

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



October 28, 2018

Challenges for Women in Peace building in Afghanistan

With the unanimous adoption of Resolution 1325 by the UNSC in October 2000, women's role in, and potentials for peace building have gained global, regional and national attention. Consequently, the past decade characterized by the identification of key issues, especially in Afghanistan, on women, peace and security, and the development of interventions to address them. The identification of issues and design of interventions on women, peace and security have been tailored around four main areas, namely early warning and conflict prevention; peacekeeping and peace support operations; peace processes such as mediation, peace talks, and signing of peace agreement/s; and post-conflict peace building. In addition, there have also been some cross-cutting concerns. This includes the increasing requirement for the development and/or domestication of policy frameworks that provide the legal and constitutional backing for women's active and visible involvement in peace and security; and the actual mobilization of women for engagement in a field that has long been a male preserve; and such involvement, of course faces vast challenges in a traditional society like Afghanistan.

The resolution of issues in each of these areas, the participation of women in policy and decision-making, and their access to power and other resources is critical to unleashing the potential of women to act as effective pillars and stakeholders in the process of building peace. This is also fundamental for the achievement of equality, development and peace as posited for in the Beijing Declaration of 1995.

Globally and in Afghanistan, violent conflict has raised women's awareness of the necessity to take initiative, and there is now a growing recognition of the significant roles that women can and do play in resolving conflicts and building peace. In Afghanistan, the role of women in peace building has gained prominence over the Past years as women's groups organize themselves to participate in peace building initiatives and processes. Their peace initiatives and efforts have ranged from the provision of survival necessities such as food, medical care, etc., to peacemaking by building bridges of reconciliation across the conflict divide; initiating intra- and inter-clan or community dialogue; intervening in national peace processes; advocating for women's human rights and access to decision-making and leadership; provision of psychosocial support to victims of rape and other violations; and assistance in the reintegration of ex-combatants.

As the lessons from Afghanistan Peace Process have shown, sustainable peace can only be achieved with the full participation of all sectors of the society, of which the contribution of women is central. Women bring an alternative, gendered view to peace building that leads to transformation at both structural and practical levels.

However, despite the considerable gains that have been made, women continue to be under-represented in peace and security processes, particularly at the formal and technical levels where women's roles tend to be largely invisible. Women's associations, groups, organizations and networks that are working for peace continue to face numerous challenges that diminish the impact of their work. Challenges to women's peace activism arise at different levels – from the international community, the national political milieu, and the patriarchal nature of society. Other impediments are generated by women's lack of confidence, skills and resources. At another level, while there has been an upsurge in the number of policy instruments on women peace and security at both national and sub national levels following years of intense lobbying and advocacy by women's groups, there is still the challenge of translating policy into real and efficient tools to support women's peace work.

Afghanistan has been a hotbed of violent conflict and war, for about 4 decades. Most of this armed conflict has been waged between rebel/militia groups and state government and the external supporters of the government, have taken unconventional forms, defying traditional 'fighting' zones by taking war right into homes and having a high human cost. The nature of the conflict and the fact that they originate from the bush, close to rural/grassroots communities, exposes and draws local populations into the violence conundrum, completely disregarding the provisions of both international humanitarian and human rights laws. Furthermore, Afghan conflict has had cross-border implications, with a spill-over effect that has exerted severe strains on neighboring countries. In addition, the conflicts have been fueled by the neighboring, regional and international actors during the 4 past decades.

The intricate, multi-faceted and multi-party character of the conflict which transcends borders has demanded a broad strategy of intervention that includes the active involvement of non-state actors and wider cooperation of diverse stakeholders across the regional level. As a result, there have to be collaborative efforts at both governmental and nongovernmental levels to intervene and respond to conflict in Afghanistan. The success of this collaboration broadly depends on the active and meaningful involvement of Afghan and regional Women organizations in the peace process of Afghanistan at the national and regional level.



Women are Prone to Violence and Gender Discrimination

By: Hujjatullah Zia

This prize will make the voices of women who suffered from sexual violence in conflict heard, especially the women in minorities like my community the Yazidis. It tells us that our voices will be heard," these words were spoken by this year's Nobel laureate Nadia Murad in the Norwegian Nobel Committee.

Nadia, a 24-year-old Yazidi woman, was held as a prisoner by the self-styled IS group in northern Iraq when IS fighters rounded up the Yazidi community in the village of Kojo in Sinjar killing 600 people, including six of Nadia's brothers and stepbrothers. The IS fighters held her as prisoner in the city of Mosul, tortured her and raped her when she was trying to escape.

In 2014, at least 10,000 Yazidis were either killed or abducted during the IS attack on Sinjar, which sparked international outcry and condemnation.

Nadia, carried the plight of her people's plight and sought to alleviate their sufferings through international support.

The IS group discriminated the Yazidis on the grounds of their religious beliefs and showed no mercy to Yazidi men, women and children. Although the IS lost ground in Iraq, their victims still suffer from trauma.

It is self-explanatory that a large number of women fall the victim of violence or discriminated in one way or another on the grounds of their gender. Radical groups, from Boko Haram in Nigeria to the Taliban in Afghanistan, are widely involved in abusing women and violating their human rights and dignity. They are treating women not on the basis of religious values but based on their fundamental mindset and radical narratives of religion. It should go without saying that their attitude towards women are highly contradictory to religious tenets and prophetic sayings.

Meanwhile, scores of women are discriminated in social, cultural and political arenas in many parts of the world. For example, women bear the brunt of discrimination in Saudi Arabia simply on the basis of their gender. Their freedoms are highly restricted in collective life and they are treated inferior to men. Saudi was ranked 141 out of 144 countries for gender parity by the World Economic Forum's 2016 Global Gender Gap Report. Although some reforms were taken vis-à-vis women's rights in Saudi in recent years, there is still a lot to be done. The reforms include very primary rights of women: Granting suffrage in the 2015 local elections and their appointment to Consulta-

tive Assembly, being allowed to have access to government services without the need of consent from a guardian and being allowed to drive.

To view Afghanistan, women are constitutionally equal to men in all political arenas and they have the rights to have social, cultural and political activities similar to their male counterparts. However, there are two major challenges. For the one, the Taliban militants still exercise their radical ideology towards women in areas under their domination. They hold out against the social, educational and political activities of women and seek to restrict their role within the four walls of home. In short, women are still deemed inferior to men in the Taliban-dominated areas.

Second, traditional culture and tribal structure in Afghanistan are still an obstacle before women curtailing their freedoms as well as their social and political role. That is to say, restrictive tradition, which is in conflict with both Islamic values and Afghan Constitution, hold sway in tribal belts and villages of Afghanistan.

In an article titled "The Many Dangers of Being an Afghan Woman in Uniform", an Istanbul-based journalist Sophia Jones writes, "Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission has noted that there are several hundred reports every year of Afghan women dying by domestic violence or "honor killings" in which brothers, fathers or other relatives kill women – and sometimes men – to restore "honor" to the family after a suspected moral indiscretion, like a romantic relationship out of wedlock or a marriage refusal. But many killings and attacks are never reported".

All in all, the rights and dignity of women are trampled upon across the world. Women are highly susceptible to both radical ideology and traditional culture. All nations are in need of woman like Nadia to raise their voice against misogynistic view and ongoing violence inflicted upon women. Nadia should not voice her concern only about Yazidi women but any women who fall victim to violence and discrimination on the basis of their gender or beliefs. As a Nobel laureate, Nadia has now more responsibilities to shoulder.

Moreover, all states have to practice upon the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and respect the rights and dignity of both men and women equally. Indeed, men and women are free and equal in rights and dignity and it is governments' responsibility to safeguard their rights and freedoms regardless of their caste, color or creed.

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MbS: For better or for worse?

By: James M. Dorsey

Embattled Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman could prove to be not only a cat with nine lives but also one that makes even stranger jumps.

King Salman's announcement that Prince Mohammed was put in charge of reorganizing Saudi intelligence at the same time that the kingdom for the first time admitted that journalist Jamal Khashoggi had been killed in its Istanbul consulate signalled that the crown prince's wings were not being clipped, at least not immediately and not publicly.

With little prospect for a palace coup and a frail King Salman unlikely to assume for any lengthy period full control of the levers of power, Prince Mohammed, viewed by many as reckless and impulsive, could emerge from the Khashoggi crisis, that has severely tarnished the kingdom's image and strained relations with the United States and Western powers, even more defiant rather than chastened by international condemnation of the journalist's killing.

A pinned tweet by Saud Al-Qahtani, the close associate of Prince Mohammed who this weekend was among several fired senior official reads: "Some brothers blame me for what they view as harshness. But everything has its time, and talk these days requires such language." That apparently was and could remain Prince Mohammed's motto.

Said former CIA official, Middle East expert and novelist Graham E. Fuller in a bid to identify the logic of the madness: "As the geopolitics of the world changes – particularly with the emergence of new power centres like China, the return of Russia, the growing independence of Turkey, the resistance of Iran to US domination in the Gulf, the waywardness of Israel, and the greater role of India and many other smaller players – the emergence of a more aggressive and adventurist Saudi Arabia is not surprising."

Prince Mohammed's domestic status and mettle is likely to be put to the test as the crisis unfolds with Turkey leaking further evidence of what happened to Mr. Khashoggi or officially publishing whatever proof it has.

Turkish leaks or officially announced evidence would likely cast further doubt on Saudi Arabia's assertion that Mr. Khashoggi died in a brawl in the consulate and fuel US Congressional and European parliamentary calls for sanctions, possibly including an arms embargo, against the kingdom.

In a sharp rebuke, US President Donald J. Trump responded to Saudi Arabia's widely criticized official version of what happened to Mr. Khashoggi by saying that "obviously there's been deception, and there's been lies."

A prominent Saudi commentator and close associate of Prince Mohammed, Turki Aldakhil, warned in advance of the Saudi admission that the kingdom would respond to Western sanctions by cosying up to Russia and China. No doubt that could happen if Saudi Arabia is forced to seek alternative to shield itself against possible sanctions.

That, however, does not mean that Prince Mohammed could not be brazen in his effort to engineer a situation in which the Trump administration would have no choice but to fully reengage with the kingdom. Despite pundits' suggestion that Mr. Trump's Saudi Arabia-anchored Middle East strategy that appears focussed on isolating Iran, crippling it economically with harsh sanctions, and potentially forcing a change of regime is in jeopardy because of the damage Prince Mohammed's international reputation has suffered, Iran could prove to be the crown prince's window of opportunity.

"The problem is that under MBS, Saudi Arabia has become an unreliable strategic partner whose every move seems to help rather than hinder Iran. Yemen intervention is both a humanitarian disaster and a low cost/high gain opportunity for Iran," tweeted former US Middle East negotiator Martin Indyk, referring to Prince Mohammed by his initials. Mr. "Trump needed to make clear he wouldn't validate or protect him

from Congressional reaction unless he took responsibility. It's too late for that now. Therefore I fear he will neither step up or grow up, the crisis will deepen and Iran will continue to reap the windfall," Mr. Indyk said in another tweet.

If that was likely an unintended consequence of Prince Mohammed's overly assertive policy and crude and ill-fated attempts to put his stamp on the Middle East prior to the murder of Mr. Khashoggi, it may since in a twisted manner serve his purpose.

To the degree that Prince Mohammed has had a thought-out grand strategy since his ascendancy in 2015, it was to ensure US support and Washington's reengagement in what he saw as a common interest: projection of Saudi power at the expense of Iran.

Speaking to The Economist in 2016, Prince Mohammed spelled out his vision of the global balance of power and where he believed Saudi interests lie. "The United States must realise that they are the number one in the world and they have to act like it," the prince said.

In an indication that he was determined to ensure US re-engagement in the Middle East, Prince Mohammed added: "We did not put enough efforts in order to get our point across. We believe that this will change in the future." Beyond the shared US-Saudi goal of clipping Iran's wings, Prince Mohammed catered to Mr. Trump's priority of garnering economic advantage for the United States and creating jobs. Mr. Trump's assertion that he wants to safeguard US\$450 billion in deals with Saudi Arabia as he contemplates possible punishment for the killing of Mr. Khashoggi is based on the crown prince's dangling of opportunity.

"When President Trump became president, we've changed our armament strategy again for the next 10 years to put more than 60 percent with the United States of America. That's why we've created the \$400 billion in opportunities, armaments and investment opportunities, and other trade opportunities. So this is a good achievement for President Trump, for Saudi Arabia," Prince Mohammed said days after Mr. Khashoggi disappeared.

The crown prince drove the point home by transferring US\$100 million to the US, making good on a long standing promise to support efforts to stabilize Syria, at the very moment that US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo last week landed in Riyadh in a bid to defuse the Khashoggi crisis.

The shift is being driven by Iran's need to evade blacklisting by the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), an international anti-money laundering and terrorism finance watchdog. Meeting the group's demands for enhanced legislation and implementation is a pre-requisite for ensuring continued European support for circumventing crippling US sanctions.

In recognition of that, Iranian supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei dropped his objection to adoption of the FATF-conform legislation.

If that were not worrisome enough for Prince Mohammed, potential Iranian efforts to engage if not with the Trump administration with those segments of the US political elite that are opposed to the president could move the crown prince to significantly raise the stakes, try to thwart Iranian efforts, and put the Khashoggi crisis behind him.

To succeed, Prince Mohammed would have to ensure that Iran takes the bait. So far, Iran has sat back, gloating as the crown prince and the kingdom are increasingly cornered by the Khashoggi crisis, not wanting to jeopardize its potential outreach to Mr. Trump's opponents as well as Europe. That could change if Prince Mohammed decides to act on his vow in 2017 that "we won't wait for the battle to be in Saudi Arabia. Instead, we will work so that the battle is for them in Iran, not in Saudi Arabia."

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