

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



June 01, 2015

Turn Window of Opportunity into Highway of Cooperation; Ghani's Letter Reads

The politics of suspicion is ripe in most of the world countries overrun by a quality of governance – often one state doubts another of foul play. It is witnessed following this malicious practice, most of time, energy and resources are allocated in finding the traces of involvement of another state behind every barbarous act the security apparatus fails to foil, instead of enacting strong net of security. This has led to evolution of trust deficit between the engaged countries.

Afghanistan and Pakistan is neighbors whose history is marked with ever changing relation. Afghanistan deems Pakistan behind some if not all of the anguish they are passing through. It is a dominant perception that the faction of Taliban operating against the central government of Kabul is backed by Pakistan. Identically, Pakistan deems Afghan land is used against Pakistan's interest. In that pursuit NDS and ISI earlier, went on signing a MoU that meant of keep a check over security moves of neighboring country in Afghanistan which rendered disagreeable to accused country.

Afghanistan for long has been denying the leveled allegation – as it couldn't turn effect to turn the perception in their favor. In order to day away with reservation of Pakistan, formerly, Gen. Murad Ali Murad, Deputy Army chief, reiterated Afghanistan would never allow its soil to be used against neighboring or regional countries. How would this statement assure state of Pakistan, amidst prolonged trust deficit? What kind of assurance are needed to bridge the deteriorated reliance and confidence between the two neighboring country?

The restoration of trust between the two states are pivotal to their development, is yet to be placed on top priority. At present this piece of land is passing through serious insecurity – everyday marks deadly attack on government departments and foreign diplomats. The capital and the elsewhere undergoes through wave of heinous attacks that leads to mass civilian casualties. Taliban announced its Spring Offensive in late April followed by a string of deadly attacks in Afghanistan, particularly attacks on guest houses in capital Kabul. President Ashraf Ghani on the other hand has urged Pakistani authorities to take action against militants who were responsible for the recent spate of violence in Afghanistan. Afghanistan wants Pakistan to use pressure over Afghan Taliban including seizure of terror funds and deprivation from sanctuaries in Pakistan. Formerly, President Ghani has dispatched an open letter to Pakistani Prime Minister Mian Muhammad Nawaz Sharif mentioning the dos and don'ts in the bid to strengthen bilateral relation. The letter is a three-page document with the first two pages outlining the issue of insurgency faced by Afghanistan. The third and final page lists his demands. In a confidential letter to Pakistan, Ghani has set out a list of demands in terms of bridging the relationship and ending extremism in the region – with the primary focus being on Afghanistan's security. In the aforesaid letter Ghani listed the following demands, "An official declaration by the political leadership of Pakistan condemning the launching of the Taliban offensive, operation; a directive by the military leadership that sanctuary will be denied to the Taliban and effective measures by the security forces and civil authorities that the directive is carried out."

At present, Pakistan and Afghanistan does not owe a formal extradition agreement but both routinely ask each other to hand over wanted person. The letter further reads: "A directive to extend the counter-terror campaign to the Haqqani network and verification that those responsible for the recent terror campaign in Afghanistan are arrested." In addition it states that a directive needs to be issued to "place the leaders of the Quetta Shura and the Peshawar Shura under house arrest and to initiate legal proceedings against them for threatening a friendly state." The two countries must go with making deal handing over the wanted criminals to the wanting country. Doing so, Afghanistan may succeed apprehending Mullah Baradar and Pakistan can seek Mullah Fazullah, who head Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). The dispatch to Sharif does entail an agreement over prisoner's exchange. One of the most crucial demand is venturing a joint operation against those wanted but have sought save sanctuaries across Af-Pak border. Mostly, it has happened Taliban kept on escaping apprehension following the operation launched against by either of the country. The wanted Taliban subsequent to pressure grown have had sought safe haven in either of the country, is the regretting most. This trend must be discouraged once forever – otherwise the fight against terrorism could not be won overwhelmingly. Both Afghanistan and Pakistan are passing through terrorist attacks – every day witness countless innocent render their lives in an aimless war which by the end of day will have no winner and loser. They are the civilians who will bear the brunt of violence. The two countries situated in the heart of Asia, the emerging economical power of twenty first century, are due to find out eternal solution to their self born issues. The unending skirmish between the two countries based on wrong fixation of problems and accusation and counter accusation may tarnish the economical gains the Asia is about to make within couple of decades if not years. President Ghani displayed an affirmation to renovate the Af-Pak relation on the new avenues stating, "The key problem in relations between the two countries during the last 13 years has been an undeclared condition of hostilities between the two countries," read the letter. In his letter, Ghani referred to his recent trip to Pakistan and saying that there is a window of opportunity that can and should be "broadened to a door, a corridor, a road and eventually into a super highway of cooperation between the two states."

The Difficult Task of Fighting Corruption

By Abdul Ahad Bahrami

President Ashraf Ghani suspended six high-ranking officials of the Ministry of Urban Development Affairs along with acting director and deputies of Afghanistan's Investment Services Agency (AISA) on charges of embezzlement and administrative corruption. According to a statement from the President's office, the President has requested travel bans for the officials, and their cases are referred to the Office of Attorney General for investigations. This is not the first measure of its kind in fighting large-scale corruption at high government level after takeover of the National Unity Government (NUG) last year. However, it is viewed as a major starting move to address what is deemed as safe havens of high-ranking corrupt officials serving in the government's key financial and sectoral departments.

The measure is coming as a bold move in fighting large-scale corruption in the government as the anti-corruption campaign in Afghanistan is overshadowed by the worsening security situation and other numerous challenges the new government has been facing in recent months. In an effort for good governance and ensuring the international community of its resolve for reforms, the new unity government has promulgated fighting corruption as one of its top priorities. However, it has been virtually held back by numerous existing challenges from taking the necessary actions for fulfilling the promises made by the leaders of the NUG in this regard. In addition to intensifying security challenges, the government had not been effectively functioning for about seven months after the last year presidential elections due to the sluggish process of formation of government cabinet and filling other key government posts.

With the new government attempting to take concrete actions for tackling the menace of corruption, now hopes for a genuine campaign against corruption at the top-levels is reviving. But doing so will not be an easy task for the government. Fighting corruption is one of the key challenges against the National Unity Government (NUG). Based on rankings provided by international organizations, the government of Afghanistan is one of the most corrupt governments in the world. A large portion of international aid supposed to help Afghanistan's reconstruction and development as well as funding its military in last fourteen years have been drained by corruption and embezzlement. Based on findings of corruption-monitoring agencies, Afghans pay billions of dollars in bribe to government officials annually. The United Nations has warned that corruption would be "a barrier to achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDG)", calling nations for taking strong measures for fighting corruption. The International Transparency, a top global accountability and transparency advocacy organization, has named Afghanistan third most corrupt nation in the world after Somalia and North Korea. Good governance and eliminating corruption in Afghanistan has been a major goal for the international community supporting the efforts in Afghanistan in last fourteen years. The former governments led by former president Hamid Karzai largely failed in promoting good governance and fighting corruption as part of its anti-corruption obligations to its international supporters and the public in Afghanistan. Efficient governance in Afghanistan was viewed as the only way for the NATO mission to succeed in Afghanistan; however, the international community mostly gave up to their exhaustions over

the widespread level of corruption in the country. Despite of huge aid money spent on anti-corruption efforts, Afghan government offices still remain deeply corrupt and ineffective.

The international community's disappointment at Afghanistan's former governments' handling of corruption and governance has led them weary of how their aid money is spent. In Tokyo International Conference on Afghanistan, the international community made conditional pledges for providing Afghanistan financial aid in the upcoming years stressing for more serious actions in tackling corruption by the government of Afghanistan. The last year controversial presidential elections once again dismayed the international community of the trend of reforms in Afghanistan. There has been increasing pressures from Afghanistan's international donors on the Afghan government to take concrete measures for fighting corruption and making reforms particularly to the country's election bodies.

The matter of seriously fighting corruption is long overlooked by both the government of Afghanistan and the international community who has been backing Afghanistan in past over a decade is its efforts to promote good governance and get rid of corruption. Many believe that the international community's focus has been mainly on military efforts rather than making major investments on development and reconstructions along with building an efficient and accountable political system. What is clear is that the international community gradually lost focus on fighting corruption in Afghanistan through pressuring the government and building the capacity of the government institutions. On the Afghan government side, there was no political will for fighting corruption at all. The main factor was that the government had been dealing with insurgency and other challenges, and more importantly, corruption benefited top government officials as well.

The suspension of top officials of one of the key government's sector departments is of particular importance for the new government's commitment of zero-tolerance policy towards corruption and creeping embezzlement in governmental offices. It shows there is political will in the new government to promote good governance and seriously fight corruption. In recent months, there have been a number of actions from the President to kick-start the long overlooked matter of eliminating corruption. Ashraf Ghani has portrayed an image of being tough in fighting corruption and embezzlement at top government levels. The new government managed to somehow address the corruption scandal of the Kabul Bank which was seen a major financial scandal for the government. Ashraf Ghani also suspended officials at the procurement department of the Ministry of Defense which was accused of corruption through procurement dealings.

However, despite some promising measures by the new government, there is a long way for proving determination and cohesion of the NUG in fighting corruption. There is resistance to the reform and anti-corruption policies of the government at very top levels of the government. There are huge cases of land seizing cases by top former and current government officials and parliamentarians. Dealing with such large-scale corrupting by the government will create high level political conflicts among the Afghan political elite. With the difficult prospect, there have been good signs for beginning a robust anti-corrupting campaign by the new government.

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Being in Dire Straits

By Hujjat Zia

We'll continue to bring them home and reduce them to embassy presence by the end of next year, but Afghanistan remains a very dangerous place", said President Barack Obama regarding the US troops during his annual speech at Arlington national cemetery on Memorial Day on May 25, 2015. Though troops remain stationed in Afghanistan, it was the first time in 14 years that the US had celebrated the holiday while not engaged in a major ground war. The speech came after years of claims by the administration to have created a path to the end of the Afghanistan war, or indeed that it was over, followed by delays in plans for troop withdrawal.

More than 2,200 Americans died since 2001 and more than \$60 billion was spent on getting Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) ready to secure the country once NATO troops withdrew, however the investments seem to be waning. Meanwhile, the commander of international forces in Afghanistan said on Saturday that the Islamic State militant group, which is gaining territory in Iraq and Syria despite US airstrikes, is trying to recruit fighters in Afghanistan over social media. "We don't want it to continue to grow," said General John F Campbell.

The nascent democracy is not a panacea for the Afghans' political problems. People fall the victims of militancy to a large extent. Violence and bloodshed have been increased since the drawdown of NATO troops and emergence of the Islamic State (IS). The spring offensive carried out by the Taliban militants led to great casualties across the country. The indiscriminate killings of the civilians have raised the public concerns.

Obama has rightly said that "Afghanistan remains a very dangerous place". The fact is that Obama has implied that NATO's counter-terrorism mission met failure in Afghanistan. The longstanding presence of the foreign troops and heavy financial investments may have gone in vain.

Due to the rise in militancy on one hand and withdrawal of NATO forces on the other hand, hundreds of militia fighters have been enlisted to battle the Taliban militants near the northern city of Kunduz. The recruitment of unofficial armed groups in Kunduz province is on a larger scale than previous attempts by the government and NATO forces to recruit militias in the fight against the Taliban. The Taliban's weeks-long siege of Kunduz has involved thousands of militants and brought the insurgents closer to capturing a major city than at any time in years.

The scale of the assault and the inability of ANSF to repel it is particularly worrying, because it comes just a few months after NATO ended its combat mission in Afghanistan.

Kunduz governor Safi, though, said he was sure the government could keep fighters loyal, and that by recruiting militias, Kabul might in fact be able to control them better.

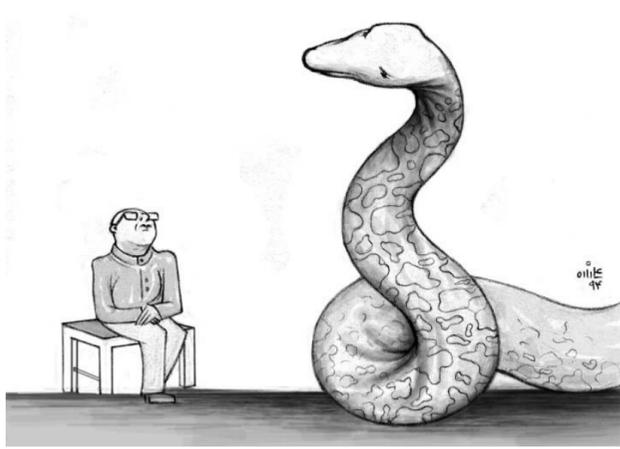
"A large number of them (mujahideen militias) were unhappy with the government, so we tried to bring them into an organized framework," Safi said.

However, political analysts believe that rearming the local militias will be highly critical for Afghanistan. According to them, the new anti-terrorist strategy will backfire. In other words, in case of coming to fruition, this milestone will be a pyrrhic victory for the Afghan government. Thomas Ruttig said that creating new layers of forces beyond the ANSF, which is made up of the army and national and local police, could mean more instability.

The question arises is that will foreign forces leave Afghanistan in the lurch and their missions incomplete? Despite stating to "reduce ... to embassy presence", speaking after a meeting with NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg on Tuesday, Obama called on all NATO member countries to help stabilize Afghanistan and to offer training and other support to Afghan forces following the drawdown of NATO troops. He further said the issue will be discussed at a NATO summit in July in the Polish capital city of Warsaw.

There are nearly 10,000 American servicemen and women still stationed in Afghanistan serving in non-combat roles, a higher number than Obama originally pledged when he announced his Afghanistan drawdown plan last year. The administration cited security concerns when it announced in March that a higher number of troops would remain there. Based on Obama's urge for stabilizing Afghanistan and the presence of American trainers, who are legalized to stay on the basis of signing Bilateral Security Agreement, there seems a spirit of cooperation in the US officials. The NATO forces will decide in the upcoming summit to complete their counter-terrorism mission in Afghanistan – as Obama has said. But it is too early to pass judgment about their achievements – if they resume their mission in the country. It should be noted that if militancy continues unabated across the country, it will be a bitter pill not only for the Afghan government but also for the foreign troops to swallow. Moreover, more than a decade of western investments and military loss will be wasted. Similarly, Afghan people will fall the victim of terrorism once more. With the emergence of the Islamic State militants and their recruitment in this war-weary country, the public fear Afghanistan will be changed into second Iraq. Hence, to end the status quo, a strong military operation by international forces is a dire need. Hope the world's common enemy – who are operating either under the white flag of the Taliban or under the black flag of the Islamic State – be rooted out by joining forces in near future.

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