

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



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Political Corruption: As the Main Cause of Weak Social Trust in Afghanistan

Political corruption is a social phenomenon that destroys the fabrics of the Socio-political system in a given society. In other words, it is the use of power by government officials for illegitimate private gain. In such a context government officials do not consider the people supreme or as their clients that their main duty is to serve them. Rather, they only look for opportunities to misuse the public resources and change the bureaucracy to a tool for personal gains. In such an environment, corruption can facilitate criminal enterprise such as bribery, extortion, cronyism, nepotism, patronage, graft and embezzlement. In the case political corruption is very common and high, we may use the term "kleptocracy", literally meaning "Rule by Thieves."

It is clear that people who live in a corrupt society should have low social trust. The opposite case is that, in order to make life bearable in a very corrupt society, like Afghanistan, ordinary citizens should develop a lot of social contacts that they could trust them. But this does not seem to be the case in our society, the people mistrust, envy, pessimism and cynicism towards, public officials and other communities or ethnic groups. On the other hand, the type of trust the people in Afghanistan have developed is, a personalized trust which means that they only trust very close friends, relatives, and people of their own ethnic group, while they are distrustful of people outside their close circle. This kind of trust is totally different from the social trust which entails giving people you don't know the benefit of the doubt and having an optimistic outlook.

One critical issue that should be considered here is that, when it comes to forming beliefs about social trust, people usually make inferences from the behavior they encounter from public officials in the given society. As mentioned before, social trust could be interpreted as peoples' moral evaluation of the society in which they live. As a result, the behavior of the Afghan public officials is one important device that people use when establishing beliefs about to what degree they in general can be trusted in their society. From theoretical perspectives, it is termed as "heuristics" which could be understood as the kind of clue people who lack perfect information use when they have to decide if they should or should not trust other people they have to deal with them. This social behavior of the people has three causal mechanisms, firstly, the inference from public officials: If public officials in a society like Afghanistan are known for being corrupt, citizens will believe that even whom the law requires to act in the service of the public cannot be trusted, as the case is about the in our society. As a consequence, they would come to a conclusion that most other people cannot be trusted either. Such a social belief leads to a gap between the people and government. If the situation persist the gap between the people and government would be such deepened that could lead to a total social crisis in the given society. Unfortunately, the signs of such mistrust are visible in our society. Secondly, the inference from people in general: Citizens would see that most people in the given society with corrupt officials take part in corruption in order to obtain what they feel their rightful due. As a result, the citizens would come to a conclusion that most of other people cannot be trusted. Due to this, social trust, among different social groups, is very weak in Afghanistan. And even if a person from a specific ethnic group goes to a public office he usually looks for a public officer of his own ethnic group to help him in his official work or to receive the public service. Thirdly, the inference from oneself, such a social environment makes the citizens to take part in corruption, even though they consider it morally a wrong act. Ultimately, they would come to a conclusion that since they cannot themselves be trusted, other people cannot be trusted either.

Political corruption is a wide spread social issue in Afghanistan. Due to this, public officials mainly focus on their personal gains in the public offices and do not give due attention to the citizens' concerns or needs. This has led to a strong public distrust to public officials, lack of social trust to others and ultimately has encouraged the people to take part in corruption themselves. As political corruption leads to wide spread social distrust, insecurity and economic crisis in a given society, it is the duty of the government of Afghanistan and the people to strongly stand against it, in order to restore social trust in the society.



Afghanistan: Slaughterhouse of Journalist and Civilians

By Hujjatullah Zia

Unfortunately, the media workers have been deliberately targeted for the purpose of extinguishing the voice of freedom of expression and enlightenment in the country. Within less than four days, three times they have been attacked in Kabul, Kandahar and Khost provinces. The first attack targeted Abdul Manan Arghand, who worked as a journalist for Kabul News TV, by gunmen in the way to work in the southern city of Kandahar. The second fatal suicide attack was carried out in Afghanistan's capital, Kabul, by an attacker who mingled with group of reporters — and calculatedly detonated his explosive among the group journalists killing thirty people including nine journalists and nearly forty other wounded. This deadly event occurred after a motorcycle rider tactically blew himself up in the middle of early morning rush hour traffic in the vicinity of the Afghan intelligence service's headquarters when journalists went to cover the blast scene then the coward terrorist blasted himself among defenseless media workers. The Afghan branch of the so-called Islamic State has claimed responsibility.

The third incident took the life of BBC reporter Ahmad Shah, who had been working in the eastern Afghan province of Khost. In total, 11 journalists have been killed within three days while several others were seriously injured. Meanwhile, another attack was carried out on a NATO convoy in Kandahar, the south of the country, took the lives of 11 innocent children student; Thus, nearly 70 people were killed and at least 130 wounded when an ISIS bomber attacked a voter registration center in west of Kabul last week. The previous month, an ISIS bomber targeted a Shia shrine in Kabul where people had gathered for celebration of the Persian New Year 31 people were killed and 65 others were injured. Overall, according to the media reports Kabul has seen 10 deadly attacks in the first four months of this year alone.

These successive incidents indicate that the climate of fear and killing has been intensified throughout the country started from spring season, especially after the three-year late election process has begun. A few days ago Jalalabad city was also rocked by explosion, targeting a mosque in the vicinity of the 4th police district of the city where registration for the elections was underway and as a result at least six people have sustained injuries. In addition, at least eleven civilians were killed or wounded in a separate explosion in Surkh Rod district of the same province one day earlier to the mentioned event.

Thus, according to last Sunday media report, thirty security forces including national and local policemen have been killed in a Taliban attack on Teshkan district of northern Badakhshan province. The incident happened at around 04:00 am on Sunday when the Taliban stormed the district, following their so-called "Al Khandaq" offensive. As quoted from Javid Majidi, Badakhshan's provincial council member, the Taliban also held three policemen in captive. The provincial police chief

Kirat Jahangir, however, said that five policemen were dead in the attack. He added that nine Taliban militants were killed and 13 others wounded in the incident. The Taliban confirmed their attack on Teshkan district of the province but claimed that it left dozens of pro-government forces dead.

However, the trends on freedom of expression is more systematic and dangerous as it seems that recent successive blasts are not the first and last attacks on media freedom in Afghanistan. In fact, the media repression had started from several years ago. In 2017 nearly 20 journalists have been killed with at least 169 cases of violence or threats have been reported. Thereafter, many reporters and media workers started to use self-censorship due to the fear climate and threats imposed on the media community. These facts were well reflected in a personal essay written by martyred Mr. Marai titled "When Hope is Gone" talked about the risks involved in his life in the Afghan capital, "I don't dare to take my children for a walk. I have five and they spend their time cooped up inside the house", he wrote.

It is more painful when no one's hearts are shaken seeing these many dreads and issues in this war-torn country. It was repeatedly criticized about journalist's threats and that government refrains from providing the necessary information to the media. It is highly important for media to have freely access to information so as to monitor and control over the state authorities elected by the society and to make a self-controlled society, which is the demand of democracy. The definition of a self-controlled society means that it shall make its own decisions. And the society can do this in case it is informed in aggregate with the open exchange of opinions by the mass media, as an instrument for the exercising of freedom of speech and expression for a democratic society. Hence, Political pundits believe when the people are aware of the facts, the country will be controlled and calm.

No state will be built on the ocean of blood; so defenseless civilian must be protected and the security of independent media which is a cornerstone of democracy must be ensured. Any types of attacks on media are deemed as attacking on freedom of speech and democracy. Democracy is meaningless without freedom of media and freedom of thoughts. According to article 50 of the Afghan Constitution and according to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and International Conventions, "Right to Know or Right of Access to Information" are the fundamental human rights. Therefore, enjoying from these rights are not possible without supporting and protecting media community against bloodthirsty groups. Both the government and its international partners should act up their legal and ethical duties based on which their presence is justified.

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Shifting energy import patterns enhance China's clout in the Middle East

By James M. Dorsey

Subtle shifts in Chinese energy imports suggest that China may be able to exert influence in the Middle East in alternative and subtle ways that do not involve military or overt economic pressure.

The shifts involve greater dependency of the Gulf states on oil and gas exports to China, the world's largest importer, at a time that the People's Republic has been diversifying imports at the expense of Gulf producers. The shifts first emerged in 2015 when Chinese oil imports from Saudi Arabia rose a mere two percent while purchase of Russian oil jumped almost 30 percent. Russia rather than Saudi Arabia has been for much of the period since China's biggest crude oil supplier.

The shifts were reinforced by the US shale boom, a resulting drop in US imports from the Gulf, and President Donald J. Trump's tougher trade policies.

"With the Trump administration, the pressure on China to balance accounts with the U.S. is huge... Buying U.S. oil clearly helps toward that goal to reduce the disbalance," said Marco Dunand, chief executive and co-founder of commodity trading house Mercuria.

At the same time, China became in 2016 the largest investor in the Arab world with investments worth \$29.5 billion, much of which targeted infrastructure, including the construction of industrial parks, pipelines, ports, and roads.

Compounding the impact of shifts in Chinese energy imports is the fact that despite support for Russian policy in the Middle East, Beijing increasingly fears that Moscow's approach risks escalating conflicts and has complicated China's ability to safeguard its mushrooming interests in the region.

Viewed from Beijing, the Middle East has deteriorated into a part of the world in which regional cohesion has been shattered, countries are fragmenting, domestic institutions are losing their grip, and political violence threatens to effect security and stability in northwest China.

China's concern is likely to increase if and when the guns fall silent in Syria and the country begins to focus on reconstruction. Already China worries that Uyghur foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq are heading to areas closer to Xinjiang in Pakistan and Afghanistan.

An end to the war in Syria, moreover, opens up economic opportunity but is also likely to sharpen rivalry between Russia and China as that will play to China's strength and highlight Russian weaknesses.

China's interest in Syrian reconstruction goes beyond dollars and cents. "Syria can be a key logistics hub for China. Its history is the key to bringing stability in the Levant, meaning it has to be incorporated into China's plan in the region. From a security perspective, if Syria is not secure, neither will (be) China's investment in neighbouring countries," said Kamal Alam, a Syrian military analyst.

All of this raises the question of how China can best stand up for its interests against the backdrop of a perception among Chinese scholars that China's unsuccessful efforts to mediate in multiple conflicts in the Middle East, including Israel-Palestine, Syria and the Gulf crisis that pits a United Arab Emirates-Saudi-led alliance against Qatar, have failed to position the People's Republic as a credible alternative to the United States and Russia. Pouring fuel on the fire, is the fact that Chinese support for Russian policies in the United Nations Security Council and elsewhere has effectively identified Beijing with Moscow rather than allowed it to differentiate itself. The Middle East has already forced China to move away from long-standing principles that underwrote its foreign and defense policies for decades like non-interference in the domestic affairs of others and a refusal to establish foreign military bases even if officially they remain valid.

China has in part been able to maintain the dichotomy between theory and practice by evading public discussion on issues such as whether and

under what circumstances China should use military force or apply economic pressure as it did for example when it expressed in 2016 discontent with a South Korean decision to deploy a US THAAD (Terminal High Altitude Area Defence) anti-missile system.

Beyond the establishment of China's first foreign military base in Djibouti, Chinese special forces have been advising Syrian president Bashar al-Assad's regime in its operations against jihadists that include Uyghurs in their ranks and have operated on the Afghan side of the Central Asian nation's border with the People's Republic.

China scholar Andrea Ghiselli noted that Chinese diplomats, scholars and journalists seldom focus on security in public, pointing instead to "the positive elements" of China's relationships in the Middle East.

Nevertheless, Mr. Ghiselli observed that few Middle Eastern leaders attended last year's Belt and Road Forum in Beijing that was intended to showcase China's Eurasian-focused infrastructure investment initiative as "a more open and efficient international cooperation platform; a closer, stronger partnership network; and to push for a more just, reasonable and balanced international governance system."

The Gulf crisis has rendered the six-nation Gulf Cooperation Council that groups Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Kuwait, Oman and Bahrain impotent and complicated negotiations for a free trade agreement with China.

Similarly, a potential withdrawal this month of the United States from the 2015 international agreement that curbed Iran's nuclear program would likely put China at odds with Middle Eastern proponents of a tougher attitude towards the Islamic republic like Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Israel.

The hardening of Middle Eastern fault lines is likely to make it increasingly difficult for China to remain aloof and emphasize economic and trade relationships without getting sucked into the region's multiple conflicts.

Saudi Arabia has so far refrained from making economics a fixture of its relationships in its effort to counter rising Iranian influence in the Middle East, and together with the UAE, has not attempted to force third countries to abide by its boycott of Qatar.

The question is whether the Gulf states will maintain their caution. Omar Ghobash, the UAE's ambassador to Russia, suggested last summer that the anti-Qatar alliance could "impose conditions on our own trading partners and say you want to work with us then you have got to make a commercial choice."

The alliance has so far not acted on Mr. Ghobash' suggestion, in part because the international community, including China, have called for a negotiated end to the crisis and refused to back the Saudi-UAE position. The shifts in China's energy imports coupled with China's need to protect its interests means that the People's Republic may be in a position to leverage its power in alternative ways.

"This... gives China significant leverage to impose its preference in oil contracts and improve its own energy security. It also means that China has the capability to greatly determine the economic future of countries currently engaged in all the regional hotspots, a costly endeavour that cannot be sustained without matching capital inflows," Mr. Ghiselli said. "Thus far," he added, "China has bought oil and gas from both Sunni and Shia countries without showing evident preferences. However, were China to do otherwise, its actions might produce deep changes in the region in ways not different from those of a military intervention in favour of one of competing parties."

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