

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



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Time for Fully Functional Local Administrations

The government has introduced a number of the provincial governors after months of delays in appointing key government officials due to the protracted presidential election process. Chief Executive of Afghanistan, Dr. Abdullah Abdullah, has suggested that a number of current provincial caretakers would be appointed as governors in addition to appointing new provinces. Many of the top provincial posts are still vacant as there is no indication of the government's resolve to quickly fill the provincial posts. So far governors of less than a dozen of Afghanistan's provinces have been appointed by the unity government and almost all the provinces were run by caretakers. According to the reports, the leaders of the National Unity Government (NUG) have had negotiations over appointment of the provincial governors, and they would continue talks to fill vacant all the top provincial posts. The move comes amidst rising grievances from the public over inefficiency of the local administrations as the insurgency is raging a bloody war in many of the country's provinces.

The move is coming as a late but right development in the sluggish process of filling key government positions. The prolonged process of the last year's presidential elections and the subsequent formation of National Unity Government (NUG) have rendered the Afghan government unable of running the day-to-day and key affairs of the country smoothly and efficiently. It also has exacerbated the chronic corruption in provincial administration that is tuning the public exhausted with the corrupt local officials. The new appointments is indicating that NUG is finally come to the point to overcome internal politics and agree on some of the key provincial positions. The urgency of the situation at local levels both in regards to security situation and administrative affairs of the government must have convinced the leaders of the NUG to move more urgently in appointing the governors.

The NUG leaders should not prolong the process of completing the government's structure any further. The increasing security, administrative and economic challenges in the country are believed to be partly due to the lack of leadership and administration in the provinces. With the Afghan government effectively dysfunctional in last seven months, the administrative and executive affairs of the government at local levels were also chaotic and ineffective. With the government in state of uncertainty in about eight months, caretaker ministers were running the government and public affairs in the provinces. However, the caretakers were officially banned of their due authorities in governorship either by law or the presidential order. For instance, the governors did not have the authority to hire or fire new top and low level employees, and they were at no position to execute other key activities of the local administrations.

The caretaker governors in the provinces did not have the power and authority of running the administrative affairs of the provincial administrations. Many important tasks in government offices such as HR and procurement issues as well as development works of the government had been effectively frozen as the government executives had been stripped of their due authority to run the activities at local levels. This was the reason behind the insufficiencies in functioning of the local administrations. Many of the caretaker governors had publicly expressed their grievances on their lack of authority to perform their key duties. Even some of the governors threatened to resign as they were seeking to be provided the required authority from the government. The government had promised to take whatever necessary actions in making a robust and efficient government both at national and local levels. It is never early for the government to do so by filling the key provincial posts in urgent manner.

The NUG did the right job to finally act decisively in introducing nominees for the ministries and having approved the nominees. With no doubt, it is the time for the Government to act promptly on appointing all governors. Finalization and completion of the government structure would quickly help to restore efficient governance at local levels and improve the overall economic, governance and security situation. Many believe that the public views towards to the local government departments are extensively negative. The local administrations are seen as ineffective, corrupt and unwilling to deal with the challenges the people are facing. This requires the NUG's urgent action to fulfill the promises and build effective and responsible administrations in the provinces.

On the other hand, the dire security threats and the ongoing war across the country also partly due to lack of leadership on all levels of the government including at local levels. Taliban are battling its most ferocious war with the government of Afghanistan in past over a decade of the conflict while the local administrations are not well positioned to tackle the threats or help the security agencies in their security operations. The Taliban's new approach this year towards the ongoing war has particularly target the provinces. The insurgent groups have had limited gains in some provinces and have inflicted heavy casualties on ordinary people and security personnel. However, it is clear the insurgents are not in the position to take major provincial capitals or districts, but it should not ignored that the widening insecurity along with other factors will render the local administrations unable of running efficiently. The government has made clear pledges to the people, and it is time for the government to act promptly on fulfilling the promises.



The Increasing Trend of Targeting Civilians

By Abdul Ahad Bahrami

With the sharp rise in Taliban activities in recent months, the militant group and other militants have been increasingly targeting innocent civilians. This is worrisome sign for safety and security of civilians in Afghanistan as the ongoing insurgency is far from being resolved in the near future. According to the reports, the Taliban stopped passenger vehicles and kidnapped dozens of passengers in Paktia province. The Taliban have claimed responsibility saying that they are searching for government workers. Last Wednesday, 14 civilians, including nine foreigners, were killed in a gruesome attack by gunmen in Park Palace Hotel in Kabul.

With the increasing incidents involving abduction of passengers, kidnapping of civilians is now becoming a trend and being used by the Taliban and other militants as a war tactic. The kidnapping of 31 passengers, 19 of whom released recently, was the most shocking incident of its kind perpetrated by the Afghan militants in recent years. The kidnapping appalled the nation and sparked widespread condemnations which culminated to release of about two third of the hostages. Previously, in two occasions, the militants abducted some demining workers in eastern Afghanistan and 11 laborers in Sar-e Pul province and released them after local elders negotiated for their release. The fate of six passengers who were abducted on March 16 on Herat-Kandahar highway remains unclear.

The Taliban is alleging that the group's formal policy is to protect civilians and show compassion towards civilians particularly for elders, women and children. However, it seems that this is all claims and the the militants are not committed to their own or common principles. The Taliban consider their struggle a legitimate fight for restoring Islamic Emirate. However, the Taliban and other new-emerging militant actors is increasing turning into a criminal group inspired by their interpretation of Islam. The militant groups launch attacks discriminately and inflict heavy casualties by roadside bombing and attacks on government offices and public places.

As the militant groups are waging a deadly campaign in the country, they are visibly adopting criminal approaches that are common for many terrorist groups in the Middle East, South Asia and Africa. In fact, the insurgency in Afghanistan is increasingly turning into policies of not differentiating between civilians and combatants. This, however, will have repercussions for the insurgent groups on the long run. In past fourteen years of war, the Taliban have also been somehow trying to capture minds and hearts of the Afghan mainstream through posing themselves as provider of security and justice in local areas where government has limited access. Civilian casualties and kidnappings by the militants would further alienate the public from the Taliban.

On the other hand, the militants have recently been adopting approaches that are largely viewed based on ethnic and sectarian lines. Most of civilians abducted by insurgents in recent months have been Hazaras. While the Taliban have usually been discouraging ethnic or sectarian violence in Afghanistan in last fourteen years, the recent incidents of kidnappings

targeting Hazaras suggest the group's - or of their affiliated ones - of desperation in the war efforts. Even if the Islamic State has been responsible for some abductions, the kidnappings could not have happened without Taliban consent in areas that are mostly controlled by the Taliban. Pursuing sectarian based approach in the war and targeting civilians put the Taliban on a sliding slope that could gradually turn the militants into criminal-terrorist groups.

In last fourteen years of war, the Taliban's formal stance on civilian casualties has been to denounce deaths of civilians and blame the government for incidents of civilian casualties. The Taliban have been somewhat avoiding to target and alienate civilians in non-war situations. Many times, the Taliban have been trying to enforce social order through strict policing in areas where government agencies have no or limited presence. But the group's discriminatory bombing campaign and terrorist attacks have been carried out without considering safety of civilians. In many instances, in order to target government workers and security personnel, the Taliban launched attacks on crowded areas such as stadiums and queues at banks.

The militants' recent war tactics clearly indicate that they will continue to target civilians in different ways such as kidnapping and bombing populous areas. The Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) needs to effectively protect the public and minimize civilian casualties by the militants. One of the objectives of the Taliban is to show the government unable of providing security to the public. If the government fails to protect civilians, its credibility to the public will decline and the Taliban will take advantage of it. The Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) has largely been successful in gaining public trust on its capability to provide security for the public. The ANSF should redouble efforts for winning the hearts and minds of the people.

With emergence of Islamic State group, there is also a high chance that the militant groups take ethnic-sectarian based approach in the ongoing war and target ethnic and religious minorities. This will virtually enter the crisis into a new phase. Development of ethnic or sectarian divisions is highly a dangerous prospect for the future of the country. Afghanistan is highly susceptible to ethnic-sectarian tensions as it is neighboring Pakistan, a country hard hit by sectarian violence, as well as the current Shia-Sunni tensions in the Muslim world. The rise of the Islamic Stage groups is coming as an alarm for Afghanistan. The Syria-originated group is a potential threat to the harmony and coexistence of Afghan ethnic groups. The government needs to plan for a long-term strategy for protecting civilians. The UN has had unsuccessful efforts in the past to persuade the Taliban for protecting the civilians. Any such efforts are beneficial. The United Nations still can influence the parties of the war to respect civilian safety and security. The Afghan government should ask the UN and other parties to negotiate with the Taliban over the issue. The anti-insurgency campaign should be combined with direct or non-direct talks with the militant groups for providing protection to civilians by all sides of the war.

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Adaption of Dual Strategy; Negotiation and Operation Works

By Asmatyari

Man suffers, not only when the part of the world in which he is residing is hit by natural calamities like earthquakes, famines, floods, diseases, etc., but occasionally also at the hands of men driven mad by political, economic or social power. The individuals driven by evil motives, fear of losing what they owned, lust of earning more monetary gains put them in the black race of domination, subjugation leading to formation of a human society we witness at the moment, characterized by rule of mob, violence, aggression, innumerable bloodshed and ruthless killings of fellowmen.

The brutality seems to have chain up unto complete annihilation of innocence - observing calm and indifferent to entire scenario. This is eventually referred to be era of vindictiveness - exploits the essence of development for peace that has turned a nightmare. The strength the anti-state elements have acquired marks the state of mercifulness we display - we are divided they are united.

At present the insurgents have turned united, that only let them, wreak havoc on ordinary masses. In the wake of pronounced spring offensive the foreign diplomats, public officials and civilian are left render the pay of decade long war. The growing attacks on foreign and civilians indicates the insurgents are underlining their pretentious presence. Earlier, two successive blasts and associated casualties rocked Kabul city.

Earlier an unfortunate morning when a suicide car went off close to the Kabul International Airport claimed lives of at least three people were killed and injuring 18 others. According to a Ministry of Interior spokesman Sediq Sediqqi, two women were among the dead and among the injured were eight women and three children. Later, European Union Police Mission (EUPOL) in Afghanistan has confirmed the death of one of their contract workers. The blast took place during rush hour in a densely populated area and inflicted severe damage to vehicles and buildings in the neighborhood. It was the second blast of the day. The first blast had occurred duet to IED explosion on night at the University of Kabul that injured two lecturers. This depicts state of soaring insecurity.

The Taliban has claimed responsibility for the fatal bombing. The militants have already stepped up attacks on government and foreign targets in recent weeks, taking a heavy toll on civilians and Afghan security forces. The insurgent group has already vowed of nationwide attacks in what is expected to be the bloodiest spring offensive in a decade as NATO forces pull back from the frontlines. Who shall be targeted is clarified in their statements, "The main targets of these operations... will be the foreign occupiers, especially their permanent military bases... officials of the stooge regime, their military constellations, especially their intelligence, interior ministry and defense ministry officials."

It depicts Taliban are definitely keeping their proclamation and pursuing their target. Nevertheless, the government necessary preparation and a coordinated joint effort to be taken seem non-existent. Despite state's security apparatus tried its best foiling the attack to a greater extent on many occasions - the non-providence of necessary information about the Taliban's advances is a clear reflection of loopholes in security institutions.

The consecutive attacks mark that Taliban has ignored the call for peace talk and instead officially launched their spring fighting offensive - expanding their battle from northern parts to rest of the country. One of strategy the government can put to exercise is building broader consensus against them to be excommunicated. Formerly, a number of religious scholars in Kabul expressed their support for recent statements made by clerics in the holy city of Mecca, condemning Daesh and the Taliban as deviants from Islam and calling on all true Muslims to stand against them. The prominent scholar, Al-Ghamedi had said that both Daesh and Taliban have killed people in the name of Islam, but in fact have no connection to the true religion.

In contrary to the aforementioned facts, earlier the High Peace Council (HPC), a government body tasked with brokering peace with Taliban and other insurgent groups, demanded the names Taliban off a UN sanction list would help continue the peace process. If we deem Taliban a political reality for the sack of argument even then this demand depicts that HPC has gone ballistic. Peace talk provides political space, the insurgents to prove they have resorted to peace and disbanded their militant activities. Even if the peace talk crystallizes Taliban who committed severe human right violations and enlisted on UN list should be subjected to fair trial.

It is certain that the entire world is facing the threats from renowned terrorists of Daesh and Taliban. Both Muslim and non-Muslim world are rendered vulnerable to attacks of these terrorists. The absence of trust and coordination between most of countries has let these terrorists invincible. Nonetheless, the broader system of cooperation between security institutions, intelligence agencies and fair prosecution system, the government may cop with the challenge of multiplying insecurity. The militants apprehended must be subjected to a fair trial is a pivotal to maintenance of peace and security.

Nonetheless, the government falling short of widening the security net, created security vacuum which is duly filled by emerging militants of ISIS. The growing activities of ISIS in the wake of Taliban's "spring offensive" multiplied governments concerns. Earlier president Ghani admitted that the group poses a serious threat to regional security whilst terming it worse than al-Qaeda. The targeted attacks by twin groups fortify government complications. Seeing the specialized techniques brought to use by the terrorist the government has likewise to develop the more sophisticated counter insurgency techniques. The international forces must broaden the spectrum of their advice, assist and train mission to get greater number of Afghan forces get trained for such speech combat missions.

Politically the government stance of pursuing the dual strategy of negotiation and operation might end up with tangible outcomes. The dual approach exercised by incumbent government to seek an end to decade long bloody conflict, is justifiably appreciable. The government proposing peace talks to the disgruntled faction of militants' amidst executing military operation to inflict crushing defeat to those challenging the writ of government seems to work in the long run.

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