

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



August 04, 2016

## Efforts to Boost Mining Sector

As the concerns regarding Afghanistan's mining sector seem to be escalating, Afghan government has taken some initiative to deal with the problems. It has signed over 80 mining contracts with the private sector in a bid to boost the extraction of mines and prevent illegal extraction of the mining.

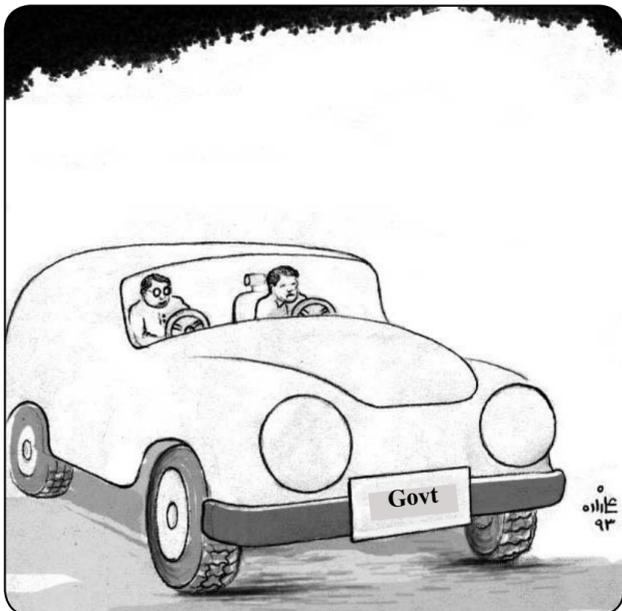
Officials in the Ministry of Mines and Petroleum told reporters in Kabul on Tuesday that the government is more focused on transparency when the contracts were signed. Mohiuddin Noori, a spokesman for the Ministry of Mines and Petroleum, said the government has concluded 84 agreements since the beginning of the new solar year. He said the contracts have been signed on key conditions to include transparency as per the new terms and conditions, control and supervision of the contracts, generation of revenue by the contracts for the private sector and the government, and the feasibility to implement the contracts in the region.

It is really important that this initiative is pursued with honest commitment as there are really serious issues within Afghanistan mining sector. Recently, it was disclosed publically that Taliban militants in Afghanistan benefit much through illegal mining. Mining sector that can be a hope for Afghanistan and its people, is turning into a funding source for the militants, which is really very much disastrous. Members of Badakhshan provincial council recently unveiled that smuggling of lapis lazuli and illegal extraction of semi-precious stone in the province was the main source of income for anti-government militants in the area. The fact is that the mining sector in Afghanistan has always suffered from lack of attention by the government authorities. This sector, if nourished appropriately, can build an optimism to uplift Afghan economy to a huge extent. Many years of uncertainty and warfare have influenced Afghan economy damagingly. The involvement of international community in Afghanistan spawned some hopes that Afghanistan would stand on its own in near future. Nevertheless, it still needs to learn to live on its own. The only way it can do this is to rely on its own resources and among them the mining sector can, without a tinge of doubt, play an incredible role. As per the statistical data by United States, Afghanistan may possess mineral deposits worthy of \$ 1 trillion, which is huge and comprises of important minerals like gold, iron ore, uranium and precious stones including lapis lazuli and emeralds. Excavating all these mineral resources and processing them so that they are ready for use or export would certainly entail the need of large factories and a large number of skilled human resource.

There is no doubt in the fact that country's rich mining sector could guarantee supporting each and every sector of the country during the next 20 years but a capable and honest administration is needed to guard the sector. It is absolutely essential that the legislative and administrative mechanisms in the country must endeavor to frame and follow the laws and policies that are for the welfare of the country and that encompass the consultations and instruction from the technical and professional individuals and groups.

The fact remains that the natural resources of the country have yet to be excavated and there have not been even rudimentary work done in this connection. So, everything has to be initiated right from the beginning and that would involve a lot of hard work and devotion. Optimistic expectations in this regard have to be backed properly by determined and practical measures; otherwise intention may end up in smoke.

Currently, Afghanistan has been highly dependent on international support to run its economic system. In the post withdrawal period there are possibilities that the international aid entering the country may reduce considerably. Though the international community has made promises that the support for the country may continue till 2024, the international political and economic circumstances point towards some other. On the other hand the security situation in the country has been going through a deteriorating trend. The terrorism seems to be rising in some of the most important parts of the country and the security situation still remains a question mark. Threatened by insecurity major projects regarding the mining sector have been postponed. The ones that have been started are lagging behind their schedule. The international investors are losing their interest as they do not feel that their investment would bring fruit in such uncertain circumstances. In such circumstances, development of a strong mining sector seems a difficult task. The mining sector is not just about digging the minerals out of the earth. It includes a complete development of an infrastructure. It involves complicated processes, machinery and latest technology. Definitely, generations of instability have incapacitated Afghanistan to work on these resources but at the same time it would require, at least a generation if not generations of stability to bring these resources in use. It is not impossible; neither there should be pessimism in this regard. The important point is to remind the people of Afghanistan and most importantly the Afghan authorities to analyze the socio-political and politico-economic conditions rationally and try to comprehend the challenges appropriately. After the challenges are understood appropriately, measures can be carried out to find out proper solution of the challenges. It is really encouraging that there are expectations from the mining sector, but these expectations must not be converted to fantasies rather they should be changed to realities through prudence and positive attitude.



# Afghan Soldiers – The National Heroes

By Hujjatullah Zia

Having assumed full responsibility for national security in December 2014, the Afghan forces had displayed commitment to the nation and the constitution through immense sacrifice, thereby earning unprecedented public support and trust. Warring parties inflicted heavy casualties upon Afghan soldiers within the past two years. With the declaration of "spring offensive" and "Omari Operation", the Taliban's inroads intensified and soldiers are left at the greater mercy of terrorism. Similarly, militancy has escalated in Afghanistan following the death of Mullah Akhtar Mansour and appointment of his successor Mullah Haibatullah Akhundzada – a radical ideologue who stages deadly attacks against Afghan soldiers and civilians.

With the establishment of democratic administration, peace has been the highest national priority and Afghan officials sought tirelessly to get warring factions to join peace process and stop violence and bloodshed. However, the Taliban persisted in their indiscriminate killings and spilling the blood of combatants and non-combatants alike. They turned the Afghan's peace offering down. Through continuing the tug of war, the Taliban left no room for negotiation and no trust to resume it.

Now, it is believed that the real tug of war has been ushered in between Afghan government and the Taliban. With the escalated militancy, Afghan soldiers have also increased their strikes along with US forces. As a result, it was revealed on July 13 that a US drone strike in Nangarhar province led to the death of Khalifa Omar Mansour – a leading commander of the Pakistani Taliban who was behind the the ruthless 2014 massacre at the Army Public School (APS) in Peshawar City of Pakistan. On July 16, President Ghani telephoned Pakistan's Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and told him Khalifa Omar Mansour and four other Taliban commanders had been killed. "Ghani informed the Prime minister that the mastermind of APS' massacre Omar Khurasani along with his four accomplices was killed few days back in coalition forces strike," said a statement issued by the Pakistan's Prime Minister's House.

Umar Mansour claimed responsibility for the attack on the Army Public School in Peshawar in the December 2014. Reuters called him Pakistan's most hated man. He was believed to be behind all key Taliban attacks in Pakistan in the last year. In January this year, he claimed the attack on the Pakistan's Bacha Khan University in Charsadda, and threatened to carry out more such attacks.

Political pundits believe that Khalifa Mansour's death may come as an irreparable loss to the already weakened TTP led by Mullah Fazlullah. Indeed, he must have got a serious emotional wound after the death of his high-profile commander, Khalifa Mansour.

It is believed that the death of Mansours, Mullah Akhtar Mansour and Khalifa Mansour, by the US drone strikes have prompted the Taliban to take the oath of revenge and compound their terrorist acts namely killing Afghan soldiers and civilians. Therefore, Afghan nation bear the brunt of terrorism and come under serious attacks in recent weeks.

The bravery of Afghan soldiers is beyond doubt despite undergoing casualties. "They are resilient in the face of adversity, and they have made constant improvements in efficiently and effectively coordinating and building systems of leadership and management," President Muhammad Ashraf Ghani said. He believed that the range of organized forms and techniques of violence today drew on previous waves of violence throughout history – anarchism, anti-colonialism, terrorism of the 1960's and 70s, and violent ethnic and identity movements of the 1980's and 90s.

Contrary to the aforementioned fact, according to media reports the Taliban delegation had visited China for discussions on the current situation in Afghanistan. The team, led by head of the Taliban's political office in Qatar Abbas Stanikzai, paid a five-day visit to Beijing from July 18 to 22 in response to an invitation of the Chinese government. An unnamed Taliban leader is cited as saying, "We wanted the Chinese leadership to help us raise these issues on world forums and help us get freedom from occupying forces."

Mostly likely, since the Taliban have come under the US heavy air strikes, they seek to show readiness for peace talks provided on having their condition fulfilled which was set earlier – the complete withdrawal of US forces – as a precondition for joining talks. In other words, the Taliban intends to resume the game, which never bore the desired fruit. They viewed peace talks as a game and played dishonestly which led to mistrust. Perhaps, Afghan officials will not fall for their false claims for resuming peace talks anymore. Under the terms of "peace talks", Afghanistan has been constantly stabbed in the back. Democracy is not gained without sacrifices. If we consider the democratic societies, people sacrificed their lives and blood to ensure democracy for their nation. Similarly, Afghan people need to devote their lives so as to invest for gaining democracy. It is hoped that the precious lives and blood of our soldiers will not go in vain rather they will ensure peace and stability for the nation, if not now, in the future. Whenever negotiation is proved abortive, blood will be the only remedy to protect the rights and dignity of a nation. Our selfless soldiers, who sacrifice their lives for protecting their nation and country, are not dead. They are alive in national memory and are considered national heroes since they play heroic role.

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## Reversing Brexit

By Anatole Kaletsky

How should the European Union respond to the narrow decision by voters in the United Kingdom to leave? European leaders are now focusing, rightly, on how to prevent other countries from leaving the EU or the euro. The most important country to be kept in the club is Italy, which faces a referendum in October that could pave the way for the anti-euro Five Star Movement to take power.

Europe's fear of contagion is justified, because the Brexit referendum's outcome has transformed the politics of EU fragmentation. Before, advocates of leaving the EU or euro could be ridiculed as fantasists or denounced as fascists (or ultra-leftists). This is no longer possible.

Brexit has turned "Leave" (whether the EU or the euro) into a realistic option in every European country. Once Britain gives the Union formal notice (by invoking Article 50 of the Treaty of Lisbon), that option will enter the mainstream of political debate everywhere. Research by the European Council on Foreign Relations has found 34 anti-EU referendum demands in 18 other countries. Even if each of these challenges has only a 5% chance of success, the probability of at least one succeeding is 83%.

Can the genie of disintegration be put back in its bottle? The EU's breakup may well prove unstoppable once Britain leaves; but Britain has not yet invoked Article 50. The bottle could still be sealed before the genie escapes.

Unfortunately, Europe is using the wrong threats and incentives to achieve this. France is demanding that Britain accelerate its exit. Germany is playing the "good cop" by offering access to the single market, but only in exchange for immigration rules that Britain will not accept. These are exactly the wrong sticks and carrots.

Instead of rushing Brexit, Europe's leaders should be trying to avert it, by persuading British voters to change their minds. The aim should not be to negotiate the terms of departure, but to negotiate the terms on which most British voters would want to remain.

An EU strategy to avoid Brexit, far from ignoring British voters, would show genuine respect for democracy. The essence of democratic politics is responding to public dissatisfaction with policies and ideas – and then trying to change the judgment of voters. That is how numerous referendum outcomes – in France, Ireland, Denmark, the Netherlands, Italy, and Greece – have been reversed, even when deeply emotional issues, such as abortion and divorce, were involved. If European leaders tried the same approach with Britain, they might be surprised by the favorable response. Many Leave voters are already having second thoughts, and Prime Minister Theresa May's uncompromising negotiating position will paradoxically accelerate this process, because voters now face a much more extreme version of Brexit than they were promised by the Leave campaign.

May has stated unequivocally that immigration control is her overriding priority and that Norway or Switzerland can no longer be models for Britain's relationship with the EU. Her new "Brexit Ministry" has defined Britain's main objective as tariff-free access to Europe and free-trade agreements with the rest of the world. That means abandoning the interests of Britain's financial and business

services, because services are unaffected by tariffs and are excluded from most free-trade deals.

As a result, the new government will soon be politically vulnerable. In fact, most British voters already disagree with its negotiating priorities. Post-referendum polls show voters giving priority to single-market access over immigration restrictions by a two-to-one margin or more. Making matters worse for May, her slender parliamentary majority depends on disgruntled "Remain" rivals. As the British economy sinks into recession, trade deals prove illusory, and legal and constitutional obstacles proliferate, May will find it hard to maintain the parliamentary discipline needed to deliver Brexit.

A strategy to avert Brexit therefore has a good chance of success. The EU could advance this strategy by calling May's bluff on "Brexit means Brexit." May should be told that only two outcomes are possible: either Britain loses all single-market access and interacts with Europe solely under World Trade Organization rules, or it remains an EU member, after negotiating reforms that could persuade voters to reconsider Brexit in a general election or a second referendum.

This binary approach, provided EU leaders showed genuine flexibility in their reform negotiations, could transform public attitudes in Britain and across Europe. Imagine if the EU offered constructive immigration reforms – for example, restoring national control over welfare payments to non-citizens and allowing for an "emergency brake" on sudden population movements – to all members. Such reforms would demonstrate the EU's respect for democracy in Britain – and could turn the tide of anti-EU populism across northern Europe. The EU has a long history of adapting in response to political pressures in important member states. So why is this strategy not being considered to counter the existential threat of Brexit?

The answer has nothing to do with supposed respect for democracy. The Brexit vote is no more irreversible than any other election or referendum, provided the EU is willing to adopt some modest reforms. The real obstacle to a strategy of persuading Britain to remain in the EU is the EU bureaucracy. The European Commission, once the EU's source of visionary creativity, has become a fanatical defender of existing rules and regulations, however irrational and destructive, on the grounds that any concessions will beget more demands. Concessions to British voters on immigration would inspire the southern countries to demand fiscal and banking reforms, eastern countries would seek budget changes, and non-euro countries would demand an end to their second-class status.

The Commission is right to believe that demands for EU reform would extend well beyond Britain. But is this a reason to resist all change? That type of rigidity broke up the Soviet Union and nearly destroyed the Catholic Church. It will destroy the EU if the bureaucracy remains incapable of reform.

It is time for Europe's politicians to overrule the bureaucrats and recreate a flexible, democratic EU capable of responding to its citizens and adapting to a changing world. Most British voters would be happy to remain in that kind of Europe.

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