

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



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Changing Challenges into Opportunities

It is widely believed concept that the nations that go through difficult times ultimately gain a sense of admiration for peace, tranquility and progress and the members of such nation become more responsible and strive to bring about positive changes. History favors this concept evidently. For example, it took European centuries to rise for development and reforms and ultimately become better nations of the world. The had to go through dark age and then many wars before they started realizing that wars would not lead them towards stability, therefore, they brought about important changes in their considerations and priorities.

Nevertheless, it is vital to understand that it is not the difficulties and troubles alone that would guarantee a better response by the nation; the nature of the response itself is also of great importance. If a nation faces troubles and issues and gets pessimistic, it would not rise to the occasion and rather succumb to it.

It would then be dominated by those troubles and a time could come that nation would consider all the troubles as its destiny and thus adjust itself with them. At that point all the doors towards reforms and development would be closed.

As a matter of fact, there are opportunities hidden in the troubles and problems. They show that there are shortcomings that have to be overcome by the society members. They require change and thus demand appropriate actions. Looking at the troubles in that perspective could give a nation an impetus to change and improve their socio-political circumstances.

One of the most imperative characteristic of a nation is its attitude and behavior within a tense and challenging situation. The nations that are able to go through such situations successfully, in fact, deserve to be remembered by history, while the ones that lose themselves only have the right to wither away with the sands of time.

Here it is important to see the nation as a whole. It is not always right to consider leaders responsible for everything that happens within the society. Definitely, they have a dominant role and certain responsibilities as well, but the society in its entirety depend on all the people. Even the quality and characteristics of the leaders depend on the types of societies and the nature of people among whom they are nourished. So, the responsibility for everything does not fall on the leaders automatically; neither are they responsible to bring about all the positive changes that are required within a society. Therefore, the nation as a whole must rise to the occasion and respond to the challenges.

Moreover, the leaders are not always perfect and there have been many cases wherein the leaders have proved that they want nothing more than their self-centered incentives. There are cases when they are corrupt and above all they are like all other human beings and they may commit mistakes, make wrong decisions and may even sacrifice the greater good for their families and friends. In such cases it becomes really important for a nation to be vigilant and must not become dumb sheep and follow them blindly.

Currently Afghan nation is also going through a very crucial phase of its history and it is demanded from the nation to be vigilant and sensible and strive to write its history itself, instead of letting the circumstances take the control and pen down their destiny.

Though a government has been formed whose basic structure is based on unity and that also claims to a national unity government, concerns still remain regarding the exposed feelings and sentiments of the people for their countrymen. It has to be accepted that even if the leaders get together and form alliances and coalitions, nothing would save the nation from going towards chaos if the people abhor each other and become the victim of chauvinist and extremist feelings.

Therefore, it is important that Afghan nation must now start thinking and acting wisely. They have experienced an ugly phase of civil war and a very long history of instability. By now, they should be sensible enough not to fall in the trap of chauvinist feelings for their fellow beings and do not give any one opportunity to utilize their feelings for their self-centered incentives.

Now, they have to realize that their responsibilities are to declare clearly that they are no more ready to be fooled and to be utilized by others. Their rights are to announce their hatred for ignorance, poverty, conservative ideas, slavish thinking and growing hypocrisy, not for each other. They need to fight against the prevailing injustice and all the efforts that try to keep them away from education and knowledge. They should say no to the darkness and try to follow the light as it is the only way that they can live their life with prosperity and dignity.



The Unbreakable Deadlock of 'War on Terror'

By Hujjatullah Zia

Following the harsh stance of the US President Donald Trump on Pakistan and calling that "Pakistan often gives safe haven to agents of chaos, violence and terror" a cold war has been ushered in. The bonhomie between Islamabad and Washington crumbled. Trump's strategy for the protracted war in Afghanistan is to increase military forces which has been deemed fruitless by Pakistani officials and political pundits who recommend pursuing the peace process instead.

After September 11, George W. Bush said that the war on terror would end only when "every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped and defeated." Trump claimed in his Inaugural Address that he would "eradicate" "radical Islamic terrorism" "completely from the face of the earth." In his address regarding the US strategy about Afghanistan, he maintained that "we will defeat them, and we will defeat them handily."

He also pointed out the tragic aspect of war in Afghanistan and the sacrifices made by US forces so as to galvanize his nation. His threatening words against terrorist militants and their "safe havens that enable terrorists to threaten America" were highly strong. According to him, a hasty withdrawal will lead to horrible consequence and the US forces, along with its international allies, had to strip terrorists of their territory.

On the other hand, Pakistani Foreign Minister Khawaja Asif has said recently that the Trump administration's "militaristic approach" in Afghanistan represented a failed policy and called for peace talks with the Taliban. He wondered how the US military approach could bear the desired result when it had not during the "surge" under the Obama administration with a force eight times as large as the one now planned.

In the meantime, the Taliban and other militant fighters continue spilling the blood of innocent individuals, including women and children, in the country and held out against the constant calls for negotiation.

In short, the US seeks military deal, Pakistan urges for negotiation, and the Taliban continue war. Worst of all, both military deal and peace talks were proved abortive within the last sixteen years and the militant fighters intensified their attacks in the past two years. The third strategy that Afghanistan adopted was pursuing both military deal as a defensive strategy, rather than offensive one, simultaneously calling warring factions to come to negotiating table. Up to now, exerting both "hard power" and "soft power" came to stalemate.

To break the stalemate, Afghanistan and its international al-

lies, along with neighboring countries that raise their concerns about instability in the country, will have to get to the bottom of the issue. Trump's suggestion to break the deadlock is "stripping terrorists of their territory, cutting off their funding and exposing the false allure of their evil ideology". These three solutions are highly significant and will necessarily break the backbone of terrorists, but the issue is how to exert them! Many words were spoken in combating terrorism but there is much to be done.

Now Pakistani officials suggest non-violent mechanism and pursuing peace talks, the US authorities seek the policy of "an eye for an eye", Afghan government adopted both the strategies without fruition, but the Taliban yield to neither - which seem really an unbreakable deadlock. The cold war is believed to exacerbate the issue and let warring parties to fish in the troubled waters.

The Taliban carried out guerilla attacks and fought for their ideology for more than a decade and half, now their incumbent leader fears that succumbing to peace talks will be a blow to their "jihad" and hard for them to justify their past. It is further believed that if Taliban's leader Mullah Haibatullah agrees to hold negotiation, an overwhelming members of the Taliban will pledge allegiance to the self-proclaimed Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) group.

Being left with two choices, i.e., holding peace talks or facing military deal, the Taliban agreed with the latter as they never ceased war.

Afghanistan will value the non-violent mechanism suggested by Pakistan if she vows with bona fide intention to persuade the Taliban to come to peace table. To put it succinctly, since the Afghan-Pak relations were in a state of flux, the two countries need to build trust. Kabul government has never closed the door for negotiation rather it frequently called warring parties to join peace process. This is proved by the establishment of High Peace Council (HPC) and its tireless efforts in this regard.

Secondly, if warring parties refuse the first choice, the military deal suggested by US President will be the only way left before the militants. Military action must target the Taliban's sanctuaries and the root causes of militancy, mainly their financial budgets.

All countries concerned over the issue of militancy need to play their role in combating terrorism. In brief, the strategy of war must be changed through not only targeting militants but also their safe havens and motivating factors.

Hujjatullah Zia is the permanent writer of the Daily Outlook Afghanistan. He can be reached at zia_hujjat@yahoo.com

A Glance over Taliban-ISIS Relationship in Afghanistan

By Ghulam Ahya Hussaini

The self-styled Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) emerged in Iraq and extended its reach in Syria. Losing ground recently, this group seeks safe havens in other parts of Islamic countries. Afghanistan, Libya and Sudan loom a primary focus for the ISIS group. Considering the presence of al-Qaeda and Arab militants in Afghanistan previously, the eastern part of this country is overwhelmed by the volume of potential terrorism plots. However, Afghanistan is not likely to turn to Iraq or Syria due to some particular circumstances.

The belief that the Taliban seek to strip off the followers of other sects has been too exaggerated. Although during the takeover of Mazar-e-Sharif in 1377 Afghan calendar, those who lost their lives were Shiites, yet there are two issues to be taken into account: First, their attack was out of revenge following their defeat, in which Hezb-e-Wahdat played the crucial role. Second, foreign members of the Taliban - who treated other sects very harshly and currently allied themselves with ISIS in Iraq and Syria - were reportedly in the front-line.

The Taliban did not claim the responsibility of attacking Shiites in organized way, either. For example, a radical Pakistani group claimed the responsibility of the bloody incident of Kabul in Ashura in 1390 and Taliban, further, condemned the suicide attack on Enlightenment Movement through issuing a statement and attributed this attack to the groups that seek to fuel sectarianism.

One of the high-ranking Taliban members Mawlavi Makh-dum Abdul Salam, who is also a member of the Taliban's recruiting commission in eastern Afghanistan, maintained that the emergence of ISIS group in the region is damaging for Muslims. The view to eliminate the followers of other religion in Islamic countries through violence and conflict is an illusion. No elements will be able to strip off a sect from the surface of the earth. The masterminds behind the scene are most likely of the view to sow the seeds of discord in Islamic countries. To cut it short, one of serious distinctions between the Taliban and ISIS depends on religious conflict - the issue that the ISIS pursues strongly and allocated two editions of their official journal for justifying Shiites' murder.

There are conflicting views in this regard between ISIS and al-Qaeda since Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi believes that Shiites are infidel, whereas Ayman al-Zawahiri denies this claim. There are also many other reasons behind the hostile relationship between the Taliban and ISIS.

According to the Taliban, ISIS is a rebellious group that has refused to obey Emir-ul-Momineen (the commander of the faithful) but ISIS believes that the Taliban did not pledge allegiance to the caliph - this is also noticed in letters exchanged between the two groups. As a result, the Taliban warned al-

Baghdadi through a letter not to let ISIS step in Afghanistan, or else he has to await the consequence. On the other hand, an offshoot of ISIS declared in a statement issued in four languages that all Mujahed forces should gather under a single flag and leadership and there is no need for the Taliban's presence.

The Taliban possess wealth and power in eastern and southern parts of Afghanistan. The emergence of ISIS will reduce their power. Additionally, ISIS will consider the country's mineral resources and narcotic drug as financial support for war, which will not be acceptable for the Taliban. So, the groups are strong opponents.

ISIS has adopted a global approach vis-à-vis its militant activities and could establish a radical network around the world via its deceptive slogans. However, the Taliban intends to re-establish an Islamic Emirate in Afghanistan and fight for the withdrawal of foreign forces from this country. Ruling Afghanistan for years, it was proved that the Taliban nurtured ethnic and national tendencies.

The conflict about the sources of wealth and power in Afghanistan is based on ethnic and local tendencies rather than religious ones. Therefore, the overwhelming numbers of ISIS group are the former Pakistani Taliban that have pledged to this group recently. There are also some members of Afghan Taliban - who nurtured a conflicting idea with the Taliban over financial or ideological issues - with ISIS and also radical groups from Uzbekistan and Tajikistan.

NATO has reported that seventy percent of the ISIS group that is operating in Afghanistan belongs to former militants of "Tahreek-e-Taliban Pakistan" previously resided the "Orakzai" tribal belts in Pakistan. The NATO's General Secretary in Afghanistan maintained that the bulk of ISIS group in this country belongs to Pakistani Taliban who escaped the border following the operation Rad-ul-Fasad launched against the Taliban by Pakistani military. He added that "Uzbekistan Islamic Movement (UIM)" also associated with ISIS.

To sum up, the ISIS struggles to spread horror and terror across the country. The fact is that both the Taliban and Afghan government deem ISIS as a threat. So, no bright future is imaginable for ISIS. Furthermore, it is hard for ISIS to capitalize on fueling sectarianism in Afghanistan as it did in Iraq and Syria. This group might have gained foothold in some parts of the country as a result of Salafis and Wahhabis' preaches but will soon meet failure. After all, their clandestine activities carried out for sparking off religious conflicts - which were one of the main reasons behind its influence in Iraq and Syria - should not be ignored.

Ghulam Ahya Hussaini is the permanent writer of the Daily Outlook Afghanistan. He can be reached at the outlookafghanistan@gmail.com

Chairman / Editor-in-Chief: Moh. Reza Huwaida

Vice-Chairman: Kazim Ali Gulzari

Email: outlookafghanistan@gmail.com

Phone: 0093 (799) 005019/777-005019

www.outlookafghanistan.net



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