

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



January 26, 2016

## Technology Should Serve People

The developments and success in science and technology have changed the lives of human beings to a great extent. Now, human beings can take advantages of these development in both individual and collective lives and thus can solve their various problems. There are different technological inventions that serve humanity in various ways and will keep on doing so in the times to come. The developed nations of the world that have pursued science and technology are the ones that are basically controlling the world. They have not only benefited their own people from the blessings of science and technology but have also made others take advantages of them.

It is a pity if a society tends to defy modern technology and tries to take human civilization back to stone age. In today's globalized world of ours, neglecting technology means arranging for a suicide. There is no field of life now, where technology has not penetrated. It is in foods, in making cloths, building shelters, providing medical facilities and medicines, updating education, linking communication channels, constructing transportations system and many others.

Both the private sector and the governments of the world, therefore, make efforts that they take full advantages of technology in order to enhance their capabilities in providing different sorts of services to the people. That's why it is no more a dream to travel distances of thousands of kilometers in just few hours; have communication with someone sitting in the other corner of the world with the help of technology; perform complicated surgeries with the help of modern robots with 100% precision; visit outer space and moon and even other planets without much difficulty; provide online services to the people so that they can have many of their problems solved without moving from their sofas; and enabling the people to search every information and knowledge that they desire only by few clicks of buttons.

People do not have to wait in queues for submitting their bills anymore as they can do the same online. Online information and booking for travel and transportation has solved a great problem of the people. They can know about the timings and schedule days before the travel and can even make bookings. Even for visa and passport they do not have to panic as they can access the websites of the relevant ministries and can solve their problems. Online banking has ensured that they get their problems of daily transactions solved with ease and convenience.

Apart from that different technological improvements by governments have solved most of the daily problems of the people. From registration of the birth of their children to the booking of grave for grandparents, people take advantages of technological improvements instead of visiting different ministries physically.

However, these blessings are only for the countries that have respect for science and technology and that have years of development in the same field. While, the underdeveloped and developing countries do not have the luxury of taking advantages of them. As, they have various economic and social problems, therefore, they have not been able to work on developing their different infra-structure on technological foundations; therefore, they fail to provide modern and easy services to their people. Afghanistan is also one of the countries where technological infra-structure has not been laid properly because of decades of war and instability. Currently, there have been some private institutions that have been working on modern telecommunication and information technology and there have been some support from international community as well to bring technology to the Afghan society but there are many issues still unresolved.

Government institutions have not been able to focus on this sector and they would require some time, marked with peace and tranquility, before they are able to make considerable technological developments. The Ministry of Telecommunications and Information Technology has, however, taken some leaps and the Ministry seems to have some ambitious motives. Few days earlier the Minister Abdul Raziq Wahidi said that the country's e-government system would be 70 percent implemented in the next two years. He also told that the e-government system was being introduced for the first ever time in the country and it would accelerate services delivery to people. In this regard, his ministry has signed Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) with the ministries of foreign affairs, interior, finance, information and culture, education, higher education, commerce and industries, public health, agriculture and Independent Administrative Reform and Civil Service Commission (IARCSC) and under the MoU the ministry would introduce advisors to the ministries for adoption of E-governance system. And the ministry has created 31 mobile applications for the e-government system to be used in IT sections of the ministries. This would diminish administrative corruption, bureaucracy and waste of time to a great extent.

This step is really a giant for a country that is still facing so many security, economic and social problems. However, the important factor is that it should be pursued with true spirit and the other government institutions should also make efforts to adopt technological developments so that they are able to serve the people of Afghanistan in true sense.

# Isn't ISIL a Serious Threat?

By Hujjatullah Zia

According to reports, US military commanders have been given the authority to target members of self-styled Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) in Afghanistan, the first such order beyond Iraq and Syria, where the militants control parts of both countries. It comes as Retired Army Gen. David Petraeus urged US to step up their game and stop building troops and instead expand the existing controlled air strikes in Afghanistan, aiding the Afghan soldiers in targeting the insurgent Taliban and the ISIL fighters with its increasing threat in the region. "We should unleash our airpower in support of our Afghan partners in the same way that we support our Iraqi and Syrian partners against extremists," he is quoted as saying. The US State Department has recently designated IS's offshoot in Afghanistan, known as Islamic State-Khorasan, which US officials refer to as "ISIL-K", as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO). Former members of Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and Afghan Taliban have formed this group - which is based in Afghan-Pak porous border.

It is believed that Daesh, an acronym for ISIL, has encountered a strong backlash from the Afghan government and President Muhammad Ashraf Ghani also ordered the Ministry of Defense (MoD) few days back to keep bombing the Daesh fighters. During a recent meeting with the US Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter, Ghani said the counter-terrorism operations to suppress the Daesh loyalists are successfully and effectively being conducted in Nangarhar province.

The statements regarding Daesh in Afghanistan by political figures make one fluctuate between hope and fear. As a result, the establishment of "ISIL-K" and allegiance of Taliban members to Daesh group and their involvement in political crisis are matter of great concerns for the public. Moreover, it was said earlier that Daesh seeks to make links with the central leadership of Iraq and Syria.

On the other hand, a US official has said that Daesh does not have the power to organize operations in multiple areas in Afghanistan. "We currently characterize them as operationally emergent ... We're not seeing Daesh elements in Iraq or Syria orchestrating events here in Afghanistan," Brig. Gen. Wilson Shoffner, a spokesman for US forces in Afghanistan, is quoted as saying.

He further said that Daesh seeks to establish a base in Nangarhar province on the southern border with Pakistan but the Afghan forces carried out successful operation against the militant group in the southern city of Jalalabad, Nangarhar. He said, "They've largely been pushed back to the southern parts of Nangarhar province.

That area is very, very rugged, it's very mountainous, it's on the border with Pakistan, and that's where most of the Daesh in

Nangarhar currently is." Shoffner also believed that Daesh lacks financial support in the country. Based on his statements, Daesh is a newly emergent group that will sustain defeat by Afghan soldiers easily and its bark is louder than its bite. Contrarily, Pakistani officials have claimed that the recent terrorist attack on Bacha Khan University - which killed at least 21 people - was organized from Afghan soil by members of Tahreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). Since US found out that "ISIL-K" is formed by members of TTP and Afghan Taliban, therefore it must be concluded that members of "ISIL-K" carried out the attack on the University.

However, the statements by US and Pakistani officials contradict each other as US says that ISIL is unable to orchestrate attack from Afghanistan but Pakistani officials claim that TTP, who is now members of ISIL group, has organized the attack from Afghanistan. If the words of Pakistani officials come true regarding the issue, Daesh poses a great threat to the entire region and perhaps decides to create tension between Afghanistan and Pakistan.

The fact is that the issue of Daesh turned highly complicated and many contradictory statements are expressed over it. It is beyond doubt that a number of Taliban members, from splinter group, pledged allegiance to Daesh and tend to be more violent - the same as forming the ISIL-Khorasan in Afghan-Pak porous border. In other words, the harsh ideology of Daesh was embraced by some Taliban members and they will extend their realm of influence.

The destructive role of Daesh in Afghanistan must not be underestimated - as it has already maneuvered its power across the country through beheading the civilians. It should be noted that rumor has said earlier that the Daesh militant group will usher in heavy attacks in coming spring the same as the Taliban's spring offensive, which was launched last spring and increased the death toll in the country.

The emergence of Daesh group has left the nation at the mercy of greater threat and made the political structure more fragile. So, the political harm that Daesh inflicts upon the country must not be undervalued.

Therefore, this militant group must be fought with all forces so as not to prolong the militancy the same as the Taliban insurgents.

The counter-insurgency being carried out by Afghan soldiers and US decision to target members of Daesh fighters will mitigate the militancy in Afghanistan and strong military operation is the only effective strategy to be adopted in this regard. Prayerfully, the nation will be able to exercise its rights soon in a country void of violence and terror and there will be no room for the terrorist networks in Afghanistan.

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## Taliban's Peace Conditions

By Abdul Ahad Bahrami

With the efforts going on for resuming talks with the Taliban, the group has announced new conditions for entering in peace talks with the Afghan government. A statement issued by the Taliban said that the group's representatives participating in a peace conference in Qatar have explained the conditions to the participants. The Qatar peace conference, organized by the peace advocacy group Pugwash, was attended by Taliban's Qatar office representatives and politicians and foreign government ministers of Afghanistan. Recognition of Taliban's political office in Qatar, exclusion of Taliban leaders from the UN blacklist, release of Taliban prisoners and cessation of "poisoning propaganda" against the Taliban are among the conditions set by the group for resumption of peace negotiations.

The conditions announced by the Taliban are coming shortly after the Quadrilateral Coordination Group - consisted of Afghanistan, US, Pakistan and China - called on the group to enter peace talks with the Afghan government. In reaction to the Taliban statement, the Afghan government has said that implementation of demands such as excluding Taliban names from the UN blacklist is not in authority of "individuals or a group", and will require some specific criteria. A presidential spokesman, whoever, has once again reiterated on the government's previously-stated demand for the militants denouncing violence and ceasing war to qualify for peace talks. In spite of saying that the Afghans would not accept talks with the militant groups who make preconditions, the presidential statement falls short of specifically ruling out considering the Taliban's conditions set for coming to table of peace negotiations.

A considerable change of tone can be noticed in the Taliban's peace conditions stated in the Qatar peace conference. Previously, the Taliban insisted on immediate withdrawals of foreign troops as a precondition for coming to peace talks with the Afghan government. Also, its stated goal from a peace deal was to establish a Sharia system in Afghanistan. This is while the Afghan government has been ruling out making any compromises over the country's constitution as well as presence of foreign troops in the country for an unforeseeable period of time. This time, there is no such apparent uncompromising stance from the Taliban for the peace efforts. This could be an important sign that the Taliban might be preparing for not only coming to peace talks but also for making compromises in a peace process.

In case of being prepared to come to the table of negotiations, it is important for the Taliban to remain realistic and not set preconditions to which they will not be able to stick once a real peace process starts. The Taliban leaders seem to be aware of such an imperative for the group. The Taliban know well that they need to be able to impose their peace-related decisions on the vast spectrum of the group's field commanders and fighters. Making uncompromising peace conditions by Taliban leaders would raise expectations among the Taliban ranks, making it hard for potential compromises in the future. This is particularly im-

portant given the Taliban's internal problems. Despite overseeing most of the Taliban fighters, the main Taliban faction led by Mullah Mansoor already suffers from the recent split in the once unified Taliban movement. Many of Taliban members remain deeply disillusioned with the group while many others part ways with the group by joining rival groups such as the Islamic State.

In previous years, the Taliban considered the Afghan government as incompetent for peace talks as the US led the international coalition fighting the Taliban insurgency. The group insisted for direct peace negotiations with the United States. However, now as the US has ended its combat mission in Afghanistan, the Taliban is finding it inevitable to talk with the government once it considered as dependent to the US. Acknowledging this, the Taliban has suggested that Afghans will have the capacity and willingness to resolve the issues that relate to Afghans. This seems to be an unprecedented acknowledgement by the Taliban of the Afghan government being the main side of the war and peace issues. The Taliban have asked for direct talks between the group and the US over issues related to foreign troops particularly US presence in Afghanistan. The Taliban will try to include immediate and complete withdrawal of foreign troops in a possible peace deal. However, they have clearly avoided making it a precondition for the whole peace process, which again indicates their caution as not setting uncompromising preconditions.

The peace conditions stated by the Taliban really matter for the possible future peace talks. Everything included in the 'demand package' seem to be decided thoroughly and carefully. The Taliban leadership had sufficient time to make the decisions for setting peace conditions. The previous talks, which stalled after announcement of the group's founder Mullah Omar, provided insight and time for the Taliban to ponder over peace talks with the Afghan government and a possible peace deal ending the conflict. On the other hand, the current preparations for peace talks are led by the four-way initiative which includes Pakistan. And it would be difficult for the Taliban to oppose the role Pakistan plays in the process. Therefore, Taliban have carefully chosen the issues as their conditions for coming to the table of negotiations. They are aware of the limitations existing for them which can create troubles for the group in the future.

Overall, the Taliban have made relatively compromising demands compared to the group's previous peace preconditions. For the Afghan government struggling to bring Taliban to the table of negotiations, these are cheaper demands than the previous ones.

The Afghan government will find itself inevitable of granting political and financial concessions to the Taliban once the negotiations start. At current stage, the conditions set by Taliban may seem difficult for the Afghan government to accept, but it may come to the point to consider even more greater concessions than what are demanded for resumption of the negotiations.

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