

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

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Haqqani Network – A Serious Threat

The closer integration of the Haqqani militant network into the leadership of the Taliban is changing the flow of the Afghan insurgency this year, with the Haqqanis' senior leader increasingly calling the shots in the Taliban's offensive, Afghan and American officials believe. Sirajuddin Haqqani, the head of Haqqani network, orchestrated lethal attacks against Afghanistan while serving as deputy to the Taliban's supreme leader, following the revelation of Omar's death.

The Haqqani Network is responsible for some of the highest-profile attacks of the Afghan war, including the June 2011 assault on the Kabul Intercontinental Hotel, conducted jointly with the Afghan Taliban, and many other major attacks throughout Afghanistan. In September 2011, the Haqqanis participated in a day-long assault against major targets in Kabul, including the US Embassy, International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) headquarters, the Afghan Presidential Palace, and the Afghan National Directorate of Security headquarters and many other attacks.

The US Government in 2012 designated the Haqqani Network as a Foreign Terrorist Organization because of its involvement in the Afghan insurgency, attacks on US military and civilian personnel and Western interests in Afghanistan, and because of its ties to the Taliban and al-Qaeda.

Of late, the US officials have said that the Haqqani network and other terrorist groups along the Afghan-Pak border pose a continued security threat to the entire South Asian region and beyond. "We all recognize the continued security threat that is posed by the Haqqani network and other terrorist groups that operate inside Pakistan and along the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan", US State Department spokesman John Kirby is cited as saying. Similarly, Afghan officials believe that the Taliban group and Haqqani network leadership councils are based in Quetta and Peshawar cities of Pakistan from where they stage attacks against Afghan forces and civilians. The escalation in militancy inflicted heavy casualties upon Afghan nation and the civilian death toll increased largely. It is believed that the Haqqani network has been behind many attacks and support the Taliban in terrorist activities.

The formation of Haqqani's network traces back to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Jalaluddin Haqqani, the founder of Haqqani's network, was a leader of one of the more radical mujahedeen factions during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, Hizb-e Islami. Jalaluddin joined with the Afghan Taliban as it grew in strength during the 1990s, although schisms between fighters loyal to Haqqani and the Taliban occasionally flared up. Following the collapse of the Taliban government in 2001, the Haqqani family fled to Waziristan and orchestrated deadly attacks against Afghan and US forces. Haqqani's network is formed of radical ideologues and shows no inclination towards peace talks. It is believed that violence and bloodshed run in their blood and is part of their ideology. Therefore, their thirst for the blood of innocent civilians will hardly be quenched. Since Sirajuddin Haqqani, who succeeded his father, comes from a radical family and grew up in a fundamental context, as religious seminaries, he will follow his father's footsteps and continue their operation against US and Afghan forces.

Following the December 16 attack on the Army Public School in Peshawar, which the Taliban said was a revenge assault for operation Zarb-e-Azb, the Pakistani officials announced that they would ban Haqqani's network. Referring to the massacre of 134 children, the Pakistan's cabinet member told Reuters, "We have decided to ban the Haqqani network as a step in implementing the National Action Plan devised after the (Peshawar) school attack." Pakistan outlawed several militant groups in the past but, ill-fatedly, they have reemerged after regrouping or renaming themselves and continued their terrorist activities within and outside Pakistan.

In 2011, President Obama authorized a volley of drone hits on Haqqani headquarters in the town of Miranshah. The strikes were supposed to be the beginning of a concerted effort to stop them from attacking Americans in Afghanistan, but the campaign was short-lived. Moreover, US drone carried out a rare missile strike in northwest Pakistan outside the country's remote tribal region on November, 2013 killing six people, including a senior leader of the powerful Haqqani network Maulavi Ahmad Jan. The missiles hit an Islamic seminary in Hangu district in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province that was known to be visited by senior members of the Afghan Haqqani network, an ally of the Afghan Taliban and one of the most feared militant groups battling US troops in the country. For the past three decades, the Haqqani Network has functioned as an enabler for other groups and as the fountainhead of local, regional and global militancy. It is believed that Afghan nation bore the brunt of casualty inflicted by Haqqani's network. This terrorist network seems highly dangerous and poses serious threats to Afghanistan. Pakistan will not be immune to its harm either as this network supports many warring factions. Efforts to neutralize the Haqqani network's operation in Afghanistan require continuous and aggressive counterterrorism operations in Afghanistan and Pakistan in addition to sustained counterinsurgency operations in key populations in and around the Southeast. A strong trilateral campaign, by Afghanistan, Pakistan and the US, against this terrorist network needs to be launched and their sanctuaries are to be targeted so as to alleviate the militancy.

The Factors of Economic Crisis in Afghanistan

By Mohammad Zahir Akbari

The depth of economic recession can be measured by recent report of World Food Program (WFP) revealed about 40% of Afghan people facing food shortage comprising 11.3 million residents and forty percent children of chronic malnourishments. All international and local reports indicate that for its survival, Afghanistan depends on international aid. The Afghan government has not been able to optimally exploit the resources it has and has fallen short of collecting the amount of revenue it had promised to international donors. On the other hand, the latest security reports indicate that militants control more than 30% of the Afghan territory or somehow exercise influence over it. The emboldened terrorists not only threaten the economic arteries of the country but also disheartened economic investment in the country. In economics, hope and faith coexist with great scientific pretension and also a deep desire for respectability which has entirely disappeared.

The formation of a national unity government in Afghanistan has raised hopes for cooperation and teamwork among various political blocks in the country. However, as time goes by, it becomes evident that the level of trust, disunity and cooperation is falling and at times there is also fear of political breakdown. The allocation of government positions to certain individuals and groups has made it harder for cooperation and joint endeavors to take place. It turns out that favouring personal interests over the needs of the country has become something of a national tradition. In the meantime, lack of job security has contributed to abuses of power by senior Afghan officials. The promises of the national unity government to eradicate corruption and create jobs opportunities have not been fulfilled and the government of Afghanistan still suffers from rampant corruption. Hundreds of corruption cases involving senior government officials are still pending in judicial institutions, bringing into question the unity government's leadership on the eradication of the problem.

Poor management and inefficiency of the Afghan government has caused a breakdown in the rule of law at various levels of society. According to reports, 161 out of 162 articles of the Constitution have been contravened over the past few years; the only article which has not been violated so far is Article 21 of the Constitution that reads, "Kabul shall be the capital of Afghanistan". The study has also found out that all three branches of the government (the Judiciary, Legislative and Executive), including the President, have infringed the Constitution. Violation of the provisions of the Constitution on such a large scale is of great concern, and a shameful reality of the rule of the law in the country. If the supreme law, as the source of all other laws, is broken to this extent, the violation of other laws has pretty much become a customary exercise. Lack of rule of law has, on one hand, facilitated major administrative and political corruption in organizations, backed by judicial impunity for perpetrators, and on the other, it has brought support for and security of private and public properties to a minimum. Lack of civil security for investors and their relatives has forced the average businessmen to flee.

Insecurity, lack of political stability, poverty, unemployment, poor

governance, corruption and lack of accountability from the government to the public have caused citizens to lose hope for the future, making citizens not only lose interest in the economic cycle of the country but also making some of them leave rather than stay in Afghanistan. According to the Afghan constitution, a market economy has been adopted as the economic policy of the country. In this globally approved system, the private sector should play a prominent role.

Over the past 15 years, the private sector has played a critical role in the mitigation of poverty, creation of jobs and flow of money and capital into the economy of Afghanistan. Yet, the Afghan government has failed to pave the ground for acceptable economic conditions so that it could attract more foreign and domestic investment. Besides becoming a good environment for investment, the private sector seeks profit, security of capital and government support for business. Since the establishment of the national unity government, the expectation has been that the Afghan leadership seek more foreign and domestic investment so that the economic situation changes. However, the factors mentioned earlier have instead brought about a flight of capital. The national unity government faces a trust deficit. Lack of economic perspective and a government stuck in insecurity means Kabul is a failed system. The business community in Afghanistan was hoping that the government would work and coordinate with them closely. However, it is two years since inauguration of the national unity government, and it looks as if the government distrusts the private sector. A shrinking business environment is not in the interest of the government. No indicators point to a better situation in Afghanistan. In such conditions, applying pressure in the name of reform discourages the private sector even further, and confronts the economic system of Afghanistan with serious challenges in the near future.

What should be done?

Firstly, as a united nation we must choose growing together based on messages of compassion, justice, meritocracy and democratic processes ... truly if we stay positive, inclusive and democratic, we may not miss historic opportunity to build our economy. Secondly, the government should trust the private sector and remove surrounding misconceptions. The coordination between the private sector and the government of Afghanistan is urgently needed. Since there are no signs of a better investment environment, the government should avoid moves that could discourage national businessmen from investing in the country. In such a critical situation, increasing government pressure - in the name of reforms - on the private sector could only lead the country to economic decline. The government should encourage the private sector to invest in Afghanistan with support and increased coordination. Nationalization and monopolization of specific sectors are not in the interest of the government as it is unable to manage these sectors effectively. Going after the private sector with excuses and pretexts will bring about further capital flight and a decrease in investment.

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The Rise and Fall of Middle Eastern Health Systems

By Ali H. Mokdad

Much of the progress in the Arab countries of the Middle East and North Africa in recent decades appears to have been reversed by the political unrest and civil wars afflicting the region. This reversal is especially visible in the health systems of Egypt, Jordan, Libya, Syria, Tunisia, and Yemen, which previously had been steadily improving.

Before 2010, these countries were experiencing increased life expectancy as well as reduced infectious disease burdens and infant and maternal mortality. Today, however, disruptions to their health systems have compounded the trauma and misery that have arisen from the region's many conflicts.

This is clear from a recent study that I co-authored for The Lancet, which examined data from the Global Burden of Disease Study 2013 to determine the effects of health-system deterioration in Eastern Mediterranean countries.

We found that projected life expectancy has declined across the board since 2010. For example, if the 1990-2008 rate of increase for life expectancy in Syria had continued apace, it would have been five years higher for women and six years higher for men than it is now. In Libya, life expectancy declined by six years for women and nine years for men. And in Egypt, Tunisia, and Yemen, it declined by .25 years between 2010 and 2013.

The larger drop in life expectancy in Syria and Libya is to be expected, given the civil wars in those countries. The United Nations Special Envoy in Syria estimates that 400,000 people have died in that country in the last five years as a result of the violence. Moreover, the turmoil has had less obvious, but equally alarming, downstream effects. For example, after declining at an average annual rate of 5.6% between 1990 and 2010, Syria's infant mortality rate has risen by 9.3% in recent years.

In war-torn countries, the destruction of infrastructure is generally indiscriminate. Despite international resolutions prohibiting attacks on health-care facilities, such attacks are a regular occurrence. Moreover, amid war and severe social unrest, medical and mental-health professionals often flee to safer environments, depriving those left behind - regardless of their status or income - of basic treatment for everything from physical injuries to drug and alcohol abuse.

In fact, conflicts in the region are especially hazardous for people suffering from mental illness and substance abuse. The rate

of total disease burden for psychological and drug-use disorders, measured in life years, increased from 4% in 1990 to more than 7% in 2013, with some countries seeing more dramatic increases than others. With the unrest yet to come to an end, the impact will be even higher in 2016.

Negative health trends are apparent even in countries that have been experiencing economic growth. Both Qatar and the United Arab Emirates are experiencing increased drug and alcohol use, suggesting that the stress of mere proximity to violence elsewhere, combined with increasing openness and massive growth in illicit drug production in conflict zones such as Afghanistan, could push people toward substance abuse as a coping mechanism.

Areas neighboring these zones are also increasingly burdened by the largest refugee crisis in 70 years. The flood of people into camps in Lebanon and Jordan has overwhelmed sanitation measures, leading to outbreaks of infectious diseases and resurgence in some areas of diseases that had been nearly eradicated, such as polio among Syrian refugees in Iraq. Most countries absorbing refugees are simply not equipped to deal with such a massive influx of people who need health and social services.

The rapid deterioration of health-care systems in the Middle East and North Africa in the last half-decade is alarming. But the progress many countries in the region made in prior decades provides grounds for hope that it can be reversed. Larger investments in education, diagnosis, and treatment, for example, would help to reduce the stigma of mental illness that persists in many Arab countries.

But a resumption of progress in the region is impossible without political solutions that reduce violence and social unrest. As we conclude in our study, "a healthy Eastern Mediterranean Region is a politically stable Eastern Mediterranean Region from which the whole world will benefit." Stabilizing a country riven by conflict is a prerequisite for improving its health-care system. Once such stability is achieved, regional and local efforts should be accelerated to improve disease prevention and health-care infrastructure, and to put the region back on a path toward providing better, healthier lives for its people. (Courtesy Project Syndicate)

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