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Examiner

Lawlessness, corruption in Afghanistan creates more terrorism: Think tank

By Jim Kouri

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The virtual absence of justice by the Afghan government and its backers following the accidental burning of Korans by U.S. soldiers is adding additional fuel to the insurgency in Afghanistan and presents a serious strategic risk, claims a new report from a British international security think-tank.

The report -- which was published before Barack Obama's apologies and statements on the violence against the US war forces in Afghanistan by some Afghan soldiers, police and protesters -- argues that any strategy to create long-term stability in Afghanistan must place justice at its core. (Read: Koran Burning Leads to Numerous US Apologies)

No Shortcut to Stability: Justice, Politics and Insurgency in Afghanistan documents how illegal land grabs, the "political marginalizing of tribal and factional rivals and arbitrary detention" have motivated Afghans to join or support the Taliban. Other factors -- money, drugs and foreign interference -- also drive the insurgency but case studies of Helmand, Kandahar and Badghis provinces demonstrate the central role of injustice in the growth of the insurgency.

The report shows how justice issues are also implicated in the insurgency's spread outside its southern Pashtun base.

Carter and Clark found that the Afghan government continues to disregard accountability -- passing an amnesty law for war criminals, issuing presidential pardons for well-connected drug smugglers, criminals and Taliban commanders and undermining key anti-corruption bodies and electoral monitoring bodies. The international response is almost invariably weak. Talks with the Taliban at the table, putting justice at the heart of policy is more crucial than ever.

For example, recently the Law Enforcement Examiner reported on rampant pedophilia in a country that is considered overly repressive due to its adherence to the precepts contained in the Muslim religion's Koran. It's difficult for American service members and diplomats to understand the fact that a large portion of the Afghan male population are pedophiles (adults who enjoy sexual contact with prepubescent children) or pederasts (adults who enjoy sexual relations with pubescent or post-pubescent children).

The report's co-author, Stephen Carter, says: "The insurgency's rise over the last nine years, fueled in large part by injustice and abuse of power, requires the Afghan government and its international partners to address these issues as essential to long-term stability. Justice and rule of law cannot be dismissed as just matters of morality and human rights. They are critical issues of strategic self-interest."

The Taliban have exploited the justice deficit of the Karzai administration and its foreign backers fully -- a clear indicator of the strategic importance of the issue to insurgents. Justice features heavily in the insurgents' campaign both in propaganda condemning the current government and the foreign occupation as corrupt and oppressive, and in the provision of courts as the first and often only service to populations under their control.

"The Taliban have played on the deep desire of Afghans for security and rule of law, and nostalgia in some quarters for the 'harsh, but just' period of Taliban rule -- a nostalgia which exists despite the Taliban's many abuses," said Kate Clark, the report's co-author.

The report examines how short-term fixes have repeatedly trumped justice, playing into the hands of insurgents and fostering the development of a 'mafia' state in Afghanistan. NATO's close cooperation with local strongmen, the build-up of the Afghan police as a paramilitary rather than civilian force and weak judicial reform efforts coupled with unchecked corruption have undermined any counter-insurgency strategy based on building an effective, legitimate and accountable government.