

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

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Peace Process – A Controversial Issue without Result

Afghan peace process has been a controversial issue since 2010 and made the national and international headlines after the talks between the Taliban and US representatives were ushered in. Afghans fluctuated between hope and fear as talks were in progress.

Obama administration for the first time authorized talks with the Taliban in September 2010. Tayyab Agha, a close confidant to the Taliban's founding leader Mullah Omar, has been authorized by him to test the waters and make contacts with the US side.

In January 2009, then US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton appointed Richard Holbrooke as the US' special envoy for Afghanistan and Pakistan. However, he failed to win Obama's confidence; Obama complained about his mannerisms. With Holbrooke's sudden death in 2010, Marc Grossman assumed the position.

Aga acknowledged the mistakes of the Taliban leadership in the past, underlined the necessity of having good relationships with the outside world and better relations with all Afghan ethnicities. He is cited as saying, "Our leadership in Pakistan send their girls to school and even universities. We realize the importance of girls' education for homes and the country."

The US incumbent President Donald Trump is believed to have his eyes fixed on fulfilling his campaign promise to bring US troops home in time for the 2020 US presidential election as it has been reported that he seeks to reduce the number of the US troops in Afghanistan. However, he sought to put pressure on the Taliban by cancelling the talks and it was proved effective.

Meeting last month on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly in New York, Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan asked Trump to resume peace talks with the Taliban. "There's not going to be a military solution. For nineteen years if you have not been able to succeed, you're not going to be able to succeed in another nineteen years," Khan said. He added, "There needs to be some sort of a peace deal. There has to be a political settlement."

A Peshawar-based expert on Afghan affairs Rahimullah Yusufzai sees "bright" chances for resumption of the talks. He said, "Both sides are testing each other's nerves. But ultimately, they will agree on resumption of talks as they have realized the fact that there is no other solution." According to him, Washington is more "rigid" and wants "something extra" from the Taliban to justify resuming the talks.

Inclusion of the Afghan government in the talks is the demand of both Washington and Kabul, which has been turned down by the Taliban on several occasions. Afghan officials believe that resuming talks without the presence of the Kabul administration would be unproductive.

Last week, however, some political parties called on Taliban to hold negotiations with the Afghan political leaders, alleging that President Ghani government lacks a stable stance in great national issues. To one's unmitigated surprise, they offered an interim government to run peace talks despite the presidential elections held.

Although there has been lack of trust between the Afghan government and political parties during the National Unity Government, the demand of the political parties is neither acceptable nor reasonable. The result of the election should be announced first, then the Kabul administration should negotiate with the Taliban from a legitimate point.

I have pointed out in my commentaries that including the Afghan government as well as regional stakeholders in the peace talks will bear a better result. Regional and global stakeholders have to put their weight behind the talks so as to pressure the Taliban leadership to declare truce and directly negotiate with the Kabul government.

Recently, some neighboring countries have vowed to support Afghan-owned and Afghan-led peace talks, which indicates that the inclusion of the Kabul government in the talks is a must. Although struggles for talks with the Taliban leadership started in 2010, when the Afghan government established the High Peace Council, there is still no tangible result and the Taliban fighters intensified their terrorist activities against the Ghani administration. The Taliban were unlikely to be sincere in the talks as their militancy continued unabated, and they declared their spring attacks this year.

Meanwhile, regional stakeholders showed sporadic support to the talks, which failed to bear the desired result. Hence, two issues are very essential in the talks: First, regional stakeholders should support the process in a continued and regular way. Second, the Taliban should stop playing a foul game and negotiate with their Afghan and international interlocutors with genuine intention.

Terrorism, opium and corruptions: the catastrophic triangle in Afghanistan

By: Mohammad Zahir Akbari

In few last decades, Afghanistan has been suffering from three interconnected challenges: Terrorism, opium and Corruption. The first two of them that require both national and international struggle, but tackle the third challenge, which is not less disastrous than the first two is the responsibility of Afghan government. In recent months, air strikes and operations against terrorists has intensified on terrorists as a result many drug trafficking centers, especially in southwest Afghanistan have been destroyed. The main problem is that when a society is engaged with terrorist activity, it also is engaged with drugs trafficking and corruption. So, the question is why there is a sort of strong multilateral dependencies amongst the three factors, especially in unstable societies like Afghanistan? What strategies can be developed to successfully overcome all these challenges? To find the answers of these questions it is necessary to explain the relation of each factor to the other two.

In regard to relation between terrorist and opium trafficking, it is obvious that both are illegal and considered as underground activities and life of each depends on the other one. Terrorism is a series of illegal activities such as killing and intimidation that a criminal group impose on innocent citizens of a country to achieve a political goal or press the ruling government in a society. Financially, terrorism may utilize dissimilar resources depending on context where they perform their activities. In context of Afghanistan, poppy cultivation is the first resource which feed terrorism, especially where the government does not have enough domination. The second part of this illegal resource is opium trafficking which can be performed in form of legal activities such as private trades or government activities alongside other goods.

Usually, the routes of drug trafficking are controlled by terrorists who receive huge amounts of money through the opium transition to continue their terrorist activities. In the absence of terrorist groups, drug traffickers cannot easily operate because the enforcement of laws will cause their activities to be interrupted. As much as terrorism benefits from the narcotics cultivation and considered one of its main funding sources, it is also needed to have control over trade and transition of narcotics as there is a kind mutual dependency on each other.

Unfortunately, Afghanistan has a modest achievement in both aforementioned parts while billions of dollars spent over the last eighteen years on counter-narcotics and terrorism; we can better comprehend the issue when we compare between the achievement and the amount of costs incurred in last two decades. In addition to increasing trend of narcotic trade and its cultivation, many young people addicted and these youths cause a lot of social insecurity such as street crimes, robbing houses, shops and sometimes lead to murder cases. Thus, the fight against drugs and terrorism also cause civilian casualties. There are many cases that terrorist take refuge among civilians and residential houses and this

not only slow the security operation but also causes unpredictable civilian casualties. Sometimes when operations are launched on opium producing factories it can also cause casualties where civilians, especially those who are working in or in the neighborhood, are killed. Last week, attacks on drug factories in Nimroz and Farah killed some civilians.

In regard to relation between drugs and corruption, obviously Afghanistan is not in a good position in terms of administrative transparency as it has been ranked among the most corrupt countries in the world. So, one of the main factors that have challenged the fight against drugs and terrorism is corruption. It has been blamed that drug traffickers have been arrested by security forces, but corrupt officer paved the way for their escape. The judiciary system is also blamed for corruption and release of criminals without being punished. Accordingly, the security forces in the border areas are more engaged with drug trafficking activities and play a continuum role with terrorist groups.

Over the past few years, the Afghan government has been fighting against corruption with the support of its international allies, but this fight has not produced good results due to many reasons. As long as the police apparatus which is considered as law enforcement arm does not act transparently against corruption we must not expect drugs or terrorism to be eliminated in the country; as long as the culture of impunity exist in the country no real improvement will take place in both issues.

In regard to relation between corruption and terrorism, terrorism as an undesirable phenomenon grows in society where there are survival beds for its continuity. Since there is no enough government control over the territory, especially terrorists' centers around the country, there will also be corruption in one way or other as it has repeatedly seen that terrorists have simply passed through security a checkpoint which is a kind of corruption. If the responsible agencies are involved in corruption, the lower ranking officers are easily bribed by terrorist because their main purpose is to obtaining black money that may come from the terrorism or drug traffickers. The culture of impunity is one of main factor of corruption that has played an extraordinary role in spreading terrorism in recent years.

Therefore, the Afghan government who expect political stability in the country should not expect any meaningful achievement without a decisive and honest struggle with all sides of this triangle. Terrorism, drugs and corruption are interconnected, and each of them benefits from the other, and the continuity and survival of each depends on the continuity of the other, but the insecurity is the mother of all evils. In order to achieve sustainable peace and then root out connected issues it is necessary to reduce all sources of tension in the country.

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Violations of Panchsheel principles by super powers in South Asia

By: Dr. Rajkumar Singh

ANKARA, Turkey – It is dismaying that Turkey's military operation in northeastern Syria is being spun in the American news media as an attack on Kurds, as weakening the fight against the remnants of Daesh (or the so-called Islamic State) and hurting America's credibility with its allies. I am compelled to set the record straight because the 67-year-old NATO alliance that Turkey has with the United States is not temporary, tactical nor transactional.

Turkey started the operation to ensure its national security by removing the danger posed by terrorists along its border regions. This operation will liberate Syrians living there from the tyranny of terrorist organizations and eliminate the threat to Syria's territorial integrity and political unity. These two developments would facilitate the safe and voluntary return of displaced Syrians.

Turkey has never accepted a corridor run by a terrorist group on its border. We have repeatedly proposed establishing a safe zone, including at the United Nations General Assembly. We have called on the United States to stop providing material support to terrorists.

But the American security bureaucracy couldn't bring itself to disengage from the group, known for short as the P.Y.D./Y.P.G. This is even though American officials, including a secretary of defense, have admitted that the P.Y.D./Y.P.G., which forms the core of Syrian Democratic Forces, is inseparable from the Kurdistan Workers' Party, or the P.K.K., in Turkey, which is recognized as a terrorist organization by the United States, the European Union and NATO.

Our American interlocutors seemed to agree that those forces needed to be removed from along our borders and we had even agreed on a timeline. Most recently, military-to-military talks in August ended with a mutual commitment to establish a safe zone from which the P.Y.D./Y.P.G. was supposed to be removed. But the United States did not see this through and gave us the strong impression that it was playing for time as the terrorist group entrenched itself even deeper in Syria.

The P.Y.D./Y.P.G. may present itself to the world as the group that fought Daesh, but it also smuggles explosives to the P.K.K. by digging tunnels into Turkish soil. We have found its members ushering Daesh prisoners toward Turkey. And in November 2017, the BBC reported on a secret deal under which the Syrian Democratic Forces arranged transport and allowed hundreds of Daesh terrorists to escape during the coalition operation to liberate the city of Raqqa.

We had to act. Several voices expressed concerns about the safety of the Kurdish population in Syria. I want to repeat and emphasize that Turkey's fight is not against the Kurds. Our fight is against the terrorists. Any description of the situation as "Turks against Kurds" is malicious and false. Kurds are not our enemies.

Our target is the complex of terror run together by the Kurdistan Workers' Party and the P.Y.D./Y.P.G., which have recruited child soldiers, intimidated dissidents, altered the demography and forced conscription in areas under their control.

The Kurds, Arabs, Christians and others who have been suffering under the P.Y.D./Y.P.G. yoke will be better off when freed. The World Council of Aramaean Christians have been asserting this point insistently.

Before proceeding with this operation, we have taken all steps to minimize risk to civilians and prevent a humanitarian crisis. Over the past several years,

Turkey has provided shelter to large numbers of refugees from northeastern Syria, including Arabs, Kurds and Turkmens.

Most of them, including over 300,000 Kurds, were driven from their homes by the terrorists. We have extended to them safety, shelter and livelihood in Turkey. We have shared our bread and the benefits of our public services. Turkey is the biggest humanitarian spender in the world and host to most refugees worldwide.

Turkey has established a reliable pattern in the last three years. Turkey's operations in northwestern Syria – in 2016-7 in and around Jarabulus and 2018 in Afrin – cleared a vast area of the terrorist presence. In the aftermath of those operations the communities that suffered under the terrorists started living in peace and benefiting from orderly governance. Some 365,000 refugees returned to their home in northwestern Syria.

We have instituted public services, including schools for over 230,000 students. Six hospitals with 55 ambulances employ over 2,000 Syrian and Turkish personnel in liberated areas in northwestern Syria. Scores of recreational and sports facilities were built, including a soccer stadium. Businesses were rehabilitated and a border gate was opened to facilitate trade. Agriculture and animal husbandry started receiving material support.

Compare Turkey's previous operations to the destruction of Raqqa by the coalition and you will see how carefully we manage counterterrorism operations. The lessons learned in those operations will help us make it even better this time around.

The P.K.K. and the P.Y.D./Y.P.G. have been blackmailing the global community by claiming that the fight against Daesh would falter without them. But the fight against those brutal terrorists will not falter, especially if our allies stay the course and cooperate with Turkey. We are the only nation that put boots on the ground against Daesh.

The fight against Daesh and other terrorist organizations will have to continue with everyone's contributions and cooperation. Several European countries have been reluctant to allow the return of their citizens who joined the group. However, wishing away the problem cannot be the policy. They must shoulder their share of the burden.

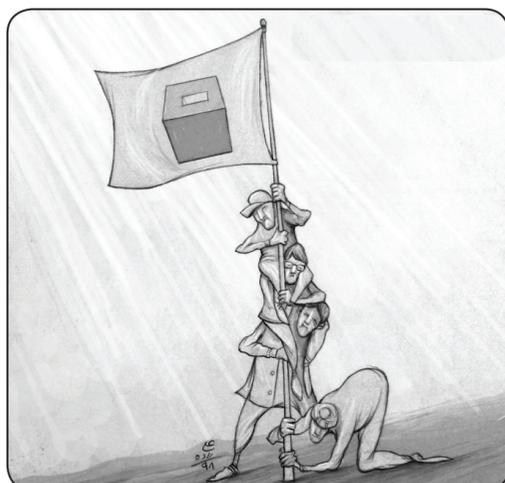
We in Turkey are convinced that we are paving the way for the Syrian refugees to return home and ensuring that Daesh and other terrorist groups will not re-emerge.

I am aware that safe and voluntary return home of the Syrian refugees needs to be carefully planned and managed. This has to proceed in accordance with international law and in cooperation with the relevant United Nations agencies. Syria is home to several ethnicities and viable and representative local councils need to be established until a political solution is found to the Syrian conflict.

After our last counterterrorism operation, in areas where the Kurds were in majority, Turkey facilitated the creation of local governing councils with a Kurdish majority to reflect the population.

The Syrians want to go home now. They have suffered more than enough. We are taking the initiative to help create the peaceful conditions that are necessary for the homecoming of millions of refugees. Contrary to the prevailing misapprehensions, our operation will help address the humanitarian dimension of the problem, contribute to the preservation of the unity of the country and add to the political process.

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