**Security, democracy and development crises**

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In my article last week, I wrote about the ongoing security crisis in Europe, involving Russia, Ukraine, NATO and Western Europe as a whole. The week before, I wrote about issues related to the transition from authoritarian rule to democracy, prompted by the recent unrest in Kazakhstan, earlier a part of the Soviet Union. I also drew attention to former European colonies in Africa and Asia, which history still cast shadows upon.

Sadly, it seems the crisis in Europe has escalated this week and has become more directed towards concrete aspects of the East-West relations, indeed NATO’s expansion. The Kazakhstan unrest seems to have been stifled with over 10,000 arrested and over 230 dead, according to reports. Russia sent a few thousand personnel to assist Kazakhstan as they are both members of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the organisation created after the fall of the Soviet Union in 1989-1991.

In January this year, Norway holds the chair in the UN Security Council (UNSC) and is an elected non-permanent member of UNSC for a two-year period, 2021-2022. The Norwegian PM Jonas Gahr Støre visited New York this week and chaired a couple of SC meetings, including on the protection of civilians in armed conflicts, and the UN’s role in Afghanistan. Støre also held separate talks with the UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres. The UN is certainly concerned about the security crisis in Europe, and the Kazakhstan unrest, but it does not get directly involved as long as no border violations have taken place, but it can and must give advice and recommendations. The Kazakhstan discontent is likely to return, sooner or later, and there may be similar situations in other states in Central Asia and elsewhere, since the countries seem not to give enough attention to development of democracy issues and people’s participation.

[Somali military kills 28 al-Shabaab terrorists in 48 hours](https://nation.com.pk/29-Jan-2022/somali-military-kills-28-al-shabaab-terrorists-in-48-hours)

The Norwegian PM’s New York visit focused on all these issues, and in a podcast by the Oslo newspaper ‘Aftenposten’, he also spoke about the US, underlining that in spite of the US having challenges in some fields, he said we should not underestimate the energy of the land. He said he was always inspired by visits to the US, indeed New York, but due to the corona pandemic, he had not been able to visit for a good while.

While Støre was out of his country, the Norwegians facilitated the organising of independent, unofficial meetings in Oslo of fifteen top Taliban leaders and politicians, aid organisations and civil society organisations from USA, Germany, France and Italy, as well the UN and EU. Some individuals and organisations from Afghanistan, Norway and elsewhere criticised the hosts for giving the Afghan regime, not recognised by any Western country, a platform to discuss issues. Others were glad the meetings were held, saying it was about high time as Afghanistan is in a very difficult situation caused by drought and for other reasons, including that foreign aid and assets abroad have been frozen. It has been reported that up to half of the land’s people suffer from severe food shortages, risking starvation, and there is a health crisis.

[Western Balkans see highest COVID deaths per 100,000 globally](https://nation.com.pk/29-Jan-2022/western-balkans-see-highest-covid-deaths-per-100-000-globally)

The country’s not receiving aid and accessing its resources abroad since the Taliban take-over in August 2021 means that payments of teachers, doctors, and other civil servants cannot be made, and goods cannot be purchased and distributed. The banking system is not working so even the miniscule aid that is coming in can only be reached by trucks from Pakistan, and some from Iran and other countries in the region.

In summing up the three-day meetings in Oslo, Jan Egeland, former UN Emergency Coordinator and Deputy Norwegian Minister of Foreign Affairs, underlined the urgency of getting work done to help the people of Afghanistan. In the press conference on Tuesday evening, he said that the Taliban had agreed to a number of conditions and measurable indicators that must be implemented when receiving aid, such as better observance of gender equality and human rights. He said that girls’ education through secondary school would be allowed, and that when the new school year opens after ‘Nowruz’ at the end of March, we will be able to see how well that agreement is followed. He said that the Taliban centrally agreed to this, but that there would be local disagreement, too, and some local leaders would feel, or be forced by ultra-conservatives in towns and villages, to define their own rules.

[4.5 magnitude earthquake jolts parts of Swat](https://nation.com.pk/28-Jan-2022/4-5-magnitude-earthquake-jolts-parts-of-swat)

Jan Egeland, now heading the large Norwegian NGO of NPA with operations in Afghanistan, said that the world has no alternative to cooperating with the regime and organisations of Afghanistan. He and the Taliban spokesman Shafi Azam stressed the good talks that had taken place in Oslo, including positive American inputs. Yet, Egeland said, tremendous tasks lie ahead and we will have to wait to see how well it all goes. It should be noted, too, that unless improvements happen fast, the Taliban regime would face political challenges from other groups; indeed, there would be a refugee disaster, and terrible sufferings.

I was myself particularly glad that Egeland admitted to the fact that the West has a great deal of responsibility for the difficult situation Afghanistan is in, after twenty years of occupation by the West and NATO. The occupation was not a time of development of democracy although some positive things happened, mainly with regards to a new mindset about gender issues and human rights. But we should also realise that the cost of the foreign countries’ operations in Afghanistan, and the actual positive impact of what they did, had terrible shortcomings and was many times negative.

[PSL 2022: Peshawar Zalmi beat Quetta Gladiators in nail-biting thriller](https://nation.com.pk/28-Jan-2022/psl-2022-peshawar-zalmi-beat-quetta-gladiators-in-nail-biting-thriller)

I would suggest that a small fraction of all foreign aid and military funds allocated to Afghanistan during the last twenty years actually reached the country and had a positive impact, while the rest went back to the donors in the form of salaries to consultants and soldiers, the purchasing of equipment, and so on. Sadly, there was also a lack of goodwill and competence. Hence, all people of good will, also the Taliban, do have the right to prepare goals and targets for the donors’ help and war compensation, not only the West listing their demands and conditions. True, now when the new Taliban leaders have taken over they would also have a shortage of experience, skills, routines, and knowledge of how to rule a war-torn and extremely poor country of 40 million people, where little funds are earned except for through aid. The heroin and other drug trade falls mainly outside government control, although when the Taliban’s ruled in the late 1990s the sector was said to have shrunk.

[Anarkali bomb blast: JIT constituted for investigation](https://nation.com.pk/28-Jan-2022/anarkali-bomb-blast-jit-constituted-for-investigation)

Let me end my article today by not only focusing on Afghanistan, but also on the other issues I mentioned at the beginning of my article: the security crisis in Europe directly affecting Ukraine and Russia, the internal Kazakhstan unrest, with possible, maybe likely, recurrence there and elsewhere in the region. In all these situations, it is important to understand that there was authoritarian rule in the counties, as it was earlier in the former colonies, and that after such rule it will take time and the right political skills and values to improve situations. Indeed as for the Russia-Europe crisis, it should have been addressed earlier, and the West bears its share of the burden, the lack of peace and development in Russia and better East-West cooperation. In future, we must be better history students and not sweep difficulties under the carpet and leave them pending. We must focus on how countries can develop from authoritarian rule to democracy.