

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



October 31, 2016

Programs Worth \$2.3 Billion Ineffective in Afghanistan

Afghan people show a certain level of optimism and hope when they hear about large sum of money being promised and even transferred to Afghanistan for support and assistance; however, they fail to see real changes in the lives of the poor and deprived people. As a matter of fact, the large amounts of money that make the headlines and give hopes to the people are not spent in the best way. They do not reach to the deserving people and are mostly swallowed by corruption, which is prevalent in the society just like poverty and terrorism. This is a matter of concern and true, dedicated and honest efforts should be made in this regard if there is a will that any sort of assistance for Afghanistan should reach to the suffering masses.

In a recent audit report, Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) revealed that more than two dozen programs that cost more than \$2.3 billion were unsuccessful overall as implemented in Afghanistan. The audit was launched in 2012 to monitor and evaluate ongoing stabilization programs and was focused on the US Agency for International Development's (USAID) Measuring Impacts of Stabilization Initiatives (MISTI) project.

The company contracted to implement MISTI, told SIGAR "it could not properly locate where USAID conducted stabilization activities because of the inaccurate geospatial data it received, and as a result, could not begin conducting verification work."

The audit quotes USAID officials as telling SIGAR that they do not have any agency or mission-level policies to govern or guide the collection, maintenance, use, or sharing of geospatial data.

Unless the problem is addressed, USAID will continue to operate with inaccurate, problematic geospatial data, not knowing where its program activities are being conducted, the audit warned. It also highlighted that this will continue to limit the agency's ability to provide effective oversight and to mitigate potential fraud, waste, and abuse in connection with its programs in Afghanistan.

Afghanistan has, as a matter of fact, failed to deliver maximum at the time when the development has been required the most and, in the process, has also lost some golden opportunities.

Corruption has been lethal enough to annihilate the efforts or the plans to reconstruct the country and the different systems that may set it on the way to development. It should be noted that billions of dollars poured in the country for both military support and development projects. But if we analyze the socio-political and socio-economic scenario in the country the development does not seem as great as it should have been. Most of these aids were devoured by corruption instead of being spent for the intended purposes. Either the money that was to be spent through government or the NGO sector, both the ways corruption had the largest share.

An annual study of Transparency International for 2015 also revealed that Afghanistan is ranked the second most corrupt countries among 176 in the world. This is really tragic and shows that no considerable work has been done against corruption though it has been highlighted as a major problem throughout the last decade. And, it has had negative influences as well, particularly in the top governmental institutions. Corruption not only dominated the elections but also haunted the Kabul Bank and brought bad name to the nation and at the same time financial loss; however, it has been left to dominate with vigor and strength. It has, in fact, victimized our society more than terrorism and insecurity and today if Afghanistan is not able to stand on its own, it is also because of the corruption.

The Independent Joint Anti-Corruption Monitoring and Evaluation Committee (MEC) earlier blamed leaders of the National Unity Government (NUG) for failing to deliver on their promises to fight corruption in the country. With the change in government, there were some hopes that the situation would get better as National Unity Government (NUG), in its early days promised to handle corruption with iron fists; however, that does not seem to be happening even after so many days have passed. Afghanistan still stands among the most corrupt countries in the world. There seems to be no doubt in the fact that one of the basic reasons of the persistent rise in corruption in Afghanistan is the lack of commitment and honest efforts to control and eradicate this menace. Neither the previous government, nor the current government has shown real efforts to face it seriously. Therefore, the serpent has survived and has become reckless and out of control.

It is a real challenge now for the Afghan government to stand against it. However, a solid and dedicated effort against it can make a difference. It is not altogether impossible to defeat it. Definitely, strict measures are required, temperaments would be tested, institutions would be questioned, the powerful would have to be threatened, and more responsible attitude would be expected from all the people; in short, the whole mechanism would be shaken if there are real and honest efforts. And, it should be noted that there is no alternative for Afghanistan. The way it is going on leads to chaos and instability. If it has to change its route it must decide now and act accordingly.

The Weakest Example of Leadership

By Mohammad Zahir Akbari

Last year, in the same days, a survey conducted among a nationally representative sample of 2,500 adults across all of the country's 34 provinces. It found that nearly 81% of people are dissatisfied with leadership of President Ashraf Ghani while it was run across Afghanistan's ethnic and geographic spectrums. Considering the daily public media broadcast, social media networks and mass expressions, the citizens' dissatisfaction is extremely increased and deepened with performance of President Ashraf Ghani and national unity government. When President Ghani and Dr. Abdullah took power, there was ray of hope for the better future that would bring positive change but things have not changed and adversely deteriorated. Yet the national unity government has been essentially locked in the unending internal conflicts, disagreements, and has not made much any improvements in people's daily lives.

Recently, the first Vice President Abdul Rashid Dostum accused President Ashraf Ghani of discrimination; he said people from the president's ethnic group are important to him, but those from his province are even more important. If you speak Pashto with President Ashraf Ghani, you will be a good person, and if you speak Pashto and you are from Logar province, then you are very good. After attending a military operation in Jawzjan, Dostum criticized the National Unity Government leaders and accused the Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah incapable. "Mr. Abdullah Abdullah is incapable and does not have a good name among the people", he said.

In the meantime, Ghani's special envoy for reform and good governance, Ahmad Zia Massoud, at a gathering in Panjshir province accused government of discrimination and politicizing the state organizations. "What benefit will come out of me using my position in government to appoint all Tajiks into various positions? This in itself will create a bad reaction. And what benefit will come out of a Pashtoon brother who is the head of state and brings in all Pashtoons into all important positions? Nothing good will come out of this, and other ethnicities will react badly," he said. He also said that he is concerned about a possible increase in activity by Taliban and Daesh militants in the upcoming spring season. He called on jihadi leaders to be prepared to defend the country alongside the Afghan security forces.

These comes after a series of criticism against president Ghani by Abdullah Abdullah, the chief executive, for failing to work collaboratively and deemed him undeserving to serve the government. Before this, he also complained that he had been left out of key decisions, and depicted Ghani as arrogant and out of touch with the deteriorating situation in the country. The government was paralyzed and ministers did have the chance to speak as Ghani provides a one-hour lecture but had not listened to the ministers for 15 minutes. "If someone does

not have tolerance, he does not deserve the presidency." He said.

Likewise, the head of Afghanistan's main intelligence agency resigned over disagreements with the president, Ashraf Ghani, laying bare divisions that had hindered efforts to fight the growing Taliban insurgency. The resignation of Rahmatullah Nabil had followed a series of setbacks including the fall of the northern city of Kunduz to the Taliban and an insurgent raid on Kandahar airport in the south in which 50 civilians, police and security personnel had been killed. Nabil, who strongly opposed Ghani's moves towards terrorist backers, said the president had imposed unacceptable conditions and pressures on the way he did his job.

Such Ethnic schism is one of the major fallouts of war-torn history of Afghanistan. In the first years following the ouster of the Taliban regime, Afghanistan once again became a home for all Afghans, and nation-building process began; however, some politicians' hunger for power allowed the enemies of Afghanistan to create problems for the nation-building and unity process. After the highly disputed 2014 presidential election, ethnic politicians once again saw an opportunity to secure privileges under the cover of ethnicity and language. Although the new dispensation formed against the general will of Afghans was titled as the government of national unity, the upshots are in conflict with its name. From the very beginning, government leaders have accused each other of failures and ethnic politics. Given the involvement of foreign elements in fuelling ethnic tensions in the country in the past, such conflicts bolster the concern that some foreign circles are again seeking to sow the seeds of divisions among the fraternal Afghan ethnic groups through some politicians as their pawns to accomplish their goals.

These political leaders should learn a lesson from the failures of ethnic politics in the past, and pursue politics based on national interests other than ethnic ones.

The art of leadership is built on the ability to resolve near-term challenges while remaining focused on long-term goals and objectives. The actions related to improving governance, national unity and cooperation, justice and meritocracy as well the distance of government from people define the ways to political and economic goal can be achieved in the medium- and long- terms. He might have very good vision how to rebuild this country but does not have a clear strategy or will to implement with his current leadership. The history may repeat if President Ghani fails to revise and address the many near-term obstacles and internal challenges in his path. He takes much of the responsibilities by himself while he is not an executive authority. He must unite not divide and he should lead the nation to effectively move forward not backward.

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Privacy for Refugees

By Inga Kroener

With people living so much of their lives online nowadays, it is easier than ever for governments and companies to collect large amounts of personal information. Not surprisingly, data privacy is a hot topic. But there are plenty of people being left out of the debates. And, unfortunately, those are the people who need the most attention.

As much as Internet companies like Facebook or Google want to collect data about their users, there are limits to their power to do so. Most of the time, there is a way to opt out of providing personal data, even if it is sometimes buried deep in a complex set of privacy settings. If those opt-outs are not convincing enough, there are privacy-focused search engines or email providers.

But some vulnerable populations - such as the nearly five million Syrians who have been forced from their home country - cannot opt out, unless they want to be sent right back to a warzone. If they hope to be granted refugee status - not to mention food, clothing, shelter, and other basic necessities - they have to give whatever information the NGOs, IGOs, aid agencies, and humanitarian workers request. In other words, for refugees, whether to provide personal information, from religious beliefs to biometric data, can be a matter of life and death.

But what if those data fell into the wrong hands? With the organizations responsible for data security operating in low-resource, high-pressure circumstances, it is not an unreasonable question. The exposed refugees might be in serious danger.

Sensitive information is being circulated among an increasingly wide array of actors, such as third-party financial institutions, technology developers, cloud computing service providers, and other humanitarian agencies. Every time that information is shared - whether it is entered into a new database or a new actor gains access to a single aggregated database - the risk of privacy breaches grows.

There is no shortage of groups that would love to get their hands on the data. Over the last few years, the Syrian Electronic Army, which supports the brutal regime of President Bashar al-Assad, has successfully hacked into a number of secure databases.

Of course, this is not to say that collecting data on refugees is fundamentally wrong. The reality is that many governments could not justify accepting refugees without a thorough vetting process - and that demands data. Moreover, using biometric data like iris scans, rather than bankcards, offers some advantages for aid-delivery - namely, ensuring that assistance is delivered to its intended recipient.

But there is a need to assess whether all of the kinds of data that are currently collected are really needed. Does collecting them genuinely advance the objectives of providing support to refugees? Are the benefits of using biometric data significant enough that refugees should have no alternative? (According to a 2013 report, many refugees are indeed concerned about providing biometric data.)

For the data that are deemed useful and necessary, there is a need to review collection, storage, and sharing processes, in order to ensure that sensitive information is never compromised. Exchanges of personal data among companies, humanitarian groups, and government agencies should be allowed only when they are truly necessary, and should be conducted as securely as possible.

Privacy is not a privilege - a comfort that desperate people should have to give up. It is a fundamental human right, enshrined in the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights. International law obliges data controllers and processors to protect data sets containing personal data, particularly in the context of large-scale monitoring of individuals.

Though some IGOs are exempt from these requirements, such organizations must strive to implement best practices with regard to privacy, ethics, and data protection. After all, it makes little sense to collect data for the sake of protecting vulnerable populations, only to leave those data vulnerable to breaches by dangerous actors.

The first step is to carry out a privacy impact assessment (PIA). A PIA is a tool used to identify, analyze, and mitigate privacy risks arising from technological systems or processes. While there is no single established approach to undertaking a PIA, experience has produced some best practices, comprising a set of privacy principles and criteria, according to which systems for collecting, storing, and share refugees' data should be assessed.

For a PIA to work, it must weigh privacy against other imperatives, such as efficient aid provision. Given the lack of experience with this type of assessment, the framework and those applying it should be flexible. In settings that are continually changing, in response to the needs and capabilities of a range of actors, an iterative approach with qualitative elements is imperative. There is no perfect methodology, and practice will always differ from theory. But a high-quality PIA can help an organization assess and mitigate the privacy risks associated with the use of information and communications technology, biometric technologies, geo-location tracking devices, and so on. It is not a solution to the privacy challenge faced by refugees and their advocates, but it is an important step in the Inga Kroener is Senior Research Analyst at Trilateral Research Ltd. in London.



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