

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



September 30, 2018

Terrorists in Syria: How They Come to Afghanistan?

Russia has warned that it will not allow jihadists in Syria to be sent to Afghanistan or elsewhere under a deal reached with Turkey that averted a large-scale military assault on rebel-held Idlib province.

According to Sergei Lavrov, there has been talk to send them off to other hotspots, for example Afghanistan that is unacceptable for Russia.

How the Syria Jihad Emerged

Syria's Jihad was involving a huge cast of jihadist actors operating within one of the most intense and multifarious civil wars in recent history. The Jihadists had a crucial part in internationalizing the conflict by establishing a base in Syria and by playing a role in its revolution. One consistent theme throughout the Syrian civil war has been the sheer multitude of insurgent and jihadist protagonists involved. Different Jihadist groups were established as a strategic tool to topple Bashar al-Assad by certain

regional and non-regional powerful countries to secure their national interests in Syria and the region.

When a conflict ends, as the case is for ISIS members in Idlib, either through force or negotiated settlement, transnational terrorists are likely to disperse in numerous directions. During this time, the militants may switch their allegiances between a smattering of groups on the ground, including ISIS, Jabhat Fateh al-Sham, and Ahrar al-Sham.

Terrorism Experts believe that if the fortunes of ISIS and other terrorist groups continue to decline in Syria, these groups will have three options.

First Option

Rapprochement with so called moderate Syrian armed groups as the only option to continue their struggle.

Second Option

Forming a cohort of stateless Jihadists who will travel abroad in search of the next jihadi theater – Yemen, Libya, West Africa, or Afghanistan. These are the militant progeny of the original Mujahideen, or transnational jihadists that once filled the ranks of al-Qaeda and fought in Afghanistan against the Soviets, and in Chechnya and the Balkans. ISIS affiliates and local jihadists in these places would likely welcome an influx of battle-hardened comrades. And certain countries will manage sending them from one place to another according to the new charming frontlines for these groups. Currently Afghanistan and Yemen are the main destinations for the terrorists who either by force or based an agreement shall leave Syria. They can serve the strategic objectives of certain countries in Afghanistan and Yemen. Contrary to Lavrov's stance, some of these terrorists will be sent to Afghanistan as the same has happened in the past.

Third Option

Returning to their countries of origin, like Tunisia or Saudi Arabia, or go further afield to Europe, Asia, or North America. And it is the cohort that most concerns those in counterterrorism circles and are considered as a terrorist threat to the national security of their countries of origin even they have been trained and equipped by some of the same countries.

Afghanistan is in the frontline of combating terrorism. As a result the Afghan citizens have been suffering from the terrorism and the proxy wars at least during the four last decades. Sending the terrorists from Syria to Afghanistan will further escalate the security in Afghanistan and it even may force the nation to the sectarian conflicts. As a result, the Afghan government shall use all national and international instruments to prevent this and do not let the regional and international powers to further change Afghanistan to their proxy wars destination.

Cultural Exchanges between China and Afghanistan Boosting Friendly Relations

By Hujjatullah Zia

Afghan high-level officials, including the Second Vice President Sarwar Danesh, attended the 3rd Silk Road (Dunhuang) International Cultural Expo in Chinese Province of Gansu, which is called the sister city of Bamyan province, Afghanistan. The expo was held on Thursday and Friday in Dunhuang city to promote cultural exchanges among nations.

The expo also aimed at promoting the spirit of the Silk Road, i.e. peace and cooperation, openness and inclusiveness, mutual learning and mutual benefit.

"Cultural exchange through the Silk Road was as diverse as the trade of the goods and products," Sarwar Danesh said in his keynote speech in the opening ceremony of the expo. He said the Silk Road in the UNESCO Plan had been termed as the "Road of Dialogue" to facilitate the dialogue between Eastern and Western countries. Adding that Kabul government fully supports and confirms the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), proposed by Chinese President Xi Jinping in 2013, Danesh said: "Afghanistan is capable to export through Silk Road to European and Far-East countries. Afghan and Chinese investors are able to invest in both countries with the use of projects related to Silk Road." He went on to say that "the reconstruction of Wakhan Corridor in Badakhshan province, Afghanistan, an important gateway in Silk Road, is crucial for economic and commercial growth of Afghanistan and the region."

It is self-evident that the megaproject of BRI carries much significance for Afghanistan, which intends to regain its historical position as an "Asian transit and trade roundabout" connecting South Asia to Central Asia and East Asia to West Asia. That is, Afghanistan is situated at the heart of Asia and its provinces of Bamyan, Balkh, Kabul, Herat and Kandahar formed some of the key Silk Road passages through which business, culture, religions and syncretic philosophies flowed to Eurasia.

Reiterating cultural exchanges between China and Afghanistan, Danesh said Gansu and Bamyan were two sister cities, two cultural and historical sisters and "the symbol of shared culture and history between Afghanistan and China".

Detailing that Sino-Afghan officials relations started in 1949, Danesh said the two countries had extended their relations since then in various fields and both Kabul and Beijing governments are determined to promote their mutual relations more than ever based on mutual trust and mutual respect. "The power and solid presence of China in areas of politics, economy, science and technology has formed a distinct neighbor and a notable and honest partner for us," Danesh

maintained.

In terms of combating terrorism, Danesh called Chinese government to support Afghanistan and use its authority and position in the region to provide peace and stability in the region in the whole and in Afghanistan in particular.

This year, Afghan high-ranking officials, including Afghan President Muhammad Ashraf Ghani, Afghan former president Hamid Karzai, the second deputy Chief Executive officer Haji Muhammad Muhaqqiq, the Second Vice President Sarwar Danesh and some ministers and other provincial-level dignitaries travelled to China on different occasions. Moreover, Chinese officials and delegates also had trip to Kabul. The exchanges of high-level officials' trips show the friendly relations between the two countries, which will further enhance the mutual cooperation and mutual understanding between Kabul and Beijing.

It is believed that comparing only to a decade ago, the level of understanding between Afghan and Chinese nations have increased since the cultural exchanges and people-to-people contacts have been promoted between the two countries. The level of public understanding about China has increased in Afghanistan and Afghan nation views China as a sincere friend, which is in pursuit of peace and stability and continues its relations on the basis of mutual respect and mutual trust. In other words, with the traveling of Afghan officials, media delegates and businessmen to China and the scholarships Chinese government provided to Afghan students, the public understanding about China has promoted in Afghanistan. With the continuation of the exchanges, both nations will understand more about each other and will enjoy more friendly relations in the future.

China is strongly determined to promote cultural exchanges between China and the outside world, seek regional peace and stability and take more concrete steps in building a community with shared future for mankind. China also seeks to open wider to the outside world with the aim of enhancing mutual relations, promoting multilateralism and contributing to regional economy. Moreover, Chinese officials along with many world leaders believe that the BRI is not necessarily a road to focus on economy but it is also a route of cultural exchanges and route of dialogue among nations for more understanding and building stronger trust, which will also contribute to global peace and stability and promote the spirit of ancient Silk Road and the spirit of brotherhood among nations of different cultures and religions.

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Defending Democracy's Essence

By Shirin Ebadi and Christophe Deloire

On December 10, 1948, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, affirming the view that "the will of the people" – democracy – should form the basis of any government. But seven decades later, the world's democracies are in peril. After a fourfold increase in the number of democracies between the end of World War II and 2000, we are now in a sustained period of political regression. Once-open societies are veering toward dictatorship, and in many countries, despotic tendencies are strengthening.

These trends can be reversed, but only if we agree on the causes of democratic backsliding and target our solutions accordingly.

That is easier said than done. In her 1967 essay "Truth and Politics," the philosopher Hannah Arendt noted that, "Freedom of opinion is a farce unless factual information is guaranteed and the facts themselves are not in dispute." Unfortunately, Arendt's farce has become our reality.

For any democracy to be meaningful, its people need access to trustworthy information produced in a free and pluralistic environment. But this basic requirement is being tested as never before. Around the world, oligarchs are buying up media outlets to promote their interests and increase their influence, while journalists who report on issues like discrimination and corruption are met with intimidation, violence, and murder. How can we guarantee freedom of opinion under such conditions?

Information and communication technologies were supposed to give us more freedom, not less. The early Internet democratized news and ended the dominance of traditional publishers and pro-government conglomerates. But this initial promise has given way to an "information jungle," where deep-pocketed predators outmaneuver an unassuming public. Today, governments wage information wars; politicians use social media to spread lies; and corporate lobbyists disseminate deceptive content with ease. As a study from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology recently found, fake news spreads online faster than real news – often significantly so.

Simply put, the globalization of information has tipped the

scales in favor of those who view falsehood as a tool of control. Dictators easily export their ideas to open societies, whereas content produced under conditions of freedom rarely moves in the opposite direction. This challenge has been magnified by the growth of multinational technology companies, which have come to dictate the architecture of the public sphere.

In the history of democracy, mechanisms have evolved to improve the accuracy and ethics of journalism. Although imperfect and often invisible, these regulatory protections have brought many benefits to users and producers alike. But the pace of change in the media industry – for example, between television and print, or news and advertising – has blurred the clear distinctions on which these rules were originally based.

Protecting democratic ideals in this conflicting environment is a vital and historic task. That is why Reporters Without Borders (RSF) is joining with Nobel laureates, technology specialists, journalists, and human rights activists to launch the Information and Democracy Commission. As co-chairs of this independent initiative, our goal is to refocus global attention on the value of "a free and pluralistic public space," and to offer solutions that enable journalists to work without fear of reprisal and allow the public to access accurate information easily.

In the coming weeks, we will draft an International Declaration on Information and Democracy, and in coordination with the leaders of several democratic countries, work to secure support from governments around the world. Our efforts will accelerate in mid-November, when global leaders gather in Paris to commemorate the 100th anniversary of Armistice Day and to attend the Peace Forum and the Internet Governance Forum.

Democracy, with its roots in the Enlightenment ideals of freedom and reason, must be defended. Democratic governments and citizens must not fall victim to fake news, "trolls," and the whims of despots. The International Declaration on Information and Democracy is intended to strengthen open societies' ability to combat authoritarian forces.

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