

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



April 21, 2015

The Waning Tranquility

The tranquility in major provinces of Afghanistan is once again waning as insurgents have intensified their attacks. With the start of spring every year Taliban insurgents start their Spring Offensive and this year they have started it with some very horrible attacks in different parts of the country. People had not forgotten the attacks in Badakhshan and Balkh when they had to hear the tragic news about the incident in Jalalabad.

A horrifying attack in front of Kabul Bank in Jalalabad City, the capital of Nangarhar province on Saturday, April 18, left around 34 people dead and around 127 others injured. According to news reports the attack was a suicide attack and the suicide bomber riding a motor bike exploded himself in front of the bank, killing mostly the civilians. The attack was really cowardly as it was intended to kill civilians, mostly government employees who were to receive their salaries from the bank.

Another blast in the city took place near Doki Baba Shrine, close to the department of information and culture; fortunately, it did not result in any casualties but two poor children were, ill-fatedly, wounded in the explosion.

The persecution of the Afghan people because of insecurity in various parts of the country is really a serious problem and must be dealt as a top priority matter. Some of the current events in the country clearly exposed that the lives of the civilians are at risk and the Taliban are chiefly responsible for it. The incidents showed that Taliban have started targeting the civilians directly. Moreover, the butchery shown in the incidents are really heinous and there have to be serious steps to counter them otherwise they would threaten the lives of the common people to a great extent.

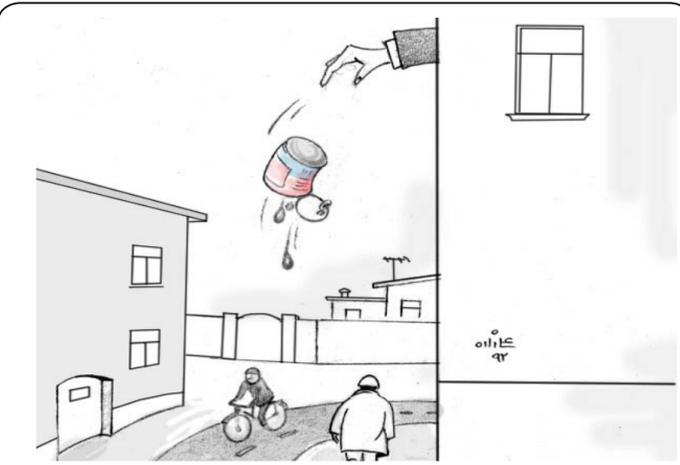
Taliban, on various occasions, have claimed that they would not target the civilians directly but the reality is totally against what is claimed by them. Recent UN report has also revealed that most of the civilian killings are because of Taliban insurgents. Civilian killings, therefore, clearly depict that Taliban do not care much about the civilian casualties; what they mostly care about is their threat and dominance over the security arrangements. Regrettably, they chase their objectives through the cowardly means of targeting the innocent civilians. Different attacks, bombings, shootings and suicide bombings of the vicious guardians of the so-called holy war have only been able to target the children, women and non-military figures. With the presence of such facts, it is weird to find Taliban calling themselves friendly to Afghan people. They have been trying to develop an image of caring and affectionate body that is trying to free the people of Afghanistan from the Western forces. Nonetheless the fact is just on the contrary. They just want supremacy and for that they will never pause to sacrifice the poor Afghan people. If they regain power, it is obvious that Afghan people will under no circumstances have peace, serenity and above all their due rights.

Saturday's blast has been widely condemned. Afghan government, the Resolute Support mission, UNAMA, civil society and governments of different countries have categorically condemned the ruthless killing of guiltless civilians.

A statement from Presidential Palace on Saturday said that President Ghani condemned the blast in strongest terms and said that bomb blasts in public places are the work of coward, senseless and anti-state elements who don't have the courage to fight Afghan forces. Similarly, MoI said that these heinous acts go against the values of humanity as well values of peaceful Afghans. These attacks also demonstrate extreme level of atrocity by terrorist against innocent and defenseless civilians.

Though these condemnations are necessary, Afghan government needs to do something more than mere condemnation. It has to understand the fact that the insurgents have become very active and trying to pressurize the government and the people through their cowardly attacks. It has to come up with a practical strategy and strive to use all resources available so as to maintain peace and tranquility in the country and must not let the insurgents gain strength at this crucial juncture.

The government must pursue peace talks but at the same time it must not remain quiet when the terrorists adopt the path of terror and violence. So as to control their violence, it must use force and let them know that Afghan security forces are in the position to answer them properly if they intend to adopt any path other than peaceful negotiations. In order to bring them to negotiation table it is important that Afghan government must show its strength and be able to dictate its own terms and conditions. Invitations of peace alone would never make the negotiations with Taliban a success. Afghan government, in this regard, must stand strong and use both force and diplomacy at the same time. The lives of the innocent people of Afghanistan stand as the most important consideration and the government has the responsibility to make sure that people live with peace and tranquility and are not sacrificed for some filthy objectives.



A Major Success for the Unity Government

By Abdul Ahad Bahrami

The approval of 16 cabinet nominees by the Wolesi Jirga on Saturday came as a major development ending months of administrative and leadership uncertainty in the government. All 16 cabinet nominees managed to secure votes of confidence of the Lower House of the Parliament. The approval of the cabinet picks as a full package was unexpected for many as most of the nominees had been rejected by the Wolesi Jirga in the previous round of voting. With the Saturday voting deciding the fate of a majority of the cabinet posts, the government cabinet formation is now almost finalized, with only the defense post remaining vacant. With the cabinet now almost fully functional, the leaders of the National Unity Government (NUG) hope they will be able to better run government affairs and get the ailing economy back on track. After seven months of delays in forming the cabinet, the development came as a major success for Afghanistan's unity government. In an attempt to complete the cabinet as quickly as possible, the government had asked the Parliament to approve the new nominees. Previously, President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani and CEO Abdullah Abdullah had promised major reforms after they agreed on formation of the unity government. However, their efforts faced obstacles as they were not able to quickly agree on nominations for the government posts and resolve the fate of the cabinet. The prolonged process of approving the nominees by the Lower House of the parliament resulted to increased disappointments among the public.

In Saturday's voting, most of the cabinet nominees managed to secure far more votes than the number required for being approved as ministers. While the unanimous approval of the cabinet nominees' package was mostly welcomed by the public, there have also been questions regarding the u-turn approach of the MPs to the approval of the cabinet nominees compared to the previous round. In the previous round, the situation was tense when the nominees presented their plans and on the day of voting, while this time the mood was far more optimistic among the MPs. Some have doubts that there may have been trading and secret deals between the MPs and cabinet nominees for votes of confidence. However, the fact is that many factors had been involved in the approval of all of the government nominees in Saturday's voting in the parliament. One of the major reasons behind the unanimous voting on Saturday was of the urgency to end the chaotic situation and enable the government to perform efficiently. The delayed approval of the government cabinet by the MPs had bought criticisms for the house. It was believed that the Lower House of the parliament was in part responsible for the increasing security, administrative and economic challenges in the country. The members of the parliament felt responsible in this regard and therefore, responded the call from the government officials and approved the cabinet picks. In addition to that, top political figures and government leaders as well as the introduced nominees all made efforts to convince the MPs to approve the nominees. According to reports, many of the cabinet nominees talked to the members of the parliament to vote for them. All

these factors resulted to the unexpected outcome of the Saturday voting in the Lower House of the parliament.

With the government in limbo in last seven months, caretaker ministers run the government and public day to day affairs. The caretaker government officials in the center and the provinces had no sufficient authority in running the administrative affairs of the relevant departments or provinces. Many crucial activities in government departments like human resource and development affairs of the government had been virtually stalled as the officials had been stripped of their power and authority to run those activities. This had caused major insufficiencies in performances of the government departments and some aspects of the government functionality were effectively crippled. Despite that the leaders of the NUG had promised to curtail corruption, the ineffective governance in the past seven months did not help achieving the pledges of the unity government leaders. It is expected that the finalization of the government cabinet would quickly enable the government to restore efficient governance in the country and improve the overall situation.

Despite the major step forward, a number of key government posts are not filled. The government has not been able to introduce a nominee for the key defense ministry as there seem to be differences between the NUG leaders. Also, the NUG is expected to appoint heads of the Supreme Court and the Attorney General Office. Given the adverse security conditions, the government has been under increasing pressures to resolve the fate of the key security post. In recent weeks, there have been deadly security incidents across the country. Killing of dozens of army soldiers in northern Badakhshan province caused public outrage. Many believe that the delay in introducing defense nominee has resulted to uncertainty in the ministry of defense. Many attributed the carnage to lack of leadership from the ministry of defense.

The ongoing security challenges may further compound if the ministry remains without a minister. With the fighting season going on, policy and army are going to engage in fierce fighting across the country. Afghan security forces have already launched operations to contain the insurgency and push back the resurgent Taliban and the newly emerging Islamic State group. This year will be a critical test for the government of Afghanistan to lead the campaign against the Taliban and other militant groups along with embarking on peace negotiations. A fully functional government will be better positioned to provide the political support and consensus for devising an extensive plan for the anti-insurgency campaign. The approval of about two thirds of the government cabinet was a major success for the NUG after months of delays in conclusion of the cabinet formation. The people of Afghanistan expect rapid improvements to the situation in the country and better performance from the government. Now, it is time that the government leaders set aside their remaining differences and quickly act to fill the remaining key posts of the government and the judiciary system.

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Improvement in US-Cuba Ties!

By Muhammad Rasool Shah

Having realized the mistakes and horrible outcomes of mistakes by Bush administration, much was expected of Barack Obama but unfortunately, he was not able to bring much evident diversion in the status-quo and the world is still suffering of the follies planted by Bush administration. It simply shows that the machinery of government or bureaucracy is so strong that a president elected for four years or even eight years may not be much successful to bring much tangible change and the same thing happened with Obama. It is the reason that, all the celebrations on the selection of Obama and the hopes from his reign later on turned out to be exaggerated optimism. However, it is the internal matter of the government of the United States and the factors involved may be better understood and analyzed by the political experts or think tanks working and observing the things in Washington or in the States.

As the final term of Obama is ending and preparations for the next presidential elections have already started, a few decisions of Obama administration need positive observation and appreciation. It was also during the rule of Obama that US had almost started another war in the war-torn Middle East by launching an attack on Syria but thanks to the bold voices from British Parliament, this plan came under severe criticism and had to be rolled back, first by its major ally Britain and then by the US as well. However, it remains a credit to Obama that US avoided another folly as Bush administration had initiated two such attacks in two restive regions of the world. Another positive work was his loud voice to close the notorious Guantanamo prison. Though the congress has rejected this decision to close the prison and transfer the prisoners to prisons inside America, Obama did his duty by taking a clear stance in this regard. It was also during his rule that drone attacks in different parts of the world were considerably decreased. No need to mention here the drastic consequences of these attacks in which majority were misdirected and harmed the American image badly when thousands of innocent citizens were targeted in different parts of the world. The latest addition in this list is the breakthrough in the Iran-West talks on Iran's nuclear program. This could have never been possible without a positive signal from the United States, which was the major stakeholder in this issue.

One of the most important and historic breakthrough in the world politics was seen in Americas summit that was held in Panama City last week. In this summit, American president met with his Cuban counterpart, which is the first high-level meeting of the leaders of archrivals in more than 50 years. American President Obama and Cuban president Raul Castro held a face-to-face meeting and gave optimistic and positive comments in the following press conference. Obama also hinted on the possibility of removing Cuba's name from the list of states that sponsor terrorism. Before this, US Secretary of State, John Kerry also met his Cuban counterpart, signaling the change on all the levels of American government. This shows the gradual process of normalization of ties between the two countries after more than five decades in which none of the sides had any gain. A number of surveys in the States had also shown that majority of the Americans are in favor of normalizing relations with Cuba. As expected, there has been slight criticism from a number of media outlets and political experts in the

US who are not happy of the too much lenient and apologetic (as they used the term) behavior of President Obama in these talks. They are not happy of the fact that Cuba is still a country ruled by a Communist party and it seems to be a complete diversion from the policies of US that was in practice since the cold war started between the two blocs of the world after the Second World War. It is hoped that with the increase of contacts between the two countries, US sanctions may be lifted from Cuba and both the nations may be able to open their embassies. According to political and economic experts, this would open a number of opportunities of trade and commerce for both the countries and would equally benefit the people of both the countries. It simply means that US has realized that its policy of alienation, differences and enmity has not worked and better and more logical strategies must be adopted for the betterment of the involved countries and of the world in general. The failed strategy contained so many strange and irrational factors. First was the factor of fear. It was feared that every country not in the capitalist bloc was enemy and would definitely try to harm the States. As the statistics and ground realities show, this was just a fear, which kept both the sides on alert. Due to this fear, decades long cold war was fed and billions of dollars were wasted on defense from both the sides. The fear and enmity could have been brought to an end and billions of dollars could have been easily saved by some positive statements and handshakes from the leaders of both the sides. Another factor was to declare someone as your enemy. Once a nation was declared enemy, all the hopes and possibilities of normal relations were burnt down and instead, fears and doubts replaced them and both the sides lived in a condition of continuous unrest and suspicions.

It is also sad that, even though having a number of wise and intelligent leaders on both the sides, no one hardly tried to take initiative that should normalize the relations between the two states. It was largely due to the fear that no one wanted to be blamed for breaking the status-quo and looking at the things from a different angle. On the other hand, the doubts and speculations of cold-war era only added to the worsening relations between different nations.

President Obama is going to be a page-turner by some of his decisions in the final months of his presidency. Though the world scenario is not so hopeful having a look at the flames of war and destruction in Middle East, Africa, Afghanistan and of course, Ukraine but the recent improvement in the ties of USA and Cuba has given us a new hope and also a new direction. Instead of declaring a nation the enemy and closing all the doors of hope, more positive expectations are needed to be promoted. As the most important nation of the world, majority of responsibility lies on the shoulders of USA. Just like the case of Cuba, doors of improved relations can be opened with Iran, China, Russia, Venezuela, Syria, and all the other nations of the world that are considered to be enemies and this negative strategy and perception has done no good for anyone. The world is in need of peace and negotiations more than any other time of history and this can only begin with positive expectations and perceptions.

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