th in the world. Regarding agriculture, the two largest crops are cotton, most of which is produced for export, and wheat, which is domestically consumed. A great deal of potential has always existed in Afghanistan-Turkmenistan relations. Being the fourth largest gas reserves; it has been actively on the lookout to build transportation routes to large markets and the route through Afghanistan has been the most feasible and economical. The rise of India as an economic giant and its increasing energy needs make Turkmenistan and Central Asia energy markets of choice for that country and also China.

Gas, oil and electricity are principal imports from Turkmenistan. The Turkmen president said his country wanted to increase energy exports to Afghanistan and was currently working on centre for exporting gas to Afghanistan. Turkmenistan, especially under the new President, is trying to play a small, but positive role in Afghanistan's development and reconstruction. Ashgabat has delivered humanitarian aid to Afghanistan and forgiven much of Kabul's debt for Turkmen electrical power. Turkmenistan continues to supply Afghani-

stan with energy at a deep discount and Ashgabat has reconstructed a portion of the railway that will connect the two countries. Turkmenistan is rich in natural gas, and currently sells most of its gas to Russia and Ukraine. The Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) gas pipeline project also came up for discussion at the meeting. Turkmenistan is home to some of the largest undeveloped oil and natural gas fields in the world. Active pipelines exist going west across the Caspian Sea, north through Russia and South across Iran, but what Ashgabat has often wanted is access to India and the markets of Asia, which desperately need Central Asia's energy supplies to sustain their rapid economic growth. The proposed Trans-Afghan natural gas pipeline, or the TAPI pipeline, named for the four countries that it would pass through (Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India) would bring natural gas from the Dauletabad gas field in central Turkmenistan along a highway to Herat in eastern Afghanistan and further to Helmand and Kandahar in southern Afghanistan. From there, it would go on to Quetta and Multan in Pakistan, terminating in Fazilka in northern India. The pipeline would be 1,680 km long (of which 735 km are in Afghanistan), and is estimated to bring an annual revenue of over \$200 million to Afghanistan, along with the right for the country to use 500 billion cubic meters of natural gas for its own consumption. It is expected the project will bring about 12,000 new jobs to Afghans.

The central Asians and South Asians countries bridged via roads and rails facilitate the fastest business between these countries; it in fact opens the new avenues to financial development. President Ghani stressed a railway line between Afghanistan and Central Asian countries including China, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran and Turkmenistan. He believed such a track would pave the ground for spurring regional trade. Despite a good signs of political and financial progress, the illicit opium trade might affect the brotherly relation of the two countries. Afghanistan is responsible for more than 90 percent of the world's illicit opium production, and 15 percent of the opiates produced in Afghanistan are smuggled through Central Asia on their way to Russia, Eastern Europe, and China. Furthermore, 20 percent of Afghan heroin, which accounts for more than 90 percent of world supply, is trafficked through Central Asia. However, because of the closed nature of Turkmenistan's society, it is not known how widespread drug abuse and drug trafficking is there. The exercise of neutral politics should be the main feature of Afghanistan foreign policy. The incumbent government must prioritize, establishing and continuing a balance relationship with the countries both regional and extra-regional, given it encompasses more gains than harms.

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