

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



May 06, 2017

Governance Issues Overlooked

In the shadow of the growing insecurity in Afghanistan, everything seems dark. There are many important issues in the country that have been overlooked because of the growing insecurity. One of the major reasons that insecurity is considered an immediate threat is that it directly targets human beings in a cold-blooded manner. However, it is important to see that there are many other issues that may not seem to be urgent or directly threatening, but they have much more potential to pave the way for instability and disorder within the society. Ill governance is one of the same type of issues; though it does appear to be an immediate threat, it is far more disadvantageous for a society and the social and political systems.

Therefore, it is imperative for Afghanistan to divert special attention towards the governance issues that it faces. Few years earlier, there used to be certain discussions regarding good governance in Afghanistan and different authorities used to have certain plans in this regard as well; however, recently there is complete silence about it. The officials and authorities are busy in different sorts of tussles that are mostly relevant to insecurity or their political differences. And, there is no one to listen to the voices of the poor people who face issues like poverty, corruption, lack of social and political opportunities and subjugation by the ruling elite.

It is time for the officials to divert their attentions towards the real issues and do not lead the people astray. They have to ensure that they make honest efforts for good governance in the country and provide strong foundations that can guarantee better future for the coming generations. Government stands as one of the most significant actors in good governance. It is the government that chooses whether good governance is realized or not. There are certain important characteristics that must be achieved so as to create it. Good governance has to be participatory, consensus-oriented, answerable, transparent, approachable, effective and efficient, equitable and all-encompassing and pursues the rule of law.

The government, therefore, must strive to ensure that all the important groups of the society are taken into consideration within the decision making process and both men and women are engaged sufficiently. Participation could be either direct or through lawful intermediate institutions or representatives. It needs to be knowledgeable and structured. This means freedom of association and expression on the one hand and an organized civil society on the other hand. Unluckily, in our country Afghanistan the decision making is not carried out through proper participation of the representatives of the people. In reality, the decision making process is very much centralized.

Achievement of good governance requires arbitration of the different interests in society to reach a wide consensus in society on what is in the best interest of the whole community and how this can be acquired. It also requires a broad and long-term perspective on what is needed for sustainable human development and how to acquire the goals of such development.

This can only result from an understanding of the historical, cultural and social contexts of a given society or community. Afghan government has not been able to build up a strong consensus and the ruling class does not seem much worried about any sort of consensus.

Accountability is a key obligation of good governance. Not only governmental institutions but also the private sector and civil society organizations must be accountable to the public and to their institutional stakeholders.

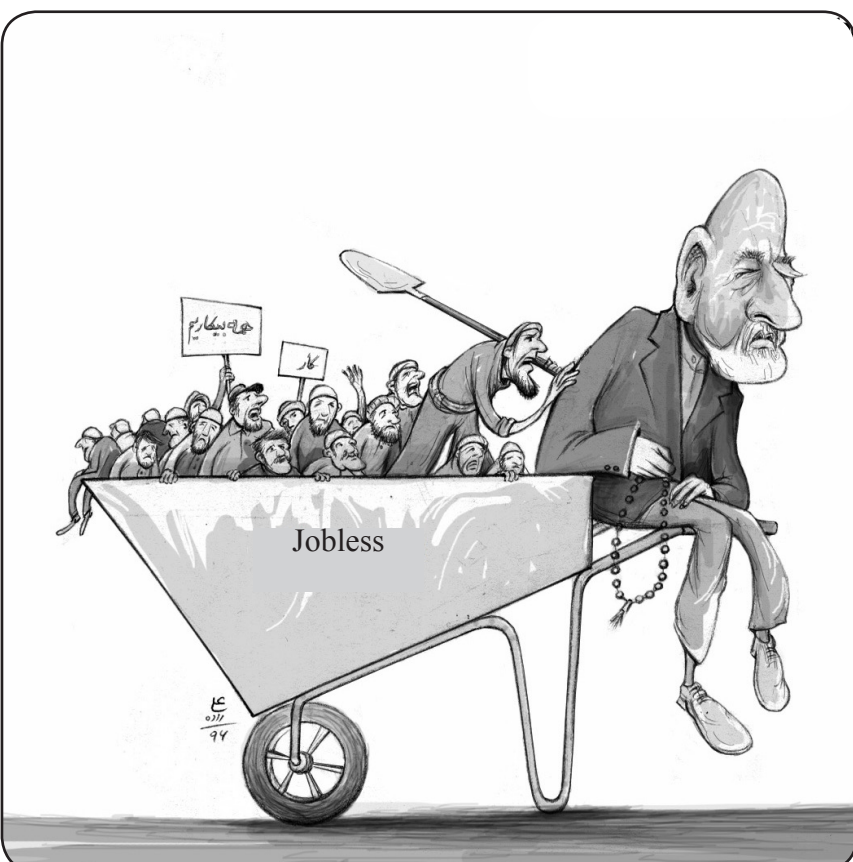
Afghan government, conversely, has been formed in such a manner that it is complicated to hold the Presidential Office accountable for its policies and actions. It can do whatever it wants without standing accountable to its people. As a matter of fact accountability can be acquired when there is transparency and the rule of law.

Nonetheless, both these characteristics seem to be non-existent in Afghan society. Transparency and rule of law can be maintained when there is proper segregation of power and the different organs of state can function on their own.

In effect, judiciary and law enforcement agencies must be competent to hold the law as the top priority theme. In Afghan political system the separation of powers is not clear and the judiciary is not capable enough to pressurize the Cabinet in true sense. Furthermore, the powerful and the rich are mostly considered above the law and the poor and weak have to go through the 'quagmire of law and order system'.

Good governance requires that institutions and processes attempt to serve all stakeholders within a reasonable timeframe. It means that it should be approachable. In the same way it should also ensure equity and inclusiveness. A society's wellbeing depends on ensuring that all its members sense that they have a stake in it and do not feel barred from the mainstream of society.

This requires all groups, but particularly the most vulnerable, have opportunities to get better or maintain their well being but what Afghan government has to offer us is the disregard for the most vulnerable. The minority groups in reality suffer from lack of proper participation in decision making and they find their existence in jeopardy within the society.



The North Korean Dilemma

By Nasser Koshan

Exclusive for the Daily Outlook

North Korea is one of the most reclusive countries in the world. The sole remnant of the Cold War era, the Kim dynasty has ruled the country with an iron fist since the Korean War. North Korea has always been a major international concern for successive U.S. administrations. To deter North Korea, the United States has stationed nearly 30,000 U.S. troops equipped with Apache helicopters, F-16s and B2 stealth bombers in close proximity in the neighboring South Korea. Moreover, the United States, South Korea and Japan have formed a triangular military alliance in retaliation to any acts of hostility along the demilitarized zone, famously known as the DMZ in the Korean Peninsula. In return, North Korea purportedly has the capability to strike cities both in Japan and South Korea within 10 minutes of unleashing any of its ballistic missiles. They have successfully developed an array of low-range and mid range ballistic missiles, (NODONG) 1,000KM, (TAEPODONG 1) 2,200KM and (MUSUDAN) 4,000 KM respective target ranges each. But as we speak, the North Korea still does not have any long range ballistic missile aimed at targeting U.S. cities in their arsenal.

Historically, North Korea has used the escalation and de-escalation as a tactical maneuver to deter its nemesis the United States for any unilateral action against the regime. They have successfully conveyed a strong signal, capable of responding to any hostility with full utilization of their de facto military might.

Previously, the U.S. administrations had taken diverse approaches towards handling the North Korean nuke program than that of the incumbent president. Former US President Clinton for instance, reached a deal with the Pyongyang in 1994, providing the country a sum of USD 4.0 billion in energy aid in exchange for abandoning its nuclear enrichment program and gradual return of the tyrannical regime to the global community. Unfortunately, the agreement never fulfilled its essential purpose, conversely enabling the communist regime to become more dangerous and disillusioned.

Whereas, the Bush administration pursued a rather different strategy countering North Korea; President Bush indulged in intensifying the already levied U.N. sanctions on the regime, labeling the regime as a rogue state hostile to the U.S. national security and that of its resident allies South Korea and Japan. In his famous State of the Union address in January 2002, he labeled the North Korean regime as an imminent threat, conspiring against American friends and allies. He subsequently, termed Iran, North Korea and Iraq as "Axis of Evil" ruled by infamous dictators, depriving their nation of freedom and democracy.

To no surprise President Trump is different; he has equivocally warned the country for any acts of provocations with an imminent military response, nevertheless, for the time being, he has consented with reaching out to the Chinese leadership pressuring the Korean dictator realize the se-

riousness on the American tone. In a surprising gesture, President Trump has also shown willingness to meet with the Korean leader "Under the right Circumstances". He has occasionally applauded his leadership style calling him "a smart cookie" who has been able to retain legitimacy despite unsustainable economic sanctions on its regime.

President Trump has urged the Chinese to take the matter in their hand, China is the oldest trading partner of the North Korean regime, and Pyongyang heavily relies on Chinese products for almost 80% of its internal consumption. In contrast to his prior stance on China during his successful 2016 bid to the Whitehouse, the candidate Trump who was fiercely accusing the Chinese for currency manipulation and unfair trade with U.S. is toning down on the reassurance given by the Chinese President Xi Jinping reaching out to the North Korean leadership for a possible negotiation.

As part of the U.S. strategy on North Korea, as recently as last week, the White House invited all the 100 sitting senators for a classified briefing on the North Korean threat. The senators were notified that the U.S. administration is considering all options at its disposal including any probable military strike on North Korea if needed, but reassured that it will not initiate any preemptive attack on the regime unless deemed necessary. Based on current intelligence reports, the North Koreans still lack the capability to strike the U.S. mainland, especially Hawaii or its west coast, but they certainly have the ability to strike any South Korean and Japanese cities including the capitals Seoul and Tokyo merely in a matter of minutes.

On the other hand, North Korea is no terms to back down, recently in direct violations of the U.N. Security Council agreements, the regime fired an array of ballistic missiles into the Japan Sea, which was instantaneously condemned as an act of provocation and an attempt to destabilize the region by the Japanese and Korean officials.

The U.S. intelligence officials believe that despite perpetual failed testing, North Korea is inching closer to adding long range Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles (ICBMs) with the capability of carrying nuclear warheads targeting United State's west coast in their portfolio. Citing the regime is vigorously striving to attain such status for its survival against any militaristic action by the resident U.N. command coalition. In conclusion, North Korea as the sole surviving communist regime in the world has a full assessment on how to keep its close and distant foes at bay, they consider their nuclear capability as the only survival tool against any possible acts of transgression from Japan, South Korea and the United States combined.

To that matter they have increased investing in adding additional nuclear payloads in their current missile arsenal, restricting the United States with two viable options, either wait for a gradual demise of the Kim dynasty or impose ever stronger sanctions to limit its nuke capabilities with China as the stabilizing factor in mind.

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Why did Trump Accept Venezuela's Money?

By Kenneth Rogoff

There is a certain irony in recent news that Venezuela donated a half-million dollars to Donald Trump's presidential inauguration through Petróleos de Venezuela (PDVSA), the state-owned oil company. Venezuela, of course, is a serial defaulter, having done so more times than almost any other country over the last two centuries.

Recently, Venezuela's despotic socialist government has been so desperate to avoid another default (which would be the country's 11th since independence) that it mortgaged its industrial crown jewels, including the United States-based refiner Citgo, to the Russians and the Chinese. (The Citgo brand is especially famous in my hometown of Boston, Massachusetts, where the company's iconic sign has become a landmark in the environs of Fenway Park, where the Red Sox baseball team plays.)

It is not exactly clear why Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro is so desperate to avoid defaulting on the country's foreign debt that he is starving his own people, much the way Romanian dictator Nicolae Ceaușescu did in the 1980s. With such severe shortages of food and basic medicines, there is little doubt that if and when the autocrat is finally deposed, there will be some eerily familiar horror stories.

It is simplistic to portray the Venezuelan tragedy as an apocryphal tale of what happens when a country is taken over by left-wing populists.

The right-wing governments of the 1980s and 1990s were also corrupt; and, while national income rose, income distribution was among the most unequal in the world. But it is true that Venezuela's current horror show is very much a product of two decades of left-wing misgovernment.

There was a time when a contribution such as the one Venezuela made to Trump was a mere pittance in a much larger aid budget. Under its previous president, the charismatic Hugo Chávez, Venezuela spread its oil money far and wide, mostly to support other populist anti-American governments in the region. Chávez even funded heating fuel for some low-income households in the US, a program made famous by former US representative Joe Kennedy II's 2006 television ads.

That was back when high and rising oil prices helped to maintain Venezuela's revenues even as economic mismanagement sent oil production into a downward spiral. Mind you, Venezuela was never nearly as rich as the US, so its aid budget was like giving to the poor by taking from the almost poor. Now, with oil prices having fallen dramatically since Chávez's death from cancer in 2013, his successor, who has all the charisma of a lifelong apparatchik, is being forced to

get by without the same easy revenues. And while Chávez was also autocratic, he probably won his elections. Maduro's election in 2013, by contrast, was a very close affair that many people question; for one thing, the opposition was allowed virtually no television time, even if starry-eyed US academics insisted that Maduro won fair and square. It is understandable that left-leaning scholars found some of the socialist government's redistribution and education policies appealing, as Nobel laureate Joseph Stiglitz did when visiting Caracas, the country's capital, in 2007.

But the left's willingness to overlook the dismantling of democratic institutions in Venezuela is more reminiscent of right-leaning Chicago-school economists' relationships with Latin American dictators in the 1970s.

Today, Venezuela's economy is a full-blown disaster, with the collapse in growth and near-hyperinflation causing widespread human suffering. In such circumstances, one might expect a traditional Latin American military coup. The absence of one in Venezuela is hardly a reflection of strong democratic institutions. Rather, the government gives the military a free hand in running the drug trade, making many generals and officials extremely rich - and able to buy the loyalty of key troops. And this brings us back to the bizarre spectacle of this economically desperate country helping to fund Trump's inauguration festivities. Like Joe Kennedy II, the Trump organizers can plead that if Venezuela wants to spend its money on making life better for its much richer northern neighbor, who are they to say no?

Well, in both cases, the US should have said no: while the aid is transparent, the symbolism of a rich country taking money from a poor neighbor with millions of suffering people is hardly attractive. And it is particularly bizarre that even as US policy toward Mexico has greatly increased the chances of an anti-American Chávez-type character becoming president there, officials are providing positive publicity to a government that is a caricature of disastrous governance.

Trump's predecessor, Barack Obama, took a principled stand in US dealings with Venezuela, imposing sanctions to rein in rogue behavior, a policy that drew broad bipartisan support. The Trump administration needs to stay the course, especially as lower oil prices have weakened the Venezuelan government's hand. Instead of bashing Latin America, the US needs to show it can be a steady and principled friend that will not be swayed by corrupt bribes of any type. (Courtesy Project Syndicate)

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