

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



August 05, 2017

## Political Twists and Turns in Afghanistan

The escalated insurgency in Afghanistan has triggered a sense of worry at national and international level. With their rights at stake, a large number of Afghan people are deeply disappointed with the status quo. Their pain and sufferings are compounded with the deadly attacks carried out constantly across the country. Further, the US soldiers adopted consultative role following 2014 without a successful mission in terms of "war on terror".

The withdrawal of US soldiers led to horrible consequence in Afghanistan. For instance, a sense of fear filled the air and many people sought to take refuge to foreign countries so as to escape war and violence. On the other hand, the Taliban insurgents intensified their attacks with stronger morale which led to heavy civilian casualties and takeover of greater parts of the country. As a result, the Taliban forces overran Kunduz city on 28 September 2015, with government forces retreating outside of the city. The capture marked the first time since 2001 that the Taliban had taken control of a major city in Afghanistan.

With the failure of war on terror, the US President Donald Trump is reportedly furious that American troops are not winning the war in Afghanistan and wants to sack their commander Gen John Nicholson. Being "increasing frustrated" with the protracted war in the country, Trump - who "lashed out at his top military advisers" when they described the war as a stalemate - has asked to plan new strategy for winning the war.

In July, US Senator McCain urged Pakistan to confront the Afghan Taliban or face the consequences in a visit to the Pak-Afghan region in July. "We have made it very clear that we expect they [Pakistani officials] will cooperate with us, particularly against the Haqqani network and against terrorist organizations," he said at a July 4 news briefing in Kabul. "If they don't change their behavior, maybe we should change our behavior towards Pakistan as a nation."

Since then, according to a Pakistani newspaper, congress has adopted several measures binding US civil and military assistance to Pakistan to the severing of its alleged links to the Haqqani network. Some of these measures also require Pakistan to prevent militants from using its soil for launching attacks into neighboring countries and to release Dr. Shakil Afridi, who helped the CIA trace Osama bin Laden at a compound in Abbottabad.

The issue of terrorism has been a bone of contention between Afghanistan and Pakistan which had lately drew the attention of the US Congress and led to mistrust between Washington and Islamabad. For example, US Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis said in July that the Pentagon would not give Pakistan the remainder of a key US military reimbursement fund allotted to the country for 2016.

The Pentagon announced the move to withhold \$50 million in "coalition support funds" in a statement Friday, saying it had determined Pakistan had not taken "sufficient action" against the Haqqani network, the Taliban offshoot responsible for numerous attacks on civilians and military targets in neighboring Afghanistan.

However, neither the US policy towards Pakistan nor the Kabul-Islamabad blame game could mitigate insurgency in Afghanistan. Indeed, Pakistan's sacrifices in combating terrorism is undeniable, but there is a lot to be done. In other words, the sacrifices should bear palpable result and the Taliban's sanctuaries must be destroyed. After all, all terrorist groups will have to be combated without discrimination since they play deadly role.

Now firing Gen John Nicholson, who has gained much experience in the country, is the next strategy regarding winning the war on terror by Trump's administration. The question is that will this strategy bear the desired result?

The next question is that is US sure that cutting military reimbursement fund has persuaded Pakistani officials to adapt its plan according to the US demands? If it has, why there is no change observed in the country? In terms of its second strategy, it is believed that changing a general will not mitigate insurgency in Afghanistan. That is to say, the political twists and turns in Afghanistan is too complicated to be resolved simply through firing a general. What if this decision backfires on the terrorist issue?

Trump, who shouted against radical groups during his presidential campaign and promised to eliminate them from the surface of earth, has set foot in a real situation encountering true challenges. He intends to win the war on terror and accomplish this mission. But there is still no hope despite all these facts and the graph of casualties is growing in Afghanistan. His two aforementioned strategies will certainly not win the war, what will be his third strategy for winning the war against the insurgents? Do you mean sending more troops to the country? That, according to political analysts, will be proved futile, too. Any other strategies? The world is looking forward to seeing more effective strategy.



## Afghanistan's Economic Outlook from the View of IMF

By: Zia Danish

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has published a commentary, written by Christoph Duenwald who led the IMF mission to Afghanistan and Robert Tchaidze, claims that Afghanistan's economic outlook is bright and promising since its economy is growing. In such challenging times, it's more important to take note of successes that will ultimately lead to stability, prosperity and self-reliance in Afghanistan. The article says that growth increase last year, inflation remains in single digits, and exports started to grow, even if from a low base.

According to the article, Afghanistan was removed from the list of countries perceived to be non-cooperative in the global fight against money laundering and terrorist financing. And in May, based on measures taken by the government of Afghanistan to strengthen macroeconomic management and tackle corruption, the first review of an economic reform program supported by a financial arrangement with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) was completed successfully.

In 1955, Afghanistan gained membership of the International Monetary Fund. Since 2002, IMF support was instrumental in helping erase nearly all of Afghanistan's external debt. Since then, the IMF has continued to help rebuild the economy and advise the government on economic reform policies, based in part on of IMF extensive experience with fragile and post-conflict states.

The IMF was formed in 1944 at the Bretton Woods Conference primarily by the ideas of Harry Dexter White and John Maynard Keynes with the intention of fostering global monetary cooperation, secure financial stability, facilitate international trade, promote high employment and sustainable economic growth, and reduce poverty around the world.

Countries contribute funds to a pool through a quota system from which countries experiencing balance of payments problems can borrow money.

The IMF became involved in Afghanistan in 2002, to assist in rebuilding economic institutions and to provide advice to the government on economic policies and reforms. The IMF has been providing technical assistance to develop monetary instruments, strengthen the central bank, modernize foreign exchange regulations, revamp tax and customs administration, establish a fiscal regime for the natural resources sector, enhance public financial management, and improve the national accounts, and price and balance of payments statistics.

The writers of this commentary believed that since 2014, with

the help of the IMF, the government has succeeded in increasing revenue by more than 50 percent. This was achieved through reforms in the revenue and customs departments and modifications to the tax regime.

It added that fighting corruption, which is still rampant in Afghanistan. The IMF is helping the government strengthen its legal framework to ensure that corruption is criminalized in line with international standards, and that high-level government officials are held accountable to the public.

Strengthening the banking sector is also one of the issues discussed in the article. The IMF has been supporting the Ministry of Finance and Da Afghanistan Bank to overcome the negative legacy of the 2010 Kabul Bank crisis in which the Afghan people were defrauded out of one billion US dollars.

The commentary says, "The IMF is deeply committed to this goal and is working closely not only with Afghanistan but also with international partners, especially the World Bank, which is playing vital role in Afghanistan, to achieve it. While peace has so far proven elusive, we are helping to build its economic foundations through strong institutions. In turn, these will allow for effective use of the substantial foreign aid flowing into the country and will help establish a dynamic private sector to invest and create the jobs needed to set Afghanistan on a path towards prosperity."

Currently, Afghanistan is the member of IMF and has carried out its multi-lateral plans with the assistance of this international organization. The IMF assigns certain standard for Afghanistan annually for collecting revenue and economic growth that the government is supposed to fulfill it. Within the three past years, collecting revenue has met rapid growth and beyond the assigned standard.

Afghanistan's ministry of finance has declared earlier that the imbursement through negotiating with taxpayers who did not pay taxes, transferring tax revenues to the central treasury, making reforms and changes in the country's customs, setting agricultural tariffs, taxing credit cards for customers of telecommunication networks, increase in the right to passage for airplanes passing from Afghanistan's environment, strengthening monitoring on customs and modernizing its equipment, as well as using intelligent systems are the reasons for the increase in Afghanistan's revenues over the past three years.

Based on this article, task of building a prosperous future is enormous. It requires dedication and hard work both from the Zia Danish is the permanent writer of the Daily Outlook Afghanistan. He can be reached at the outlookafghanistan@gmail.com

## The Noose Tightens

By Elizabeth Drew

Even with a new minder trying to bring some order to the White House, President Donald Trump remains in a heap of trouble. The recent installation of retired general John Kelly, formerly Trump's Secretary for Homeland Security, as Chief of Staff, replacing the hapless Reince Priebus, has reduced some of the internal chaos and induced a bit more discipline in Trump's behavior. But all this could change any day, or at any moment.

Kelly has put a stop to aides sauntering into the Oval Office whenever they felt like it - Trump tends to echo the last person he's spoken with - and has demanded that papers and memos for the president be submitted to him first. For the time being, at least, the president's tweeting has been reduced in number and nuttiness.

Keen Trump observers expect that he'll soon begin to chafe under the discipline Kelly has encouraged. Understanding Trump's enormous ego, Kelly is said to encourage gently rather than instruct. Kelly also has the advantage of Trump's high regard for generals.

But Trump could well become incensed by news stories praising Kelly for bringing order to the White House. (Counselor Steve Bannon never fully recovered in the president's esteem after he was on the cover of Time magazine soon after the inauguration.)

Meanwhile, Trump's poll ratings are lower than ever - and the lowest of any president at such an early point in an administration. Members of his own Republican Party are distancing themselves from him.

The recent failure of the Republican-dominated Congress to repeal Barack Obama's signature achievement, the Affordable Care Act, which made health care available for millions of people who previously couldn't afford it, was a humiliating defeat for Trump. Just enough Republican senators (three, but more were in reserve if needed) voted to reject the last of several efforts to fulfill the party's vow to replace "Obamacare."

That nickname for the ACA, coined by the Republicans when the law was enacted in early 2010, was intended to be derogatory, and their opposition to the program seemed to be vindicated in that year's midterm elections, when they swept both houses of congress. But the Republicans didn't reckon on two things: that as people gained access to health insurance (some 20 million by this year), it became popular - as did Obama, who ended his second term as one of America's most liked presidents.

Over Obama's tenure, Republicans came to realize that it was no longer sufficient simply to call for a repeal of Obamacare, and their rhetoric shifted to the need to "repeal and replace." They held more than 50 roll-call votes saying that they'd do just that, knowing that it didn't really matter because Obama would veto any serious repeal. The roll calls were actually fundraisers: appeals to the unsuspecting Republican base to send money to keep up the fight against the supposedly hated program.

But when the 2016 election put a Republican in the White House, the party's congressional leaders had nowhere to

hide. The Republicans were now in full control of the government - and they hadn't a clue about what should replace Obamacare.

At the end of six months in office, Trump doesn't have a single legislative achievement to crow about (though he has claimed the Senate's approval of Neil Gorsuch as a new Supreme Court justice as a victory). Significantly, Senate Republican leaders ignored Trump's demand that they take up repeal and replace of Obamacare again, before they consider any other major issue.

While the health-care bill was commanding most of the attention on Capitol Hill, another piece of legislation was moving along in the Congress, representing another setback for Trump. Troubled by the president's apparent soft spot for (or perhaps fear of) Vladimir Putin, overwhelming bipartisan majorities in both chambers passed a bill to impose more sanctions on Russia and - most unusually - to prevent the president from lifting any such penalties. And, because the bill passed with enough votes to override a presidential veto, Trump had little choice but to sign it, which he did in private, without the customary presence of a bill's sponsors and the press.

Meanwhile, the investigation into Trump and his campaign's relations with Russia in connection with its meddling in Trump's favor in the 2016 election has continued out of the public's sight. That investigation has broadened to include Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner and his son Donald Jr.

This spring, Trump let it be known that he wanted the special counsel running that investigation, Robert Mueller, a former FBI director who is highly respected by both parties, to be fired. He'd already fired FBI director James Comey, but by law, he couldn't fire Mueller himself, so he tried to bully Attorney General Jeff Sessions, who had (appropriately) recused himself from the investigation, into resigning. That way, Trump could appoint a replacement who would fire Mueller.

But Sessions, the first Republican senator to endorse Trump, was enjoying rolling back numerous Obama-era protections in areas like civil rights, and refused to resign. Several of Sessions' former Senate colleagues also demanded that Trump back off. Though Kelly called Sessions to tell him that his job was safe, Republican senators, concerned that Trump might remove him during the August recess, established a procedure that would prevent Trump from appointing an interim attorney-general to fire Mueller, and warned that such a move would provoke a constitutional crisis.

Then, as Congress prepared to leave for the August recess, it was learned that Mueller - who had hired highly regarded prosecutors specializing in international financial transactions, despite Trump's warnings not to investigate his finances - had impaneled a grand jury in Washington. The noose tightens.

Elizabeth Drew is a regular contributor to The New York Review of Books and the author, most recently, of Washington Journal: Reporting Watergate and Richard Nixon's Downfall

Chairman / Editor-in-Chief: Moh. Reza Huwaida

Vice-Chairman: Kazim Ali Gulzari

Email: outlookafghanistan@gmail.com

Phone: 0093 (799) 005019/777-005019

www.outlookafghanistan.net



The views and opinions expressed in the articles are those of the authors and do not reflect the views or opinions of the Daily Outlook Afghanistan.