

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



October 02, 2016

The Plight of IDPs Ignored

As the security situation in Afghanistan has not been satisfactory for decades now, many people have been disturbed. There are many people who have left the country and are now refugees in other countries. Many others have been displaced in their own country but still they have suffered as the new places have brought about many challenges for them. They are identified as Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), and just like the immigrants, they also face different sorts of problems. However, their troubles are not highlighted as often as that of the refugees or immigrants.

A report by Amnesty International (IA), My Children Will Die This Winter: Afghanistan's Broken Promise to the Displaced, earlier this year showed that the number of people displaced in Afghanistan because of the prevailing violence and poverty had more than doubled over the past three years – it climbed from 500,000 to 1.2 million. The number is really large and shows how increasing insecurity and consistent poverty have victimized the poor people of Afghanistan. And, the trouble is not just the increasing number of the IDPs but also the different sorts of trouble these all people face while they become IDPs. And, recent reports from Uruzgan show that as heavy clashes continue in Trinkot city, thousands of families have left their homes and have fled to neighboring provinces including Kandahar. According to the local officials, nearly 6,000 families have escaped to Kandahar who are going through difficult times as they have poor access to food, water and other facilities. Mohammad Azam Nawabi, provincial director of Refugees and Repatriation Affairs, said in a statement, "At least 260 of the families have received assistance so far. We welcome this move and we hope that it continues by other individuals and organizations. Meanwhile, a number of displaced families have said that they are faced with numerous challenges – including lack of drinking water, shelter and food. The displaced families claim that Taliban used their houses as their strongholds, adding that government should ensure Uruzgan's security in the near future.

There is no doubt in the fact that IDPs face numerous problems including inadequate shelter, a lack of food and water as well as limited access to education, healthcare and employment. Unfortunately, this large number of people with so many troubles have not been able to gain much attention, neither by national authorities nor by international organizations.

It is important to see that there are not only physiological needs of these people; there are so many other requirements as well that they should get. Their psychological needs are also imperative but because there is no arrangement even for the physiological needs, the psychological and emotional needs are out of question. It is really difficult for the people to leave their homes and their birthplaces. The new places are always unknown to them and it is really difficult for them to adjust at such places. Moreover, the new places do not always welcome them with open arms. The people already living at that place may not be happy by the arrival of new people and may not be ready to share the limited resources that they have.

Few among them may be economically sound and they may have travelled because of insecurity. Only they are able to start their lives anew, while most of them suffer from poverty and thus they have no other option but to find support in one way or the other. In some cases, the government or private support may reach to them but that also proves to be insufficient or ill-managed.

In other cases, they are provided some shelters, where they can live and some food and drinking water; however, that is not adequate for them to stay healthy and fight diseases.

In the wake of such a condition, the arrangements by the Afghan government are almost non-existent. According to an earlier report by Amnesty International (AI), Afghan authorities promised to improve the conditions of the IDPs; however, the promises have not been fulfilled, instead the daily threats of forced eviction, from both government and private actors, of the IDPs have persisted on daily basis.

The Report also highlighted that in 2014, the Afghan government did endorse a new National Policy on Internally Displaced Persons, raising hopes of displaced people and their advocates that the situation would change. However, the Report found that the policy has not delivered for IDPs. Despite the comprehensive approach outlined, very little has happened in practice.

In reality, the policy is a failed promise and the situation for those who are internally displaced has deteriorated in the period since the policy was introduced.

So, as an urgent step, the government authorities must make sure that the IDPs get proper food, shelter, clothing and other needs like education and health facilities. Coupled with that, the authorities should also have a long-term strategy in place that should clearly highlight the steps to restore peace and tranquility in different parts of the country so that the IDPs return to their own houses, which they deserve.

Peace Agreement with HIA

By Hujjatullah Zia

Addressing a ceremony marking the 5th assassination anniversary of former head of High Peace Council (HPC) Professor Burhanuddin Rabbani on Friday, Jihadi leader Abdul Rab Rassoul Sayyaf urged Afghans to avoid tribal and linguistic discriminations in the supreme national interest. He called on the government to pay greater attention to strengthening Afghan security forces, and ensure strong national support to them. He hailed the sacrifices of Afghan forces as unprecedented in the country's history.

The Taliban envoy who had travelled to a Kabul house that fateful night, ostensibly to discuss peace, carried a more deadly message inside his turban, which murdered the head of HPC Professor Rabbani on 20 September 2011. Afghan officials offered an olive branch to the Taliban elements to come to negotiating table and stop spilling the blood of Afghan civilians and soldiers. Afghan HPC was established in 2010 to pave the way for truce. However, the Taliban have been refusing the peace offering and continue their acts of terror without mitigation. They have intensified their attacks in recent months and the graph of casualties has risen. The Qatar-based Taliban representatives persisted on pre-conditions for joining the peace process, which was announced at the Pugwash research center in Doha on January 23. The Taliban preconditions included complete withdrawal of the foreign forces from Afghanistan, official recognition of Taliban's political office in Qatar, removal of Taliban from United Nations terrorist blacklist, halt to the arrest and elimination of Taliban, and release of the Taliban inmates from prisons. It did not come to fruition and instability was intensified by the Taliban.

Subsequently, the peace agreement between the government and the HIA was inked on September 22 after negotiations within two years. The agreement was signed by HPC Chairman Pir Syed Ahmad Gilani and National Security Advisor Mohammad Hanif Atmar. During a ceremony, where President Ashraf Ghani confirmed the peace agreement with his party on Thursday, Hekmatyar hoped the pact would contribute to peace and stability in the country, saying both sides would soon start implementing all articles in the deal. An independent Afghanistan, national unity, respect for all sides and adherence to religious values were common goals of different political groups, he said. The HIA called on the high-profile figures of Afghanistan to support the groundbreaking deal. He urged all militant groups to the join peace process and realize their objective through peaceful means. In addition, Hekmatyar had message for both the Taliban and National Unity Government (NUG). He urged all warring factions, including the Taliban, to join peace process and resolve the political issues through peaceful means of negotiation. It is believed that his remarks will be of no significance since the Taliban and HIA were in conflicts and

had skirmishes in the past. It is believed that the Taliban leader Mullah Haibatullah will refuse to come to negotiating table and continue his fighters will continue the unmitigated insurgency. Hence, the HIA will be considered the Taliban's hostile once again and Hekmatyar's words will do more harm than good through triggering hatred among the Taliban elements.

On the other hand, Hekmatyar demanded the president accept some terms of the Taliban, including the release of key prisoners as gesture of goodwill for the sake of stability.

However, it is believed that the release of the Taliban prisoners will deteriorate the situation and destabilize the country more than ever before. When a number of their prisoners were freed during former President Hamid Karzai's administration as peace-offering, they rejoined the militant parties and spearheaded deadly attacks in the country. Will Hekmatyar ensure that the Taliban will hold talks and, in case of freeing their prisoners, will not rejoin the fighters?

The answer will be negative. The one, who has turned into Taliban's stronger hostile through joining NUG, will not be able to ensure a significant issue like this. Moreover, he has never the charisma of a religious leader nor carries the weight of a Mufti for the Taliban, that they give green light to his words.

President Ghani said, in a gathering in the presidential palace, that it was high time for Taliban and other groups to decide if they wanted to stand alongside their nation by joining the peace process like the HIA or choose to continue fighting and promoting insurgency.

Hekmatyar had a third message for a neighboring country not to invest in promoting conflict and killing in the warring country and not to seek its interest in waging a war in Afghanistan. He further asked the country's political leaders and the international community to help bring other fighting groups to the negotiating table.

Indeed, Afghan officials made huge sacrifices and great efforts to make peace and support democracy through bringing warring parties to peace table, despite the death of HPC's former head Prof. Rabbani. The peace agreement with HIA reveals the government's generous acts as it granted an amnesty to this party in spite of their terrorist acts in Afghanistan – this was considered a violation of human rights by Human Rights' Watchdog and triggered a sense of fear and hatred among the public.

Currently, the public hope for better with a sense of fear. It will be too early to judge about the outcome of this agreement. The process of time will reveal the result of the agreement and it is the readers to pass their judgment in this regard. After all, Afghan nation should be careful enough not to involve in sectarian and linguistic issues and will have to strengthen unity through focusing on shared interests, mainly in such a critical situation.

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Managing a Multipolar Europe

By Mark Leonard

People used to think that the most important decisions affecting Europe were made in Paris, Berlin, or Brussels.

But in recent months, as the European Union has confronted the refugee crisis, and the Syrian conflict that is fueling it, Moscow and Ankara have come to the fore. And the EU is divided on how to deal with its two disgruntled neighbors, Russia and Turkey, both of which feel increasingly snubbed by the West.

The EU-Russia relationship has long exposed EU member states' varying historic, geographic, and economic interests. While all EU countries agreed on sanctions against Russia after it annexed Crimea in March 2014, this temporary unity belies member states' fundamentally different views about the kind of relationship they want for the long term.

Europe's new cold warriors, such as Estonia, Poland, Sweden, and the United Kingdom, have stood up to Russian aggression; but Austria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Slovakia, and other countries only signed on to sanctions reluctantly, and are more open to engagement with Russian President Vladimir Putin's government.

Turkey is in a different category, because it is a NATO member and a candidate (at least in principle) for EU membership. But Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has been no less a source of division in Europe than Putin has. In the past, Turkey was seen as a potential EU member state and a model for Islamic liberal democracy; today, it is mainly seen as a geopolitical buffer zone.

For countries such as Germany and Greece, Turkey absorbs Middle Eastern refugees, as well as the spillover violence from which they are fleeing; in other EU countries such as Austria and France, however, mainstream political leaders tend to criticize Erdoğan to attract voters from the political right. This will make it more difficult to implement the deal – brokered by German Chancellor Angela Merkel earlier this year – that gives Turkey financial support, and its citizens visa-free travel to the EU, in exchange for its cooperation on containing refugee flows.

The coming weeks will test Europe's resolve on both sanctions against Russia and the deal with Turkey, especially now that Merkel's authority is waning. A breakdown in these arrangements would cause a major crisis for the EU, which is already divided between north and south by the chronic euro crisis.

Both Putin and Erdoğan are leaders who have been shaped by their domestic insecurity and the need to project strength. Europeans, however, have trouble maintaining relationships that pit their geopolitical interests against their desire to defend human rights and uphold international law. In fact, the

EU seems to have no conceptual framework for accommodating neighboring countries that aren't actively importing its norms and regulations.

But the EU's problem with both Turkey and Russia is about more than difficult personalities or inadequate policies; it is rooted in the European order itself. When the Cold War ended, the EU and NATO were at the center of an expanding unipolar order that, it was assumed, would establish the conditions for European security. In fact, this was far from guaranteed.

Six years ago, Ivan Krastev and I wrote a paper for the European Council on Foreign Relations warning of the specter of a multipolar Europe, wherein the rules and institutions affecting European countries would not all be decided by the EU. That specter has become a living reality.

Today, the EU is just one of several European projects. Russia is now as hostile to the EU as it is to NATO, and has created a Eurasian Economic Union to serve as an alternative regional unification effort. Russia is also doing its best to hollow out from within European institutions such as the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the Council of Europe.

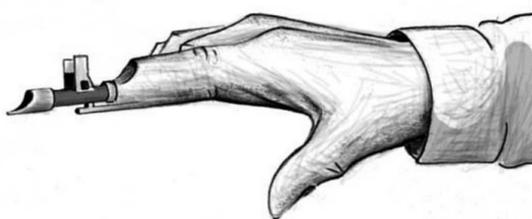
Turkey, for its part, no longer considers its regional aspirations satisfied by its role as a NATO member or its EU accession candidacy. Its own regional policy has changed significantly, from "zero problems with neighbors" to "zero neighbors without problems." But Turkey is now a critical player, because its geopolitical reach covers regions where the EU and Russia are both actively engaged – from the Balkans and Central Asia to the Middle East.

With Turkey's accession process stalled and the conflict in Eastern Ukraine still raging, the EU is beholden to countries with which it has increasingly complex political relations. There is much handwringing in Europe over the possibility that Turkey and Russia could form an alliance against the EU. That worry may be premature. The Turkish-Russian relationship has warmed recently, but not by much. The two countries are still divided on many issues, from Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's future to Black Sea security and the annexation of Crimea.

Still, the EU needs to develop fresh thinking so that member states can agree on how best to manage these relationships. If it does not, it could find itself increasingly isolated and alone in a neighborhood where new powers have moved in.

From Eastern Europe and the Balkans to Central Asia and Syria, Europe's periphery could shake its core. (Courtesy Project Syndicate)

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