

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



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16 Years of Afghanistan After 9/11

It has been 16 years since the 9/11 attack that was carried out by a group of Al-Qaeda terrorists in the United States (US). Following the attack, US sought to retaliate and reached to Afghanistan to topple down the government of Taliban that supported and protected the Al-Qaeda militants. The war was not a difficult one for US as Taliban were soon defeated and a so-called democratic government was established in Afghanistan.

However, the circumstances that followed the war did not favor the people of Afghanistan though they had to give so many sacrifices; nevertheless, they were not able to achieve the society that they had started to dream about. 16 years after the incident of 9/11 and more than 15 years after the establishment of a democratic government, the situation of peace and security seems gloomy. The terrorism and terrorist networks are very much active, whereas the so-called democratic government is not able to achieve socio-political stability.

There are many doubts, and the opinions regarding the current situation in Afghanistan are very shaky. Especially, in the last some months the situation seems ambiguous as to where the country is leading and what would be the future of socio-political scenario in the region. Though, since the downfall of Taliban there have been major contributions on the part of international community to help our country out of instability and in that regard billion of dollars have moved in, especially from US, the major issues still remain with major concerns. There are many serious minds that doubt the future of the peace, stability and prosperity in the region.

As a matter of fact, the administrative, development and security sectors in Afghanistan still remain immature and underdeveloped. It is comprehensible that these sectors take long time for their improvement, but the level of the improvement so far made is not in accordance to the energy and resources being utilized. One of the biggest hurdles in this regard has been the lack of transparency in the utilization of the resources, mostly provided as aid by the international community. The wave of corruption has uprooted the weak foundations of the development projects and possibilities of better outcomes have diminished to a great extent.

There are three basic sectors which require special attention. They include incapacity of the government to provide good governance. Good governance relates to the conduct of the public institutions regarding the public affairs in such a way so as to guarantee well being, prosperity and definitely human rights. But instead our public institutions have been dominated by incapacity and corruption. These institutions have been further adding to the troubles of the common people instead of solving their problems.

The real purpose of a democratic system is to reach to the common people of the society and provide them facilities on their door steps. Further, the so called democratic system in our country has not been able to represent the people of Afghanistan as a whole.

The diverse Afghan society has not been able to be compensated in the system that has been trying to keep the central government stronger. The political system, wherein more authority should be given to the provinces, can provide better representation to all the ethnic groups in the country and can favor the general will but such a setup has not been appreciated the way it should have been.

As far as the security of the country is concerned, there have been many improvements but a lot of work still needs to be done. The international security forces have withdrawn and the responsibilities of security are on the shoulders of Afghan security forces. As far as the capacity of Afghan forces to guarantee secure life for Afghan people, there are grey patches. Unless there are speedy development in the capacity building, training and professionalism of Afghan forces, the eyebrows will remain tense as far as security arrangements are concerned.

Further, the political reconciliation with Taliban that is expected to find out some political solution to the issues in the country in order to lead to peace is also suffering from lack of clarity and commitment, especially after the current aggressive approach of Taliban and Daesh.

On the other hand, the fragmented Taliban leadership has not shown readiness for the peace process. In addition, the factions existing within Taliban also differ in their views regarding any peace deal and this makes the process difficult by introducing the intricacy as to whether which faction should be considered as the true representative to Taliban, and what should be done with the other factions who opt to go against any sort of peace process.

Though the current aggressive policy laid forward by US may help in subduing Taliban to a certain extent but to solve the issue properly the US must stop subordinating programming to counter-insurgency objectives, devise better mechanisms to monitor implementation, adequately address corruption and wastage of aid funds.

On the other hand, to address the socio-political and security concerns appropriately there has to be immense effort made on the part of government and other authoritative institutions in the country. Above all, this effort should be directed towards the wellbeing of all the people of Afghanistan.



Afghans Have a Dream

By Hujjatullah Zia

Similar to all nations, Afghans also nurture an ambition for having a peaceful and democratic state. Their dream is to exercise their rights in a civil society void of war and violence. They desire to taste the sweet fruit of democracy. They dream their children be able to live a peaceful life. Afghan men and women pray for having a society where life and liberties are valued and no blood is shed or tears are flowed. An end for the outpouring of grief which results from bloody incidents and atrocious acts is the desire of Afghan people.

To the unmitigated chagrin of Afghan people, radical elements and colonial powers amalgamated throughout the history to destroy this land and sow the seeds of discord and sectarianism. For instance in the past, the successive kings of Afghans—who were pawns in puppet regimes—practiced upon the policy of “divide and rule” and inflicted heavy human casualties and irreparable loss upon the nation. The cruel rehearsals of dictatorial regimes and fatal civil unrest played the most destructive role in Afghanistan. A thumbnail description about the past regimes will unfold all the barbaric practices of those who ruled under sacred terms—from Abdul Rahman Khan to Mullah Muhammad Omar who both called themselves Amir-ul-Mumineen (the commander of the faithful) but treated people in the worst possible way. The history is shocking for the nation and fill a large number of people with hatred.

With leaving a dark history behind, Afghans dreamt for a peaceful society, particularly following the collapse of the Taliban’s regime. The nation believed that it was the death knell of fundamental ideology and murder of innocent civilians. Democracy, which upheld the rights and dignity of mankind and cherished humanism and civil society, was likely to pave the ground for respecting public rights. With this dream come true, Afghan men and women celebrated democracy through electing their representatives for approving Constitution and participating in provincial and presidential elections. This was deemed as a unique milestone in the country’s history. This superficial view and optimism were really naïve of the nation who did not regard the other side of the coin; i.e., the orchestration of the Taliban’s guerilla fighters.

The bloodshed of the past resurfaced with the Taliban’s terrorist activities shattering the dream and hope of Afghan nation. Being left despondent, a large number of people abandoned the

country and many others were beset by sufferings. The continuation of tragic episodes and merciless killings left no room for optimism.

With the escalated militancy, Afghan civilians mainly women and children were changed into sacrificial lambs and the nascent democracy did not take root. After all, on the one hand, militancy started with great force, on the other hand, the “war on terror” involved US-led NATO forces in the issue. The war continued for more than a decade and half but warring factions did not hesitate to keep on fighting. In other words, the war started by Bush administration and lingered up to Trump’s. However, it is worth saying that the US, along with Afghan government, also called warring parties to come to negotiating table which was refused by the militants including the Taliban. The Taliban were fluctuating whether or not to hold peace talks. A meeting was held between the Taliban and Afghan government on July 07, 2015 near Islamabad, in Murree. But just a day before the second meeting, the revelation of Mullah Omar’s death destroyed the peace process. Neither his first successor nor his second one succumbed to the frequent calls for peace.

Despite the fact that the US military mission ended in 2014 during Obama’s administration and the bulk of US forces withdrew from Afghanistan, Donald Trump has declared to resume military action through sending more troops to the country. This came as Omar’s second successor has intensified attacks in Afghanistan. So, military action will be resumed as a result of the Taliban’s relentless offensives and their repeated refusal to peace talks.

Now there is only little room left for Afghans’ dream for a peaceful society. Warring factions still murder people under sacred terms of jihad and practice against religious tenets. That is to say, their ideology is based on no religious values or moral standards. A large number of political pundits believe that military action will not be a viable solution to the problem but it seems to be the only option versus the persistent attacks of warring parties. The fact is that civilian casualties will continue and the public dream for a society free from violence and bloodshed will hardly ever come true. The public hope is shattered for the end of the protracted war and a sense of disappointment fills the air.

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In Afghanistan’s Tiny Daikundi, the Motivation for more Women in Journalism is “the Story.”

The United Nations has a mandate to support the Government of Afghanistan and its citizens in a shared goal of becoming a stable, open, and peaceful nation. The following news feature is meant to tell a human interest story related to how Afghanistan and the UN are working together to overcome the many challenges to achieving this goal.

After two years working as a journalist in a deeply challenging environment, Insiya Najafi, in her sparkling blue camouflage scarf and wide smile, is pretty sure what keeps her going as a radio reporter and talk show host. One day she discovered a family wandering the back alleys of her city with a child who had passed away during the family’s hasty flight from fighting in southern Afghanistan.

“They had no idea what to do with their baby,” Insiya says now. “They had taken the child to the hospital and the authorities had sent them away. I guided them back and showed them how to ask for shelter. What I’ve seen here since has been a change in attitudes, moving towards a greater local acceptance of displaced persons.”

Daikundi province sits in the highland heart of Central Afghanistan. Beset with an arid climate best for apple and nut orchards, the capital city, Nili, it is surrounded to the south, west and east by war. Though calm by comparison to other embattled Afghan provinces, Daikundi is impoverished and teaming with social and health problems, including malnutrition. The dominant Hazara ethnic group, however, actively promotes women’s participation, including in media, which adds to a surprising national trend in Afghanistan.

Through gritty determination, ambition, and hard work, Afghan women across the country have increased their presence working in media by 12 percent this past year despite ongoing security threats and documented instances of harassment, according to the group NAI Supporting Open Media. Even with the 12 percent rise, only 17 percent of all journalists in Afghanistan are women, but the trends are encouraging say national journalist unions and leading editors, adding that high-profile jobs for women in journalism provide a “role model” for other Afghan women with working ambitions.

Insiya, 23, is an example of the motivation of young Afghan women seeking work in the profession. She began work two years ago with a three month old child of her own and help from her family. “I had the support I needed— including from my husband,” she says. “When I’m out in the field women also feel free to talk to me and highlight their own struggles.”

The world of journalism has turned upside down for Afghan women in just the last sixteen years. Until 2001, under the Taliban, even the idea of a media encouraging an open society was nonexistent. Women were forced to remain inside, and even whipped for seeking an education. “Everything after 2002 was entirely new for Afghan women in journalism,” says Torpekai Amarkhel, a seasoned producer with the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan’s public affairs section, and who works with female radio teams across the country.

The UN Mission in Afghanistan includes support for local radio stations, including in Nili, and education about the public’s access to information through media, which the UN considers a bulwark of an open society. “For now, the number of women working in media might have increased, but there are still many obstacles,” said Amarkhel. “I work with teams in the field now,

who arrive to work in burqas [head to toe veils] and conduct their interviews through burqas, particularly if they are outside of the office. It is still not easy to convince women that this a great or even comfortable profession for them.”

Even in the capital Kabul, there is still a high amount harassment, often sexual in nature. “We have received so many complaints of sexual harassment,” says Makia Monir, who helps to document such cases for the Journalist Association of South Asia. “We actually sometimes don’t publish reports showing heavy harassment because we don’t want to frighten woman away from the profession.”

Yet women have a long history in Afghan journalism and have been working in the profession for over a century, according to Najeeba Ayobi, who is the Managing Director at Killid Radio, a national network of stations that has been a leader in promoting women’s participation in the media. “Nearly a century ago when the Her Royal Highness Queen Suraya visited Europe, she returned with the idea to start a new publication focused on women’s issues,” she said. “Topics included issues of working at home as well as biographies of leading ladies.”

Later, under King Zahir Shah in the 50s and 60s, women began to work more openly in media as reporters, editors and also as TV presenters. Still, media remained what Mrs. Ayobi now calls “still a patriarchal profession,” dominated by men. Despite the hardships, Mrs. Ayobi notes the allure of working as a journalist is still strong, particularly for young Afghan women wanting to make a difference. “It holds forth the possibility of fame, if not fortune,” she says.

Yet, here in dusty Daikundi, which is not on the list of stopovers for diplomats or even aid workers, there is little evidence that the allure of journalism holds forth the hope of fame here in dusty Daikundi. Several female reporters said they regularly are spoken down to by men in an abusive manner and have difficulties setting up interviews.

Masooma Seerat, 24, began her tenure at Radio Nili with almost no support from her peers and no encouragement from her own family. “When I started here, people in my village were talking behind my back,” she said. “They asked, ‘Why is she doing this? I had arguments with my Mom and spoke to my Dad and he was also against it, but finally he allowed it.’”

For Masooma, the inspiration to work was similar in some respects to that of her colleague, Insiya. It was her “big story”— the one that helped her recognize the essential value of serious journalism.

“It was about two elderly sisters living together in a tiny room and holding on by a thread to their own lives,” she said. “I went to visit them. People thought they would not make it through the winter—that they would freeze to death—but after my story about them I had both a businessman, who wanted to help, and the Department of Women’s Affairs on the phone asking about them. That story really changed my outlook on the impact I could make, and now, all the talk of ‘why’ I would work as a journalist in my own neighborhood has ended.”



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