

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

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Intra-Afghan Peace Talks; The Most Challenging Part of the Talks

This round of talks will be the most challenging and time consuming part of the talks; during this period Afghans shall discuss a comprehensive and permanent peace deal, agree on a road map for the future of Afghanistan including the political system, women rights and the Afghan constitution.

The US and other countries involved in the Intra-Afghan peace talks will remain neutral during the process and they will only take part in the process if the Afghan negotiators asked them to mediate. They say the Afghan crisis belongs to the Afghans and they shall decide how to solve it. However, they say they are ready to help Afghans to put an end to the war in the country.

One of the positive developments in terms of the peace process in Afghanistan is the relative support of the neighboring countries; though it is not clear how much they really support the process and will they end supporting the terrorist groups or not in the future. In general, the neighboring countries of Afghanistan including Iran and Pakistan have voiced their support from the Afghan peace talks; They see peace talks essential for a secure and stable Afghanistan for restoring peace and stability in the region and call on the regional and international community to cooperate with each other to end the conflict and restore peace in Afghanistan.

Intra-Afghan peace talks provide a unique opportunity and a crucial responsibility for each and every Afghan citizen. The unique opportunity is that as a citizen each of us shall contribute and cooperate to succeed this process. And the crucial responsibility that each one of us has is to ensure that, the 18 year democratic achievements, our basic rights including human rights and women rights will not be compromised with the Taliban. Afghanistan constitution shall be amended based on the legal framework considered in the constitution and the republicanism shall not be replaced with Emirate System.

Afghan Government shall lead the Intra-Afghan talks
There are many concerns about the peace talks and the real intentions of the Taliban. One of the main assumptions is that they only use the talks as a tactic; to sign a deal with the US and then start a new round of civil war once the US withdraws from Afghanistan. With this assumption in mind, they try to sideline the Afghan government from the Intra-Afghan talks. Doing so, they will be able to divide the Afghan political leaders and the CSOs representatives. Taliban, in the absence or weak role of the Afghan government will be able to bring the changes they want in the future political system, Afghan national institutions including the military and basic rights of the citizens and equal participation of the minority groups in political system of the country.

Considering the tough challenges of the Intra-Afghan peace talks, The US and other countries involved in the process, say the process belong to Afghans and they shall decide about the future of their country. What matters is here that, the Afghan negotiators shall be mindful and use the peace road map developed by the Afghan government to lead the talks. The redlines of the peace talks have already been identified in this road map and it can ensure the amendment of the Afghan constitution according to the legal framework identified in the constitution, preserve the 18 year democratic achievements, and ensure the basic rights of Afghan citizens.



Traditional Culture Has a Huge Bearing on Women's Rights

By: Hujjatullah Zia

The evolution of women's rights have passed many ups and downs. Social and political issues have had direct impacts on the rights and freedoms of Afghan women. Tribal code of conduct and traditional culture have been one of the great drawbacks before the progress of women's rights and liberty.

In post-Taliban and post-Mujahidin Afghanistan, although women were entitled equally with men and their freedoms and inherent rights were recognized constitutionally, shocking violence against women occurred and tragic story emerged regarding them. Afghan women in tribal belts bore the brunt of tribal tradition deeply imbedded in Afghan culture. Honor killing is prevalent in remote areas of Afghanistan.

For example, Rod Nordland, the New York Times correspondent, said in his book "The Lovers" that a number of girls who were raped had to marry their rapists based on the decision of tribal elders. He also pointed out that Bibi Aisha had increased backlash against women's shelters after a picture showing that her nose had been cut off appeared on Time's cover. "Bibi Aisha was widely criticized in Afghanistan after that cover picture - including by officials in the office of President Hamid Karzai - for bringing shame to her homeland," Nordland maintained.

Pointing to King Amanullah Khan's reform and modernization, Nordland said that Amanullah Khan's movement did not bear the desired result in Afghanistan in the wake of backlash shown by conservatives. He said that when Amanullah returned from a visit to Europe "with his liberal minded queen, Soraya Tarzi, he declared at a public event that Islam did not require women to be covered, whereupon Queen Tarzi tore off her veil and the other government wives present did so as well." He said that under Amanullah's rule, women were allowed to divorce and to choose their husbands, bride prices were outlawed, women were encouraged to work and study.

However, mullahs and conservatives protested against his movement, which led to the collapse of his regime. Subsequently, his reforms were undone by his successors and the strides made in the sphere of women's rights and liberty backtracked.

Even with democratic administration after the downfall of the Taliban's regime, tribal code of conduct and parochial mindset regarding women's rights held strong sway in Afghanistan. Notwithstanding strides made by Afghan women and high official positions held by them, violence continues unabated. As a result, Nordland quoted some women

rights activists who were victims of violence themselves at home.

The country's patriarchal system and traditional culture is believed to have tarnished Afghanistan at regional and global level. Local militia commanders and strongmen still control their villages with misogynistic view. In areas dominated by the Taliban, women's rights and freedoms are curtailed to a great extent and the Taliban's warped mind is imposed on locals, mainly women. A girls' school was reportedly burnt down by the Taliban militants few days back in a district in Kabul.

Generally speaking, a large number of Afghan people are highly sensitive to the human rights discourse and deem them as western product. Worst, the Elimination of Violence Against Women law, which was legalized by Hamid Karzai's decree, could not be approved by Afghan parliament as a result of backlash and sensitivity shown by some conservative MPs, including former warlords and Mujahidin.

Overall, tribal code of conduct and traditional mindset had huge bearing on women's progress and those of their rights.

Meanwhile, Afghan women still fear the return of Islamic Emirate, which restricted women's rights and freedoms based on radical interpretation of sharia law. Now Afghan women urge the Taliban negotiators, including the government, to include female representatives in the talks.

As far as tribal code of conduct is not reformed and some mullahs, especially those who pretend to be mullahs and dress like them, continue their exploitation on the grounds of religious terms, violence against women will not stop. That is, the Afghan Constitution approved in 2004 should be enforced thoroughly.

Afghan Constitution, which was approved with the presence of Afghan clergymen and former Mujahidin and warlords, leaves no room for gender discrimination. Article 22 states, "Any kind of discrimination and distinction between citizens of Afghanistan shall be forbidden. The citizens of Afghanistan, man and woman, have equal rights and duties before the law."

The horizons of tribal locals will be broadened regarding the issue of women's rights and liberty through founding schools and universities in every nook and cranny of the country. The Afghan government has to encourage the schooling of boys and girls, especially in tribal areas, through extending educational institutions and schools so that it could change not only locals' mindset but also their customs.

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Today's Terrorism Is More Fatal with Modern Techniques

By: Rajkumar Singh

Earlier terrorism was not a widespread phenomenon as it is today in contemporary political system of the world. In the 1960s national security was perceived as the ability of a nation to protect its internal values from external threats. In the 1990s the notion of national security has been greatly enlarged to mean the capacity to control those domestic and foreign conditions that the public opinion considers necessary for its autonomy, prosperity and well being. It has been interpreted by some to mean any condition which might degrade the quality of life of the inhabitants of a state. In this confused perception of security the terrorists has a ready field to exploit. The relationship between the citizen and the state having snapped, terrorists target the citizens with greater violence and in the least expected places. In response to the terrorists' use of violence the state uses its military apparatus. In the process it alienates the population. The increasing reliance on the military cannot and does not stop terrorist activity. It in fact increases the vulnerability of the citizens.

Helpful methods and grievous threats

The threats we face from terrorism are constantly changing in all sorts of ways. It is not easy at a time when commercial airlines can be used as flying bombs, and when terrorist strategy is planned by internet, mobile phone, satellite and coded messages on websites. It has now become a global phenomenon with increasing and rather well identifiable links between different terrorist group and organisation. They use each other's areas for recruitment and training, exchange of illegal weapons, engage in joint planning and ventures and also provide administrative and other logistic support. This type of terrorist activities show a new dimension due to circumstances characterised by the advancement of science, technology and diverse social, economic, political and historical reasons conditioning it. The development of computer science, satellite and mobile links have also affected the modernisation of terrorist activities. It is also feared that weapons of mass destruction previously controlled by governments can now be purchased on the black market. It is said that not only the weapons but also the scientists with the knowledge of how to make them are available.

Meanwhile, experts in terrorism believe that the next big threat will come from the practitioners of biological terrorism. Dr. Raymond A. Zilinskas, a microbiologist and former UN-SCOM inspector, recently discussed three categories of bioterrorism. Low technology bio-weapons are delivered in food or water, causing food poisoning. Such acts are extremely difficult to prevent, but rarely have much more than local impact. High technology bio weapons disperse agents over a larger area, but the use of foggers or sprayers is beset with technical problems. Explosive munitions as dispersal devices kill the agents in the explosion. There is also bioscience-based technology in which bacteria might be genetically engineered to be resistant to all known antibiotics, while viruses may be made more resistant to environmental factors. Dr. Zilinskas warns, 'Nevertheless, we can expect that in the not too distant future, some well-trained molecular biologist will utilise her or his knowledge for military or terrorist purposes.' A 1999 Federal Research Division (FRD) study examined some changes from terrorists of the past, especially the emergence of terrorist acts carried out by individuals and members of small, adhoc groups largely unknown to security organisations. Tactics, as well as sources, had changed, with the greater use of suicide attacks and attacks by women and children. A very significant concern was the possible use, by terrorists, of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD). Researchers for a 1999 General Accounting Office had also concluded that this is not a hypothetical fear but it also must be

assessed in terms of possible damage, ...except if using toxic industrial chemicals, terrorists would need a relatively high degree of sophistication to successfully and effectively process agents, improvise a device or weapon and disseminate the agents to cause mass casualties. ...Effectively disseminating both forms of agent (dry or liquid) can pose technical challenges in that the proper equipment and energy sources are needed.

New weapons applied

However, in this context, above all is the fact that terrorists, while having at their disposal all the arms of the system, have also another fatal weapon: their own death. If they limited themselves to fighting the system with its own weapons, they would be immediately eliminated. If they did not oppose the system with their own death, they would disappear as quickly as a useless sacrifice: this has almost always been the fate of terrorism until now and the reason why it could not but fail. Everything changed as soon as they allied all available modern means to this highly symbolic weapon. The latter infinitely multiplies their destructive potential. Many terrorist organisations employ attacks in which the death of the attacker is not a risk, but is a certainty if the attack is carried out. Several operations have used trucks loaded with explosives and driven into the target. The driver either manually set off the explosives, causing his own death as well as deaths in the target. For example, the 9/11 attack involved the deaths of both the hijackers that took control of the aircraft, and those that flew it into the target. The suicide attacks have both a psychological and a practical effect. Going back to the World War II Japanese Kamikaze, who used suicide attacks against purely military targets, the recipients of the attacks were impressed, and to some extent demoralised, by the determination of the enemy. Current terrorists use the suicide attacker's brain as an equivalent to high technology and obtain psychological benefits as a result. Terrorism is violence for a cause and terrorists always want the world to know about their existence, their causes and the power they wield. When they strike but don't seek publicity then they are working as a proxy.

Groups also help each other

The terrorists of today have a global network and little firm information is available about the type of data used by network analysts. The experts in general mostly rely on newspaper and other media reports, but it is certain that they maintain a high degree of connectivity and considerable redundancy. The dynamic units are probably small, with high personnel turn over and considerable structural equivalence. The network is not managed in the strict hierarchical sense, but a central leadership appears to plan major moves, to provide training, finance and logistical support but to permit considerable autonomy at the local level. Such structures contrasts markedly with typical governmental hierarchies. In fact, to understand networks, one has to interview people; learn about their friends, relations and contacts; describe the relationships; reduplicate so that everyone is represented only once in the network, albeit in multiple roles; describe their movements; determine the processes of fission and fusion that create their particular dynamics; and connect the dots. For the terrorists even nationality matters less than the commitment. The force is composed of a variety of ethnic and national groups, whose belief presumably binds them to the cause, and not necessarily to a given organisation or leader. The breakdown of such a network, whether on the local or global scale, depends obviously on two factors: money and trust.

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