

What is Needed to Enhance National Security?

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The people in Afghanistan, especially the Afghan women, are still hopeful, they still see a bright future for their children. They still see that Afghanistan is on the right track towards peace building and security. But increasingly from day to day, they also see bad signs that are creating concerns and worry. These signs come from two sides. First, they are caused by international actors. Second, there are feelings of insecurity originating from within, from internal factors.

Let us start with the external factors, the international community as a whole. To be honest, it cannot be said to be in Afghanistan to fight terrorism. Sometimes it seems to have other priorities, other agendas, and the country and homeland of the Afghans is once again used as a battlefield. It is the question of every Afghan whether today, after seven years of peace agreements, peace accords and political transition processes, are they the real priorities of the international community? Is peace and development in Afghanistan, is the social security for individuals in Afghanistan the priority? Women are concerned and would ask the international community: "Are you really concerned that today we have the highest maternal mortality rate in the world? Are you really concerned that today we do not have schools, we do not even have tents where we can learn to read? Are you really concerned that we do not have water? Are you really concerned that after seven years we do not have electric power in Kabul? It is a very big city and millions – billions – of dollars are being poured inside Afghanistan. Why don't we, on the very local level, see these things happening?" The Afghans are not unrealistic and want everything to happen overnight. But they want to see at least something which gives comfort, which heals their traumas and make them become comfortable. There is still trust in that the international community is in Afghanistan to support the Afghans, to give them food and shelter, and to provide them with very basic human rights.

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It would not be a big deal for Afghans to remove the Taliban. If they had trust in their government, if they had trust in the international community, they would remove them by their own power and willpower. There would not be a need for such huge interventions or such huge amounts of money to be poured in. Our single security person working with the police or in the army, although getting a salary of only 70 dollars monthly, could with his willpower, his courage and his love to the country, could be very effective in fighting terrorism.

But people are not taking part in the fight against terrorism. They have left everything to the international forces or the Afghan national army just because they do not trust. Trust does not come when, from the beginning of the peace agreement process, different people who were violators of human rights, whose hands were full of the blood of the people, were talking about peace and democracy in Afghanistan. But still people had hope, saying that maybe they would come up with new faith and bring peace and stability to Afghanistan. But it did not happen. In each of the four or five stages of the process of state building and political legitimacy in Afghanistan, whether it was Loya Jirga, the constitutional law making process, or parliamentary and presidential elections, it just ended up legitimising those who had been involved in killing people and destroying their homes, bringing chaos into Afghanistan.

Today, people on local levels are concerned about having to negotiate with the groups who have been, and who are, the principal human rights violators. Women cannot forget that they had to wear burka on the street and could not go out of the house without being accompanied by a man – if they did they were beaten. They cannot forget that acid was thrown on them just because they were bare faced. All those sufferings caused by the Taliban cannot be forgotten. Today they are again asked to sit down and negotiate. If the Afghan government and the international community were strong enough to take the fight for human rights or to fight against terrorism and show some success, such negotiations would be accepted. But now, when they are jeopardising the security of each Afghan, where is the

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legitimacy in sitting with them? Why will once again the mistakes be repeated that have been repeated for many years?

In these matters the Afghans feel that even if they fight against the Taliban today, they may be in power tomorrow, so why worry? They just try to keep the small-scale security and peace that they still have in their homes. Why should they fight a local commander – maybe tomorrow he will be the governor of the province, so why take the risk? They have been fighting for the last thirty years for sovereignty of their state, for protection of their land, for protection, respect and honour of their women. Why should they fight now again, and for whom? They are really concerned about all these strategies and policies which are making them confused, but from which they do not see any real impact on field level.

The security in the western region and the neighbouring provinces of Afghanistan has been badly disrupted. The Taliban are not much of a problem there. But now, after many years of calm, there are some anti-government elements emerging. They do not see trust in the government in terms of keeping the security, of listening to their voices or of bringing peace to them. Trust is missing not only in the Afghan government but also in the international community, both in external and internal matters. This is one of the major factors which are destabilising the situation in Afghanistan.

In the beginning people warmly welcomed the international community, which came up with the slogans of development, food, water, shelter, protection – the whole package. People wanted to hear these things and were happy to see all the international actors coming and to work with them. But things did not turn out well. Some the major donors who are represented here should know that the Afghans are really thankful for the different funds they receive from different organisations. But activities are mostly very short term. It is a bit like betraying people, like telling them that they will become literate in six months.

Afghans have reasons to act, but they do not have the capacity yet. They certainly do not want to remain at their present low capacity level, and there have been a lot of changes in the last

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years, they are gaining capacity. But at least until they are coming out of this war, out of this violence, out of all catastrophic situations, they need some sincere hands to help. However, sometimes they see, from these sincere hands, that they are not the host, they are the guests in their own country. They do not have any ownership over any project. The work and activities which the PRTs are performing in Afghanistan are not totally aligned with the priorities of Afghans. Their priorities are different. Now the projects are designed outside of Afghanistan. When implemented, the Afghans are not satisfied. If they are not implemented, again they are not satisfied, because at least these projects give livelihood opportunities to five or six people who are involved.

The voices of the Afghans are heard very little. With all projects which are coming into Afghanistan for development, there is like a kind of mafia. There are layers and layers of contractors who are performing the development work, and the money which should go to reconstruction work, or to protection, is trickling through all these layers. When it reaches the real project implementation there is very little left. There is also a lack of monitoring of the development work. But what can be expected from a poor, or weak, government? Its staff is getting only 60-70 dollars per month, while there are consultants with 10-20,000 dollars, or even more. How can there be trust between them? How could civil society actors with very handsome salaries and government staff with such low pay work together? What is there to make a balance? There is a kind of capital market establishing in Afghanistan, but the poor do not get anything out of it. The rich may become richer, maybe some people with some skills are earning good salaries. But that is not the case for ordinary people who suffer from the many decades of war. The government teachers earn 50 dollars a month, and with 50 dollars they can only buy a sack of wheat and oil, nothing more. How could anyone expect that there would not be any corruption among the government staff? There are also statistics saying that international forces get one billion dollars per month for running their costs, but a person in the Afghan national army gets only 50-70 dollars per month.

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Pointing at these imbalances is not trying to take the side of government, but it shows a kind of discrimination in the whole business of aid work, of aid effectiveness. It has created tension among the people, who have lost their trust. Unless the problem of poverty is not tackled, unless the people in the communities are not reached and their basic needs are addressed, peace and stability cannot be reached in Afghanistan.

It would be unrealistic to say that the situation of Afghanistan can change quickly, but at least people want to get something from this government and from the peace process. To give an example: three outreach workers were sent out in the field to work with human rights and women's rights. They were chocked because in the entire community there were only three men. The rest had gone to other provinces for poppy cultivation, as it was during harvest time, to earn their living.

These outreach workers, standing in front of poor people, felt sometimes ashamed when talking about luxurious issues like gender equality, democracy, etc. They were bombarding their listeners with big words, but the people did not have anything to eat and had to send their children to work out of their homes. Either by hook or by crook they had to bring the money. Such a situation is hurting and can not create the desired commitment.

Everything is possible, especially in a country like Afghanistan which is not that big and where there is a strong potential for peace, where people have warmly welcomed the international community to come and help us, where peace and security mean everything to the people. The Afghans do not want to see the international community fail in such a small country with so much potential for peace, for everything.

With a clear strategy among the international community, and if Afghanistan is its priority for peace, then insecurity in Afghanistan can be tackled very easily. However, some of the countries neighbouring western Afghanistan are concerned that the international community is not in Afghanistan to support the Afghan people but have other agendas. They are preparing to defend themselves and are trying to create an insecure situation in Herat. There are examples of the same in other parts of Afghanistan. So if some countries are in Afghanistan because

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they have other agendas for the neighbouring countries or for other reasons, then this vicious circle of poverty and insecurity will remain.

There must be coordinated efforts with a clear strategy, involving regional groups and the countries of the region, to come to discuss and partake in the peace building process of Afghanistan. Otherwise, if they are left out, they will feel that the agenda is not peace in this region, the agenda about is something else and they are not part of it. The international community will then not fight international terrorism; they will fight with several countries just because of their own interest.

However, the international community cannot be blamed for everything. There are also weaknesses inside the country. There is a lack of capacity inside the government offices, which are short of staff and other resources. Still, throughout the past seven years there were some chances to make a better work, but the government did not use those chances. Most Afghans are very upset about the recycling and reshuffling of faces which did not contribute a lot. They are upset about deals with local commanders and about the lack of a clear government strategy for poppy eradication. Alternative livelihood projects are not provided and this is an area where the international community can contribute. So far all poppy projects have been on very short term and therefore not realistic. A long-term coherent plan is needed to end the poppy business in Afghanistan, which is one main source of insecurity in Afghanistan.

The whole culture of impunity is still in place, and it is creating lots of security problems. In Herat, a trend of extortion and kidnapping has started recently. It first hit the top level like the business community. Then it has affected the middle class: doctors' sons have been abducted, and the kidnappers demanded more than 10,000 dollars. Now it is coming further down in the community, to local people in the *bazaar*. Their sons or daughters are abducted and the kidnappers ask for high ransoms. The increasing criminal activities show that people have lost their trust in the government, and that neither the law enforcement bodies nor the security forces are working. The security bodies

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are also taking part in the criminal activities, which is upsetting the people very much.

In spite of all this, the Afghans still have hope. They are hopeful that whoever is elected in the upcoming election will create a strong team. There is also hope that the election will decrease the control and power of those who took part in the Bonn Agreement just for fighting terrorism.

As a conclusion this must be stressed: the Afghans are hopeful, they believe that if there is a strong political will, both at international and national level, there are people who work for peace. The country is ready for a social change and for all kinds of development work. The peoples of Afghanistan, with different cultures and different identities, have always lived in peace together. This is still possible if the culture of impunity comes to an end, if the atrocities of the past are fought, if culprits and human rights violators are kept outside of providing services to the people. Justice must be done, it will benefit Afghanistan. The government must, at least, acknowledge this and carry out a vetting process. That will give the people some peace of mind. Otherwise they will see it as if first the warlords and then the Taliban were brought to the peace table, but there was no place for them. Again they will see the same cycle of atrocities, humiliation and violence against women and children.

The problem of transitional justice must be taken very seriously. Coordination must be very strong at the international level in term of tackling the issues of terrorism. The priorities of the Afghan people must be very clear and all efforts coordinated in order to reach these priorities.