

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



September 29, 2015

Real Security Threats

The security situation in the country has reached to an alarming position after Taliban have been successful in taking control of the northern Kunduz city. Taliban launched a massive and well coordinated attack at around 3 am on Monday morning and by the evening they had taken control of the most parts and buildings of the city. They were able to close off the only four access points into the city - effectively preventing troops from entering and civilians from fleeing. Some reports state that hundreds of Taliban members split up into groups and carried out the coordinated attack.

According to some news reports the militants have also been able to close the airport road. Heavy fighting has been ongoing throughout the day and so far Taliban have seized the provincial council building, the offices of the local High Peace Council, the National Directorate of Security (NDS) building, UNAMA offices and other key official facilities including private banks.

Officials also reported that the Taliban have over run the local prison and freed all prisoners.

Reports indicate that heavy fighting continues around the police headquarters and the provincial governor's office.

This piece of news has basically disclosed the nature of the security that government has been able to provide to the people. With each passing day, there are more security threats and the level of uncertainty about the future seems to be rising. Though war against terrorism was initiated in Afghanistan with the ambition to bring peace and prosperity, there are no clear indications of this ambition being transformed to reality.

A recent survey conducted by TOLO news clearly depicted that the security threats increased by 13 percent in August this year as compared to July. 1,089 terror and anti-terror events were recorded during August with 13 percent of the events similar to the events that were recorded during July. The month of September has not been better as well and now Taliban have been able to capture an entire city, which is really threatening.

In addition, there are also reports of different districts in different parts of the country falling to Taliban. The advances of Taliban in different parts of the country have reached to new levels during the year.

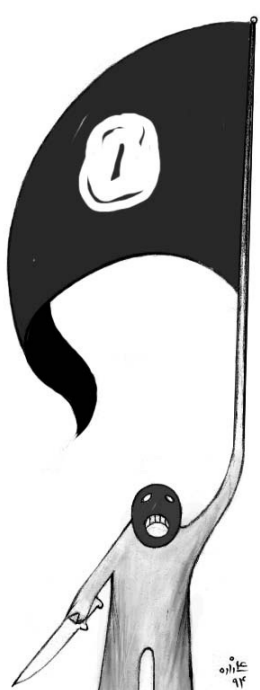
By looking at the security situation one has no other choice but to question the real outcomes of the war against terrorism that was started after the 9/11 incident. War against terrorism has completed 13 years and the international forces seem in a hurry to end up the war and most of them have already withdrawn their forces. The war is considered to have reached to a decisive position and the international community now thinks that Afghan forces and authorities are capable enough to take over the responsibility of the security of their country.

There are some who are very much optimistic about the result of this 'transition' but at the same time, there are some others who believe that many concerns are yet to be dealt with. Above all, they consider the war against terrorism not to have reached to a decisive position as the terrorism and terrorist networks are yet to be defeated and there are great chances that they may get stronger if the war is left at this particular position. Further, the ongoing situation of peace and tranquility also suggest that there are many things to be done before the victory is considered decisive.

Keeping in mind the concerns regarding the capabilities of Afghan security forces and the strengthening terrorist networks the feared situation is quite possible. The other major issues which remain ambiguous after 13 years of the efforts include the prevailing instability in the country regarding the political and economic systems. Both of them stand on shaky foundations and suffer from a trend of uncontrollable and ever increasing difficulties. It is really difficult to build reliable expectations except the support of international community.

Moreover, the regional dissatisfaction and ambiguities are also increasing about the war. Afghanistan's neighboring countries do not see eye to eye with the US authorities regarding the war and its prospects and their relations with Afghanistan face fluctuations time and again.

Keeping in mind the present scenario in Afghanistan and the region, it can be safely said that if this war is not termed as 'unnecessary' and 'evil', it can be termed as 'indecisive' for the time being. Definitely, there is more to be done to take this war towards conclusion. A proper conclusion of the war means defeating the enemy or reaching to some sort of agreement with the opposing forces, which at the present scenario are Taliban. Unfortunately, neither Taliban have been defeated completely, nor the reconciliation process with Taliban is on the track and heading towards a certain future. Taliban at the moment have opted for more aggression and they do not seem in a position to come to negotiation table. There have been many sacrifices to achieve positive outcomes from the war against terrorism; these sacrifices should not go in vain and Afghanistan should be supported so that it can stand strong with dignity against disorder and terrorism. At the same time, the Afghan government and authorities must also strive to do their best in fulfilling their responsibilities and must endeavor to guide the nation towards lasting peace and tranquility.



Flocking to Foreign Countries

By Hujjatullah Zia

Our village has gone into a deep silence and my childhood playmates are either in international camps or the citizens of foreign countries such as Europe and Australia. The houses seem to have changed into nursing homes and the elderly people, parents and grandparents are left lonely.

The families are traumatized by the death of their loved ones every once in a while. The fate plays cruelly with some of the unlucky migrants - who dream to breathe a sigh of relief in their utopia. Afghan youths emigrate from the country with the ambition to live a peaceful life and get rid of violence and bloodshed. However, some of the dreams do not come true and their imaginary world changes into dystopia. Who knows that they will be the prey of mammoth whales just in few minutes or succumb to a bullet that will be shot by a foreign soldier - this is the destiny of a number of Afghan youths.

Of late, the body of a young man was returned to his family in Logar province. He had finished his studies last year at Kabul University's medical school. Failure to secure employment had forced the young physician to gamble his life - his parents were told that he died a "mysterious" death somewhere between Iran and Turkey.

About two weeks ago, Austrian police saved 24 teenage Afghans who had been packed into the back of a small wagon with the doors welded shut. Some 71 others were found dead, sealed in a truck a week earlier.

A large number of Afghan youths venture out to foreign countries to flee instability and political challenges. In other words, the dire security situation prompts many Afghans to risk everything; others flee because of the country's economic stagnation and staggering unemployment rates.

Scores of families sell their belongings or borrow money to pay human smugglers to be transported into Europe. Those who can not afford to pay for an entire family buy passage for only their youngsters, usually skilled sons, in the hope that they might obtain a brighter future in a safe and prosperous country.

"Until last year, Afghans were the largest global refugee population at 2.6 million people - almost 10 percent of the country's entire population. Today, estimated at 12 percent, they are ranked as the second largest group (after Syrians) to have reached European shores and borders."

According to the United Nations' refugee agency, UNHCR, more than 40,000 Afghans have sought asylum in Europe from January until August this year.

According to the passport agency's employees, they are now issu-

ing an average of 2,000 passports a day, a threefold increase from six months ago. Unofficial reports from one border crossing in Nimruz province claim that over 8,000 Afghans cross into Iran on a daily basis. The total number may be much higher, given Afghanistan's porous borders and multiple crossing points.

Unemployment has reached record heights. Domestic and foreign investments have halted, and the flight of capital is becoming a critical issue. Projects attached to international aid - one of the largest sources of employment in the past decade - have, for the most part, shut down or been placed in hibernation.

The mounted militancy in recent months i.e. the Taliban's spring offensive on the one hand and the emergence of the Islamic State (IS) group on the other hand has filled the air with a sense of disappointment. The civilian death toll has increased with the withdrawal of foreign troops and continues unabated. Since the "war on terror" was proved futile, Afghanistan was not ripe for the transition of power from US-led NATO forces to Afghan soldiers. Nonetheless, Afghan forces have achieved on a large scale. Yet, there are a lot to be done. In another item, the nascent Afghan National Security Forces have performed remarkably well, but without international military assistance, Afghanistan's war against terrorism and peace efforts will be in vain. In nutshell, the persistent militancy, which leads to high graph of non-combatant casualties, is one of the major reasons behind the brain drain.

Afghan MPs have also raised concerns over the current exodus and urge the government to provide job and security for the youths. No doubt, the youths play a key role in a society. If this trend continues, the country's sovereignty will be affected and the officials will have to take serious step in this regard. The government is responsible to "form a civil society void of oppression, atrocity, discrimination as well as violence, based on rule of law, social justice, protecting integrity and human rights, and attaining peoples' freedoms and fundamental rights; strengthen political, social, economic as well as defense institutions; attain a prosperous life and sound living environment for all inhabitants of this land; and, eventually, regain Afghanistan's appropriate place in the international family".

The increase in the current exodus is really a matter of great concern. The mouth-watering promises in presidential campaigns seem to be no more than a flash in the pan. The nascent democracy is highly susceptible to social, economic and political issues. In other words, Afghans suffer from social, political and economic crises in one way or another. Afghan officials have to provide job opportunities and security for the citizens to prevent from the emigration and brain drain. Hope the crises come to an end in near future.

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Refugees and Reform in Europe

By Mohamed A. El-Erian

There is a simple truth beneath the growing human tragedy of Europe's refugee crisis, and the European Union cannot address the massive influx of exhausted, desperate people in a manner compatible with its values unless governments and citizens acknowledge it. Simply put, the historic challenge confronting Europe also offers historic opportunities. The question is whether Europe's politicians - who have failed to deliver on far less complicated issues over which they had a lot more control - can seize the moment.

The scale of the challenge is immense, with the flow of refugees extremely difficult to monitor and channel, let alone limit. Fleeing war and oppression, tens of thousands of people are risking life and limb to find refuge in Europe - a phenomenon that will continue as long as chaos persists in countries of origin, such as Syria, and countries facilitating transit, such as Iraq and Libya.

In the meantime, Europe's transport networks are under stress, as are shelters, border crossings, and registration centers. Common asylum policies - including, for example, the basic rule that asylum-seekers should be registered at their point of entry into the EU - are not functioning or are being bypassed. And the cherished concept of effortless travel within the border-free Schengen Area is under threat.

These problems are aggravated by coordination failures. Attitudes toward refugees vary widely across countries, with Germany taking a particularly enlightened approach that contrasts sharply with Hungary's notably heartless one. Some countries, such as the Czech Republic, have blocked deals to share the burden fairly among European Union members, including through mandatory quotas.

Add to that the preferences of the refugees - who, after risking everything to get to Europe, have strong feelings about where they would like to settle - and the policy challenges are enormous, particularly in the short run. European politicians have yet to catch up with the reality on the ground, let alone get ahead of it. And their failure is exacerbating the risks to the EU's political cohesion that emerged over the Greek crisis.

Politicians have a powerful incentive to get Europe's response to the refugee crisis right. Beyond the need to alleviate the human misery that fills television screens and front pages of newspapers lies the imperative not to miss the significant medium-term opportunities that migration provides.

Although there are pockets of high unemployment in Europe today, the ratio of workers to elderly people will decline consider-

ably in the longer term. And, already, labor-market flexibility has been undermined by structural inertia, including difficulties in retooling and retraining workers, particularly the long-term unemployed.

As the German government and some corporate leaders, including the CEO of Daimler-Benz, have already recognized, an open-minded approach to refugee absorption and integration can help to mitigate some of Europe's protracted structural problems. After all, a significant proportion of the incoming refugee population is said to be educated, motivated, and committed to building a better future in their new homes. Capitalizing on this, European decision-makers can turn a severe short-term challenge into a powerful long-term advantage.

An enlightened policy response to the refugee crisis could help Europe in other ways as well. Already, it is unlocking additional fiscal outlays in countries like Germany - which, despite having the means, did not previously have the will to spend - thereby helping to alleviate an aggregate-demand imbalance that, together with structural impediments to growth and excessive indebtedness in some countries, has held back the region's recovery.

The current situation could also provide the catalyst needed to make decisive progress on the EU's incomplete political, institutional, and financial architecture. And it could compel Europe to overcome the political obstacles blocking solutions to longstanding problems, such as providing the cover needed for certain European creditors to grant deeper debt relief for Greece, whose already-massive fiscal and employment problems are being exacerbated by the influx of refugees. It can even drive Europe to modernize its governance framework, which allows a few small countries to derail decisions supported by the vast majority of EU members.

Pessimists would immediately point out that Europe has struggled to come together even on far less complex and more controllable issues, such as the protracted economic and financial crisis in Greece. Yet history also suggests that shocks of the scale and scope of the current refugee crisis have the potential to spur remarkable policy responses.

Europe has the opportunity to turn today's refugee crisis into a catalyst for renewal and progress. Let us hope that its politicians stop bickering and start working together to take advantage of this opening. If they fail, the momentum behind regional integration - which has brought peace, prosperity, and hope to hundreds of millions of people - will weaken considerably, to the detriment of all.

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