

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

Daily
Outlook
AFGHANISTAN
The Leading Independent Newspaper

July 29, 2019

Women's Rights Still a Concern at Negotiating Table

Afghan high-ranking officials have voiced their concern about the susceptibility of the past achievements, mainly the rights and freedoms of women, at the negotiating table on several occasions. Afghan women also fear if their rights were compromised at the table, which indicates that women made great strides in the post-Taliban Afghanistan.

"In areas where the Taliban have reclaimed control, there are reports of honor killings, stoning and other attacks on women's rights. Peace, security and economic stability are urgently needed," said UN Deputy Secretary General Amina Mohammad in her briefing to the UN Security Council members. She added, "During our visit, we heard a strong call from Afghan women for peace – but peace that safeguards their hard-won rights and does not backtrack on what has been achieved. All the women we spoke to wanted an inclusive peace centered on women, as well as victims and survivors."

There had been significant progress. Women are in senior roles in the Defense, Foreign Affairs and Interior ministries. Presidential Elections are scheduled for September, and heads of the Independent Electoral Commission and Electoral Complaint Commission are both women, said Amina. In supporting democracy, foreign aids and institutions particularly focused on empowering Afghan women and creating opportunities for them to use their talents and abilities. They are enjoying their rights to education, equal rights with men before the law, and equal suffrage. Foreign institutions advocate the rights and freedoms of women to a great extent and invest on empowering women.

Afghan Constitution bestows equal rights and freedoms to women and leaves no room for gender discrimination through recognizing the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

"To protect human rights and promote gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls", which is the fifth goal of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, it is essential for the Afghan government and the international community to safeguard the fundamental rights of Afghan women achieved within the past 18 years.

It is self-explanatory that the Taliban exercise a highly patriarchal ideology and intend to foist their ideology on Afghan national laws and women's rights and liberties, as they proposed amendment to the constitution at the negotiating table, after they reach an agreement. Similarly, the Taliban do not elaborate their policy about women and simply say that they would accommodate the rights and freedoms of women within the Islamic frame – which is a misleading term since the Taliban still have capitalized on Islamic tenets/sharia and killing people under the same terminology. Afghan clerics argue that there is no contradiction between Islamic tenets and Afghan Constitution or national laws. They say that Islamic tenets have been protected in the constitution and Afghan women are allowed to have active role in social, political, and economic activities. Observing hijab, Islam does not urge women to stay within the four walls but to participate in collective life. For example, if the Taliban do not allow women to visit male doctors, there must be female doctors and nurses, which is possible only if women have access to education. If women are not allowed to be taught by male instructors, there must be female teachers and professors. If women do not go to school or university, how do they become teachers and professors? After all, Islam does allow women to be taught by male teachers and professors. Amina said that Afghan women needed and deserved the support of the United Nations system and the international community to invest in building on those gains, while sustaining peace.

The international community and the US and NATO officials should continue their support to democratic principles in Afghanistan and invest on democracy and human rights after the peace agreement between the Taliban and the Afghan government, too. They, along with the government, should make sure that the Taliban would practice upon the peace agreement. The Taliban should pose no threat to the past gains, achieved as a result of Afghans' heavy sacrifices. The peace agreement between the Taliban and their interlocutors have to promote the security situation and the rights and freedoms of all Afghan citizens rather than restricting those rights. The Taliban have to, as they claimed, moderate their ideology, especially regarding citizens' rights and freedoms. They should no more impose their radical ideology on Afghan people.

It should be noted that the Afghan government has said constantly that human rights and freedoms and democratic principles are a "red-line" for Afghans and would never be compromised. If peace agreement put the past achievements and Afghans sacrifices at stake, it will be acceptable neither to Afghan nation nor to state.

Ups and Downs of Journalism Freedom in Afghanistan

By: Mohammad Zahir Akbari

Journalism considered as one of the top ten high-risky jobs in the world; journalists knowingly they pay their precious lives to gain liberty for their nation. Despite numerous challenges, they work in the worst working conditions for information and freedom of expression. In Afghanistan, in additions to restrictions, humiliation, threats and job insecurity, they made countless sacrifices for the realization of freedom of expression, but now it seems that Afghan journalists are increasingly resorting to self-censorship due to fear that their reporting could be punished by the violence of armed unarmed groups. Even the Taliban has recently warned Medias for releasing reports against them.

However, Afghanistan lies in a good status in term of media freedom comparing to some regional countries. Indeed, it is one the greatest achievements of post-Taliban era. The country has never had more news outlets than today as there are hundreds of print media, tens of television stations, hundreds of radio stations and dozens of news agencies. Firstly, the credit of this achievement goes to Afghan young journalists who successively sacrificed their lives in this way. Secondly, Afghans are grateful to the initial sincerity of international community when toppled the enemy of freedom in 2001, but hope to act up their commitments accordingly.

During Taliban regime, there was one radio station called Vice of Sharia, it was used to broadcast propaganda of the Taliban insurgent only. After Taliban regime had toppled, the new government under administrative of ex-president Hamid Karzai, provided opportunity to establishment of numerous media outlets in the country. According to Afghan Constitution Article 34, "Freedom of expression shall be inviolable. Every Afghan shall have the right to express thoughts through speech, writing, illustrations as well as other means in accordance with provisions of this constitution. Every Afghan shall have the right, according to provisions of law, to print and publish on subjects without prior submission of state authorities. Directives related to the press, radio, and television as well as publications and other mass media shall be regulated by law."

Nevertheless, Taliban is considered of the great enemies of media freedom in Afghanistan. In 2016 Afghanistan got position of the second most dangerous country for reporters in the world after Taliban killed at least 13 journalists and dozens wounded. Perhaps the Taliban seek to target civilians and media staff to put pressure on the government since their militant fighters sustain heavy casualties on civilians recently. From one hand, targeting non-combatants shows the weakness of the group, and on the other hand, it always caused the public anger and hatred against them.

Thus, in, 2017 and 2018, dozens of journalists lost their lives in Afghanistan, more than anywhere else in the world. According to a report, violence against journalists was increased by 22% over the first six months of 2018. Almost all of them were killed while performing

their duties as journalists. Having waged a hard-fought struggle for media freedom after the fall of the Taliban regime in 2001, Afghan journalists now find their human rights under relentless assault. The Taliban and other armed groups have escalated their threats and violence. Meanwhile, some of the local self-styled standard-bearer of press freedom – has also imposed its own restrictions.

In 2019, the latest act of violence against media was closure of Samaa radio station by a local Taliban commander. However, according to report, this was the third time that Samaa radio station had been forced to stop its operations in the past four years. Even as the Taliban pursuing peace, it has once again singled out journalists as targets. Ahead of the recent intra-Afghan dialogue in Doha, the Taliban's military commission issued a statement warning journalists that it will consider them and their organizations "military targets" unless they stop issuing "anti-Taliban" statements and advertisements. Brazenly threatening to carry out crimes under international law, the armed group alarmingly warned that journalists or employees of media organizations "will not be safe."

Therefore, the international community is expected to show a serious reaction to the Taliban's message of threat to media staff and put pressure on them to stop targeting journalists and civilians. Targeting media staff is a war crime. The media staff continues their responsibility with impartiality, and they are simply reporting and reflecting the news through the power of their pens and lenses of their cameras. Hence, they have nothing to do with the conflict except for reporting. Meanwhile, the government should prosecute all cases of violence and crimes against the media and journalists in Afghanistan – particularly the cases where state officials are the suspects of the crimes. Moreover, the Protection of media freedom and the right to freedom of expression must not be undermined by any peace talks, and require to be respected, protected, promoted and strengthened. The Taliban must stop targeting and attacking the media and journalists in Afghanistan, and Afghan journalists must be allowed to do their important work freely and without fear.

Taliban will not be able to restrict the freedom anymore. A large number of the youth are engaged on social media and they are able to spread news and reflect the Taliban's terrorist activities this way. Thus, targeting journalists will not be in their interests. In addition, the Taliban should understand that the media do not only report about them but also monitor the government and report the corruption and any activities going on within the government. The government and officials are criticized severely by the public and writers through the media. After all, the media also interview the Taliban's leaders and provide a platform for them to have their say. Lastly, the media are also expected to report about all layers of the society in a fair and impartial way.

Mohammad Zahir Akbari is the permanent writer of the Daily Outlook Afghanistan. He can be reached at mohammadzahirakbari@gmail.com

Ultimate breakthrough in US attitude towards Afghanistan

By: Rajkumar Singh

Osama's death came after nearly a decade of the US-led war on terror. President Barack Obama in an address to the nation said, 'For over two decades Bin Laden has been Al-Qaeda's leader and symbol, and has continued to plot attacks against our country and our friends and allies. The death of Osama marked the most significant achievement to date in the US effort to defeat the Al-Qaeda. With caution he added, 'Yet his death does not mark the end of our effort. There is no doubt that the Al-Qaeda will continue to pursue attacks against us. We must and we will remain vigilant at home and abroad.' Obama also took the opportunity to emphasise that his country would never be at war with Islam, and also that Pakistan's counter-terrorism cooperation had been important in the operation. Bin Laden was not a Muslim leader; he was a mass murderer of Muslims. Indeed the Al-Qaeda had slaughtered scores of Muslims in many countries.

A welcome move with caution

The elimination of Osama bin Laden, the leader of a global terror network, by the US forces was welcomed by all countries of the world. With his death Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh hoped that it would strengthen the hands of those forces in Pakistan who want the state to shut the door on militancy, extremism and terrorism once and for all. The Kremlin press service also welcomed "serious success" of the US in the fight against international terrorism and called for stepping up joint coordinated battle against this evil. The Russian Foreign Ministry said the US blow to Al-Qaeda had universal significance showing that terrorism is doomed and retribution strikes terrorist sooner or later. But in the death of Bin Laden Moscow saw a wider US game plan behind the liquidation of Al-Qaeda leader and was deeply concerned about US further strategies in Afghanistan and Central Asia. Russia considered the death of the leader as the result of a deal between American and Pakistan intelligence that would pave the way for a power sharing arrangement with the Taliban and should facilitate US withdrawal from Afghanistan. The Kremlin expressed its worry about US interests in Central Asia. Sergei Chekinov, head of the Centre for Military Strategy Research of the Russian General Staff, said, 'The West seeks wider excess to energy resources in Central Asia and a foothold to advance its interests beyond the region.' He also called for strengthening the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO). Chekinov apprehended that the killing of Bin Laden may strengthen the hand of a rising interventionist lobby in the White House and Russia viewed it as a dangerous tendency.

After effects of Laden's death

In post-Bin Laden period the United States of America got an opportunity to start a new beginning in Afghanistan. From this point onward President Barack Obama needs to rethink the war in Afghanistan. If the ultimate objective is to talk to moderate Taliban in order to negotiate an end to this war, there is no justification for further military oper-

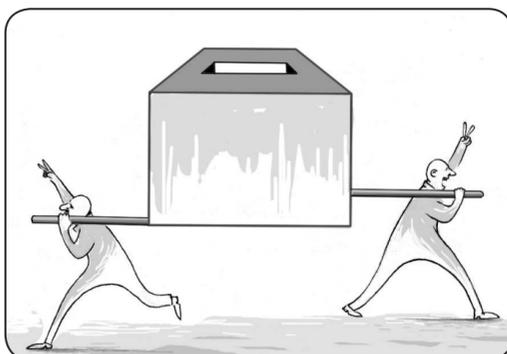
ations in that country, and no excuse for delaying the departure of the US and foreign troops. Exactly the Obama Administration has moved forward in this direction a ground was prepared for talks between the US and the Taliban in June 2011. The Afghan President Hamid Karzai and Robert Gates, the US Defence Secretary had confirmed that preliminary facts are under way.

As an important step forward in this direction the UN Security Councils' sanctions list has been divided so as to separate Taliban leaders from those of Al-Qaeda. The US Defence Secretary in a television interview on 19 June 2011 declared, 'We have said all along that a political outcome is the way most wars end. The question is when and if they (the Taliban) are ready to talk seriously'. He also argued further that US pressure was needed on the Taliban, 'Talks yes, but not yet has long been the Pentagon position. At the juncture Hamid Karzai, the Afghan President, is in difficult situation. Like the Taliban, he wants to end his country's occupation though he is not sure how to do it, given the countervailing pressures from the insurgency and the Americans as well. In fact any long-term bases or talks for withdrawal under the guise of a strategic partnership would not only affect the serious negotiations to end the war but would also undermine the prospect for any regional agreement between Afghanistan and its neighbours.

Analysis of Obama's overall policy

In the circumstances President Barack Obama's announcement came regarding the drawdown of troops in Afghanistan. Several answers were put forward to the question why he took such a decision. Put simply, his sharp political instincts prevailed. He had a pledge of redeem; he sensed the public mood; he heard "bipartisan" opinion in Capital Hill that the soldiers be brought home; he faces an adverse budgetary environment and he understood that his priority should be to mend the US economy rather than wage wars in foreign lands. Meanwhile Afghan opinion was also turning against foreign occupation and the killing of Osama bin Laden offered a defining moment. On diplomatic front too regional allies proved exasperatingly difficult, while European allies got impatient to quit. The regional opinion militates against a long-term US military presence, while the contradictions in intra-regional relationships do not easily lend to negotiations. The Taliban responded to Obama's announcement saying, 'The solution for Afghan crisis lies in the full withdrawal of all foreign troops immediately. Until this happens, our armed struggle will increase from day to day. Unlike his predecessor George William Bush who once said that US would someday consider a Marshall Plan for Afghanistan, Obama pleaded that this is a time of rising debt and hard economic times at home and he needs to concentrate on rebuilding America.

Rajkumar Singh is Professor and Head of P.G.Department of Political Science in BNMU, West Campus at Bihar, India. He can be reached at rajkumarsinghpg@yahoo.com

Daily
Outlook
AFGHANISTAN
The Leading Independent NewspaperChairman / Editor-in-Chief: Moh. Reza Huwaida
Vice Chairman / Exec. Editor: Moh. Sakhi Rezaie
Email: outlookafghanistan@gmail.com
Phone: 0093 (799) 005019/777-005019
www.outlookafghanistan.netافغانستان
The Daily Afghanistan Ma

The views and opinions expressed in the articles are those of the authors and do not reflect the views or opinions of the Daily Outlook Afghanistan.