

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



April 14, 2018

Corruption: A Major Constraint to Economic Development in Afghanistan

Political and administrative corruption continues to thwart economic development and undermine political legitimacy in Afghanistan. Corruption is the main cause of wasting the funds that the international community has provided to Afghanistan since 2001. Some social scholars believe that it is more dangerous than insecurity for Afghanistan; they hold that insecurity is the outcome of wide spread corruption in the country and it nurtures it. The Taliban and other terrorist groups justify their harsh ideology and violence claiming they are fighting against a corrupt government that not only has wasted the funds of the international community but also has wasted the revenues and resources of Afghanistan too. Although the NUG has taken some important actions to curb corruption at the various levels and arenas in the country, they have not brought much noticeable improvements in the perception of the International community and the people of Afghanistan on anti-corruption efforts of the government. On the hand, people consider the government as weakly performing, and they think corruption is still rampant and growing in the country. What is alarming is that the culture of corruption has infected different aspects of public and private widely. Therefore, corrupt culture presents a big challenge to the government and it must be aware of and ready to confront it systematically; especially considering Afghanistan is ranked fourth on Transparency International's Corruption Index and it is the most corrupt country in the region.

Corruption networks and their impact on the national economy

Corruption is deeply rooted in the political and administrative system of Afghanistan. Some social scholars believe that the foundation of political and administrative system of Afghanistan has roots in corrupt governance system; as a result it has just nurtured corruption and made the corrupt political and administrative culture institutionalized in the country. From the beginning of modern state in Afghanistan, the country has suffered the absence of a comprehensive system of control and accountability, and it is now evident in every area of public and private affairs of our society. From past to present, corruption and patronage networks have been running our country's public affairs. And the result of such corrupt practice has been weak performance of government, and the formation of corrupt power blocs which control public resources and opportunities in Afghanistan. For instance, corruption at the civil service has created large numbers of "imaginary employees". It not only put intense pressure on the state budget while unemployment rates among the Afghan youth remains high but has tarnished the credibility of the government in the eyes of the international community and the people of Afghanistan. Corruption in the different sectors, especially in the security, energy, construction and education has led to weak quality of service delivery. This trend has caused the Afghans to suffer heavily at the national and sub-national level.

Corruption and its impact on the private sector

Afghanistan has an unfavorable investment environment, not only on account of the volatile security conditions, but also because of the involvement of corrupt and influential figures who impose various illegal conditions on investors in the country. Investors shall pay large amounts of money for facilitation and protection to different sources. Due to these practices not only the international investors do not invest in the country, but also many national investors have taken away their money from Afghanistan and have invested in other countries. Such an environment has led to both weak economy and wide spread unemployment in the country.

Role of parliament in tackling corruption

Parliament shall be the voice of the people in a democratic country. It can play a substantial role in shaping how a country to be governed by enacting legislation or by monitoring the implementation of the law. However, the majority of the Afghan people do not think the members of Parliament have performed effectively. It has many reasons including some members of parliament are those who just pursue their personal business agendas and do not advocate for the rights of their constituencies. Also, the weakness and fragility of the parliament internal capacity as an institution has led to weak performance of it. Lack of commitment to accountability is another weakness of the parliament of Afghanistan to perform its role properly. Experts believe that the constitution has provided sufficient tools to the parliament to oversight fighting corruption, but in most cases, such mechanisms have only been used to put under pressure the government officials to compromise with some members of the parliament.

Corruption is a major obstacle to economic development in Afghanistan. The wide spread corruption in Afghanistan has undermined the credibility of the government in the eyes of the people and International community. Corruption in Afghanistan traces back to the corrupt governance system established in the past in the country to ensure the interests of a specific ethnicity in general and a specific family in specific. Afghanistan has taken some initiatives to tackle corruption systematically but they have not led to breakthrough changes in anti-corruption efforts. The main reason behind the failure to curb corruption in Afghanistan is the corrupt political culture; to overcome the corrupt political culture, Afghanistan requires promoting the good governance system at the national and sub-national level.



Taliban's Concern about Civilian Casualties

By Hujjatullah Zia

Civilian casualty is one of the most painful aspects of conflicts in the region and Afghanistan. Non-combatants, mainly women and children, have sustained fatalities and injuries within decades in Afghanistan and the nascent democracy could not end this issue since the Taliban militants continue their fight against Kabul government. However, the recent civilian casualties in Afghanistan's Kunduz province provoked a strong sense of anger within and across the country.

Few days back, Afghan soldiers carried out air strike against the Taliban in Archin district of Kunduz province, in which a number of the Taliban's high-ranking figures were killed. The Taliban aired a video clip of children's death and the photos of their dead bodies in social media and condemned Afghan soldiers claiming that the strike was carried out in a religious seminary where a ceremony was held to honor the students. Nonetheless, Afghan officials said that the attack targeted the Taliban who had a meeting.

The public showed a mixed feeling toward the incident. A number of people supported the attack for inflicting heavy casualties upon the Taliban. However, some others, mainly from the tribal belts, believed that the attack did more harm than good since some children were among the casualties.

After all, some radical figures in Pakistan raised their voice against the attack in the wake of civilian casualties. Maulana Fazl-ur-Rahman, a senior preacher from the hardline Deobandi sect and Emir of Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam, voiced his concern about civilian casualties in Kunduz attack. Maulana, who is said to have a close tie with the Taliban, condemned the attack in a strong tone. Since some video clips of children's death were released in social media with provocative comments in Urdu Language, Afghans believed that it was Maulana's supporters who sought to fish in the troubled waters.

Fazul Rahman's concerns in this regard seemed to be out of political tendencies rather than religious dilemma. For instance, the militant fighters, mainly the Taliban, have killed thousands of civilians and continue to do so in Afghanistan and Pakistan but he never raised his voice. Similarly, he does not issue fatwa against Jihad in Afghanistan despite the civilian heavy death toll. Hence, according to the public, he still shares a tie with the Taliban and he was more concerned about the death of the Taliban's leaders - including

MaulawiShahidullah, MaulawiBrial, MaulawiMumtaz and MaulawiZahidullah - in Kunduz rather than the civilian casualties.

The Taliban's concern about civilian casualties, although it is not confirmed if civilians are killed by Afghan soldiers' attacks, was highly ridiculous. The Taliban have carried out deadly attacks against Afghan nation and killed thousands of civilians, including women and children, in the past. The suicide car bombing in the heart of Kabul in January 27, for which the Taliban claimed responsibility, killed and wounded more than 300 people, mostly civilians. The Taliban have constantly carried out attacks in public places and sacred places that resulted in heavy civilian casualties. They will not end their attacks in public places in the future, either. Therefore, their concern for civilian casualties was highly ridiculous.

It should be noted that the Taliban are never ever concerned about civilian casualties, however, they sought to provoke the public sentiment against the government. The Taliban's cruel practices against the civilians are beyond the world's doubt. It is said that if children are killed in Kunduz attack, they must have been trained for militancy as the Taliban have recruited children in the past. The Taliban brainwash the children in seminaries and send them to war.

To prove their concern about civilian casualties, the Taliban will have to stop their suicide attacks in public places and their war in residential areas. Secondly, they have to sit around the negotiating table with Afghan government and resolve the challenges through dialogue rather than conflicts. But they have been turning down peace talks. The continuation of conflicts will result in greater civilian casualty, which is a great cause for concern.

Moreover, the government also has to protect the life and rights of people and be highly committed to the rule of war. It is self-explanatory that Afghan soldiers fight for protecting the life of people, but they have to observe the humanitarian law so that civilians do not sustain casualties anymore.

Meanwhile, Afghan people should be cautious enough not to fall for the bogus claim of the militants or the anti-government political circles, be it in or out of the country. The Taliban have a highly black record in killing civilians and their concern in this regard is to provoke the public sentiment against the government. *Hujjatullah Zia is the permanent writer of the Daily Outlook Afghanistan. He can be reached at zia_hujjat@yahoo.com*

A Cautionary Tale for Media Regulators

By Anya Schiffrin

To understand the possible consequences of US President Donald Trump's constant denunciations of the press, one need look no further than Ecuador, where former President Rafael Correa's government attacked the news media for years. During his 2007-2017 presidency, Correa implemented a raft of measures aimed at stifling press freedom. And, like Trump, he regularly used the media as a whipping boy to rally his supporters.

In 2015, Correa managed to pass a constitutional amendment re-categorizing communications as a public service, like water or electricity, thereby allowing for more state control over speech. And with the stated goal of ensuring "balanced media coverage," he pushed through the 2013 Ecuadorian Communication Law, and enacted additional regulations allowing the government to crack down on journalists with fines, forced public apologies, and even prison sentences.

Like Trump, Correa would sometimes go on television or radio programs to denounce journalists by name; and his government repeatedly took news organizations to court. For example, Correa brought an \$80 million lawsuit against El Universo, one of the country's major newspapers. In the end, the paper was forced to pay \$40 million in exchange for a "pardon."

With the spread of disinformation online fueling distrust of the media and other institutions, regulations to police some kinds of speech may seem like a good idea. Clearly, major distribution platforms like Facebook need to be more heavily regulated.

But, in some cases, laws enacted in the "public interest" can actually work against it. And at the same time, laws meant to support legitimate journalism usually offer only scant protection against those who are determined to act in bad faith. I learned this first-hand when I accompanied a group from the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) on a recent trip to Ecuador.

From speaking to Ecuadorian journalists, it is clear that most of Correa's media policies and enforcement practices crossed the line into outright censorship. News outlets that did not provide ample coverage of government statements were fined, as were outlets that did not recirculate foreign press reports that were favorable to the government or critical of opposition figures. On some occasions, news outlets were even forced to print or air lengthy dissenting statements from government officials who disliked their treatment in the media. Ecuador's experience shows how laws that seem reasonable on paper - such as those guaranteeing subjects of news stories a "right to reply" - can easily be abused. According to Ecuadorian journalists, government officials often refuse to speak to reporters because they know that, should a story about them appear, they can simply force the outlet to publish a long, unedited statement of their own. And though news outlets may appeal in "right to reply" cases, doing so can lead to lengthy and costly lawsuits. Similarly, laws affording ordinary citizens the right to com-

plain about press reports are easily gamed. Government officials routinely find "ordinary citizens" to file complaints against media organizations on their behalf.

Ecuador's current president, Lenin Moreno, has promised to ease the country's media restrictions. And in a recent meeting with the CPJ, Ecuadorian Secretary of Communication Andrés Michelena said the government plans to reform the Ecuadorian Communications Law this year. Still, as the journalists we met noted, the structure and language of the law have not changed. In general, Latin American media tend to be captured by elites, with wealthy owners whose interests are represented in how the news is reported. This is why many of the leftist politicians who came to power in the last two decades pledged to make media more representative of voiceless and marginalized communities.

For example, in Argentina, certain forms of cross ownership were banned. In other countries, underrepresented indigenous communities were given cameras and broadcast licenses. And in some cases, governments have interrupted programming on privately owned television stations to issue political statements. Under Correa, the government even assumed editorial management of the country's oldest newspaper, El Telégrafo.

In Ecuador, what started as a move toward media diversity ten years ago has ended up eliminating much of the country's capacity for investigative and critical reporting. This does not bode well for the country's future. Aggressive, fact-based journalism is a public good. As the fourth estate, the media holds governments and corporations accountable by reporting on corruption, environmental degradation, and other violations of the public trust. But in Ecuador, journalists now must fear the consequences of doing their jobs.

Like many Latin American countries, Ecuador is deeply polarized. Correa still has many supporters on the left who point to his government's stunning achievements in reducing poverty and boosting health and education spending. They say that the corruption during Correa's presidency was no worse than under previous governments, and they applaud his government's efforts to rein in the media, which they view as dishonest and representative of right-wing, corporate interests.

There is a lesson here for the US and other countries where distrust of the media is growing. Since the revelations that Facebook and Twitter played a key role in disseminating false information and sowing mistrust and racial tension in the 2016 US election, a growing chorus has called for stricter regulations. But such regulations can be difficult to implement fairly, and can have unintended consequences.

Ecuador has learned the hard way that if combating misinformation means the loss of in-depth, factual reporting and a media that can play a watchdog role, then the price is too high. Let us hope that this lesson is taken on board not just in Ecuador, but in democracies worldwide.

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