

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



October 10, 2016

Political Crisis Lingers

The political syndrome and protracted war in Afghanistan continue unabated and have challenged the National Unity Government (NUG). With the futility of "war on terror" Afghan government established High Peace Council (HPC) in 2010 to bring warring factions to peace table and urged Pakistan to facilitate the talks with the Taliban. The trilateral political haggling continued among Pakistan, Afghanistan and the Taliban for years and Pakistan hosted direct talks between Kabul and Taliban on July 2015, at the popular tourist resort of Murree. Moreover, the Quadrilateral Coordination Group (QCO) constituted of Pakistan, Afghanistan, China and the US held another round of negotiation in Islamabad aimed at reviving long-stalled direct peace talks between Kabul government and the Taliban. The first negotiation came to a standstill with the revelation of Mullah Omar's death and the second with the death of his successor Mullah Akhtar Mansour - who was killed in the US drone strike.

Subsequently, Mullah Omar's second successor Mullah Haibatullah Akhundzada intensified the terrorist attacks in Afghanistan and inflicted heavy casualties upon Afghan soldiers and civilians. He followed the very footsteps of Mansour through increasing insurgency and overrunning Kunduz - which was also overrun on September 2015 for some days as a result of the Taliban's spring offensive led by Mansour. In other words, Mansour's death brought no challenges in Taliban's policy towards the country and their heavy offensives and militancy continue unabated. Haibatullah is also an obstacle before peace talks, however, he moves more cautiously than Mansour perhaps fears falling prey to the US drone strike.

The escalated insurgency resulted in heavy casualties and humanitarian crisis. The UN reported earlier that at least 1,601 civilian have been killed and 3,565 others wounded in the first half of the current year, showing a record surge of four percent compared to the same period in 2015. Moreover, even without reliable Afghan government statistics for 2015 and 2016, the trends indicated by anecdotal evidence and UN figures point to a silently evolving, increasingly alarming humanitarian crisis. According to UNHCR, the total numbers of "people of concern", including Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), refugees and returnees, nearly doubled between 2013 and 2015, rising from 985,197 to 1.77 million people. UNOCHA estimates that 265,141 more were displaced from their homes in 31 of 34 provinces between 1 January and 15 September 2016.

On top of this has come an unprecedented rise in recent months in the return of registered and unregistered refugees from Pakistan, averaging 5,000 people daily in early September. Combined with the new internally displaced, an alarming one million (57 per cent of whom are children) could be on the move just as winter sets in between September and December 2016. All will require urgent food assistance, health, shelter and other essential services. This spike in the numbers of IDPs and returnees will increase the percentage of the population facing seasonal or permanent food insecurity beyond the current estimate of 40 per cent, and will further strain already meager economic and employment opportunities and public services.

The NUG's inability or unwillingness to respond to these challenges has profound implications for both its legitimacy and the future of the post-Taliban political order. In the Asia Foundation's 2015 Survey of the Afghan People, citizens who believed the country was going in the right direction declined to 37 per cent from 55 percent in 2014. After insecurity, worsening economic conditions were cited as the main reason for such pessimism. While the NUG inherited problems that were already mounting before it was formed in September 2014, the Afghan public increasingly links the worsening economy with the government's policies and/or inability to perform.

It is aptly said that "it never rains but it pours". Afghanistan's challenges also come in large packages and the NUG is wrestling with many crises. To tackle the issues, there are a lot to be done: First, the officials and political parties will have to cultivate trust among themselves - which will also be instrumental in bridging the gap between state and nation. Secondly, the setbacks in the government's machinery which hamper the political reforms i.e. administrative corruptions, bribery, lack of law enforcement, etc. must be eradicated and corrupt figures are to be pursued and prosecuted. Thirdly, stronger strategy to counter insurgency is to be adopted to tackle terrorism and protect the life and liberty of the nation.

Pakistan still suggests the negotiation of peace as a panacea for the escalated insurgency despite its frequent failure. Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif has recently underlined the need for a negotiated settlement of the conflict to ensure stability in the country. He said Pakistan's civil and military leadership were in touch with Afghan counterparts on facilitating the peace talks. "We believe that an Afghan led and Afghan owned reconciliation process is vital to long term peace. We have conveyed to the leadership of Afghanistan that the enemies of Afghanistan are the enemies of Pakistan and we have stood by our words," he is cited as saying. Meanwhile, Afghan government calls on warring parties to stop violence and bloodshed and join the peace process. A bona fide peace talks will be significant in political stability in the country but the Taliban are not only to show the green light but also prove sincerity in this regard through declaring ceasefire and decreasing their terrorist activities.

Counterterrorism Needs International Convention

By Mohammad Zahir Akbari

Terrorism is a flaming fire which burn black and white, Muslim and None-Muslim eastern and western, sinful and sinless equally. According to reports, from 1970 to 2016, there were almost 150,000 terrorist incidents happened worldwide. Just over 23,000 occurred in North America and Europe. In 2014 alone, 13,463 terrorist attacks occurred around the world, causing at least 32,700 deaths and more than 34,700 injuries. As of November 16, 2015, 658 detainees from Guantanamo Bay have been transferred: 532 detainees pre-January 22, 2009, and 126 detainees post-January 22, 2009. Of those transfers, at least 117 (17.8 percent) have been confirmed as re-engaging in terrorist activity, and 79 (12 percent) have been suspected of re-engaging in terrorist activity. Nearly 60 percent targeted private, infrastructural, educational, media, or religious individuals and institutions.

So, it proves that terrorism is common flaming fire which burns all humankind evenly. And it requires an international consensus to formally ensure that no political or economic goals are hunted at cost of human blood.

In regard to Afghanistan as a part of the world, there is no positive development in security situation. Insecurity and insurgent activities have taken an upward trend. Although the Taliban's activities were limited to southern and south-eastern provinces until a few year back, now there are daily reports of clashes, explosions and deaths nearly all over the country, from the east to the west, the north and to the south. The escalation of fighting has sent the casualties of civilians as well as of both sides to the conflict worryingly high.

Over the recent months, Helmand and Kunduz provinces have taken the brunt of the fighting. The Taliban overran the strategic Kunduz city after launching a surprise multi-pronged assault on it at dawn on last Monday for a second time almost exactly a year after their first brief takeover of the city in fifteen years following their ouster. The last year's Taliban capture of Kunduz undermined the faith of Afghans in the ability of Afghan National Defence and Security Forces (ANDSF), and in the future of the country, and also gave the US a pretext to delay its Afghanistan troop drawdown. However, Afghan forces were able to regain control of Kunduz, but other key urban areas remain under threat from the Taliban.

Many of the failure seasons attributed to mismanagement by the National Unity Government, National Security Directorate and an Afghan Ministry of Defense. While there was a lot of criticism of the government for failing to stop the fall of Kunduz to the Taliban last year, the bitter experience repeated once again. By the same token, Helmand's two districts - Nawa and Khanshin - fell to the Taliban one after another in two days, and the provincial capitals of Baghlan and Uruzgan provinces are also under serious threat. Due to lack of strong political will

against terrorism and weakness of government and the flaws have led to growing insecurity, and the collapse of districts and even provincial capitals to the Taliban. Even though the government uses the term -- "tactical retreat" -- for the fall of regions, many questions about it remain unanswered. The fall of districts has become a routine matter. Every week, there are reports about districts falling to the insurgents, and then retaken by government forces. The Taliban's capture of districts and government checkpoints has become a tool for them to seize military vehicles and large cache of weapons, which are then used against ANDSF.

Also in some instances, covert deals are blamed for the fall of regions and districts to the Taliban, with some reports suggesting that some military officials leave checkpoints to the Taliban in exchange for money, but yet leaders of the government not only do not question them, but also send them elsewhere, and even recognize their performance sometimes. This unfavourable practice has led to the incapability of ANDSF to repel insurgent offensives despite spending billions of dollars on them. According to the UN reports, battles in Kunduz have forced tens of thousands of people to leave their homes but many trapped inside the city facing severe food and water shortages, lack of health care and so many other issues.

Some reports indicate that scores of civilians so far have been killed or wounded during the war.

Some are coping with various challenges and even many reached Kabul to escape the war. "I was a university student in Kunduz, Taliban seized our home, we had a lot of problems over there and hardly managed to escape the city," said a Kunduz resident Hamida. However, a number of Afghans from across the country have shown a willingness to help their countrymen in Kunduz.

To successfully combat against international threats, to successfully prevent gaining political goals by bloodshed games of tragedies and to successfully stop terrorism at its source, there is a need for an international convention as global legal counterinsurgency strategies. But hopelessly the problem is that stakeholders better know what the ground realities in world or in Afghanistan are and what the real solutions are.

The top political players, the self-interested power-seeking groups and warring factions with conflicting agendas tend to ignore facts and never touched the root solutions; some do so because they profit from conflict and others live in a bubble of a self-imagined, unreal world. Given the high human and material costs of the several cycles of the Afghan conflict, only fools from either side will expect to win this endless war. Indeed, Afghanistan's wars have produced no winners in the past and will never do so in the future.

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The Dawn of Climate-Friendly Air Travel

By Christiana Figueres and Laurence Tubiana

As the world becomes increasingly interconnected, demand for air travel is growing, with more than 30,000 new large aircraft expected to take to the skies in the next few years. But if we are to sustain growth in air travel without aggravating global warming, we must quickly reduce aviation-related CO2 emissions, which are substantial and not covered by the Paris climate agreement that more than 190 countries agreed to last December.

Fortunately, now is the perfect time to decouple aviation emissions from air-travel growth. Representatives from 191 countries convened in Montreal this week for the 39th Session of the United Nations' International Civil Aviation Organization; after decades of wrangling, they have agreed to an aviation-specific climate agreement.

The new ICAO framework aims for "carbon-neutral growth" in international aviation from 2020 onward, and has as its centerpiece a global market-based measure (GMBM) to help airlines affordably cap their net emissions at 2020 levels. When implemented, it will be the first carbon-emissions cap on a global industry that does not noticeably increase costs for consumers. And airlines will purchase emissions reductions from other economic sectors, thus funneling billions of dollars into low-carbon development around the world.

For the first six years, the new framework will apply only to flights between countries that have voluntarily adopted it, which means that the ICAO will have to encourage adequate participation for the program to be effective. This opt-in approach has some critics, but whether a program is categorized as "voluntary" or "mandatory" is beside the point, because international accords generally apply only to the sovereign countries that have decided to join them.

Some 64 countries have already signaled their willingness to sign on to the ICAO agreement, and together they account for nearly 80% of expected growth in CO2 emissions above 2020 levels. That isn't 100%, but it's a great start, and we can expect more countries to join when they see others reaping the benefits of low-carbon development.

The airlines themselves will welcome a coherent global framework that establishes clear and predictable compliance metrics, rather than a regulatory patchwork that differs from country to country and complicates international operations.

To minimize compliance costs - and because environmental

sustainability is now a key competitive marker for customers and investors alike - airlines will likely encourage the countries where they do business to participate in the ICAO program.

The new agreement provides an enormous opportunity to prevent the emission of 2.5 billion tons of CO2 in the first 15 years - the equivalent of taking roughly 35 million cars off the road every year the program is in force.

The agreement will also spur major manufacturers such as Boeing, Airbus, Bombardier, and Embraer - which are already investing in quieter, more fuel-efficient aircraft and efficiency improvements for existing models - to develop cleaner technologies that will allow them to purchase fewer emissions offsets. However, the framework decided in Montreal is not complete, and crucial details need to be worked out quickly so that airlines can begin to plan how they will meet the new environmental targets.

Developed countries have already offered to help implement the GMBM, which, it is hoped, will pave the way for investments in emerging economies that are becoming new aviation powerhouses. If the countries can leapfrog over old technologies, they can become new leaders in carbon-smart flying. They should seize the opportunity before them and join the ICAO framework so that their manufacturers have a clear and predictable path forward.

At the Paris climate talks last year, we witnessed the power of global collective action to address climate change. No fewer than 187 countries - large and small, developed and developing - announced emissions-reduction targets in the months before the conference, which created the momentum to reach a landmark accord.

With the Paris climate agreement on track to enter into force in the coming months - more rapidly than anyone ever thought possible - we still have that momentum. The ICAO agreement is the next wave in the international battle against climate change. Together, the two agreements will boost our chances of delivering environmentally sustainable economic growth. By cleaning up our carbon footprint now, future generations of air travelers from all countries will be able to look out their window onto a healthy planet. (Courtesy Project Syndicate)

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