

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



June 06, 2018

## SCO Member States Media: The Pioneers of Shaping a New Shared Vision for Future

The first SCO media summit was held in Beijing on June 1, 2018 in Beijing. As the summit main theme was carrying on the "Shanghai Spirit" it called urgently the media to usher a new era for cooperation in order to exchange ideas on building new platforms of media cooperation and closer people-to-people ties. Indeed such cooperation and people ties require a strong political will of the SCO member states. Since, talking about the importance of shaping a new era of mutual understanding and cooperation is both easy and favorable; considering the conflict ridden region and long conflicts in some SCO member states like Afghanistan. At the same time, reaching to a political consensus between the politicians of the SCO member states like Afghanistan and Pakistan or Pakistan and India etc. is not an easy task. In fact, it calls the politicians of these countries to change their perceptions towards each other; there will be no peace in the region unless Pakistan really thinks that instability in Afghanistan harms Pakistan and India comes to a conclusion that instability in Pakistan is not in the interest of India and vice Versus. This approach applies to most of SCO member states and a political perception change, as a multilayer process, is not an easy goal to be realized very soon in the region. It is the unique geopolitical characteristics of the SCO member countries that give SCO a strategic privilege to other initiatives taken at the regional and international levels. On the other hand, media can play a historic and outstanding role to bring a shift in the regional political interaction based on the Shanghai Spirit. They can do so by working together, creating a sustainable network for information exchange and stay unbiased even during the complicated situations that may tempt them to take sides in certain times. This mechanism requires the SCO member states to strategically support, harmonize and institutionalize media cooperation and information exchange among them. SCO member states media has the potential to help creating people to people connectivity and establish a platform to cooperate with each other in order to create a positive and comprehensive environment both among their nations and states. They can become the tools of sharing knowledge, experience and the political, economic, social and cultural realities of their countries and the region in order to create a realistic and vibrant understanding of current situations of their countries, region and beyond. Media can be the pioneers of taking forward the cooperation of their respective countries at the regional level in different areas to promote and sustain a closer friendship and cooperation in the region.

In addition, SCO should not remain as a regional apparatus for mutual cooperation and partnership, but based on the spirit of Shanghai it has an international mandate: to contribute to a better world, contribute to change the current unfair way of interactions pursued by some major powers to ensure their narrow interests and it should contribute to replacing such modes of interactions with a mutual trust and partnership at the international level to benefit all mankind. Doing so is possible, if they do join hands for an all-round cooperation to build a fairer and more rational international communication platform and remain committed to it. In this context, SCO member states media should build itself into advocates of spirit of organization, pioneers of the practical cooperation, and communicators of friendships between people. Each SCO member state should firmly support the development of the SCO, and work with all parties to build a Community of Shared Future for Human Beings."

Our world is facing some big problems including climate change, large scale conflict, terrorism, inequality, poverty, religious conflicts, and etc. In this context, the world needs a new platform to transform from its current challenges. It is clear cut the main reason of these problems lies in unfair interactions of the powerful countries with the less powerful ones. Such behavior is rooted in not respecting the diversity and mutual respect. The idea of a shared future is based on the lessons learnt from the past in order to shape a regional and international approach, based on mutual respect and partnership that based on it, every state would benefit from its partnership with other countries. It is an idea aiming at a better future for mankind. As such, it is the mandate of SCO member states media to develop the necessary networks and platforms to ensure realizing it.



## Reaction Against Religious Scholars' Gathering

By Mohammad Zahir Akbari

On Monday, more than 2,000 Afghan religious scholars gathered in Kabul to examine the status of ongoing war in Afghanistan from Islamic viewpoint. After some discussions they issued a collective fatwa outlawing the current war in the country while since 2001, Afghanistan has been suffering from violence imposed by militants, who often use suicide bombers and claim that their struggle is a holy war. The religious scholars stressed in their statement that "war in its all types is forbidden under the Islamic law and it is nothing except shedding the blood of Muslims whereas the real victims are innocent Afghan men, women, and children.

It follows the recent Ulema meeting when Afghanistan, Pakistan and Indonesian were gathered in Jakarta to discuss the roots and reasons of the ongoing war in Afghanistan and to find a durable peace solution for the conflicts of war-torn country. The Islamic scholars of three countries had issued a declaration on the war and peace in Afghanistan, in which they promulgated their opposition against the terrorism and violent extremism and had declared their support for any peace offer, efforts and declarations in ending war and bringing peace in Afghanistan.

Unfortunately, the Ulema peace efforts have been responded with shedding their bloods on Monday. Sharply after the fatwa against the ongoing war in the country, a deadly explosion happened near the gathering of religious scholars which was arranged at Loya Jirga place, the Grand Assembly tent, close to Kabul Polytechnic University. As reflected in the local media, "The suicide attack happened outside the Loya Jirga ten when religious scholars were leaving the gathering." Less than an hour before explosion, they made their declaration proclaiming that the "true victims" of the nearly 17-year-old war are innocent Afghan men, women, and children and the ongoing war in Afghanistan is illegal and has no root in Shari'a law. According to the initial information, the explosion left 14 people dead and 17 others wounded. Among the casualties, a renowned religious scholar from Qandahar province, Abdul Haq Akhnzada was recognized as martyred.

The Taliban has denied involvement in Monday's attack but the Takfiri group claimed the attack via their Amaq propaganda agency. They released two short statements on the attack. In the first, Amaq claimed that the dead or wounded totaled about 40 people but later they claimed that the casualty count had risen to 70 people. Both the Taliban and IS have stepped up their headline-grabbing assaults on the heavily fortified capital in recent months. Taliban gunmen are blamed in killing of Imams and other religious officials in the past but the ISIS are more interested in attacks against worshippers, especially on the Shiite religious group. Recently, over 70 people were killed including five children, 21 women and nearly 120 others wounded in the attack, which was carried out at the doorway of an identity card distribution and voters' registration center in Kabul's Dasht-e-

Barchi area.

As usual, many countries and international organization including USA, Iran, Pakistan and the United Nation condemned the suicide attack that targeted the congregation of religious scholars for peace. They expressed grief at the loss of precious innocent lives in this barbaric act of terrorism. "The USA Secretary-General reiterates that no cause can justify such violence. Targeting civilians in this way is a clear violation of international law and international human rights law," said a statement issued by his Spokesperson Stéphane Dujarric. Thus, a few days ago the U.S. Department of State (DOS) had warned its International Religious Freedom for 2017 Report that the Taliban and the Islamic State (ISIS/ISIL) are increasingly killing and threatening clerics in Afghanistan for preaching messages contrary to their version of Islam.

Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokesman Bahram Qassemi has strongly condemned the terrorist attack near a gathering of top clerics in the Afghan capital of Kabul. He added that the terrorists did not want the Afghan clerics to convey their message of peace, humanity, mercy, compassion as well as the message of fighting hostility, violence and terrorism to the country's people and other nations, PressTV Reported. Accordingly, Islamabad expressed their feeling of sorrow and sympathy with government and people of Afghanistan.

The suicide attacks in Afghanistan are frequently condemned in word as fanatical and immoral, especially when civilians are killed, but in practice the condition has been deteriorating and the insurgent groups view the tactic as their most effective weapon. Suicide attacks, explosions for killing people, insurgency, different types of corruption, kidnapping have been increasing under Islamic name but in Islam it is firmly counted as big sins and against the order of the Almighty Allah. If a person intentionally kills someone, he must be penalized by death. Executing, financing and supporting such acts are against Sharia law," said a separate statement tweeted by the government. Fighting in the name of jihad in Afghanistan, where the majority of the population is Muslim, has "no legitimacy" in Islam.

To sum up, the Ulema peace efforts were widely appreciated by Afghan people but the government are widely blamed for being irresponsible failed in devising fundamental measures to protect people from repeated cruel attacks. If the insurgents are Muslim, they should pay respect to the voice of Islamic scholars, worshippers and the Ramadan fast keepers. We hope that all parts of conflicts pay respects to the decision of Ulema and stop the killing of civilians which are against Islam. If they are really fighting for Muslims or the country, they should not ignore the voice 2,000 scholars calling them not to kill innocent civilians.

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## King Abdullah of Jordan:

### Balancing on an Ever-Tighter Tightrope

By James M. Dorsey

Look at a decade of failed social, economic and political reform in Jordan goes a far way to explain recent mass anti-government protests demanding the resignation of the government.

The protests, prompting concerns about the survival of the Hashemite dynasty, also bear witness to the fallout of the region's epic power struggles and the pitfalls of government failures to respond to long-standing discontent that has been simmering across the region just below the surface.

Pent-up anger and frustration with governments that have failed to deliver public goods and services were at the core of popular Arab revolts in 2011 that initially toppled the leaders of Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Yemen.

If anything, the Jordanian protests in a Middle Eastern nation viewed as relatively stable, have defied notions that the brutal rollback of Egypt's successful revolt and the bloody conflicts wracking Libya and Yemen as well as Syria have cowed the region's public into accepting autocratic rule as the best of all evils. The protests target corruption and a proposed tax bill that protesters say will reduce living standards in a country with double digit unemployment, 21 percent of the population living below the poverty line, and finances and services burdened by the influx of more than 2 million refugees, including 600,000 plus Syrians.

The bill would raise taxes on employees by at least five percent and on companies by between 20 and 40 percent in line with the terms of a three-year \$723 million dollar loan from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) that Jordan secured in 2016.

Jordanians have seen repeated price rises on staples such as bread and increased taxes on basic goods like electricity and fuel since the beginning of this year. The Economist Intelligence Unit earlier this year ranked Jordan's capital Amman as one of the most expensive in the Arab world.

The writing has been on Jordan's wall since the 2011 protests when in a seismic shift of Jordanian politics, tribal leaders took their criticism public rather than relying on traditionally secret, behind closed-door interactions with the country's monarch.

The change in tactics that in the current protests has brought a wide swath of Jordanians irrespective of whether they are of Palestinian or East Bank tribal descent on to the streets bears a cautionary note for regimes across the region.

Scores of prominent East Bank Jordanian tribal leaders signalled

the change in an unprecedented public letter to the king in February 2011 that accused King Abdullah's glamorous Palestinian wife, Queen Rania, of corruption.

The leaders charged that Queen Rania, "her sycophants and the power centres that surround her" were dividing Jordanians and "stealing from the country and the people." It warned King Abdullah that if he failed to tackle corruption and introduce reform "similar events to those in Tunisia and Egypt and other Arab countries will occur."

The letter and a 2011 Carnegie Endowment for International Peace report written by former Jordanian Deputy Prime Minister Marwan al-Muasher constituted early warnings of what is at the core of the current protests: a popular demand for a government that garners public support by catering to popular social and economic aspirations as well as demands for political participation.

"All efforts to open up the political system have been thwarted by a resilient class of political elites and bureaucrats who feared that such efforts would move the country away from a decades-old rentier system to a merit-based one. This group accurately predicted that reform would chip away, even if gradually, at privileges it had acquired over a long period of time in return for its blind loyalty to the system. It thus stood firm not just against the reform efforts themselves, but also in opposition to the king's own policies," Mr. Al-Muasher added.

Jordan's usefulness in resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has also diminished because of US president Donald J. Trump's policies that have effectively dashed hopes for a two-state solution.

Survival could well mean that Jordan forges closer ties to countries like Iran, Turkey, Qatar and Russia – a prospect that is raising concern in Jerusalem, Riyadh and Abu Dhabi.

Already, Jordan's smouldering discontent has Israeli and Western intelligence analysts worried. Even if it may seem at best a theoretical notion, some have nonetheless begun to ponder the survivability of Jordan's Hashemite dynasty.

That may be a scenario too far. What is beyond doubt, however, is the fact that King Abdullah's options are narrowing as he walks an ever more tightly spun tightrope.

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