

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

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Main Causes of Ethnic Conflict in Afghanistan and Solutions

Afghanistan is witnessing growing ethnic tensions these days. Ethnic tensions on zone based election in Ghazni, decided as an ad hoc approach by the Afghanistan Independent Electoral Commission, and firing on the civilians in Faryan province who demanded the release of police chief of Qaisar district, Nizamuddin Qaisari are the most outstanding ethnic tensions testing the government's conflict management nowadays.

There are many causes for ethnic conflicts in Afghanistan. However, the main causes are listed as below:

Tribalism

Tribalism is assumed as one of the causes of ethnic conflict in Afghanistan. According to social scholars, loyalty to ethnic groups has impeded true nationalism and unity in Afghanistan.

From the beginning of Modern Afghanistan till today, ethnic leaders have used ethnic biases to win power. And such mechanism of gaining power just has divided the citizens of the country along the ethnic lines. If we trace back the root of the conflicts we would reach to ethnic sentiments that have been fueled by selfish political motives.

Most of the conflicts that take place in the country begin from this ancient ethnic sentiments fueled by selfish political motives. Thus, tribalism in the course of history has divided the people and has fostered favoritism in Afghanistan.

Favoritism

Preferential treatment is another main cause of the conflict. It entails the action of those in power favoring their relatives and friends especially in appointing them to good positions in the public offices. Favoritism is a big source of conflict in Afghanistan, as some people in authority fall short to adhere to the rules strictly when it relates to their relatives and friends.

These authorities prefer their relatives and friends even when they are not qualified for government appointments, positions or carrying out contracts. The corrupt and inept leaders in Afghanistan are the outcomes of Favoritism.

Corruption and Inept Leadership

Corruption and unqualified leaders have intensified ethnic conflict in Afghanistan. Gross mismanagement of national and the international resources by unqualified leaders have impoverished and denied opportunities to majority of Afghans which has led to agitations by citizens.

With a simple glance at the list of the government employees one can conclude that clear inequality exists in the way Afghanistan shares its public positions and allocation of infrastructure projects among the provinces as well.

Resource Control

This is one of the other causes of ethnic conflict in Afghanistan. It is one of the main issues in any country and if resources are not distributed equally among the citizens it can cause conflicts. Marginalization of certain ethnic groups from accessing the resources not only fuels the tensions but keeps back the country from balanced development as well. Therefore, It prevents the country to use the full human and natural resources it has to ensure sustainable development.

Marginalization of Some Ethnic Groups in the Country

It is clear that some ethnic groups have been marginalized and this policy not only has severely undermined the social cohesion in the country but has motivated the ethnic conflicts too. Further, marginalization was one of the main causes of civil wars in Afghanistan during the 90s too.

Lack of vision

The above mentioned causes has impeded the governments to identify a vision to mobilize all the ethnic groups to fell committed to it and find their interests ensured by such a vision. As a result, there is no ideal to inspire patriotism among citizens. In Afghanistan we need an ideal like the American dream to make the citizens to fight to uphold it.

In this article some causes of ethnic conflict were discussed. However, what counts is to provide some applicable solutions to prevent serious conflicts in the future that have the power to push the country to the civil war, if not addressed adequately by the government.

The main solutions to prevent future occurrence include ensuring balanced development of all parts of Afghanistan, and practice of justice and equity in public positions.

Indeed, the use of ethnic sentiments to cause division among the nation will lose its appeal when the government treats all its citizens equally. Conflicts have never done any good to us so let us prevent them and fight for peace and progress in our country.

Talking about Sexual Attitudes and Behaviors; A Cultural and Social Taboo in Afghanistan (Part 2)

By Hamid Bamik

Given the above reasons, it is argued that one of the key factors of violence against women increase in Afghanistan is shortage of gender/sex education at Afghanistan's schools. For example, several studies echo that presenting guidance by the teachers about sexual attitudes and behaviors of students at schools will reduce the occurrence of sexual assaults and gender violence in the society. Because girls and boys as teenagers will learn about their sexual attitudes at schools. In other words, sex education will help students how to tackle their sexual problems appropriately, how to respect their opposite sex's sexual characteristics and not to look at their opposite sex as a physical and biological object but as a human being.

Since there is not any formal education about sexual attitudes and behaviors at schools in Afghanistan, most of the Afghan teenagers and youths obtain information about sexual issues secretly via internet or friends. The Afghan Institute for Strategic Studies survey projects that this kind of approach toward knowing about sexual matters leads to watching porn movies that eventually result into porn addiction. Moreover, researchers believe that the lack of education at schools and the lack of proper education of parents regarding sexual attitudes and behaviors of youths may create serious cultural and social problems for the health of the entire society. They argue that embedding the topic of sex education in school curriculum can acquaint the children from the stage of childhood to sexual issues. When they grow up, they don't feel shy of talking about their sexual problems and needs in families, among their friends, or referring to a doctor because of their sexual problems. Furthermore, addressing sex education in an integrated education system may provide information for children and adolescents that won't provoke them toward inappropriate solving their sexual needs. Additionally, providing sex education through schools, can help students not to look for other misleading channels for obtaining information about their sexual attitudes and behaviors.

Afghan Society and the Taboo of Sex Conversation

Traditional values that may restrict access to knowledge about sexual attitudes and behaviors might be the main barriers on debating regarding sexual issues among the families and youths in traditional societies. In Afghanistan, there are many reasons that why parents don't educate their children about sexual issues. First, only 31.741 percent of Afghan adults aged 15 and above are literate that is why most of the parents are not aware of sexual issues due to not being able to read regard sexual topics. Second, parents feel shameful and uncomfortable of conversing about sexual issues with their progenies thus they have a negative attitude to sexual attitudes and behaviors. Third, most of the parents in Afghanistan feel that if they talk about sexual issues with their children, the respect between them and their children is broken, thus, they neither want nor can to talk about sexual matters with their progenies.

When there is no formal sex education at school, and parents are not interested in talking about sexual issues with progenies either, there is a risk that children and adolescents may become familiar inappropriately with sexual issues out of the home. Studies hold that educating teens and adolescents about sexual issues by parents and schools is a safe and healthy way. While gaining information about sexual needs and issues

via friends and Internet may provoke teens and adolescents to commit sexual violence, rape, teasing their opposite sex in the society, and other abnormal deeds.

Lack of information about sexual attitudes and behaviors often lead to misconceptions about sexual issues. This ignorance usually manifests itself in the form of shameful, impolite, and culturally abnormal conversation among the families in Afghanistan. Dr. Haidari Nasab, a consultant and member of the family and sexual health group, believes that the question of how to answer children's questions about sexual issues is a cultural issue. It depends on the culture of each community and the family how to respond and to get acquainted with sexual issues. He argues that the crucial point is that parents and teachers step by step should acquaint teens and adolescents with sexual attitudes and behaviors. Sexual information provided to a 3-year-old child is very different from that of a 13-year-old girl. On the other hand, the lack of awareness and refusal to answer of puberty and sexual questions can provoke the curiosity of the newly-raised teenager, therefore, the family is the most important social elements that should give enough information and guidance to their teens in this respect.

Recommendations for Policy Implications

First, as schools are the main hubs of education for children, scholars are in this belief that school teachers should instruct the students that sexuality is a natural, normal, and healthy part of life. They should provide value-based education and offer students the opportunity to explore and define their individual values as well as the values of their families and communities. The discussion between teachers and students should include a wide variety of sexuality-related topics, such as human development, relationships, interpersonal skills, sexual expression, sexual health, society, and culture. The conversation should be based on the accurate and factual information.

Second, since most of the families in Afghanistan, particularly in the countryside, don't have information about their sexual attitudes and behaviors, Ministry of Education in collaboration with Ministry of Public Health through school administrators should start public awareness campaigns in this regard. These campaigns should be held at schools and mosques. The campaigners should discuss the importance of knowing sexual attitudes and behaviors with the local people. They should tell the families that having information about sexual issues is not shameful and bad culturally and socially, but very vital and important for the health and social safety of their families and communities. Because, it is necessary for the parents and teachers, first of all, to receive the appropriate information for instructing teens, and then they can answer their questions related to sexual attitudes and behaviors.

Finally, parents and teachers should create a sincere and faithful relationship with children in conversing with them regarding sexuality and sexual issues. Because as long as there is no trust between parents and teachers, teens and adolescents can't share their sexual problems and issues with them. Doing so, parents and teachers can reduce the risk of referring teens and adolescents to illegal and inappropriate channels for seeking the answers to their questions related to sexual attitudes.

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Combatting Political Violence: Pakistan's Determination Is Put to the Test

By James M. Dorsey

Pakistan's determination to crack down on United Nations-designated global terrorists is being put to the test barely two weeks after the South Asian nation evaded blacklisting by an international anti-money laundering and terrorism finance watchdog.

A statement by a group widely viewed as a front for UN-designated Jamat-ud-Dawa and its leader, Hafez, Saeed, said it would field hundreds of candidates in elections scheduled for July 25 under the banner of an existing Islamist political party.

The agreement between Milli Muslim League, the front group, and Allah-O-Akbar Tehreek, an Islamist party, came after Pakistan's election commission rejected the League's application to be registered as a political party.

The agreement follows the government's removal of a virulently anti-Shiite militant from its terrorism list two weeks ago at the moment that it was finalizing its agreement with FATF at the group's meeting Paris. Pakistan's willingness to work with FATF to improve its anti-money laundering and terrorism finance regime in ten specific areas meant the country was grey rather than blacklisted by the watchdog.

The removal of Muhammad Ahmed Ludhianvi, the head of Ahl-e-Sunnat Wal Jamaat (ASWJ), from the Pakistani terrorism list paved the way for the group to field its own candidates in the upcoming election. Mr. Ludhianvi unlike Mr. Saeed, believed to be the leader of Lashkar-e-Taiba, one of South Asia's most violent groups, which established Jamaat-ud-Dawa after it was designated by the United Nations and banned in Pakistan in 2004, has not been globally designated.

Lashkar-e-Taiba, which reportedly enjoys tacit support of the Pakistani military because it targeted India, is widely held responsible for the 2008 attacks in Mumbai that killed more than 160 people. The US Treasury has put a \$10 million bounty on Mr. Saeed's head.

"Militant organizations are active. Call them non-state actors, should we allow them to cross the border and kill 150 people in Mumbai? Explain it to me. Why can't we complete the trial? It's absolutely unacceptable. This is exactly what we are struggling for," said ousted prime minister Nawaz Sharif in May in what was seen as an attack on the military.

Pakistan's agreement with FATF stipulates that it demonstrates "effective implementation of targeted financial sanctions (supported by a comprehensive legal obligation) against all 1267 and 1373 designated terrorists and those acting for or on their behalf, including preventing the raising and moving of funds, identifying and freezing assets (movable and immovable), and prohibiting access to funds and financial services."

Mr. Saeed, Jamaat-ud-Dawa and Lashkar-e-Taiba have been designated under UN Security Council resolutions 1267 and 1373. Milli Muslim League does not fall technically under the resolution because it has been designated only by the US Treasury and not the UN.

The Pakistani election commission's rejection of the group's application, however, amounts to recognition by the government that it is a front for Jamat-ud-Dawa.

"Getting into politics is the right of every Pakistani, and no one can be

denied their basic, fundamental right. That's why we have decided to participate under the umbrella of Allah-O-Akbar Tehreek in the upcoming elections," the League's spokesman, Ahmad Nadeem Awan, said.

The militants' determination to field candidates in the upcoming election puts at stake more than Pakistan's commitment to FATF and its determination to avoid blacklisting, which would severely limit if not cut off its access to the international financial system.

It goes to the core of a debate in Pakistan on how to deal with militants and an apparent desire by the military and intelligence to coax them into the mainstream of Pakistani politics in an effort to reduce violence and militancy in a country in which religious ultra-conservatism and intolerance has been woven into the fabric of branches of the state and significant segments of society.

Running last year as an independent in a Punjabi by-election, Milli Muslim League candidate Yaqoob Sheikh garnered together with another Islamic militant 11 percent of the vote. Traditionally, Islamists have had social and political influence but never fared well in elections.

Military support for the participation of militants in elections was "a combination of keeping control over important national matters like security, defense and foreign policy, but also giving these former militant groups that have served the state a route into the mainstream where their energies can be utilized," a senior military official said.

Critics charge that integration is likely to fail. "Incorporating radical Islamist movements into formal political systems may have some benefits in theory... But the structural limitations in some Muslim countries with prominent radical groups make it unlikely that these groups will adopt such reforms, at least not anytime soon... While Islamabad wants to combat jihadist insurgents in Pakistan, it also wants to maintain influence over groups that are engaged in India and Afghanistan," said Kamran Bokhari, a well-known scholar of violent extremism.

Citing the example of a militant Egyptian group that formed a political party to participate in elections, Mr. Bokhari argued that "though such groups remain opposed to democracy in theory, they are willing to participate in electoral politics to enhance their influence over the state. Extremist groups thus become incorporated into existing institutions and try to push radical changes from within the system."

The Milli Muslim League statement puts the Pakistani political and military establishment on the line.

Said retired Lieutenant General Talat Masood: "Allowing MML (the League) to participate under some other political platform will only add to the global pressure and criticism on Pakistan regarding cracking down on militant groups. Don't forget, we have just been added to FATF's terror watch list, and there is a possibility of going on the blacklist in the coming months."

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