

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



October 07, 2018

## Pros and Cons of War on Terror

Seventeen years ago, on September 11, the United States had two devastating terrorist attacks on its land. The three airliners that had been hijacked hit World Trade Center building in New York and the Department of Defense in Washington, DC, killing nearly 3,000 people.

The government of the United States associated the responsibility of the attack to Al-Qaeda and attacked Afghanistan in October the same year since Taliban in Afghanistan were harboring Al-Qaeda and they were not ready to handover their leaders to the United States.

This war began with the aim to topple Taliban regime and eliminate Al-Qaeda bases in Afghanistan. Although the US and NATO forces defeated Taliban within few days, this victory, however, was a temporary defeat, and the Taliban began its operations in different parts of the country with different tactics. Now it has become stronger over the past few years. Insecurity has spread from the south to the northern regions of the country, and now much of the territory of Afghanistan is outside the control of the government.

In addition to the parties involved, tens of thousands of civilians have also been killed and injured in this war, which has lasted for seventeen years now. During this period, the US strategy for Afghanistan has progressed through various stages. After the outbreak of the war in Afghanistan, the US strategy was to overthrow the Taliban regime and create a new system in Afghanistan. During this period, when George W. Bush was the president of the United States, relations between Afghanistan and the United States were warmer and aid and support from the international community, especially the United States, came to Afghanistan. In the second phase, after the Taliban's war against foreign forces and the Afghan government began to re-emerge and spread over several years, the focus was more on the battlefield, and in 2006 the number of foreign troops increased.

During the presidency of Barack Obama, on the one hand, relations between Hamid Karzai and the United States were widespread, and on the other hand, the casualties of the US forces also increased, and voices rose in the United States against the war in Afghanistan and Iraq. For this reason, the US policy changed in Afghanistan. First, a decision was made to increase US troops in Afghanistan and later to withdraw US troops from Afghanistan, which eventually began the withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan in late 2011.

In addition to withdrawing its troops from Afghanistan, the United States also created military bases in the country, which improved again with the approach of the National Unity Government (NUG) and the bilateral security agreement was signed with the United States. However, with the installation of new government, the security and political situation in the country could not be improved and continued in some form or the other. Today, the war in Afghanistan has once again intensified, with serious number of casualties being suffered both by Afghan forces and civilians in different fronts.

However, in the 17 years of the US-led war in Afghanistan, not only did Taliban thrive and grow, but in recent years, the Islamic State in Afghanistan - Daesh - has gained grounds and started operations in different parts of the country, especially the eastern regions, and in a short time it has become a major threat in Afghanistan. The group has carried out dozens of bloody and deadly attacks in the capital and other major cities. Along with this, according to Afghan government officials, more than 20 armed groups are currently fighting in Afghanistan.

Although the NATO-US military missions apparently ended in 2014, and these forces assumed responsibility for training, support and counseling of Afghan forces, but with the election of Donald Trump as the head of the United States, it has started pursuing a more aggressive policy and more of a combat role. Donald Trump, while discussing his new strategy for Afghanistan had said that his country's new strategy was to continue supporting the Afghan government, eliminating the terrorist groups and destroying the safe bases of these groups outside Afghanistan.

The US-led coalition is claiming that Afghanistan is self-sustaining economically, militarily and politically but the fact is that it has not been able to meet its obligations to the country and its people over the course of seventeen years. Today, over 45 percent of Afghans live below the poverty line; the country stands 4th in the list of most corrupt countries of the world and it tops the list of the countries where drugs are produced and smuggled.

As a matter of fact, the war that was started in Afghanistan on the pretext of war against terrorism has not been able to eradicate terrorism; neither, it has been able to achieve anything worthwhile regarding nation-building the country. Therefore, billions of dollars that have been spent on Afghanistan have not been able to guarantee a safe and stable country.

## The Belt and Road Initiative Looms Large for the World

By Hujjatullah Zia

Hosting four significant events: The Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), the 15th China-ASEAN Expo, the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road China (Guangdong) International Communication Forum and the Third Silk Road (Dunhuang) International Cultural Expo in September this year, China could take more practical step in promoting the Silk Road spirit and pursuing multilateral cooperation and win-win result.

The four events carry much more significance in promoting the Belt and Road Initiative which includes two mega projects: The Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road. The former links China with Central Asia, the Middle East and Europe on land while the latter unites the major sea trade of Africa, Europe, Oceania, South and Southeast Asia. That is, the MSR reiterates connecting the Asia-Pacific economic circle in the east and the European economic circle in the west by building a network of sea ports, linking the economic hinterland in China.

With the importance of the maritime trade and transport in the globalized world, economists believe that the MSR - which is intended to serve diplomatic, economic and strategic purposes - carries more weight than the land-based economic belt. The MSR will open a new chapter in the history of sea trade and it will offer an enormous opportunity to the world in general and to Europe, Africa, South and Southeast Asia in particular. This mega project urges all nations to play the "symphony" in tune.

Being the significant station of the MSR, Africa is of especial importance for China. For example, Senegal, Tanzania, Djibouti, Gabon, Mozambique and Ghana are all included in the Chinese investment plan as the development of roads, railways and ports are closely tied to one another in these regions.

In the FOCAC, the two sides, which form roughly 2.6 billion population, approved an action plan for bilateral cooperation in the next three years and pledged to step up building a community with shared future as President Xi Jinping pointed out in his keynote speech, "The over 1.3 billion Chinese people have been with over 1.2 billion African people in pursuing a shared future."

This year's China-ASEAN Expo was connected with the MSR, which is an indivisible part of the Silk Road Economic Belt. Since the adoption of the BRI five years ago, the two sides have promoted

the Silk Road spirit and consolidated the steps to build a community with shared future. ASEAN countries are China's third largest trade partner and China has been ASEAN's biggest trading partner for nine consecutive years. To facilitate further trade, ASEAN countries believe that reviving the MSR is necessary and they also seek to align their economic activities in the frame of the BRI.

I believe that the importance of Silk Road Economic Belt will be similar to the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road and China has made great efforts in promoting both in the frame of the BRI. In other words China is seeking to promote the spirit of the Silk Road - i.e. peace and cooperation, openness and inclusiveness, mutual benefit and mutual learning. This year, China has hosted a number of expos and forums in its different provinces to win the regional and global support for the BRI and to show that China will open its door wider to the outside world. China will also host a highly remarkable expo in Shanghai in November.

Delivering a speech in the opening ceremony of the Third Silk Road (Dunhuang) International Cultural Expo on September 27, Afghan second vice-president Sarwar Danesh emphasized the significance of the Silk Road and said, "The ancient and historical Silk Road has been one of the oldest and longest commercial routes for exchanging commercial goods, knowledge, and culture of humankind that linked some of the biggest civilizations of the world, namely, China, India, Greece, Buddhism and Islamic Cultures to each other."

The Silk Road is termed "Road of Dialogue" by the UNESCO to emphasize "dialogue among civilizations", "intercultural and inter-religious dialogue" and "rapprochement of cultures". To increase mutual understanding, promote a peaceful coexistence, enhance the spirit of brotherhood and build a "community with shared future for mankind" through trade and people-to-people interactions, the world needs to revive the ancient Silk Road.

Since the proposal of the BRI in 2013, more than a 100 countries and international organizations have voiced their support to this mega project of the 1st century. Hope it will be the route of dialogue and communication and all nations could be the beneficiary of the BRI. As it is promised, it is hoped that peoples could learn about the culture of one another and be able to have a fair share in the BRI.

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## Journalist's disappearance challenges fragile Middle Eastern pragmatism

By James M. Dorsey

Saudi Arabia and Turkey, despite being on opposite sides of Middle Eastern divides, are cooperating in Syria to enable youth and women to acquire skills that would either allow them to compete in the job market or turn them into entrepreneurs. The Saudi-funded, Turkish-executed projects potentially highlight a newly found degree of pragmatism and fluidity among seemingly entrenched alliances in the Middle East that largely pitch Turkey, Iran and Qatar against Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Saudi Arabia and Turkey differ on some of the Middle East's most important divides. Turkey backs Qatar in its 15-month-old dispute with a Saudi-United Arab Emirates-led alliance that is boycotting the Gulf state economically and diplomatically and is competing with Saudi Arabia, and even more so with its closest ally, the UAE, for influence in the Horn of Africa.

While Turkey and Saudi Arabia are closer in their approach towards Syria, Turkey hosts members of the Muslim Brotherhood, a group that has been banned in the kingdom and is at the centre of its conflict with Qatar. It also opposes US sanctioning of Iran that has been embraced by Saudi Arabia.

Turkey further has exploited Saudi reluctance to aggressively oppose US President Donald J. Trump's pro-Israel policy to position itself as the leader of the Islamic world in supporting the Palestinians. Turkish officials have suggested that the UAE had funded a failed 2016 military coup.

The projects are but one indication of the seeming emergence of a degree of pragmatism on the part of parties on all sides of the Middle Eastern divide. Other indications include differences between Turkey, Russia and Iran over how to handle Idlib, the last rebel-held stronghold in Syria; Bahraini trial balloons suggesting a softening of the boycott of Qatar; and Turkish-German efforts to mend fences with one another.

The signs of flexibility are as fragile as the alliances themselves. They are being put to a test with the disappearance in Istanbul of prominent Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi, a critic of the kingdom's crown prince, Mohammed bin Salman, who disappeared this week during a visit to the Saudi consulate.

Mr. Khashoggi, known for his close ties to the ruling family, went a year ago into self-exile in Washington, after being banned from publishing, which he feared was a prelude to arrest.

Neither Saudi Arabia nor Turkey have so far commented on Mr. Khashoggi's disappearance. A Saudi Press Agency report said an unidentified Saudi national accused of having signed cheques that bounced had been deported to the kingdom on the basis of an arrest warrant issued by Interpol. The agency gave no further details. While it is unknown whether the agency was referring to Mr. Khashoggi, many fear that he may have been kidnapped. It would not be the first time that Saudi Arabia has forcibly repatriated its critics.

A Saudi detention or nabbing of Mr. Khashoggi in Istanbul without at least tacit Turkish cooperation would embarrass Turkish prime minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan and likely spark a further deterioration of Turkish-Saudi relations. If Turkey was complicit, it would

bear testimony to increasing pragmatism.

Meanwhile, Saudi-Turkish cooperation in Syria goes beyond relief and development aid. It helps Turkey create a sphere of influence in areas of Syria near Turkey's border that are controlled by Turkish troops and administered by Turkey.

In a bid to compliment Turkish hard power in Syria with soft power and counter Kurdish influence, Mr. Erdogan's Religious Affairs Directorate or Diyanet has trained Syrian religious personnel, according to a 104-page report published by the directorate.

The report said that the directorate had spent a total of US\$34.1 million dollars in Syria on things like repairing mosques, distributing Kurdish-language Qur'ans, and educating 11,250 students.

Journalist Amed Dicle said that Diyanet had recruited 5,686 teachers from the ranks of rebels opposed to the regime of Syrian president Bashar al-Assad whose curriculum emphasized Turkey's synthesis between Islam and nationalism and included anti-Kurdish teachings. "Kurds are portrayed as atheists, and the PKK, YPG and other Kurdish fighters are infidels," Mr. Dicle said, referring to the outlawed Kurdish Workers Party and its Syrian offshoot, the People's Protection Units.

A Syrian imam told Al-Monitor that "we're getting paid by the Turkish government. We're grateful to them and we see that the local population here are happy to be under Turkish rule. For Turkey, religious and national allegiance are one and the same. But our interpretation of Islam may not always be the same. Turkey keeps Kurds under control and that's good for us. Plus, one day Syrians in Turkey may come and settle in these areas."

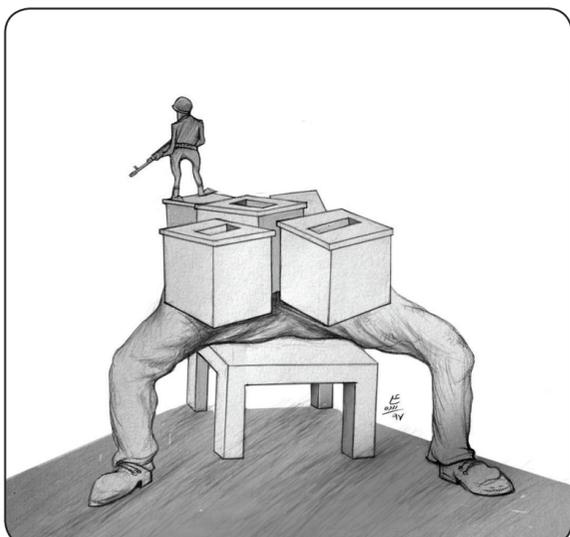
Saudi cooperation with Turkey and its anti-Kurdish agenda in Syria has not prevented the kingdom from establishing ties to Iraq's autonomous Kurdish region that borders on Iran with the opening of a consulate in Erbil, initiation of Saudia flights from Jeddah to Erbil, and a visit by Saudi businessmen.

Bahrain reportedly hinted last month that the Gulf states boycotting Qatar may re-open airspace to flights bound from and to Doha. The continued closure has forced Qatar Airways to fly longer routes to circumvent Saudi, UAE and Bahraini airspace at considerable cost to the airline. The report was widely seen as a trial balloon.

Similarly, Mr. Erdogan travelled last week to Germany with which it has had strained relations in a bid to increase his options following a summit with Vladimir Putin and Hassan Rouhani, the presidents of Russia and Iran, in which he for now delayed a Syrian-Russian assault on Idlib that would have sent hundreds of thousands, if not millions fleeing towards the Turkish border.

The limitations of the notion, apparently shared by German chancellor Angela Merkel and Mr. Erdogan, that deep differences can easily be put aside to pragmatically focus on issues of common interest, a key pillar of Middle Eastern alliances, were on display with the European Parliament this week voting to withhold 70 million euros in pre-accession funding because Turkey had failed to reverse its moves towards authoritarianism.

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