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Corruption is Threatening Afghan Society

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One of the most frustrating issues for Afghanistan is corruption. Today, it has penetrated deep within Afghan society and there are no tangible measures to control it. Unfortunately, it is also one of reasons that despite so much assistance and aid, Afghan society has not been able to make considerable development. Most of the money has gone to the authoritative personnel or the warlords, while the poor and needy people have remained thriving. Ill-fatedly, fighting corruption has not been on the agenda for the US as well. It has been ignored, in several cases, even strengthened by them.

Recently, John F. Sopko, the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR), addressing students at the University of Pittsburgh Graduate School of Public and international Affairs, said, “After insecurity and unemployment, corruption was the most important reason that Afghans felt their country was moving in the wrong direction... Corruption was not always at the top of the U.S agenda in Afghanistan. In fact, some would argue that it still is not given the importance it deserves. SIGAR has created an office on Lessons Learned from Afghanistan and is preparing a report on how the U.S government understood corruption there and sought to combat it. It will show that the U.S government initially had little understanding that corruption could threaten its entire security and state-building mission... Indeed, during the U.S invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 and for some years to follow, the United States partnered with abusive warlords and their militias to pursue al-Qaeda and the Taliban, and supported the installation of these warlords and their militias at high levels of the Afghan government. The United States also failed to recognize that vast sums of money injected into the Afghan economy, with limited oversight and pressures to spend, created conditions for corruption.”

It is really difficult to think of any decisive victory in Afghanistan without beating corruption. It will always stand as a wall and needs to be destroyed before moving ahead. US, must now, at least, make efforts to tackle it before it is too late. The reconstruction and reintegration of the Afghan society largely depends on the efforts directed towards curbing the growing corruption. There is no other way out. If US is really interested in making real development works in Afghanistan it must deal with the issue of corruption first. In the words of Sopko, "Corruption poses a deadly threat to the entire U.S effort to rebuild Afghanistan,"

Afghan authorities, themselves, require making efforts to control the serpent of corruption. However, they themselves have been on the advantageous side. The previous government made little efforts to do anything worthwhile. And, the current government also seems reluctant to take any decisive step. Though in its early days National Unity Government (NUG) made some promises that it would do something regarding corruption but it seems that the promises have been forgotten.

Mostly, NUG blames insecurity for the lack of attention towards other issues particularly corruption, but it fails to realize that controlling corruption should be one of the main steps towards improving security. Without defeating corruption or controlling it, it would be really difficult to fight insecurity. Any effort for confronting insecurity would end up in smoke if the intentions, processes and personnel are corrupt and this has been happening in most of the cases. NUG, therefore, needs to understand the link between the two and prepare itself to eradicate the cause first.

It also needs to do the same as far as political and economic stability are concerned. Afghanistan cannot continue its journey towards a politically and economically stable society unless it takes a bold step against corruption. As Sopko says, "It is true that the governing coalition in Afghanistan remains fragile. As Director of National Intelligence James Clapper recently testified, in 2016, the Afghan government faces the risk of a political breakdown. But we at SIGAR are convinced that the dangers of letting corruption run rampant are greater than the risk of disrupting the entrenched practices of Afghan officials."

Afghan government, therefore, needs to have a comprehensive strategy in dealing with the situation; otherwise, it would further destabilize the society. Corruption basically generates a sort of injustice within the society and adds to the grievances and difficulties of the people. Those who deserve are not awarded because of corruption and they ultimately take steps to make up for their rights through illegal ways. The large bulk of assistance that were given and received in the name of the poor and needy people of Afghanistan, never reached them and their lives still remain miserable. Finding government officials gaining advantages that are meant for the poor people, make the people question the legitimacy of the government and they, ultimately, decide to join the opposing forces.

With the rampant corruption threatening the stability, security and legitimacy of Afghan society, there is no other option for the Afghan government to take quick and effective measures to control it, while US must make serious efforts in this regard as well. Otherwise, expecting any progress without curbing corruption would be nothing more than a day dreaming.