

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



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## The Vitality of Media

Media has a vital role in democratic countries. Its role and its influence has been so much tremendous that now it is considered as one of the pillars of the state. It is believed that in modern democracy, media keeps an eye on legislature, judiciary and executive and at the same time scrutinizes their policies and their undertakings. Therefore, they have an opportunity to reconsider their undertakings and try to amend themselves as required.

However, for this to happen, it is necessary that media should be independent and must not be dominated by the government.

Apart from scrutinizing the government media has a critical role in shaping and directing the public opinion and at the same time providing timely information and knowledge to them. Today's modernized media has the capacity to reach the people 24 hours and provide them information in real time. There are a large number of people in the world that are influenced by the bewitching effects of media. TV's, computers, newspapers and magazines, radios, mobile phones, tablets and many others, all are the parts of modern media and reach billions of people every day. Therefore, underestimating the role of media would be a fool's errand.

Though media's function in daily life is already significant, its role during the era of instability, conflict, war and different movements becomes paramount. Because of this fact, the different parties of the conflict try to use it for different sorts of propaganda and thus persuade the people to favor their perspectives. The independent and unbiased role of media during such an era will definitely make the whole world see the truth, while its biased role may bring more miseries and injustice.

Considering the influence and the role of media in the modern world, it is really important that it should have a very responsible and wise character. Misinformation and too much sensationalized and dramatic versions of the truth may deviate the people away from the path of the truth and they may start believing untrue as true and may even play a role to further dominate the truth.

Afghanistan has been one of the countries that has been dominated by instability and conflict. The role of media in Afghanistan has been felt very much vital, but unfortunately, it is has been developed only in the last decade. Today, it is claimed that Afghan media is independent, yet there are many issues that have to be dealt with to really make it free and independent in the true sense of the word. At the same time, the international media active in Afghanistan has also played an important role that cannot be neglected at all.

The role of media, both national and international, in the last decade, especially in the era of war against terrorism has been very much important. It has disclosed to the people the real nature of the war and the parties to the conflict. It has brought to the people, the events and the incidents with their details and their horrors. Analyzing these incidents and events, it would not be difficult for the people of Afghanistan to understand their true enemy and friend. It is also crucial that media must make the people know about their true enemies and their true friends so that they must be able to choose the better between them.

The media reports and the analysis have clearly shown to the people of Afghanistan that they have been highly influenced by Taliban and their actions. Though, they have been the victims of the war as a whole, the role and activities of Taliban have proved to be more deadly for them. Recently, the media reports have clearly depicted that most of the civilian casualties have been because of Taliban. It is because of Taliban that Afghanistan has an image of an extremist nation with no respect for moderation and democracy. However, there is an important aspect of the fact that has not been properly handled by media and that is the truth as a whole.

The truth in pieces, promulgated both by national and international media have caused certain misunderstandings as well. They have not been able to declare the war against terrorism as a war against terrorism in true sense. The war against terrorism simply means that there are two parties to the conflict; first party is the moderate Afghan culture and their supporters in international community and the second party is composed of the religious extremists.

It is important for media to see the truth as a whole and try to understand the political tricks that are played by the politicians. It is not the duty of media to pursue the wills of the politicians, but to provide people with unbiased and complete truth. The complete truth is that our country is influenced by hardliner extremists, who have no respect for moderation and are the real party to the conflict in war against terrorism.

It is not important what they are termed as; the important factor is what they do and what they want. Pursuing the truth as a whole is the only way through which media would be able to support the common people in understanding the scenario around them and their real friends and enemies, which is very important to make better decisions for the country as whole.



## Only Strong Afghan Air Force Can Guarantee Winning the War on Terror

By Sayed Niyam Alami

Although the US and alliance forces have been working to develop the Afghan Air Force (AAF) for more than a decade now, the AAF has still not been enabled to reach a stage whereby it could take on the security role being fulfilled by US and coalition forces. The force's accomplishments and achievements are hailed but control of the aircrafts is not being fully handed to Afghans. The AAF has been many times lauded as unique force in the region with a mighty and young force; however, it is still unable to carry out operations solely.

Since its inception in 1924 under the reign of King Amanullah Khan, the elite Afghanistan Air Force (AAF) has went through many ups and downs throughout the war-weary Afghan history. The 95-year-old AAF was once powerful on regional level having 240 different types of military aircrafts, 40 logistic aircrafts and 150 cargo planes. When the United States invaded Afghanistan in 2001, Afghan air combat capability had atrophied; whereas, the AAF was in its heyday in the 1970s, when it was the beneficiary of Russian training and equipment.

The force was again paid attention in 2007 after its complete extinction during the 1990s civil war and the following era of the US-led invasion of Afghanistan in 2001. Since the beginning of its revival efforts, the force has been gaining strength. NATO's Train, Advise, Assist Command-Air (TAAC-Air) mission in Afghanistan promises that under current plans, NATO wants to boost the size of the AAF from 8,000 to 12,000 troops and grow its inventory from 124 to 259 aircrafts as part of recapitalization. Meanwhile, President Ashraf Ghani lauds the force which he says will be tripled soon under the four-year security plan for Afghanistan that includes strengthening the air force as a strategic force to ensure the security of the country.

However, in an assessment -- conducted between March and August 2017 -- released on January 4, the Pentagon's top watchdog is highly critical of NATO-led, US-supported efforts to improve and expand the AAF. The review acknowledges that Afghanistan's air arm has improved in some respects, but criticizes significant gaps in training and logistical support to the air force. The assessment adds that coalition advisers are not adequately prepared for the tasks at hand. It is very bewildering as the assessment puts down that the international efforts still lacks a coherent and overarching strategy. This is while Brig. Gen. Phillip Stewart, the U.S. Air Force commander in charge of NATO's TAAC-Air mission in Afghanistan, says that over the six years to come, the US military and its coalition partners will invest \$7 billion to augment the AAF, including a more than twofold increase to the country's aircraft fleet.

It is not clear yet how the promise made by the international fraternity could be honored in a situation when there are huge gaps in training and logistical supports to the forces. In order

to avoid civilian and reduce military casualties, Afghan forces should unquestionably maintain a strong air force. Given the vast distances and rugged terrain of Afghanistan, flying is quicker and safer for chasing down insurgents on the condition that the aircrafts are manned by only Afghan airmen. With full control at disposal, Afghans will act as eagles in hunting terrorists sent from their well-known hotbeds across the imaginary borderline.

However, during many air operations, the Afghan talented youth are not given the opportunity. The airstrikes are conducted merely by foreign pilots that, as we have witnessed, are faulty and almost always cause collateral damage.

The flawed airstrikes have many factors but communication problem is a case in point. The foreigners flying the jets have difficulties while receiving the coordinates of a place from ground forces; because they include foreigners from various NATO-member countries speaking different languages.

As misinterpretation problem occurs; the air raids result in failure. When the Afghans are granted full control and the foreign advisors asked to pay serious heed to the training sphere, there will be meager chances of mistaken operations and the so-called friendly fire. Because Afghans know their territories well than anybody else, so they know the exact hideouts of rebels. In addition, the air-ground integration and coordination between the Afghan National Army on the ground and the AFF in air would be very effective in carrying out successful operations.

At this stand, the AAF -- as acknowledged by the US top military commander in Afghanistan, Gen. Nicholson -- is a grand force in the region and the Afghan talent is known around the globe. Therefore, the force should be entrusted with full access to aircrafts. Also more airmen should be sent to various countries for studies and receiving trainings.

Moreover, the TAAC-Air mission in Afghanistan should focus more on training and meeting the logistical needs of the AAF and it should have a coherent and clear strategy for materializing its claim of helping the AAF to reach full strength over the next few years.

The donor countries must provide more gunships and aircrafts in order to fully equip the force. Since a high level delegation from the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) is in Kabul to assess the progress of war in Afghanistan, it is duty of the Afghan government to highlight the importance of a strong Afghan air force against the complexity in the war on terror. The Afghan government and politicians should clearly tell the members of the delegation that foreign support of terrorists fighting the Afghan security forces is no more a secret. In presence of foreign support of terrorists, I recommend to the Afghan government to pay more attention to the AAF in order to be victorious against insurgents, defend its borders and be able to maintain its territorial integrity with minimum civilian and military casualties.

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## Hoping for a Peaceful Year

By Hujjatullah Zia

Afghanistan was ranked the second worst country in terms of terrorism in the world due to the Taliban's intensified attacks. The last two years have been highly deadly for Afghan soldiers and civilians despite the death of Omar's successor Mullah Akhtar Mansour, who was considered an obstacle before peace process. But the Taliban employed their radical ideology targeting people indiscriminately. Worst of all, the self-styled Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) emerged in the country and compounded the instability.

The escalated offensives of the Taliban on the one hand, and the ISIL's systematic killings on the other hand, filled the air with a strong sense of fear and disappointment. Initially, Afghans feared the presence of the Taliban hoping that they would be nudged to the negotiating table. Therefore, the Afghan people flocked to the ballot boxes during the presidential and provincial elections with the aim of strengthening democracy in the country.

They hoped that their ballot would put an end to bullet and ensure peace and prosperity. To their unmitigated chagrin, it was not only the Taliban that intensified their attacks but also the ISIL group which ushered in fueling sectarian violence and spilling the blood of people, mainly ethnic minorities, indiscriminately. It is believed that the presence of the ISIL group was one of the main reasons behind Afghanistan's ranking as the second worst country out of 163 in the world.

Loyalists to the ISIL seek to employ its dogmatic beliefs and radical practices in Afghanistan. That is to say, the ISIL does not follow any specific objectives other than their mainstream in Afghanistan rather it emerged in the country to demonstrate its existence to the world. However, the ISIL emergence spread a strong sense of fear and shattered the public hope for a peaceful society. Believing that the seed of democracy will not be sowed amidst war and violence, a large number of Afghan people took refuge to foreign countries.

The brain-drain was followed by two horrible consequences; First, scores of Afghan refugees have occupied refugee camps without a clear destiny.

They have no choice but to grin and bear it. This issue pressures them mentally since their families wrestle with financial challenges. Second, the masses lost their morale as a result of exodus and look forward to having a slim chance to abandon the country. In addition, Afghan officials also expressed concern

over the brain-drain but without an effective mechanism to mitigate the situation, especially the security situation.

Constitutionally, the state is committed 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." Despite this fact, people's rights and freedoms were violated on a large scale and the government could not fully safeguard the life and liberty of citizens. The idea of "civil society" did not come true and the nascent democracy failed to panacea the bleeding wound of Afghan nation.

To view the security situation, Afghans are left at the mercy of terrorism and will sustain casualties as ever before. The Taliban do not intend to hold negotiation with Kabul government and will continue their escalated attacks in the country. Similarly, the ISIL group seeks to recruit more people and fight against the government as long as possible.

In spite of the militancy, the strong resolution of Kabul government along with its international allies, particularly the US, is light at the end of the tunnel. The Trump's administration seems very serious to win the war on terror in Afghanistan and adopt offensive attacks. Perhaps the strong decision to defeat the Taliban and ISIL group will be the last gleam of Afghans' hope. If Afghan government and foreign troops intensify their offensive attacks, rather than defensive ones, 2018 will be different from the two past years and Afghans will not sustain heavy casualties.

The Afghans' only hope is to be able to exercise their rights and freedoms in a civil society which is promised by both the Constitution and officials. It is further hoped and prayed that Afghanistan will not be ranked on the top list of terrorist stricken states.

Indeed, if people live a peaceful life in the country, there will be no tendency in taking refuge to foreign countries. But if the militants gain upper hand in battlefields, the brain-drain will continue and the last gleam of hope will come to an end. Hence, the Kabul government will have to intensify attacks against the militants so that Afghans no more experience a deadly year.

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