

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



November 04, 2018

Corruption: As a Main Challenge to Good Governance in Afghanistan

In every society and community, there are certain behaviors, which are very much detested in the course of interpersonal relationships, and group behavior. The behaviors include cheating, lying, etc. These behaviors which have moral, ethical, legal and religious implications are detested because they are inimical to proper and decent standards. The pattern of that encapsulates all this detested attitude is corruption.

Corruption is a household name in every society nowadays and the negative impact it has on the socio-economic and political setting of a country can hardly be over emphasized. There has been a global cry and coordinated efforts to tackle this social evil through the creation and implementation of anti-graft laws and policies across nations.

Some nations have been successful in their quest to reduce the level of corruption while others are still lagging behind. In this light, Afghanistan seems to be an example of a state that has failed in combating corruption. From the common man in the street to the highest political figure, corruption is recurrent in almost every transaction in the Afghan society.

Within the last one decade, the issue of corruption and good governance has taken the center stage in development discourse worldwide. Corruption is shaking the foundation of the nation as there is no sector that is not affected by this monster. The challenges of corruption remain a major devastating issue facing Afghanistan, although, this phenomena has become a cankerworm that has eaten deep into the fabrics of our system.

As a result, over the years, public sector in Afghanistan has been characterized largely by ineffectiveness and inefficiency. The situation is the same in some other Asian countries too. High-level corruption has been identified as being responsible for Afghanistan's insecurity, underdevelopment and growing crimes rates. It is instructive to note that the Afghan government and citizens have not totally committed themselves to introducing and implementing measures that can prevent or drastically reduce the extent and consequence of corruption in the country. That is not to say that laws, institutions and programs for controlling corruption have not been introduced by successive governments. On the contrary, every Afghan government has introduced elaborate laws and programs, only for officials to turn such programs into fertile opportunity for corrupt practices and enrichment. Consequently, there has been a geometrical growth in the rate of corruption in the country. It is also claimed that corruption is the source of many socio-economic and political problems that have militated against the attainment of economic development, equity, social justice, political integration and stability as well as democracy in the country. The employment, promotions, postings and deployment processes in the public service are riddled with corruption.

This trend was exacerbated 15 years ago after international coalition forces toppled the Taliban regime. Since then, the world has poured hundreds of billions of dollars to Afghanistan. Most of what was pledged was meant to bring peace, stability, build and rebuild institutions that would work for all Afghans after so many years of wars and devastation; instead, much of that money has been wasted. You could even argue that the dangers posed by ISIS and the Taliban, who now control more land than at any point since the 2001 western intervention, are ultimately less damaging than the country's corruption.

Although the National Unity Government has taken some good initiatives to fundamentally tackle corruption, the situation remains unacceptable as corruption continues to permeate and pervade every facet of national life in Afghanistan. As a result, the Afghan government should show a strong political will to end impunity for corrupt officials in order to create an effective and transparent government in Kabul.



Regional Stakeholders Should Involve in Afghan Peace Process

By: Hujjatullah Zia

In the last talks with US envoy Zalmay Khalilzad in Doha, the Taliban representatives insisted on their preconditions which include the pullout of US troops from Afghanistan, lifting sanctions on their leaders, release of their prisoners and establishment of an official political office in Qatar.

In his 2017 strategy for Afghanistan, the US President Donald Trump said a hasty withdrawal from Afghanistan would lead to horrible consequences similar to those of Iraq and his administration "cannot repeat in Afghanistan the mistake our leaders made in Iraq". He called himself "problem solver" and promised victory either through military deal or political settlement. Subsequently, he increased the number of soldiers from 8,400 to about 14,000.

Kabul government, however, urged the Taliban to stop killing Afghan people and resolve their issues through negotiation with Afghan High Peace Council.

Turning down Kabul's peace offer, the Taliban guerilla fighters intensified their attacks against Afghan nation and the number of civilian casualties reached 8,050 - 2,798 dead and 5,252 wounded - in the first nine months of the current year, according to a report released by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan.

In the last US-Taliban's talks, the US has agreed to discuss the pullout of its troops from Afghanistan and the two sides "talked about the end of occupation and a peaceful resolution for the Afghan issue," Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid is cited as saying.

It is believed that the withdrawal of US troops will not mark an end to Afghanistan's conflict. There is a strong gap and mistrust between Kabul and the Taliban leadership. Kabul government will urge the Taliban "to abide by Afghan Constitution", whereas the Taliban will persist "the return of Sharia". The former is based on democratic and international principles, while the latter is originated from the fundamental ideology of the Taliban and their radical narrative of religion. Thus, the two contradictory demands will remain a bone of contention between Kabul government and the Taliban leadership. In such a case, the withdrawal of US troops will be a one-step-forward-and-two-step-backward move. Consequently, Trump or his future successor's administration will re-send its troops to the country similar to that of Iraq to resume its military action.

There is one more possibility that with the pullout of US forces based on agreement with the Taliban, China and Russia will step up their efforts for pushing the Taliban to peace table with Kabul government if insurgency

does not come to an end. The room for Iran and Pakistan will also expand for supporting the Afghan-owned and Afghan-led process.

China and Pakistan are believed to be the two heavyweight peace stakeholders in the region and they are willing to support Afghanistan to push the Taliban to the table. The three neighboring countries also established a mechanism for dialogue and cooperation on counterinsurgency. China's assistance with Kabul government include "political encouragement; diplomatic support in any international, multilateral and regional platforms; QCG and China-Russia-Pakistan trilateral dialogue on Afghan issue," said Dr. Zeng Xiangyu, scholar of South Asian Studies at Sichuan University. "I don't think," Zeng said, "China is in the position to bring Taliban to negotiating table." But in terms of Pakistan, he answered positively saying that "Pakistan has a leverage over the Taliban".

Kabul government calls regional countries in general and China and Pakistan in particular to partner it with peace talks and counterinsurgency. So, Kabul will welcome regional support for being more effective and productive. Likewise, Kabul government expects the international community to support Afghanistan in counterinsurgency as well as peace process.

Although Washington has put all its weight behind the peace talks through appointing Khalilzad as its special representative for Afghanistan reconciliation and discussing the pullout of its troops from the country, the Taliban's unmitigated insurgency signals their insincerity to the talks. If the negotiations do not bear the desired result, neither Trump will be a "problem solver" nor his administration the winner.

All in all, the US is advised to consider two points: First, it should not ignore the role of regional countries, mainly China and Pakistan, in the peace process. Second, it must act more cautiously so that the mistake made in Iraq could not be repeated in Afghanistan.

Meanwhile, the Taliban have to stop holding the negotiations as a political game, stop their insurgency and practice upon any agreement made with their interlocutors. If the Taliban guerilla fighters do not stop their insurgency in the country despite reaching a census with their interlocutors, a potential window for a peace deal, backed by regional and international powers, may be closed. In short, the Taliban should either come to the table with bona fide intention, or face the consequences of a strong military action by Kabul and its international allies.

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Saudi Arabia and Iran: When it Comes to Exiles, the Pot calls the Kettle Black

By: James M. Dorsey

If Saudi Arabia is under pressure to give chapter and verse on the killing of journalist Jamal Khashoggi in its consulate in Istanbul, Iran risks straining relations with Europe at a time that it needs European support the most by targeting ethnic rights activists.

Mr. Khashoggi's murder has focused attention on Saudi harassment and intimidation of dissidents as part of the kingdom's effort to silence critical voices. The Saudi campaign had little geopolitical significance until Mr. Khashoggi's killing.

By contrast, Iran's long history of targeting ethnic rights activists, including Iranians of Arab descent and Kurds, has long been rooted in the Islamic republic's belief that they enjoy the support of the United States, Saudi Arabia and Israel in a bid to destabilize the country.

If Saudi Arabia has suffered severe reputational damage with the killing of Mr. Khashoggi and could face sanctioning for the first time in its history, Iran, long struggling to polish its tarnished image, could face sanctioning by Europe at a moment that it needs the Europeans the most.

In the latest Iranian incident, Danish Prime Minister Lars Lokke Rasmussen and intelligence chief Finn Borch Andersen are calling for European Union sanctions after they discovered a plot to kill Danish residents associated with the Arab Struggle Movement for the Liberation of Ahvaz (ASMLA), an Iranian Arab group.

The plot, together with at least two other incidents in Europe in the last year, complicates European efforts to salvage a 2015 international agreement to curb Iran's nuclear program after the United States withdrew from the deal and imposed crippling sanctions on Iran despite Iran's denials of involvement.

The alleged Danish plot came to a head when authorities in late September closed bridges into Copenhagen and suspended train operations in connection with the case. Mr. Andersen said that Norway had since extradited to Denmark a Norwegian national of Iranian descent who was seen taking pictures of a Danish home of an ASMLA leader.

ASMLA strives for independence of Iran's south-eastern oil-rich province of Khuzestan that is home to Iran's ethnic Arab community and borders on Iraq at the head of the Gulf.

Two other groups, the Islamic State and the Ahvaz National Resistance, claimed responsibility in September for an attack on a Revolutionary Guards parade in the Khuzestan capital of Ahvaz in which 29 people were killed and 70 others wounded.

Iranian officials blamed the United States and its allies, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Israel for the attack.

Iran at the time summoned the ambassadors of the Netherlands, Denmark and Britain to protest the three countries' hosting of Iranian ethnic rights militants.

The Danish plot followed the killing by unidentified gunmen in the Netherlands in November 2017 of Ahmad Mola Nissi, another ASMLA leader. Shot dead on a street in The Hague, Mr. Mola Nissi died the violent life he was alleged to have lived.

A 52-year-old refugee living in the Netherlands since 2005, was believed to have been responsible for attacks in Khuzestan in 2005, 2006 and 2013 on oil facilities, the office of the Khuzestan governor, other government offices, and banks.

Together with Habib Jaber al-Ahvazi also known as Abo Naheth, another ASMLA activist, Mr. Mola Nissi focussed in recent years on media activities and fund raising, at times creating footage of alleged attacks involving gas cylinder explosions to attract Saudi funding, according to Iranian

activists.

Mr. Mola Nissi was killed as he was preparing to establish a television station backed by Saudi-trained personnel and funding that would target Khuzestan.

The Netherlands has emerged in recent years as a hub for Iranian activists alongside Britain.

A group of exile Iranian academics and political activists, led by The Hague-based social scientist Damon Golriz, announced in September the creation of a group that intends to campaign for a liberal democracy in Iran under the auspices of Reza Pahlavi, the son of the ousted Shah of Iran who lives in the United States.

Compounding the fallout of Iran's targeting of activists, is last month's expulsion by France of an Iranian diplomat accused of being part of a plot to bomb a rally in Paris organized by the Mujahedeen-e-Khalq, a Saudi-backed Iranian exile group that calls for regime change in Tehran. The diplomat was among six people arrested for allegedly plotting the bombing.

The Mujahedeen enjoy the support of prominent Western politicians like US President Donald J. Trump's national security advisor, John Bolton, his personal lawyer, Rudolph Giuliani, and Saudi Arabia's former intelligence chief, Prince Turki al-Faisal. Mr. Giuliani addressed the targeted rally. U.S. officials say Iran plotted to attack the group's massive base in Albania in March.

Support for the Mujahedeen has figured prominently in broadcasts of UK-based television station Iran International that according to The Guardian is owned by a secretive offshore entity with close links to Saudi crown prince Mohammed bin Salman.

The Guardian reported that Saud al-Qahtani, Prince Mohammed's menacing information czar who was one of several senior Saudi officials removed from office in the wake of the killing of Mr. Khashoggi, was among the station's main funders.

"I can say that Iran International TV has turned into a platform ... for ethnic partisanship and sectarianism," The Guardian quoted a source as saying.

The Danish, French and Dutch incidents suggest that Iran takes serious indications that Saudi Arabia is considering attempting to destabilize the Islamic republic by stirring unrest among its ethnic minorities.

Mr. Bolton advocated a similar strategy before becoming Mr. Trump's national security advisor.

Iran has been the target in the past year of various insurgent groups believed to have Saudi support, sparking repeated clashes with Iranian security forces and the interception of Kurdish, Baloch and other ethnic rebels. Iranian foreign minister Mohammad Javad Zarif arrived in Islamabad this week on an unscheduled visit to discuss the recent kidnapping of at least 12 Iranian border and Revolutionary Guards believed to have been abducted on the Iranian side of the Pakistani-Iranian border by Jaish al-Adl, a Pakistani group that often issues its statements in Arabic rather than Baloch, Urdu or Farsi.

As the United States prepared to next week impose a new round of sanctions against Iran, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo used the Iranian attacks in Europe to weaken European rejection of the US move.

"For nearly 40 years, Europe has been the target of Iran-sponsored terrorist attacks. We call on our allies and partners to confront the full range of Iran's threats to peace and security," Mr. Pompeo tweeted.

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