

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



July 31, 2018

The Scourge of Trafficking in Persons

July 30 was celebrated as World Day against Trafficking in Persons or Human Trafficking in many countries around the world. The day was adopted by United Nations General Assembly in 2010, through the Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Person. The main objective of the Plan was to urge governments worldwide to take coordinated and consistent measures to defeat this scourge. The Plan, in fact, calls for integrating the fight against human trafficking into the UN's broader programs in order to boost development and strengthen security worldwide. One of the crucial provisions in the Plan is the establishment of a UN Voluntary Trust Fund for victims of trafficking, especially women and children. UN Secretary General, António Guterres, on the occasions, said in his statement, "Human trafficking takes many forms and knows no borders. Human traffickers too often operate with impunity, with their crimes receiving not nearly enough attention. This must change."

Human trafficking is, undoubtedly, a serious international issue these days. As poverty and discriminations have escalated in different parts of world, there have been increased probabilities of human trafficking. Each day hundreds of people are trafficked from one place to another for different purposes. Throughout the process, the people who are trafficked serve as a commodity that can be bought and sold whether they agree upon it or not. In most of the cases they do not even realize that they are being bought and sold. It is now a complex phenomenon and it involves different individuals and groups. The whole process actually includes these individuals and groups as various players at different locations that take the victims to their desired place. The techniques used by different individuals and groups differ from one another and they include both legal and illegal ways of transactions, travels and even crossing the borders.

Human trafficking is a trend in the countries where the standard of life is not satisfactory, and people suffer because of lack of economic facilities or they are threatened by instability that has even jeopardized their lives. Feeling dissatisfied from life or threatened by danger, they develop hopes to bring about better changes in their lives and fall easy prey to human traffickers who promise with them better future, which are never turned into action.

In Afghanistan, recently it has been observed that there has been a rise in human trafficking. IOM has also noted a steady increase in young females trafficked from bordering countries in Afghanistan. Many victims are children who end up in carpet-making and brick factories, domestic servitude, sexual exploitation and drug smuggling. This is really a matter of great concern. Females who are otherwise considered as the 'honor' of the society are left at the mercy of the traffickers and they ultimately end up in the houses of the 'foreigners' who can use them the way they want. Does not this situation awake the so-called, dignity, of Afghan men?

The dissatisfied, insecure and poverty-stricken life has compelled the people to search for unconventional and easy ways of earning livelihood. Moreover, the series of civil wars and religious fanaticism have made the life miserable for most of the people and many have migrated out of the country, and many others are now being victimized by human trafficking. Since the downfall of Taliban, the circumstances have seemed to improve but there are serious concerns after the withdrawal of international forces and return of instability. People are not sure about their futures. There are many who do not know what to do with their lives. Uncertainty prevails everywhere. There is no solace for the victims of poverty, instability and war. Families just think of finding ways of guaranteeing their survival. They send their children and even daughters out of their houses to earn some morsels of food. They do not hesitate even if they become the targets of the curse of begging, street crimes and now this monster human trafficking.

Human trafficking is really a serious crime and all the ways that strengthen the process must be checked properly through strong legal measures. The support and assistance provided through different NGOs can play a role in highlighting this issue and taking certain measures to control it but it will not be possible to solve the problem without the involvement of the government and the people as a whole. Unfortunately, Afghan government has seemingly diverted its attentions completely towards the issue of insecurity, where it has not been able to achieve anything worthwhile. Therefore, it requires diverting attentions to some of the other major issues as well that are influencing the people to a large extent and pushing them into jeopardy. Above all, the issues like human trafficking do not only influence the individuals who are being trafficked but also their entire families; and ultimately such issues will bring bad name to the nation as whole. Therefore, the government must make all sorts of effort to nip the evil in the bud.

At the same time, Afghan government must make sure that ordinary people are provided the rudimentary requirements of life and stable political and social circumstances so that they should not go for such options.



US and Taliban Initial Talks Starts in Qatar

By Mohammad Zahir Akbari

It is confirmed that Taliban's political representatives and United States officials have held direct talks in Qatar with no third party. The Taliban political representative, Mutasim Agha Jan, said the talks with American officials in Qatar was 'very useful', adding that both sides explored ways for holding formal and high-level dialogues. It is said that US Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs led the delegation of initial talks in their first contact to end the conflict in Afghanistan. "though the negotiations are at the initial stage, both sides discussed options to pave the way for future contacts and the talks were held in a 'very cordial atmosphere and both sides had useful exchanges", he added. Mutasim Agha Jan expressed optimism saying, "I'm confident that Taliban and US will continue dialogue and will reach a deal." In regards to a question regarding the absence of the Afghan officials in the talks, Agha Jan said Taliban's war was not against Afghans, but the Americans and their invasion of the country, emphasizing that the Afghan government should not have any objections as a peace deal would end the long lasting conflict in the country. He said Taliban's demands for peace include an end to the invasion and the removal of the names of Taliban leaders from the United Nations sanctions list.

In addition, the Taliban negotiators have called for the opening of their office to be the main channel of talks with the US. Their office was closed down days after it was opened in 2013 after then Afghan President Hamid Karzai criticized the Taliban white flag and plaque of the "Islamic Emirate" displayed at the office. Taliban used the white flag and Islamic Emirate during their rule of Afghanistan (1996-2001). Despite the office's closure, the Taliban political envoys continued to reside in the oil-rich Gulf state for contacts with the world community. Once, in January they had visited Pakistan to discuss prospects for reconciliation. After the visit, the Taliban told Pakistani authorities that they would not hold talks with the Kabul administration but were ready for talks with the US.

When a US ministry official was asked about the talks, he said: "The United States is looking for all ways to advance the peace process (in Afghanistan) in consultation with the Afghan government. "The Taliban have always rejected negotiations with the Afghan government and are calling for direct talks with the United States. But a senior US State Department official said that any talks on the Afghan political future will be conducted between the Afghan government and the Taliban.

What has become a hallmark of the Trump administration's approach now, U.S. officials seem to begin negotiations without any preconditions. While Trump announced his new war strategy last year, stated that Taliban and Islamic State insurgents in Afghanistan "need to know they have nowhere to hide, that no place is beyond the reach of American might and American

arms." After they declared end of combat operations in 2014, most American troops withdrew to major population areas in the country, leaving Afghan forces to defend remote outposts. Many of those bases fell in the following months. During a news conference last month in Brussels, Gen. John W. Nicholson Jr., the commander of the American-led coalition in Afghanistan, said remote outposts were being overrun by the Taliban, which was seizing local forces' vehicles and equipment.

Currently, out of 407 Afghanistan's districts the government either controls or heavily influences 229 to the Taliban's 59. The remaining 119 districts are considered contested, according to the Office of the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction. Hamdullah Mohib, the Afghan ambassador to the United States, recently disputed that American and Afghan forces were leaving rural areas and essentially surrendering them to the Taliban. The intent was not to withdraw, quoted from Mr. Mohib, but to first secure the urban areas to allow security forces to later focus on rural areas.

By and large, the United States has made several efforts to negotiate with the Taliban but the current diplomatic effort is the first serious bilateral attempt at talks between the United States and the Taliban since 2013. In 2015, the United States, China, Pakistan, and Afghanistan attempted to sustain talks with the Taliban through a process known as the Quadrilateral Coordination Group. That summer, it emerged that Mullah Omar, the founding leader of the Taliban had died two years prior, prompting a leadership succession crisis in the Taliban that led to the group's fracturing within the period.

The talks between Taliban and US occur after the Special Representative of the Russian President, Dmitry Kevov, recently announced that the Russian government had called for Taliban representatives to visit Moscow before the end of the summer. Kubulov justifies Moscow's decision to negotiate with the Taliban, arguing that the Taliban "control more than half of the territory of Afghanistan," and therefore must be included in the final peace deal in Afghanistan.

Given the United States' engagement in Afghanistan, Russia might have limited chance to influence the countries' issues, but the controversial nature of Russian involvement in Afghanistan is very important for Moscow, as they have been accused of equipping the Taliban. Furthermore, Russia may use the Moscow peace talks to increase the credibility of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization's efforts to facilitate political settlement in Afghanistan. Chinese President Xi Jinping at his sixteenth Cingdao summit in June showed his strategy to strengthen the role of the Contact Group of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, a peaceful solution to the conflict in Afghanistan.

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Afghan Peace Should Not Fall Victim to Conflicting Priorities of Nations Involved in the Process

By Mohammed Gul Sahibzada

Since the US direct involvement in Afghanistan in the aftermath of events unfolded after 9/11 in 2001, priorities and nature of involvement of US and other countries - mainly the ones forming NATO - kept changing. The initial goal was to capture Osama Bin Ladin, the main suspect who planned and carried out fateful attack on World Trade Center in New York city, which killed and wounded more than three thousand people, and to dismantle his organization - Al-Qaeda. Thousands of US and NATO member countries' armed forces entered Afghanistan to achieve these goals. Taliban government was toppled by US military mainly because they rejected US demands to handover Osama Bin Ladin and his accomplices to US Government. Strategists and planners in the White House and Pentagon decided to start the process of nation building in Afghanistan parallel to ongoing military campaign to fill the power vacuum created due to Taliban eviction from government. This tedious process was undertaken at a time when most of the focus was to defeat Al-Qaeda and Taliban, and the process of nation building was not given due diligence and attention, which was warranted at the time. Though military campaign, which was focused on the main goals of US intervention, went smooth when it comes to defeating Al-Qaeda and capturing Osama Bin Laden, but political stability, economic development and nation building remained periphery objectives for the entire decade, starting 2001 till 2010. It was later decided to clear out all un-governed space in the country in order to deny safe havens for terrorist organizations and Taliban fighters across the country.

The United States of America and NATO member countries - I would call them as 'stakeholders' intervened in Afghanistan in order to defeat terrorists in the country. This was the mandate given to armed forces of these countries in Afghanistan. As the war in Afghanistan prolonged - against the expectations of stakeholders, priorities of mentioned countries changed as well. Democracy inherently calls for elections and change in government policies. These policy changes on the part of stakeholder countries - including the US under Obama administration - caused huge dent in political, economic and military landscape of Afghanistan. Everything seemed to be starting and reviewing a new. Disagreements reached to their peak between US Government i.e. NATO and Afghanistan government concerning the way to move forward. It was almost a tipping point for US government under Obama administration to pull out all forces from Afghanistan due to differences with then Afghan Government headed by Hamid Karzai.

All the pitfalls and unpleasant consequences that had taken huge toll on coalition and Afghan forces in the shape of losing ground to Taliban fighters, which eventually settled for almost 40% of total Afghan geographical area at Taliban fighters' hands, and the sorry state of economy of Afghanistan, which prompted thousands of educated and young Afghans to flee their country in search of better life to EU countries, had been due to lack of all-inclusive strategy for Afghanistan, and conflicting priorities of different governments that came into power in the US and other NATO member countries. Though leveling the playing fields for political settlement of ongoing military campaign has started with the new government under Trump administration, it is highly recommended that progress made in Afghanistan during the last one and half decade should not be compromised while talking peace with Taliban. Though there have been urgencies initiated at stakeholders' home countries and their policies, it is sensible to look back and review the progress of one and half decade in Afghanistan, which has been earned by shedding so much blood and so very much resources. Afghans

now stand comparatively united, politically alert to their future, committed to build their national institutions, are struggling to achieve economic development in the country. These are major milestones for nation building, which have been achieved. A stronger Afghanistan will accommodate interests of all stakeholders, friendly countries and neighbors in her national agenda. Therefore, it is highly recommended that stakeholder countries accommodate in their priority and national interests, Afghanistan's political, economic and social stability.

Long term peace is possible when it is all-inclusive, aligned with present Afghanistan realities and alert to national, regional and international sensitivities and rivalries.

Though the Bush (junior) administration during his two terms office had put lots of resources in support of nation building by constructing hundreds of schools and clinics, and building thousands of kilometers of roads across the country, but this huge operation was undertaken without a strategic framework and extensive planning process.

The idea behind building schools, clinics and roads were logical because education would train future generation of the country to take responsibility and control of the country, clinics would take care of the health of population because healthy nation can bring around huge economic benefits, building roads would connect villages, districts and provinces for the people of the areas, who had been locked in smaller geographical areas for hundreds of years, so that they could trade, interact and communicate with each other.

But nation building requires a strategy with hundreds of moving parts in order to bring about a stable, functioning, inclusive, and economically viable government and a standing nation in the country. Most of the tips and advices were ill-fated, but were given due attention in the process of building the strategy for nation building. For example, Pakistan had advised against building a strong Afghan army, and they consistently opposed this. The price of such ill-fated blips in the decision to build a strong Afghan National Army was huge - both for coalition and Afghan government in later years. There had been many factors contributing to the kind of lukewarm attention towards building Afghan national institutions, which resulted in a series of spasmodic reactions to events at that time, which - despite of injecting precious resources, manpower and time to the process - lack of strong, inclusive government institutions continued to take toll on the people and government of Afghanistan and proved taxing on US and NATO member countries. Corruption increased many fold, warlords climbed to the summit of power in every government organizations in Kabul and in the provinces. Judiciary and legal institutions had become main source of corruption, which alienated general public from the government and rallied support around forces opposing the government.

Things had almost gone out of control before a re-think to build a viable strategy was agreed upon among the stakeholders in 2011.

The ongoing efforts to bring peace in the country are commendable. The present government of Afghanistan and its leadership seem to have understanding of the sensitivities lurking around peace talks. It seems all major stakeholders, regional powers and neighboring countries have been taken into confidence in the ongoing peace negotiations. This is the way forward, and the people of Afghanistan are looking forward restlessly to a positive outcome of the ongoing peace negotiations with Taliban so that a strong and peaceful Afghanistan can emerge and stand as an example to the whole world community.

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