

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



March 13, 2016

Efforts to Control Graft

As the concerns regarding corruption in Afghanistan are getting serious, the European Union (EU) Delegation in Afghanistan has launched a campaign against it, known as 2016 Anti-Corruption Campaign. This campaign is aimed at helping Afghan citizens fight the scourge and mobilizing government to take stronger action.

The campaign is planned to run for seven weeks and would culminate with a high-level conference in early May. A statement issued during the launch of the campaign by the EU in Afghanistan says, "Afghanistan's endemic corruption is crippling the economy and undermining the fight against the insurgency. This threatens past achievements and investments in Afghanistan as well as the future of all young Afghans... The campaign will focus on four themes: Corruption and peace; corruption in the judicial sector; natural resources and stability – the threat of illegal mining; and public action against corruption."

Meanwhile, EU Special Representative in Afghanistan, Ambassador Franz-Michael Mellbin, attending the campaign launch said, "Every day ordinary Afghans are confronted with corruption's dark shadow that fills the pockets of the rich while the poor suffer. It undermines the Afghan people's hard-won achievements over the last 14 years, and it is a primary threat to the sustainability and survivability of the Afghan state... The government can and should do more, but government action cannot stand alone. Every Afghan should take personal responsibility for ending this scourge. This includes refusing to benefit from the corruption of others. This is why the campaign will also focus on how ordinary citizens and media can confront and expose corrupt practices."

Afghanistan is one of the countries largely influenced by the menace of corruption. It has, in fact, penetrated deep within different institutions in the country and has crippled the overall systems. Afghanistan has, therefore, failed to deliver maximum at the time when the development has been required the most and, in the process, has also lost some golden opportunities. Corruption has been lethal enough to annihilate the efforts or the plans to reconstruct the country and the different systems that may set it on the way to development. It should be noted that billions of Dollars poured in the country for both military support and development projects. But if we analyze the socio-political and socio-economic scenario in the country the development does not seem as great as it should have been. Most of these aids were devoured by corruption instead of being spent for the intended purposes. Either the money that was to be spent through government or the NGO sector, both the ways corruption had the largest share.

An annual study of Transparency International for 2015, earlier in the year, also revealed that Afghanistan is ranked the second most corrupt countries among 176 in the world. This is really tragic and shows that no considerable work has been done against corruption though it has been highlighted as a major problem throughout the last decade. And, it has had negative influences as well; particularly in the top governmental institutions. Corruption not only dominated the elections but also haunted the Kabul Bank and brought bad name to the nation and at the same time financial loss; however, it has been left to dominate with vigor and strength. It has, in fact, victimized our society more than terrorism and insecurity and today if Afghanistan is not able to stand on its own, it is also because of the corruption.

The Independent Joint Anti-Corruption Monitoring and Evaluation Committee (MEC) last month blamed leaders of the National Unity Government (NUG) for failing to deliver on their promises to fight corruption in the country. With the change in government, there were some hopes that the situation would get better as National Unity Government (NUG), in its early days promised to handle corruption with iron fists; however, that does not seem to be happening even after so many days have passed. Afghanistan still stands among the most corrupt countries in the world.

There seems to be no doubt in the fact that one of the basic reasons of the persistent rise in corruption in Afghanistan is the lack of commitment and honest efforts to control and eradicate this menace. Neither the previous government, nor the current government has shown real efforts to face it seriously. Therefore, the serpent has survived and has become reckless and out of control. In fact, it would now require a bold step to stand against it as it would, definitely, devour wholly the person who may confront it.

It is a real challenge now for the Afghan government to stand against it. However, a solid and dedicated effort against it can make a difference. It is not altogether impossible to defeat it. Definitely, strict measures are required, temperaments would be tested, institutions would be questioned, the powerful would have to be threatened, and more responsible attitude would be expected from all the people; in short, the whole mechanism would be shaken if there are real and honest efforts. And, it should be noted that there is no alternative for Afghanistan. The way it is going on leads to chaos and instability. If it has to change its route it must decide now and act accordingly.



Seeking Peace Talk – A Futile or Fruitful Effort?

By Hujjatullah Zia

The war and militancy continue unabated despite the peace discourse. Afghanistan, along with its political allies, seeks to bring the Taliban to negotiating table, however, the Taliban outfits insist on their preconditions i.e. complete withdrawal of the foreign forces from Afghanistan, official recognition of Qatar Office, removal of Taliban from United Nations terrorist blacklist and releasing their prisoners. Of late, the Taliban issued a statement denying the rumor of participating in peace talks brokered by the four-nation group – Afghanistan, Pakistan, China, and the United States. The Taliban once again reiterates that "unless the occupation of Afghanistan is ended, black lists eliminated and innocent prisoners freed, such futile misleading negotiations will not bear any results". Last week, a former Taliban leader, Syed Akbar Agha, dubbed the four-ways talks in Islamabad and Kabul as "ineffective" because details of what discussed in the talks remained hidden from the nation and Taliban representatives were not present in the meeting held in Kabul on February 23, 2016. Similarly, the representatives of Taliban in Qatar said they are "unaware of plans for talks" and that they had not changed its preconditions for joining the peace process.

The statement ended hopes of the reconciliation negotiations commencing in the first week of this month – a timeline set by the four-nation group following the Kabul meeting. This is the second time that Quadrilateral Coordination Group (QCG) has missed the deadline. It had initially planned to open the talks in the last week of February.

Meanwhile, the US re-urged the Taliban to join peace talks and said Afghan and US forces would have to prepare themselves for the prospect of escalated violence in the spring and summer if the insurgent group did not agree to talk. "If there's no peace process in place and the Taliban's not willing to come to the table and talk about a reconciliation ... we would and the Afghan security forces would have to prepare themselves, for the potential for increased violence in the spring and summer months," the US State Department spokesman John Kirby said.

"They have a choice. Rather than continuing to fight their fellow Afghans and destabilizing their country, they should engage in a peace process and ultimately become a legitimate part of the political system of a sovereign united Afghanistan". In spite of the fact that the complete withdrawal of foreign troops is on the list of Taliban's preconditions, Pakistani officials, who offered to host the first round of direct talks between the Afghan government and Taliban representatives, said that the abrupt pullout of US soldiers from Afghanistan was not advisable and the Afghan Air Force is to be supported

and trained further.

Moreover, Pakistan downplayed the Taliban's rejection of proposed peace talks saying that it hoped for progress "in coming days". Sartaj Aziz, foreign policy adviser to Pakistan's prime minister, said that Pakistan, the United States and China would use their influence to persuade the Taliban to come to the table to try to end a nearly 15-year-old war. Speaking at the Council on Foreign Affairs in Washington last week, he also said that Afghan Taliban's leadership enjoyed shelter inside Pakistan, which was used as a "lever" to pressure the group into holding talks. He stated, "We have some influence on them because their leadership is in Pakistan and they get some medical facilities, their families are here. So we can use those levers to pressurize them to say, 'Come to the table'." China also hoped that Afghanistan, along with concerned parties, would work together to bring the Taliban to the table. At a routine press conference, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hong Lei said that the QCG had worked for creating favorable conditions for direct talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban and has played a positive role in building consensus and pushing forward the reconciliation process since its establishment. He said China was willing to play a constructive role in the resumption of the peace talks in Afghanistan, having respect for Afghan sovereignty and the will of concerned parties.

It is self-explanatory that the Taliban's reaction is highly crucial towards the peace talks and the QCG is tasked to persuade them to sit around the table. Taliban always set ifs and buts and therefore, refused to declare a truce via holding a face-to-face talk. So, an amicable agreement between Afghanistan and the Taliban elements has changed into a dream that never comes true – in spite of the long lasting efforts made by Afghanistan and its allies. Likewise, the Afghan High Peace Council (HPC), which was established in 2010, gained no achievements albeit great sacrifices were made in this path. Hence, the hopes and optimism should be expressed on the basis of tangible results.

This should be noted that insurgency and terrorist attacks are intensified and the graph of combatants and non-combatants' casualties increased in recent months. In other words, the discussion about peace negotiation brought no positive changes in the country and the warring parties continue their inroads without faltering.

If the QCG's pressure and appeal do not work, Afghanistan will be on the alert for escalated violence in spring and summer. Thus, a fruitful outcome of resuming peace talk is still under doubt and baseless optimism, in this regard, is no more than an illusion.

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Countering the Menace of Terrorism

By Asmatyari and Delawar Sherzai

The discontent within Afghan people seems to be rising about the ongoing reconciliation process and prospects of peace and tranquility in the country. The people of Afghanistan, at the moment, do not seem to be in the position to have vivid clue about where the scenario is leading as there have been many ambiguities and secrets about the most important political issues. Apart from that, the incapacity of Afghan government to provide better political system and good governance has made Afghan people undergo distress.

It is really important to note that there are major deficiencies in the ongoing political setup of the country. The current government has not proved to be very much inclusive and efficient and has not been able to provide even the rudimentary requirements to the people of Afghanistan.

Everyday the news of a successful terror plots has mad us think that terrorism grows mightier irreversibly. Deteriorating security condition, escalating insurgency, militancy, Talibanization and worsening state of law and order are the immediate common issues that call for urgent attention. The consecutive successful terror plots undertaken by insurgents and militants depict the degree of strength they have acquired over the course of time. Afghanistan is presently passing through mirage of problems. One of them is irreversible growth of insurgency, terrorism and Talibanization. In both the states majority if not all terror plots are claimed by Taliban whilst proposing table talk too.

Taliban militants consider the group as an Islamic political movement fighting for restoration of Sharia in the country through political power. However, the group is increasingly turned into an insurgency group wrecking havoc across the country through roadside bombing, kidnapping and terrorist attacks on government offices and military installations as well as foreign entities. In last over-a-decade, the militant group has been fighting against Afghan National Security Forces and US-led NATO forces which have left thousands military personnel and civilians dead.

In fact, the different branches of the insurgent groups operating under the umbrella group of Taliban follows the path of other global typical terrorist groups such as Al-Qaeda terrorist network considering it legitimate to target civilians as part of their campaigns against foreigners and the secular western-backed states. In last 15 years of war in the country, the Taliban and its other affiliate groups have committed countless cases of atrocities against the innocent civilians. Formally, Taliban denounce civilian casualties in the wars, but still are responsible for majority of civilian casualties in the country. The Taliban and other militant groups would not be able to en-

gage in direct warfare against security forces across the country, rather they would further turn to unconventional wars such as bombings, attacking on public offices and civilian populations. If the ongoing peace efforts do not succeed in the near future and if the Taliban fail to resurge forcefully, a scenario that is highly unlikely, the risk will exist that the militant group will turn into a long-term insurgency engaged in low-scale subversive activities against the government and the civilian populations.

Adoption of diplomatic channels and force are the two permissive way out that let Afghanistan ultimately counter terrorism. The diplomatic means can be put to action given the terrorists mold them in accordance to the constitution of the country and turn into a law abiding citizens. Provided the terrorists abandon terrorism and bloodshed and transform their militant power into political strength exercised within the jurisdiction of constitutional provisions, should be ensured legal safeguards. If the government surrender to the demands laid by Taliban, might require a heavy price of constitutional aversion, is not practically acceptable. Consequently, there seems a little chance the table talk succeeds, provided the divergent agenda the government and Taliban owe hardly coincide each other.

The other only option left with parallel progression of diplomatic channel is the relentless use of force. The first step to move ahead involves a loud condemnation of terrorism and terrorist activities by citing Quranic verses supporting this purpose.

The subsequent step includes dismantling the safe havens of terrorists –anybody found extending moral, political or economical support to a terrorist or a group must be taken into custody and tried for terrorist act. Bringing the latest technology into use all the clandestine means the terrorist draw financial backing must be uncovered and curtailed. The terrorists willingly joining peace process and giving up their former malicious activities should be given vocational training and economic incentives. Counter terrorism department supplemented with fully equipped and trained personnel empowered to take immediate action against any person or group charged with the act of terrorism. An anti-harassment legislation based on ones religious, racial and ethnic inclination must be enacted, in that pursuit the exploitation of religion, sect or ethnicity to harm others must be discouraged and treated a punishable act. The government should rely on the use force against those elements referring to force against innocents' civilians on any ground. The menace of terrorism can be countered prioritizing the aforementioned course of action.

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