

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



December 13, 2015

The Uncertain Scenario

The approach of the people and intellectuals towards the socio-political scenario in Afghanistan seems divergent and there are not very certain attitudes in this regard. There are many "ifs" and "buts" and the opinions regarding the situation are very shaky.

Especially, in the last some months the situation seems ambiguous as to where the country is leading and what would be the future of socio-political scenario in the region. Though, since the downfall of Taliban there have been major contributions on the part of international community to help this country out of instability and in that regard billion of dollars have moved in, especially from U.S., the major issues still remain with major concerns. There are many serious minds that doubt the future of the peace, stability and prosperity in the region.

Afghanistan has seen many decades of wars, including both international and civil wars. The people in the country have been seeking a period of stability wherein they get opportunities of development and progress. They have gone through the severest kind of agony and have experienced the worst possible kind of economic, social and political crisis. There have been hopes lately that country would move towards prosperity, but these hopes are being challenged now in the ongoing period of transition. After more than twelve years of war and movement against terrorism, though there have been improvements, the administrative, development and security sectors still remain immature. Though it is necessary that these sectors should take long time for their improvement, the level of the improvement so far made is not in accordance to the energy and resources being utilized.

One of the biggest hurdles in this regard has been the lack of transparency in the utilization of the resources, mostly provided as aid by the international community. The wave of corruption has uprooted the weak foundations of the development projects and possibilities of better outcomes have diminished to a great extent.

There are three basic sectors which require special attention. They include incapacity of the government to provide good governance. Good governance relates to the conduct of the public institutions regarding the public affairs in such a way so as to guarantee well-being, prosperity and definitely human rights. But instead our public institutions have been dominated by incapacity and corruption. These institutions have been further adding to the troubles of the common people instead of solving their problems. They have been vehemently dominated by the individuals in authority. The institutionalization process has been very weak and institutions serve the authoritative people on the top of bureaucratic hierarchy.

The real purpose of a democratic system is to reach to the common people of the society and provide them facilities on their door steps. Further, the so called democratic system in our country has not been able to represent the people of Afghanistan as a whole. Even the key institutions like legislature, judiciary and executive have not risen to the task. They, instead of serving the country, seem to be fanning the flames of controversies. The government that should be the leading force towards a democratic setup, itself seems to be running after authority, not democratic principles.

As far as the security of the country is concerned, there have been many improvements but a lot of work still needs to be done. The international security forces, that have been helping out the country so dominantly in the last twelve years or so, will soon withdraw completely, after which, the vacuum has to be filled by Afghan security forces. As far as the capacity of Afghan forces to guarantee secure life for Afghan people, there are grey patches. Unless there are speedy development in the capacity building, training and professionalism of Afghan forces, the eyebrows will remain tense as far as security arrangements are concerned. Though the transitional handover of authority from international forces to Afghan security forces has been completed, the prospects of an overall peaceful transition seem very much difficult.

Further, the political reconciliation with Taliban that is expected to find out some political solution to the issues in the country in order to lead to peace is also suffering from lack of clarity and commitment. On the other hand Taliban have not shown their complete readiness for the peace process. In addition, the factions existing within Taliban also differ in their views regarding any peace deal and this makes the process difficult by introducing the intricacy as to whether which faction should be considered as the true representative to Taliban, and what should be done with the other factions who opt to go against any sort of peace process. In short, the security situation in Afghanistan is still not very certain and future is very much ambiguous.

The impact of international assistance will remain limited unless donors, particularly the largest, the U.S., stop subordinating programming to counter-insurgency objectives, devise better mechanisms to monitor implementation, adequately address corruption and wastage of aid funds. In order to address the socio-political and security concerns appropriately there has to be immense effort made on the part of government and other authoritative institutions in the country. Above all, this effort should be directed towards the wellbeing of all the people of Afghanistan.

Afghanistan's Migrants Crisis

By Abdul Ahad Bahrami

Hundreds of thousands of peoples from conflict zones have arrived in Europe this year in search of protection and better lives. Afghans constitute a large portion of the exodus into Europe in 2015. According to the UN Mission in Afghanistan, insecurity, economic problems and fears of forced recruitment by armed groups are the main causes for the Afghan refugees leaving the country. According to Maya Ameratunga, the UNHCR representative in Afghanistan, "fear of forced recruitment, intimidation by anti-government elements, human rights abuses are some of reasons why refugees are leaving." With the influx turning into a potential crisis for Afghanistan, the Afghan government has been struggling to tackle the issue. However, thousands of Afghans have left the country this year as part of the large exodus of people from the Middle East, South Asia and Africa into Europe.

There have been calls for curbing the migration crisis and discourage Afghans from leaving the country for European countries. The Afghan government has urged youths to not to leave the country and avoid taking the precarious road for Europe. Based on the nationality of the refugees and migrants leaving their countries for Europe, Afghans have become the second largest group after Syrians coming to European countries. Before November, a large portion of the refugees from Afghanistan landed in Germany and other wealthier European nations. German officials called on Afghans not to leave their country, saying the country would help the government of Afghanistan to provide security and employment for Afghans. Since then, the government of Afghanistan has stepped up diplomatic efforts to work more closely with the destination countries for migrants to resolve the migration crisis.

The Afghan government's measures to address the issue have been some sort of reactions to an urgency rather than long-term planning for resolving the problem. The government cannot resolve the issue without addressing the root causes of challenges in the country forcing the citizens to take precarious journey abroad. On the hand, the government will not be able to solve the crisis through arbitrary measures which do not deal with the main causes of the migration problem. There have been visible inconsistencies in the policies and approaches of government institutions towards migration of Afghans to other countries. Only through long-term, sustainable and cohesive policies the government would be able to tackle the challenges fundamentally and to more extent successful. The government's policy towards migration of Afghans still suffers major flaws. The overall policy of the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation has been to protect rights of the Afghan refugees and negotiate with the countries hosting Afghan refugees to help them settle or return voluntarily. However, the government sent a very contradicting message to the hosting countries. On one hand, initially the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation, and later the Parliament, urged the European countries not to deport Afghan refugees. But later German officials announced Ghani had agreed to accept the deported Afghans from the country. The announcement

led to an angry outcry from both inside the country and Afghan refugees in European countries. Though government officials denied any such agreement, the suspicions remained in place, including after President Ghani's recent trip to Europe.

On the other hand, any agreement with the countries hosting Afghan refugees to have forcefully deported the refugees will only generate further anti-government sentiments among the youths. The government has already been under severe criticisms for its clandestine measures in talking the European governments in a way that it will have no problem with forced deportation of Afghans. One of the most recent such moves from President Ghani was his referral of Afghan refugees being hired as cooks, spurring widespread anger among the public and the refugees abroad. The government needs to realize it will buy more criticisms from the public if it continues to arbitrarily talk about coming back of the refugees.

There is no doubt that Afghan youths should stay in their country. But it is the government's responsibility to provide security and employment for the youths to prevent them leaving the country. Those who leave for protection and better lives cannot be blamed for escaping daily violence in the country and extreme economic challenges. Ordinary citizens are getting killed or kidnapped on daily basis. This is while unemployment and poverty is also a major driver of people embarking on migrating from the country. The major causes of the migration of Afghans are well-known for the government and the country's policymakers. The two most important causes of the unprecedented migration of Afghans are war and violence as well as economic challenges. According to reports, 29 out of 34 provinces of the country have been affected by war, violence and internal displacements. Many youths who have received higher education have been leaving the country in recent months, which is showing the country's grim prospect of security and economic situation.

The most important factor behind the mass migration is what is labeled as 'pull factors'. Most of Afghans are concerned with their and their family's safety and security, but in many cases it is the 'pull factors' in the destination countries that convince them to leave the country. Many of those arriving in Europe are deemed as economic migrants who take the journey for better lives. Therefore, it is crucially important for the mass influx to be stopped to end the open-door policy of the European countries for the economic migrants. Whatever the causes of migration of Afghan citizens, the Afghan government needs to deal with the issue more responsibly. The people taking the journey risking their lives to reach Europe. Forced deportation of Afghan refugees will have bad consequences for the Afghan government.

The government has enough on its hand to do with no need to encourage deportation of the Afghan refugees. In absence of security and employment for the people, the returned refugees will be a burden on the government's shoulder. The only long-term and viable solution to the crisis is improvement of security and the country's economy and job market.

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Will Negotiation Break the Stalemate?

By Hujjatullah Zia

The ebb and flow of Afghan-Pak relation continues more than a decade. Pakistan has constantly promised to orchestrate peace talk. A face-to-face negotiation was hosted between Afghan officials and Taliban elements on July 07, 2015 near Islamabad, in Murree. However, the revelation of Mullah Omar's death and subsequent struggle for succession in the Taliban leadership threw the whole process into uncertainty.

The Taliban's new leader, Akhtar Mansour, in his first statement since the pronouncement of the supreme leadership of the movement emphasized that the fight would continue. He dismissed talks about peace as "enemies' propaganda." Prior to the publication of this speech in audio format on the Taliban website, Mansour had long been seen as one of the most pro-peace and moderate figures in the movement's leadership. However, he made heavy inroads in Afghanistan in the wake of being appointed as Omar's successor in order to gain further allegiance from the Taliban's insurgents.

Since the Taliban insurgents made inroads from across the border, tension between Kabul and Islamabad resurfaced. The Chief Executive Officer Dr. Abdullah Abdullah declared on the 70th United Nations General Assembly meeting in New York that the Haqqani network had been identified as a main culprit and needed to be dismantled as had been Afghanistan demand in the past. "Our demands are legitimate as our people continue to suffer at the hands of terrorist elements who cross into Afghanistan and indiscriminately victimize our citizens. This matter needs to be addressed and facilitated by trusted international partners," Abdullah said. "We call on Pakistan to do what its leadership promised to us a few months ago when they agreed to crack down on known terror outfits - meaning the enemies of Afghanistan."

Therefore, the rift between the two countries widened and peace process stalled up to now. But in a recent visit to the United States, Pakistan's Army Chief General Raheel Sharif discussed the resumption of peace process. In other words, Pakistan and the United States agreed in November to work together for an early resumption of the stalled Afghan reconciliation process, during Sharif's visit to the United States where he held extensive discussions with key figures of the Obama administration, including Vice President Joe Biden. The joint inauguration of "Heart of Asia" conference in Islamabad, which aimed to intensify efforts for regional linkages and to promote peace and stability in Afghanistan, has bridged the long-term gap. Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and Afghan President Muhammad Ashraf Ghani jointly inaugurated the conference attended by Foreign Ministers of several countries. "Afghanistan is the heart of Asia and if

there is trouble in the heart, the entire region will be turbulent," Sharif is cited as saying. "The enemies of Afghanistan are the enemies of Pakistan and the government will continue to support an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process that remains the most viable option to promote stability and end violence," Sharif added.

Ghani said that Afghanistan has come a long way in building close ties with all its neighbors. He held the "regional and international terror groups" responsible for the violence in the country. He further said, "I have had to become a war president, because an all-out war has been imposed on us. Unfortunately, recent events in Pakistan have forced us to host 350,000 to 500,000 refugees from Pakistan"

Afghanistan showed great tendency towards peace long ago and urged Pakistan to nudge the Taliban outfits to sit on the table of negotiation. Similarly, Pakistan officials stressed to broker the peace talk and said that "the enemies of Afghanistan are the enemies of Pakistan". However, according to Afghan officials, their practices went against their words and failed to prove their statements. Now, the question is that will Pakistan practice what she preaches?

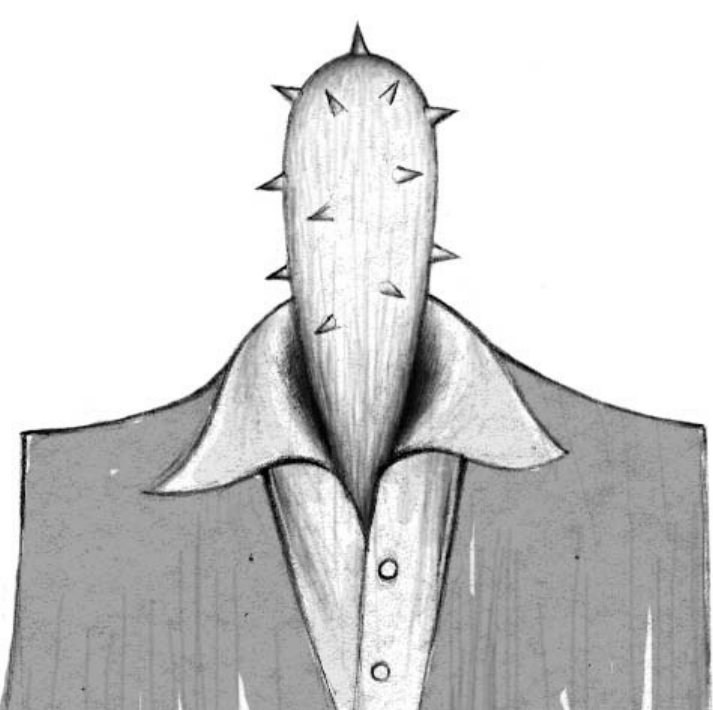
A sense of mistrust, which roots in previous relation that left the nation-state's ambition unfulfilled, still seems to be in the air. Despite Kabul's relentless efforts to gain peace and security through Islamabad's mediatory role, it has changed into an unachievable goal. In a nutshell, Pakistan officials yet to prove their loyalty and good will via brokering the talk in the best possible way and treat Afghanistan's foes as Pakistan's opponents.

Indeed, the heart of Asia - a historical name for Afghanistan - plays a key role in the region. Therefore, the region has to join cooperation to stabilize the country - be it through military deal or negotiation.

It is believed that the military operation is effective when it is the last resort i.e. when the peace talk does not come to fruition. Since a number of countries, mainly Pakistan, urge for resuming reconciliation process, it can be the last chance for dialogue. However, if this chance be proved abortive, the government will have to terminate the High Peace Council (HPC) and talk with the militants' own language namely the barrel of gun.

The fact is that the splinter group will bring the peace parley into stalemate. When a group comes to an agreement the next will act as a distracter - as it was done earlier and the peace negotiators, such as Mulvai Abdul-Raqib, were targeted mysteriously, perhaps by members of the Taliban or other warring parties such as Haqqani network, Lashkar-e-Jangavi, Quetta Council, etc.

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