

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



July 18, 2019

Afghans Shall Decide To Live in Peace or War!

War is known as part of the identity of Afghanistan now. It is more than four decades that Afghanistan is in war. It takes the lives of many Afghans every day, destroys its economic and physical infrastructures.

When the Soviet Union left Afghanistan most of the Afghans and the international community thought that a new chapter would be soon opened in the life of Afghans; they assumed that Afghan refugees will return to their country, they will start rebuilding their country and live a happy life. However, it did not come true, because different Afghan armed groups immediately started fighting against each other in the country. Religion, language, race and region were the main causes of the new round of the conflicts in the country. All the hopes of Afghans vanished and they were left alone. The international community did pay no attention to address the civil war in the country, because the USSR was demolished and they thought that the Afghan civil war was an internal issue. When all Afghan were fed up of the civil war, the Afghan Taliban emerged as a group to save the country and put an end to the endless suffers of the Afghan citizens. Sadly, it turned to another tragedy due to the harsh religious policies and specific ethic agendas of the group.

Taliban made Afghanistan safe haven for the terrorists. However, international community did not take their threat serious unless the twin towers of the United States were attacked by Al-Qaeda, a group affiliated with the Taliban regime and provided shelter by them. They both believed and believe now in a strict interpretation of Islamic law and that violence is needed to enact it. Anyhow, after September 11 terrorist attacks, the United States attacked Taliban and toppled their regime. This time, nearly all of the Afghans were sure that Afghanistan would be rebuilt, the refugees would return to the country and All Afghan would live in peace and harmony. However, it did not happen and the war restarted again.

It is about one year that the US has started direct talks with the Taliban. The seventh round of talks between the U.S. special envoy for peace in Afghanistan and the Taliban ended on July 6, 2019, after signs of progress, according to the reports. The US and Taliban may reach to a peace deal sooner or later. However, the question that needs to be answered is that, will peace and security be restored in the country? The answer is clear: No!

According to a report submitted by Pentagon to the US Congress, the Khorasan branch of ISIS has expanded the areas it controls during the past six months (December 2018 to late May 2019) in Afghanistan. Based on this report ISIS will continue fighting against the US and Afghan defense and security forces. If there is a peace deal between the US and Taliban, ISIS and some more conservative parts of Taliban will continue attacking the US and ANSF.

War has been part of the life of Afghans for more than four decades. To be honest, there is not much hope for a comprehensive peace in Afghanistan soon. Strategic rivalries between the regional and world powers, mafia groups and loose social cohesion are the main causes of the endless wars and conflicts in Afghanistan. The Afghans may not be able to do much with the first and second causes of the war in their country. However, if they put aside their mistrusts and trust each other they will be able to define a shared future for themselves in Afghanistan. Doing so, they will be able to put an end to the endless wars in their country. The last but not the least, Afghans can search for peace and war within themselves. As a result, they only can decide either to continue this tragedy or live a peaceful life.

Civilian Casualties – Great Cause for Concern

By: Hujjatullah Zia

Militancy and terrorist attacks in populated areas and major cities were described as the main causes of civilian casualties in 2015, underscoring a push by Taliban militants into urban centers "with a high likelihood of causing civilian harm". Including Taliban-claimed attacks, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan assigned responsibility for 62 per cent of total civilian casualties in 2015 to anti-government elements. However, the report also noted a surge in casualties caused by pro-government forces, including the international troops.

While ground engagements were the largest cause of civilian casualties, improvised explosive devices came second, the UN said in its 2015 report, adding that the use of such weaponry was in violation of international law and could constitute war crimes.

Worst of all, the SIGAR reported that civilian casualties in 2016 were the highest since the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan began recording them in 2009. That count found conflict-related civilian casualties in Afghanistan rose to 11,418. The record high civilian casualties continued up to the current years and the militant fighters, mainly the Taliban and the ISIS group carried out the bulk of the casualties.

With a new wave of privately run seminaries/madrasahs being opened across the country, the women's rights groups feared that women's freedoms were again under threat. Three years ago, it was reported that 1,300 unregistered madrasahs were operating in Afghanistan, where children were given only religious teaching. This was increasing fear among those involved in mainstream education. Arguably the most controversial of these madrasahs was Ashraf-ul Madares in Kunduz, founded by two local senior clerics, where 6,000 girls were said to study full time. Generally speaking, heavy casualties inflicted upon Afghan civilians and soldiers will fill one with a strong sense of disappointment. The post-Taliban democratic government could not stop the bleeding. The heart-wrenching stories repeat one after another. Although the Taliban vowed, in Doha talks with Afghan political figures, not to target civilians, the recent roadside bomb blast in Kandahar killed and wounded tens of Afghan civilians, which were widely believed to be carried out by the Taliban. It suggested that the Taliban will not be trusted.

The gory incidents and hemorrhage suggest that the Taliban are not genuine in the peace talks. The spate of terrorist attacks in recent months has added to public disappointment and the public

fear a deadlock in the talks.

The emergence of democracy in the post-Taliban Afghanistan has sustained strong blows mainly from the insurgent groups. Counting fatalities and hearing or reading heart-wrenching stories every day in a democratic country seem ridiculous. The non-stop sufferings and heavy casualties in Afghanistan put democracy under serious question. I believe that a democratic country does not necessarily mean having only a democratic constitution when political rehearsal goes against it. The country's constitution hold people's rights, liberty and dignity in respect – this is in ideal world but violated realistically. In addition to having a constitution based on democratic values, presidential and provincial elections, and parliament, protecting people's fundamental rights i.e. rights to life, liberty and estate and natural dignity is far significant for a democratic society.

It is hoped the government will take high steps in safeguarding the rights and dignity of Afghans and reinforce the soldiers to retaliate the past casualties. It is further prayed that Afghan nation will no further be a casualty of radical mindsets and fundamental ideology of militant groups.

Martin Luther, a Nobel Laureate, once said, "Violence as a way of achieving racial justice is both impractical and immoral. I am not unmindful of the fact that violence often brings about momentary results. Nations have frequently won their independence in battle. But in spite of temporary victories, violence never brings permanent peace. It solves no social problem: it merely creates new and more complicated ones. Violence is impractical because it is a descending spiral ending in destruction for all. It is immoral because it seeks to humiliate the opponent rather than win his understanding: it seeks to annihilate rather than convert."

To sum up, the reason behind all this violence are believed to be: practicing no religious tolerance; exercising fundamental ideology; claiming racial superiority; humiliating human rights and dignity and treating one another with disdain. If human societies do not uphold the fundamental rights of mankind, violence and bloodshed will continue unabated.

Since conflict has only led to casualties and destruction, the warring sides have to resolve their issues through meaningful talks so that all citizens, mainly civilians, could live a peaceful life.

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Asia's Scary Movie

By: Richard N. Haass

History at any moment can be understood as a snapshot, telling us where we are, or as a moving picture, telling us not just where we are but where we have been and where we may be headed. It is a distinction with an enormous difference.

Consider East Asia and the Pacific. A snapshot would show a region at peace, with stable societies, growing economies, and robust alliances. But a moving picture would be considerably less reassuring. We may well come to look back on this moment as the time in which the most economically successful part of the world began to come apart.

North Korea is one reason. War has been avoided, not because North Korea has done anything to reduce the threat posed by its nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles, but because US President Donald Trump's administration has not matched its fiery words with actions. The nuclear and missile threat posed by North Korea has actually increased since Trump embraced summitry with Kim Jong-un just over a year ago.

There is no reason to believe that the Kim regime will ever denuclearize. The question is whether it will agree to place a ceiling on its nuclear capabilities in exchange for some reduction in sanctions – and, if so, whether it lives up to the agreement and whether neighbors such as Japan believe they can be safe without developing nuclear weapons of their own.

The latter question makes the deterioration in relations between Japan and South Korea all the more disquieting. Japanese officials are uneasy with South Korea's approach to North Korea, viewing it as too conciliatory, and are furious with South Korea for reviving its demand that Japan apologize and compensate Korean women abused by the Imperial Japanese Army before and during World War II. Tensions between these two American allies are spilling over into their trade relationship and will make it harder to coordinate policy toward North Korea and China.

Then there are the ongoing protests in Hong Kong. As mainland control over the former British colony has increased, the "one country, two systems" formula promised in 1997 has not played out as the people of Hong Kong had hoped, steadily giving way to "one country, one system." This is unlikely to change, as China is less dependent on Hong Kong as a financial gateway and is concerned that a liberal approach toward demonstrators there will signal weakness and encourage protests – and even a leadership challenge – on the mainland. The authorities in Beijing are thus likely to do whatever they believe is necessary to maintain order.

China's turn toward repression is even more starkly apparent in its policies toward its Uighur minority. At the same time, Deng Xiaoping's careful foreign policy has given way to a more assertive foreign policy under President Xi Jinping. In the South China

Sea, China is militarizing islands in an effort to gain control of this strategically vital waterway and intimidate others into abandoning their claims. Likewise, with its Belt and Road Initiative, China is providing infrastructure loans to countries throughout Eurasia, often on onerous terms that enhance China's access and influence, while yielding questionable benefits for the recipients. Taiwan's future is also unclear. This year marks the 40th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the United States and the People's Republic of China (PRC). At that time, the US recognized the PRC government as China's sole legal government, but pledged to maintain unofficial relations with the people of Taiwan. And in the 1979 Taiwan Relations Act, the US pledged to provide the island with arms, and stated that it would view with great concern any effort to determine Taiwan's future other than peacefully.

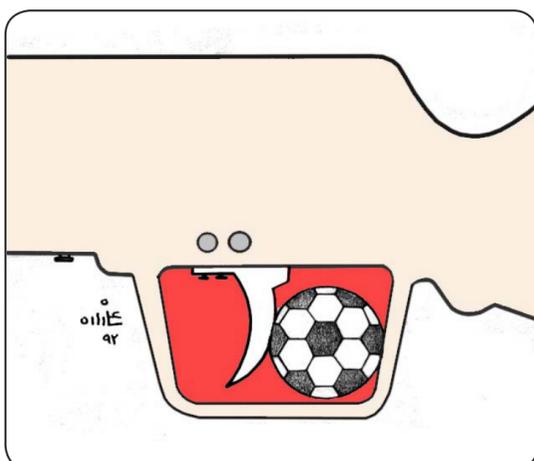
It all made for an arrangement that finessed positions in the absence of a commonly acceptable solution, one that has worked well for four decades, as Taiwan has become a thriving democracy with a booming economy. Differences over Taiwan have not precluded a viable Sino-American relationship, and the lack of an official relationship has not prevented strong US-Taiwan ties. Now, however, it seems as though Xi may decide to push this issue, as unifying Taiwan with the mainland appears to be integral to achieving his "Chinese Dream." Meanwhile, some in the US and Taiwan advocate closer ties or even recognizing Taiwan as an independent country. At some point, a crisis is likely to materialize when one or more parties cross a line the others cannot accept.

A final question mark over the region stems from US policy. The US has been central to Asia's success. Its alliance with South Korea has reduced the chance of conflict on the Korean Peninsula; and its alliance with Japan has reduced the chance of a Japanese nuclear program or a war between China and Japan over disputed islands.

But Trump has publicly questioned the value and fairness of both alliances, suggesting that they are at risk unless South Korea and Japan pay more and adjust their trade policies. And, more broadly, Trump's foreign policy is at its core unpredictable and disruptive, whereas strong alliances require predictability and confidence.

When all of these snapshots – a nuclear-armed North Korea, an uneasy Japan, a more assertive and repressive China, growing impatience over Taiwan, and mounting uncertainty over US policy – are viewed as a moving picture, it becomes clear that the stability underpinning Asia's unprecedented development can no longer be assumed. It is difficult to imagine the future being better than the past; it is not at all difficult to imagine it being worse.

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