

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



August 04, 2018

To Withdraw or not? It is the question

Donald Trump's administration has asked the Afghan security forces to pull out from remote and low population areas. This issue was first reported by the New York Times. Political analysts hold that it is a part of the U.S new military strategy for Afghanistan. US officials say they have made this decision to decrease attacks on the checkpoints of the Afghan forces in the remote areas and it also helps the Afghan forces to more concentrate on the security of the big cities including Kabul. The New US strategy places a premium on protecting the population, especially in towns and cities where the Taliban has made inroads.

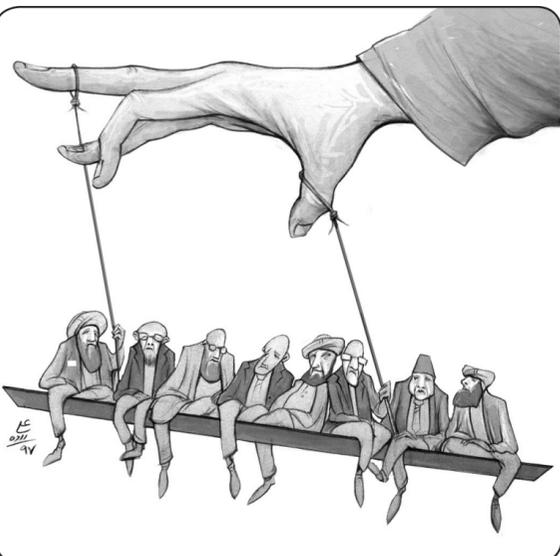
The new US strategy has created a series of debates among the Afghans and international sources. Human rights activists consider this strategy as a tool to give legitimacy to the Taliban. As a result they have expressed concern over the new strategy saying this may have serious consequences in the future as the Afghan government and its allies have declared legitimacy for Taliban group which is carrying out terroristic attacks in Afghanistan. Some other military analysts say al-Qaida created a myth that it single-handedly pushed the Russians out of Afghanistan in the 1980s, and now, the terrorist groups like ISIS, Taliban, al-Qaeda HN and other ones may use the same tactic to capitalize on the Afghan security forces pullback from Afghanistan remote. Also the jihadists would use this approach as a rhetorical victory, as a recruiting tool to strengthen their own story, and they're going to try to do that again.

However, there are conflicting arguments in terms of setting back from specific areas as part of a secret negotiation: Some scholars say that it rewards terrorist behavior, encourages them to continue their violent behavior that undermines democracy and peaceful ways that political actors pursue to realize their goals. Many political scholars hold that an alternative like combat is preferred by governments because it does not need concessions, does not grant legitimacy, and is consistent with the governments' strategies.

What makes negotiations a viable strategy is to ensure the other party's capability of conducting negotiation agreements and to make concessions. As pointed out, one way to relieve to negotiations and retain the ability to deny the other party, are back channel communications. Such acts not only give incentives to future talks, they will also create the required logistics before announcement of fully public negotiations. Political argue that secret talks help prevent political setback and shouting from hawkish politicians of a fully public negotiations. Secret talks is an approach for one side to gain knowledge of the other party and decide whether if the other is willing or able to negotiate at the concerned time.

What makes negotiation a must is the case that a group or groups have strong ethnic or religious supports, the group can be hidden, resupplied, provided moral justification and even the population may contribute to the active terrorist group members. Political analysts believe that in such case, curfews, checkpoints, harsh policing efforts and collateral damage leads to alienating the population away from the government.

As Afghan government is determined to reach to a sustainable peace with the Taliban group, it is necessary to the entire Afghans and the Afghan government to push its peace policies cautiously. If withdrawing from certain parts of the country is part of the peace negotiation, such act should ensure the basic rights of the citizens, and as the Afghan government has said, the local militia or members of the public uprising shall replace the police and national army forces. All the Afghan citizens support a peace deal that ensures the security and development in the country. However, no Afghan citizen will accept a peace deal with Taliban or any other insurgent group to compromise their basic rights and freedoms and this applies to the withdrawal from the remote areas as well.



Lack of Oversight on Performance at Government Institutions Exacerbates the Sorry State of Governance & Public Services (Part 1)

By Mohammed Gul Sahibzada

In the advent of establishment of new political order in Afghanistan after toppling of Taliban regime by the US and allied military in December 2001, Government institutions in Afghanistan were equal to not-existing. The US, NATO and international community started to rebuild these institutions in order to strengthen Afghan Government services, functionality and operability. But all this was done without first laying out extensive planning. Reconstruction of Government institutions is done in two phases - to say it in the simplest form: 1) the hardware part, which constitutes buildings, structures, energy, transportation and logistics, equipment, vehicles and all kinds of infrastructure; and 2) the software part, which includes technocrats, skilled workers, knowledge, expertise, establishment of routine procedure, effective management, manpower, oversight on ongoing projects, mandate, objectives, goals, chain of command, hierarchy, operation and maintenance and reporting.

In the process of reconstruction of Government institutions, more emphasis was put on the hardware part of it as more resources were available, but the software part of the process was hardly given any due diligence or attention. Meaning, lack of talented technocrats, skilled and properly educated employees, and assignment of people based on personal relationships, nepotism and political favoritism in various, important senior positions led the entire Government institutions to serve vested interests and look for personal benefits, which resulted in endemic corruption, scandals and formation of inefficient Government organizations. This trend remained to nurture for a long time until it became part of the culture of Government institutions.

Capacity building of leaders, managers, employees and workforce of an institution / organization is equally - or even more important - than infrastructure or the buildings. Since last one and half decade, it has been established trend that donor countries and organizations recuperate more than fifty percent of the grant allocated to different government institutions mainly due to lack of capacity and skills of concerned ministries and institutions to implement development projects. Despite harsh criticism at national and international levels because of this laggard nature, there is no tangible record to show efforts by Government leaders at various ministries and institutions to improve the current status quo. The reason is that the same people are sitting in key positions with no knowledge or talent to implement. Government should bring change in this status quo and break the ice by removing the present officials and replace them with experienced, knowledgeable and talented ones. The current bureaucracy is the main reason for corruption, inability to deliver good governance and public services to the masses.

There have been cases in point where heads of certain Government institutions are removed and replaced, but to gauge and compare the background of the old ones with newly installed ones, in most of the cases, officials are shifted from one province to another or from one department to another, which exacerbates the status quo. This whole phenomenon has turned most of the Government organizations as Zombies, meaning they are there only to spend all the money, use the resources and social status to keep themselves alive, receive good salaries, enjoy social status and spend yearly budgets without any impact on beneficiary communities, and without conducting yearly audits of money spent, audit of project results and project impact on beneficiary etc.

Here are cases in point of the Government ministries and institutions that are blatantly wide of the mark to meet objectives, implement projects as per national economic agenda, to bring about positive change or spend the money within yearly budgeted framework. These are Zombie ministries and institutions, which need urgent performance overhaul, structural changes and extensive overview of knowledge, talent and experience of the employees at all levels.

Though very few Government institutions have unleashed the process of reform, which include ministry of interior, office of the Attorney General, Judiciary and Justice Department as a whole, ministry of finance and ministry of defense, there still remains a large number of other important ministries

and government institutions which need drastic reforms and changes in the way they perform.

The first to come in mind is Traffic Police Department. One can imagine the sorry state of Traffic system in Kabul and hundreds of other cities in the country.

A country's first image of the level of development, organization, law and order and discipline is exhibited from the manner how the traffic is managed. Managers and leaders of the department have been enjoying good salaries, protocols and other perks related to their benefits and packages, but their performance is equal to zero. They continue to keep the status quo in place as, a) this is the only way to keep the status quo that benefit them the most, and b) they do not have to work hard to bring about improvement, positive changes and routine procedure in the traffic system. Lack of oversight on this department ensures continuation of the status quo, which relentlessly take toll on general public.

Government should take heed of the problems generated by bad traffic system in the country, and assign professional, industrious and knowledgeable officials at the helm of affairs of this department to bring changes. It is not so difficult to implement organized and routine traffic system. There are professional firms and traffic engineers who can advise, plan and provide implementation strategy for building a viable, modern and normal traffic system. It is always cheap to spend on improvement and up-gradation of certain government institutions rather than to continue with the status quo, which definitely can prove more expensive and resource depleting phenomenon.

Kabul Municipality is one major laggard in the process of bringing in structural changes, which is badly needed, and effect immediate reforms in its management and operations system.

Kabul city streets are not clean, garbage is not removed routinely, dustbins do not exist at all, and where they do exist, they are in dilapidated state.

Tall buildings of up to twenty stories are being constructed in residential areas without any check and control. Culturally, Afghans consider their homes the safest place on earth. But this safety is encroached by construction of tall buildings because strangers who reside in these buildings can easily have access to peer and look inside the surrounding, neighboring houses, eighty percent of which are not more than two stories.

It seems there aren't any rules and regulations government ongoing construction of high rise in the city. It is incumbent on Kabul Mayor to take heed of this irregularity and take drastic, remedial steps to regulate this sector. Water well construction is one major concern. Every household, building owners and landlords in Kabul city dig deep water well at will. There is no procedure in place, such as obtaining license before construction of water well.

Hundreds of deep water wells are currently under construction across Kabul city. Water level has gone tens of meters down compared to twenty years ago. Many surveys and scientific findings have drawn grim picture of underground water in Kabul within next ten years.

Kabul Municipality in collaboration with National Geological Department should lay out a plan and enforce stern regulations by imposing licensing and other administrative procedures on people who want to dig deep water well. In addition, Kabul Municipality should set aside considerable budget and start to construct extensive piping network for water distribution to households in Kabul city, and build large water dams around Kabul to feed the city.

Most recently, Kabul Municipality exhibit hectic activities in the wake of involvement of USAID and World Bank to upgrade and beautify the city streets, but this is being done under a separate project and project management team, the credit of which does not go to Kabul Municipality. People want to get rid of the present irregularities and mismanagement unleashed by Kabul Municipality. It is hoped these points are taken heed of and effective steps are put forth.

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Putting FDI on the G20 Agenda

By Karl P. Sauvants and Axel Berger

While much of the world's attention is focused on the economic damage being wrought by US President Donald Trump's trade wars, global trade's twin - foreign direct investment - has largely been neglected. And yet, with FDI flows valued at \$1.43 trillion in 2017 - on top of the \$28 trillion already invested - how these flows are managed matters. International investment has become an important source of external finance for many countries; for developing economies, in particular, FDI can exceed official development assistance by wide margins. But if FDI is to contribute meaningfully to economic growth and sustainable development, existing flows must increase even more. For that to happen, international investment policies need better coordination, and we believe that the G20 is the best forum to facilitate this process.

The current FDI framework - a muddled mess of more than 3,000 agreements - is insufficient to attract the level of investment needed to meet the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals for the year 2030. For example, some of the world's largest economies are encouraging domestic firms to "re-shore" their operations and invest more at home. Many countries are also tightening controls on inward FDI; applying stricter screening measures to mergers and acquisitions; and demanding reciprocal market access in return for investment.

Moreover, an increase in the number of disputes being filed by foreign investors against host countries has challenged efforts to improve dispute-settlement mechanisms, as some countries withdraw from global arbitration forums altogether.

If these trends are not reversed, the result could be declines in FDI flows, and perhaps even the emergence of "investment wars" stemming from the over-politicization of foreign investment approvals. Yet, increased investment flows obviously are needed to meet global development goals; what is less clear is how to bring them about.

Unlike the global trading system, the international investment regime does not currently have a multilateral organization to facilitate rule-making, monitor policy developments, or adjudicate disputes. But one can be built, and the G20 is the most sensible place to start. At the very least, the G20 can offer the appropriate level of guidance to help advance FDI policy.

The G20's members already account for two-thirds of global outward FDI flows. Moreover, they participate in most investment treaties, and include both developed and developing countries. Not only is the G20 an important

venue for policy dialogue and coordination; it is also well suited to lead on efforts to address key international investment issues.

To be sure, this is not a new idea. For example, during China's G20 presidency in 2016, the G20 adopted the "Guiding Principles for Global Investment Policymaking." This set of nine concepts was designed to foster an open, transparent, and conducive policy environment for investment, while promoting coherence between national and international rules.

Still, as we argued in a recent policy brief for the G20's T20 think-tank, work on this issue has only just begun. In fact, at least three additional steps need to be taken if efforts to improve the international investment regime are to succeed.

First, the G20 should call on other international groupings to conduct analyses of their investment policies to ensure alignment with the bloc's nine principles. When gaps are identified, strategies for plugging them must be developed. Furthermore, to promote compliance and knowledge-sharing - and to chart a course for the negotiation of future agreements - the G20 should facilitate a peer-learning network that links interested governments and regulators.

Second, the G20 should encourage the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL) and the International Center for Settlement of Investment Disputes (ICSID) to intensify efforts to reform their own dispute-settlement mechanisms. Because dispute resolution is key to any successful investment regime, the process for resolving disagreements must be beyond reproach. To make certain that it is, the G20 should track progress by requesting regular updates from UNCITRAL and ICSID.

Lastly, the G20 should support the World Trade Organization's discussions on investment facilitation. More precisely, the G20 should stress that future agreements need to be compatible with the "most-favored-nation" principle while prioritizing sustainable FDI over other forms of foreign investment.

The G20 can play a leading role in overcoming the deficiencies that plague the international investment regime. To do this, however, current and future G20 presidencies must provide a home for discussions about action-oriented policymaking. International investment can avoid the type of tensions currently enveloping global trade, but only if the rules of the game receive the attention they need.

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