

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

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Civilians Bear the Brunt of Militancy

In the last round of intra-Afghan dialogue in Qatari capital of Doha, the Taliban said they would seek to reduce violence and civilian casualties, but their recent indiscriminate attacks inflicted heavy casualties on civilians, including children.

On the surface, commitment to decreasing civilian casualties seemed a great achievement in the intra-Afghan dialogue, but the Taliban could not fulfill their promise and targeted civilians. This issue filled the public air with mistrust and disappointment.

In one of my commentaries, I pointed out that much optimism about the positive outcome of peace talks was not based on facts. Peace talks are likely to be a pyrrhic victory for Afghan nation and will not yield fruit forthwith. The Taliban's war strategy is to target civilians so as to put pressure on the government. The Taliban's statements at the peace table and their contrary acts of violence in the ground suggest that there is lack of agreement between the Taliban's political office and their military commanders. The Taliban rank and file tend to continue their violence and bloodshed and are unlikely to follow the instructions from political office.

A surge in violence shows the Taliban's lukewarm response to ceasefire. They do not pursue negotiations genuinely. After all, Afghans fear that the Taliban will not respect the agreement if they reach at the peace table since they broke their promise for decreasing civilian casualties. Hence, the level of mistrust has increased to a great extent.

If the Taliban and their negotiators reach an agreement, the international community and Afghanistan's international allies have to monitor the Taliban's practices to ensure that they respect the agreement.

CEO Abdullah Abdullah said it was the time for the direct talks between the Taliban and the government. He is cited as saying, "If the Taliban say that they want peace, then they must come to us to reach an agreement. It is not possible that Taliban say they want to reach agreement with the US and NATO but not with other side." Refusing to hold talks with the government, which is being fought against, will prolong the conflict. The Taliban group is fighting against the government but negotiating with the US. On the contrary, regional states and Afghanistan's neighboring countries reiterated the intra-Afghan dialogue or "Afghan-led" talks. And they urge the Taliban to sit around the table with the Afghan government.

In a personal interview, Dr. Zeng Xiangyu, Professor in the Institute of South Asian Studies at Sichuan University of China, said, "An Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace and reconciliation process is the real solution. This judgement is not based on a negotiation-preference or anything associated with idealism. On the contrary, this is based on the hard and often unpleasant ground reality." He added, "Military operations as was in the past one and half decade, failed to settle the issue. Then how can the same tactic succeed in the next few years, let alone without the support of a very strong foreign military force?" He said, "I have no idea on how to operationalize the peace talk as I understand it is much easier said than done, and more importantly, this must be an Afghan-led process instead of something imposed from outside."

Both warring sides agree that military deal has reached stalemate and the two sides are able to resolve their issues only through dialogue. But the Taliban still continue their militancy, which only leads to casualties and destruction.

The Taliban once said that they did not seek to monopolize the power after reaching an agreement. It implies that they will be integrated in the government. It is possible only after holding direct talks with the government. To stop civilian casualties, warring sides have to seek an immediate ceasefire, which could build trust and generate optimism among the public. Declaring ceasefire would also show the Taliban's genuine intention for talks.

It is self-explanatory that targeting civilians, which is a war crime, will further compound the challenges. It is not in the interests of warring parties, mainly the Taliban, to carry out indiscriminate attacks. Targeting civilians will intensify the public anger and hatred against the Taliban. Since warring sides had vowed not to target civilians, they have to keep their promise.

The US and Afghanistan's neighboring countries need to put pressure on the Taliban to declare ceasefire if they really intend to stop civilian casualties and come to the table with genuine intention. The war-war and talk-talk strategy seems confusing and will not bear the desired result.



Reactions to the Establishment of New Dar-Al-Fatwa in Afghanistan

By: Mohammad Zahir Akbari

Few days ago, the president established a New Dar-Al-fatwa (Religious Fatwa Issuance Center) aiming to have a specific address for issuance of religious fatwa in Afghanistan. As described by officials, this Dar-Al-Fatwa will be fully independent in terms of budget and issuance of fatwa throughout the country. It is also said that the Dar-Al-Fatwa will deal with community problems such as violence against women and children, family and community morality, promotion of administrative ethics and overall giving responses to religious questions through telephone calls. Also, the members of the Dar-Al-Fatwa will be chosen from among well-expert scholars who have a comprehensive knowledge of the state and are committed to contemporary system life.

The establishment of this center has caused various reactions to throughout the country. The media, especially social networking users, have made a lot of remarks about this emprise. A number of analysts link it to the sensitive step of election and peace process saying that the president needs to strengthen its position among the people and religious scholars while others believe that he may have political need to it in the future. There were also a few who believe that the establishment of this center is needed. For example, the 8am quoted form Tahmina Shujah, a social activist, believes that the establishment of this center will aware the people from wrong fatwa and misuses; but Abdull Wadood Pidram, another a social activist, believes that the Dar-Al-fatwa will not be effective in Afghanistan because the fatwa which was issued by Ulema Council has not decreased the war and extremism in the country. Overall, many think it increases the extremisms and will not have the ability and impartiality to issue accurate fatwa.

It seems that all those who oppose or doubt about the creation of such a center in Afghanistan do not have a proper understanding of the functions and necessity of such institution in the country. The existence of such institution under name of Dar-Al-Fatwa or Fatwa Council has long history in Islamic countries. It has had also a vast operation, functionality and good history among Muslims and Muslim countries. The most effective Dar-Al-Fatwa has been established in countries such as Egypt, Turkey, Pakistan and some other Islamic countries, and so far they had great achievements and fruits in social and cultural arena of these Muslim countries.

In particular, one of the most important functions of Dar-Al-fatwa in other countries is propelling people to secularization of those Muslim societies; Contrary to what was claimed about the establishment of such an institution that contributes to the spread of extremism, Dar-Al-Fatwa and fatwa councils in those countries have led to religious tolerance and the consolidation in those countries. Specifically, the existence of such an institution in Egypt and Turkey has helped the religious teach-

ings reach Muslims through the right channel and prevent the intermingling of religious matters with political and social affairs.

In our country, the existence of a strong and creditable center can end the dividing social behavior caused by religious teachings and will greatly help to unite the people. As we know, every year there is a general confusion among the people due lack of such creditable address. For example, the days of Eid Al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha cause a lot of differences and inharmony among the people. People have no option other than follow the fatwa maker of neighboring countries and celebrate Eid in different days; however, such differences are natural and normal from religious viewpoint, but its social and political consequences are very heavy and irreparable. In fact, it sparks a kind of dissension and social frustration. Therefore, the creation of an independent Dar-Al-fatwa combined of all Islamic sects and ends such vain differences.

One of the most important functions of Dar al-fatwa can prevent religious extremism providing solitary interpretation and views on issue of peace and war in the country. As we know, the ongoing war and the successive terrorist attacks of extremist groups are justified with religious laws and teachings. If an institution can provide a common and unified view of genuine Islam on the basis of human rationality and logic of religious concepts, there will no longer be room for the growth of extremism. At present, the terrorist and extremist groups are abusing the name of Islam and Islamic values with launching the worst acts of inhumane action.

One of the cases that repeatedly used as a religious justification for all disasters in Muslim world is the religious term of "jihad". If an institution can issue a genuine religious fatwa will absolutely opposes extremist perceptions of Jihad, it will be the greatest service to the Muslim people. The Consideration of some critics as if the creation of such a center will lead to extremism is either due to their unawareness or political intention. As a Muslim country with around 35 million people and severe vulnerabilities due to low awareness, we extremely need to have such an independent internal center. Otherwise, it would lead to unfavorable consequences due to imports of wrong fatwa from outside.

In clearer term, Dar-Al-fatwa will rescue the people from different so-called scholars who are addicted to production of political fatwa. It will also rescue the people from the fatwa of some middle-aged scholars who unknowingly encourage the people to extremism and division. In fact, it was a dangerous gap using the people as a weapon against innocent people of Afghanistan. In recent months Taliban and Daesh terrorist group have successively assassinated the genuine religious scholars who played the same awaking role in Afghanistan.

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Terror policies of Bush and Obama in Afghanistan

By: Rajkumar Singh

Barack Obama succeeded George William Bush as the 44th President of the United States of America on 20 January 2009. It marked verily a revolution, a culmination of a long fight of the black (Afro-American) population for equality and human rights. Obama expressed his determination to bring about a qualitative change in internal and external policy which has created an atmosphere of hope and optimism all over the world. In his inaugural speech he has eloquently spoken of his ardent desire to unite US bridging different segments of US population and unite humanity transcending national barriers. The US, he said, will be friend of every country in the world. Generally political campaigns speeches are bound to conflict with the ground realities when one sits in position of power. As opposed to Bush Administration earlier Barack Obama has committed himself to base US conduct in global affairs on values which have been beacon light to be emulated by the world effectively demonstrated over the years and more recently by a change in Eastern Europe after the collapse of the Soviet Union. However, on assuming the office, Obama remained as steadfast as any other leader to relentlessly confront violent extremists who pose a grave threat to our security because we reject the same thing that people of all faiths reject the killing of innocent men, women and children.

Terror policy of George W. Bush

Earlier too during the Presidency of George William Bush security of the country and its citizens remained on the top of Bush's agenda. At the close of his regime much of the heat of the war on terrorism was turned on Pakistan after the US identified Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and North West Frontier Province (NWFP) as a safe heaven for Al-Qaeda and Taliban insurgent. According to the New York Times, President Bush was believed to have given confidential orders in July 2008 allowing US air strikes and ground operations to be carried out against militant sanctuaries within Pakistan without the prior knowledge or approval of Islamabad. The first of such attempts by US troops to launch a ground attack in September 2008 was met with stiff resistance and reportedly thwarted by Pakistan paramilitary soldiers. These attacks not only caused massive civilian deaths, but were in flagrant violation of Pakistan's territorial sovereignty. A news report in The News stated that of the nearly sixty cross-border American drone attacks between January 2006 and April 2009; only 10 managed to hit their actual targets, leading to the death of 14 Al-Qaeda leaders and perishing 687 innocent Pakistani civilians. Despite the visible opposition to their use, drone strikes seemed to be a favourite with the Americans as they claim that these attacks have delivered significant body blows to the Al-Qaeda leadership. Not only that, George William Bush, in his final farewell speech from the White House on 15 January 2009, defending his administration's eight-year long period of war mongering, said that the war on terror, the ideological pivot of his administration, must carry on. The main thrust of his speech was to defend his tenure as president and exhort the new administration to carry forward the global war against terror that his government had launched in the aftermath of the World Trade Centre attacks in 2001.

Terror policy of Barack Obama

At the time Barack Obama took over as the president of USA the focus of the war on terror has come to rest firmly on Pakistan which is seen to have become a sanctuary for Al-Qaeda and Taliban terrorists. A major reason for the Taliban's growing strength has been its ability to escape across the Afghanistan-Pakistan border into the safety of the latter's tribal regions and target the US and NATO forces from these areas. In fact Pakistan continues to remain clearly both part of the problem and the solution to the threat of terrorism facing the United States. Indeed the 9/11 Commission had more or less highlighted Pakistan's deep involvement with international terrorism and recommended a long-term US commitment to provide comprehensive support to Pakistan. A fractured Pakistan that is nuclear-armed is appropriately termed by Western scholars as the "most dangerous place in the world". In the circumstances US officials have begun to acknowledge the importance of Pakistan pursuing more consistent counterterrorism policies, rather than relying on its past tactics of fighting some terrorists, while supporting others.

On the other hand, the year 2009 also witnessed a surfacing of the debate within the US administration with measures adopted thereof, to undo the assault unleashed on

the international human rights framework during George Bush's presidency. As the war on terror entered its eighth year, it is confronted with several challenges. Robert Gates, Secretary of Defence, is reported to have told the Senate Armed Services Committee that civilian casualties caused by US air strikes were during the US enormous harm. "If Afghans come to see us as part of their problem, not as part of their solution, then we are lost. With anti-American sentiment already on the rise, civilian deaths will only deepen the antagonism. Thus the primary challenge for the US administration was to target Taliban, without causing concomitant civilian casualties. Perhaps it was in this background that president Obama candidly admitted in his Cairo speech that we meet at a time of great tension between the United States and the Muslims around the world but assured the Muslims that he sought a new beginning based on mutual interest and one based upon the truth that America and Islam are not exclusive and need not be in competition. In the situation we can easily expect a change in American behaviour/policy during the Barack Obama Administration.

Marked shift in terror policy

The new President of the United States of America made a significant policy shift in the war against terror. It was in respect of the overwhelming use of military power and war. This was exhibited in full measure in the shock and awe attacks on Afghanistan and Iraq. Perhaps Bush and his close allies in policy-making Vice President Dick Cheney and the former Defence Secretary Rumsfeld intended to do the same in case of Iran and Syria. But US was so embroiled in Iraq that they had no opportunity to actually implement the threats extended to both these countries. Therefore, Barack Obama distanced himself from using the term-global war on terror' or 'long war' cutting these out from the country's military lexicon, he chose instead to use the phrase "overseas contingency operation". However, use of another term for global war on terrorism does not make Obama's policy for a clean break from that of his predecessor's. In fact America's military engagement in the region only promises to become deeper and wider. Despite his orders to shut Guantanamo Bay and ban torture, Obama categorically denied any plans to close down the Bagram Theater Internment Facility in Afghanistan, seeking instead to invest \$60 million to expand the detention facility to accommodate double its present capacity of about 600 inmates. This, skeptics point out is just one of the several similarities that the Obama Administration shares with its preceding Bush Administration, in that it endorses the continuation of the programme of extraordinary rendition, indefinite detention of terror suspects without trial, and an openness to military commission trials.

In principle too, the view which extends the boundaries of the conflict to take in Al-Qaeda's operations around the world, has essentially been maintained by the Obama Administration and is a source of tension between the United States and Europe. According to current State Department Legal Advisor Harold Koh, "whether a particular individual will be targeted in a particular local will depend upon considerations specific to each case, including those related to the imminence of the threat, the sovereignty of the other states involved, and the willingness and ability of those states to suppress the threat target poses. The United States believed that its right to use armed force in self-defence in response to 9/11 extends to strikes against Al-Qaeda operatives on Pakistani territory, when Pakistani forces were incapable of reaching terrorists, since it has been conducting predator drone strikes under those very conditions.

In March 2009 in federal court while filing in the detention context, the Obama Administration proposed a flexible standard for the substantive extent of its law of war authority in its armed conflict with Al-Qaeda and its allies. Falling under the asserted detention authority were persons 'who were part of' or who 'provided substantial support' to 'Al-Qaeda or Taliban forces and associated forces' that are engaged in hostilities against the United States or its coalition partners a standard similar to that used by the Bush Administration. In a further statement the State Department's Legal Adviser Koh explained that the United States regards its legal authorities to include 'lethal force, to defend itself, including by targeting persons such as high-level Al-Qaeda leaders who are planning attacks. Thus, the new administration made no compromise on country's security.

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