

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



November 18, 2017

Facing Winter Challenges

In certain parts of Afghanistan, the winter season is very challenging. People living in such areas have to face different sorts of hardships and troubles. In certain cases, those hardships come in the form of different calamities or natural disasters. As, the facilities to counter such disasters are minimum, the losses are mostly huge and, in certain cases, even result in the death of many innocent lives.

In one of similar incidents, a snow-slide killed eight members of a family in eastern Kunar province on Friday. The family belonged to the Bahadar village of Chapa Dara district and consisted of three children. The incident is really tragic and shows how difficult the lives of the common and poor people of Afghanistan are.

In winter season when snow covers different parts of the country and, in few of them, even turn into avalanche disasters, the ones who become the victims are the poor people who have ill-constructed houses and suffer from lack of facilities.

After any natural disaster in a particular locality, there are many issues that may rise if support does not reach to the effected people quickly. Moreover, it may take the victims a long time before they are able to live their lives the way they used to live, and by that time they may face problems like rise in diseases, malnutrition, lack of proper medication, hygiene issues and unavailability of shelters.

Now that winter is getting more intense, the problems may multiply; therefore, it is really essential that speedy measures must be taken when there is any natural disaster. The concerned officials require to act prudently and make sure they reach to all those who have been affected.

The people, at the same time, can make efforts to support their countrymen. Particularly, those who are not influenced by the tragedy and have the capability to support others must stand for others support. They should feel the problems of others as their own and must show true patriotism at the time of trouble.

It is really tragic in Afghanistan that common Afghan people have not only been victimized by wars and conflicts but also by natural disasters. Whether it is avalanches, floods, famine or even earthquake, the severest of the shocks shake the existence of the poor and destitute. They are the most effected, in two different ways. First, they do not possess a strong and reliable shelter and other facilities that can safeguard them against the natural disasters, which make them easy victims.

Second, the facilities that should be there after the disaster to minimize the level of destruction, never reach them, as they are at the remotest of the areas.

Leave the disaster aside, even when there are severe weather conditions, which cannot be even termed as disasters; the loss of life and property incurred by the poor Afghans is really immense. Every year, the severe cold weather victimizes many poor people as they do not have enough capacity to secure themselves. As the people in the affected areas, because of their wretched and torn shelters and no fuel or wood to burn, are being victimized, there is no enough support from the relevant officials to provide them the facilities to fight against the death. The result is misery. And when the severe cold weather turns into disasters in the form of avalanches, the incapacity of the government to help its people out of the disaster is further exposed.

There are many lives that can be saved through proper and timely efforts. Moreover, there are many other areas as well that are necessary to be given proper attention by the government so that such disasters and incidents should be properly handled. Among them making a very well-equipped and properly trained disaster management unit is the most important one. At the same time making the different parts of country accessible through proper roads is also vital. Many places happen to be in the remotest of the areas, where the rescue teams and equipment take a very lengthy time to reach as there are no proper roads. Though security has been the most dominant issue in Afghanistan, there are many other issues as well that kill more people than the lack of security. The proper attention of the government in that regard and its services can save many lives. It requires to institutionalize its efforts and put to practice National Disaster Management Plan. Department for Disaster Preparedness must be improved and must be equipped and capacitated enough to carry out its responsibilities during and even before disasters.

The developed countries of the world, through institutionalized efforts, have minimized the risks of disasters and have the capacity to react rapidly when such disasters take place and thus save the valuable lives of its people as much as possible.

Therefore, the government of Afghanistan must also pay consideration and concentration in such areas and must make sure that poor people do not lose their lives worthlessly.



Five Things You Need to Know about ISIL

By Hujjatullah Zia

The self-proclaimed Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) did not only shed the blood of innocent individuals but also dishonored thousands of women and destroyed tens of cultural monuments. ISIL gained global prominence in early 2014 when it drove Iraqi government forces out of key cities in its Western Iraq offensive, followed by its capture of Mosul and the Sinjar massacre. ISIL is widely known for its videos of beheadings of both combatants and non-combatants and its destruction of cultural heritage sites. The group proclaimed itself a worldwide caliphate and began referring to itself as the Islamic State or IS in June 2014.

In Syria, the group conducted ground attacks on both government forces and opposition factions and by December 2015 it held a large area in western Iraq and eastern Syria containing an estimated 2.8 to 8 million people, where it enforced its interpretation of sharia law. In July 2017, the group lost control of its largest city, Mosul, to the Iraqi army. Following this major defeat, in August 2017 ISIL continued to lose territory to the various states and other military forces allied against it, resulting in significant territorial losses for ISIL in the areas of Syria and Iraq. Following the defeat of ISIL, however, reports said that mass graves containing at least 400 suspected ISIL victims, many wearing prison uniforms, have been found in northern Iraq. The sites were discovered on Saturday near Khashad air base close to the group's former stronghold, Hawijah, 45km west of Kirkuk. It is said to be a common ISIL tactic to imprison and execute anybody who was in opposition to their rule.

The discovery of the mass graves was not the first after the collapse of ISIL in Iraq and Syria.

In August, Iraqi military investigators discovered two mass graves near a former ISIL prison outside Mosul that contained the bodies of 500 victims. Earlier that month, Associated Press news agency conducted a survey that concluded that ISIL buried thousands of their victims in at least 72 mass graves across Iraq and Syria. In a speech in September 2014, United States President Barack Obama said that ISIL is not "Islamic" on the basis that no religion condones the killing of innocents and that no government recognizes the group as a state, while many object to using the name "Islamic State" owing to the far-reaching religious and political claims to authority which that name implies. In fact, ISIL never respected religious tenets as they killed and dishonored thousands of people. It never showed mercy to civilians and targeted people indiscriminately, which is against both Islamic law and international principles. In short, the first issue to be known is that ISIL is a self-styled group with anti-

religious ideology but operating under the cloak of religion. ISIL follows an extremist interpretation of Islam, promotes religious violence, and regards Muslims who do not agree with its interpretations as infidels or apostates. The second fact to be known about ISIL is that it sought to foist its warped minds on the public with the barrel of gun and targeted both Muslims and non-Muslims. So, ISIL intended to mask its radical ideology under religious sharia but its veneer of sanctity was uncovered to the world.

According to some observers, ISIL emerged from the ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood, the first post-Ottoman Islamist group dating back to the late 1920s in Egypt. It adheres to global jihadist principles and follows the hardline ideology of al-Qaeda and many other modern-day jihadist groups.

However, other sources trace the group's roots to Wahhabism. The third thing is that ISIL did not practice upon a certain school of thought but its behaviors originated from different radical schools.

The United Nations Commission on Human Rights has stated that ISIL "seeks to subjugate civilians under its control and dominate every aspect of their lives through terror, indoctrination, and the provision of services to those who obey". Civilians, as well as the ISIL itself, have released footage of some of the human rights abuses. This is the fourth fact that ISIL was widely involved in human rights violation and respected neither human rights principles nor the International Humanitarian Law (IHL). Men, women, and children suffered under ISIL on the grounds of their race, color, and creed. ISIL fighters trampled upon people's rights without a tinge of guilt.

ISIL is known for its extensive and effective use of propaganda. It uses a version of the Muslim Black Standard flag and developed an emblem which has clear symbolic meaning in the Muslim world. It propagates through social media, radio, and press, which is the fifth issue to be known about this group. It was ISIL's wide propaganda that recruited people from around the globe and the youths and people of faith fell for its bogus claim.

In brief, ISIL is a self-proclaimed group with hardline ideology operating under the mask of religion and left people with two choices either to succumb to their ideology or die. It did not practice upon a certain school of thought rather it amalgamated a number of radical mindsets which had no rational or religious bases. ISIL violated people's rights and dignity to a great extent. It is highly propagandist and recruited people through spreading propaganda.

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The Pandora's Box of the Digital Age

By Carl Bildt

Is the world sliding dangerously toward cyber Armageddon? Let us hope not; but let us also apprehend the threat, and focus on what to do about it.

One country after another has begun exploring options for bolstering their offensive capabilities in cyberspace, and many other countries have already done so. This is a dangerous escalation. In fact, few other trends pose a bigger threat to global stability.

Almost all societies have become heavily dependent on the Internet, the world's most important piece of infrastructure - and also the infrastructure upon which all other infrastructure relies. The so-called Internet of Things is a misnomer; soon enough, it will be the "Internet of Everything." And our current era is not a Fourth Industrial Revolution; it is the beginning of the digital age, and the end of the industrial age altogether. The digital age has introduced new vulnerabilities that hackers, cyber criminals, and other malign actors are already routinely exploiting. But even more alarming is the eagerness of national governments to conduct cyber-warfare operations against one other.

We have already reached the stage at which every conflict has a cyber dimension. The United States and Israel crossed the Rubicon in 2010 by launching the Stuxnet attack on Iran's nuclear facilities. Now, there is no telling where ongoing but hidden cyber conflicts begin and end.

Things were different in the old world of nuclear weapons, which are complicated and expensive devices based on technology that only a few highly educated specialists have mastered. Cyber weapons, by contrast, are generally inexpensive to develop or acquire, and deceptively easy to use. As a result, even weak and fragile states can become significant cyber powers. Worse still, cyber-war technologies have been proliferating at an alarming pace. While there are extensive safeguards in place to control access to sensitive nuclear technologies and materials, there is almost nothing preventing the dissemination of malicious software code.

To understand the scale of the threat we face, look no further than the "WannaCry" virus that, among other things, almost shut down the British National Health Service this past May. The virus exploited a vulnerability in the Microsoft Windows operating system that the US National Security Agency had already discovered, but did not report to Microsoft. After this information was leaked or stolen from the NSA, North Korea quickly put the ransomware to use, which should come as no surprise. In recent years, North Korea has launched numerous cyber attacks around the world, most notably against Sony Pictures, but also against many financial institutions.

And, of course, North Korea is hardly an exception. Russia, China, and Israel have also developed cyber weapons, which they are busy trying to implant in systems around the world. This growing threat is precisely why other countries have started talking about acquiring offensive cyber capabilities of their own: they want to have a deterrent to ward off attacks from other cyber powers. Cyber security is regarded as com-

plicated and costly; but cyber offense is seen as inexpensive and sexy. The problem is that, while deterrence works in the nuclear world, it isn't particularly effective in the cyber world. Rogue actors - and North Korea is hardly the only example - are far less vulnerable than developed countries to cyber counterstrikes. They can attack again and again without risking serious consequences.

Cyber attacks' often-ambiguous origins make it even harder to apply a rational theory of deterrence to the cyber world. Identifying the responsible party, if possible at all, takes time; and the risk of misattribution is always there. I doubt we will ever see unambiguous proof that Israel is conducting offensive cyber operations; but that certainly doesn't mean that it isn't. In the darkness of cyberspace, sophisticated actors can hide behind oblivious third parties, who are then exposed to counterstrikes by the party under attack. And in the ongoing conflict among Gulf countries, at least one government may have contracted hackers based in other countries to conduct operations against an adversary. This method of avoiding detection will almost certainly become the norm.

In a world riven by geopolitical rivalries large and small, such ambiguity and saber-rattling in the cyber realm could have catastrophic results.

Nuclear weapons are generally subject to clear, strict, and elaborate systems of command and control. But who can control the legions of cyber warriors on the dark web?

Given that we are still in the early stages of the digital age, it is anyone's guess what will come next. Governments may start developing autonomous counterstrike systems that, even if they fall short of Dr. Strangelove's Doomsday Machine, will usher in a world vulnerable to myriad unintended consequences. Most obviously, cyber weapons will become a staple in outright wars. The United Nations Charter affirms all member states' right to self-defense - a right that is, admittedly, increasingly open to interpretation in a kinetic, digitized world. The Charter also touches on questions of international law, particularly with respect to non-combatants and civilian infrastructure in conflict zones.

But what about the countless conflicts that do not reach the threshold of all-out war? So far, efforts to establish universal rules and norms governing state behavior in cyberspace have failed. It is clear that some countries want to preserve their complete freedom of action in this domain.

But that poses an obvious danger. As the NSA leaks have shown, there is no way to restrict access to destructive cyber weapons, and there is no reason to hope that the rules of restraint that governed the nuclear age will work in the cyber age. Unfortunately, a binding international agreement to restrict the development and use of offensive cyber weapons in non-war situations is probably a long way off. In the meantime, we need to call greater attention to the dangers of cyber-weapon proliferation, and urge governments to develop defensive rather than offensive capabilities. An arms race in cyberspace has no winners. (Courtesy Project Syndicate)

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