

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



February 12, 2017

## Indicators of our Living Standards

Towns and cities all over Afghanistan have many dissimilarities in the standards of living and quality of life. These dissimilarities can be associated to many factors and issues about the residents and location. Though every town is unique in its own way, a pattern in the variation of standards of living can be observed. For many cases as the distance from the city center is increased, the quality of living standards also increases. This variation in the living conditions can be linked to the residents in the area. Looking at the economic, social, and environmental criteria, it is clear to see why people are living in the conditions that they do.

Looking at the economic aspects of residents in an area can depict many things like their profession. One of the best indicators to look at is the unemployment levels in an area.

This would basically involve collecting the unemployment figures. Generally, it is a very good way to measure the living standards of an area, as it shows the percentage of people who are out of work. The higher percentage means that many residents are bringing little money into the home, and therefore might not have enough to just live off. Therefore they cannot afford many luxuries and comforts, and also these people may be content.

This shows that they do not have a very high living standard. Currently, this figure is very high in Afghanistan as the public and private sectors are not able to create job opportunities for the people and most of them are unemployed and may participate in the activities that are not positive for the society as a whole. Many other statistics can be included in the category of money, and how much is brought into the home.

The annual earnings, for example, number of doctors per one thousand people, and percentage of people who work in professional jobs or managerial jobs are all good indicators to the living conditions of an area. Basically the more money people bring into the home shows their attitude to life, they want to do well and succeed. It is these types of people who have the higher living standards because of the jobs they do and the money that they earn.

Criteria that can be studied to look at the social aspects of living improvements include things like crime rates and social status. Crime rates are a very good indicator towards measuring the living standards. With higher crime rates in an area shows that the quality of living is reduced because of the people who are there do not abide with the law. It also shows the incapacity of the law and order system to provide facilities to the people.

Afghanistan has not been able to focus much in this regard and even the capital Kabul has become a place where the crime rate is getting out of control. Private amenities are very good indicators towards the living standard. Homes with many private amenities show they do not have to share things like bathrooms, and can live in comfort with central heating.

On the other hand, if people are without basic amenities like hot water and have to share bathrooms with other tenants, then this is because they cannot afford to do anything about it. These people do have a low living standard as they are without amenities that are basic to most homes.

The current wrath of cold weather clearly disclosed the nature of the private amenities that are possessed by the people of Afghanistan. There are many people in the country who do not have any sort of arrangement for heating in the cold weather. Moreover, the unavailability of proper bathrooms is another issue that the people of Afghanistan has been facing. In many remote districts there are not bathrooms even to share; what the people share in common is the open ground.

The environmental aspects of an area that people live in area very good indicators to the living standards that they have. Pollution is something that no one wants to have much of around where they live. Therefore, this is an excellent judge of an area. The higher amounts of pollution in an area can be because of many factors, like living next a factories or major roads.

Therefore, the lower levels of pollution in an area means that the area is probably an excellent place to live. However, in Afghanistan most of the villages and towns are free from such polluting factors. The only city that seems to be highly influenced by pollution is the capital Kabul itself. Higher levels of pollution in Kabul clearly shows that it is now becoming a city that is not very pleasant to live in. It is not very difficult to identify the indicators of the living standard of the people in the country.

The difficult task is to take these indicators seriously and make efforts to improve the living standard of the people. It is one of the main responsibilities of a democratic system that it must work for improving the lives of the people.

So, if Afghanistan claims to be a democratic state it must work in this regard or at least strive to work.

## 'If You Want Peace, Prepare for War'

By Hujjatullah Zia

Terrorism has been a serious threat to Afghanistan for decades. Afghan nation bears the brunt of militancy with the Taliban's heavy attacks. In the current year, Afghan civilians and soldiers seem to pay large sacrifices and terrorism continues to take the lives of innocent individuals in public places. Omar's second successor Mullah Haibatullah, who practices upon radical ideology, is believed to be relentless in pursuit of war and bloodshed. He will not answer positively to the frequent calls for peace.

Of late, the Taliban fighters have intensified their attacks and carry out indiscriminate suicide bombings across the country. The recent attacks in Kabul and Helmand left dozens dead and wounded behind which reveal the Taliban's negative reply to peace negotiation. The focus of the NATO-led mission in Afghanistan has narrowed considerably to training Afghan forces and conducting counterterrorism missions since a significant drawdown began under Democratic former US President Barack Obama. Obama was often criticized by Republicans in Congress for focusing too much on driving down U.S. troop numbers in an attempt to force Afghan soldiers to become more self-sufficient.

The US President Donald J Trump and his Afghan counterpart talked on telephone about opportunities to strengthen ties, counterterrorism cooperation and economic development, the White House said in a statement. Trump is said to emphasize the continuing importance of the US-Afghanistan Strategic Partnership and his support for Ghani's government, which is faced with an emboldened Taliban-led insurgency that is still gaining ground after more than 15 years of war.

Moreover, it is said that the US would like to maintain close ties with Pakistan and to use those ties to persuade Islamabad to change its policies towards Afghanistan. Senator McCain, a regular visitor to both Afghanistan and Pakistan, underlined the US dilemma on this issue. Acknowledging that thousands of Pakistanis had sacrificed their lives in the fight against terrorists, he is cited as saying, "But the fact remains that numerous terrorist groups still operate within Pakistan, attack its neighbors and kill US forces."

The senator, who also visited North Waziristan last year, praised Pakistan for conducting a successful military operation in that area, but said that this was not helping the US forces combating terrorists in Afghanistan. "Put simply, our mission in Afghanistan is immeasurably more difficult, if not impossible, while our enemies possess a safe haven in Pakistan. These sanctuaries must be eliminated," he said.

In the meantime, Russia has announced it will host a regional conference on Afghanistan in Moscow in mid-February, with representatives from Afghanistan, Pakistan, China, Iran and

India in attendance. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov made the announcement following a Tuesday meeting with his Afghan counterpart, Salahuddin Rabbani, in Moscow. Lavrov highlighted the need for the inclusion of the Taliban in the constructive dialogues in order to find a solution to resolve the security crisis in Afghanistan, prevent the spread of violence and the infiltration of ISIL terrorists in the country. Within the political wheeling and dealing, peace negotiation has been one of the hotly debated issues at national and international levels, mainly following the failure of "war on terror" launched by Bush administration after the 9/11 terrorist attack. Afghan government established the High Peace Council (HPC) in 2010 to bring the Taliban to the bargain table. Similarly, Afghanistan showed great tendency towards peace long ago and urged Pakistan to nudge the Taliban outfits to sit on the table of negotiation.

In addition, Pakistan officials stressed to broker the peace talk and said that "the enemies of Afghanistan are the enemies of Pakistan". However, no effective step was taken in this regard and militancy continues unabated in the country.

To the Afghans' unmitigated chagrin, the peace talk holds no sway regarding the security situation in Afghanistan. People lose their lives in every corner of the country in suicide bombings, Improvised Explosive Device (IED) and attacks carried out by the Taliban insurgents. Almost everyone, from the famous figures to the simple citizens, suffers from the terminal illness of terrorism and s/he is exposed to the dangers that would possibly target them in one way or another and if they survive, they would be affected by the trauma of war and violence. If the Taliban seek a bona fide negotiation for peace, they will have to put an end to the indiscriminate killings of the civilians and shrink the battles against the Afghan government. But the militants have escalated their offensive against combatants and non-combatants alike.

No wonder, Islamabad's role in peace negotiation will be crucial but the Taliban's escalated militancy widened a gap between Kabul and Islamabad since harsh rhetoric has been changed. The mistrust still needs to be repaired for a genuine struggle for peace. After all, it is believed that the upcoming mid-February conference, which is supposed to be hosted by Russia, will not alleviate the challenges for two main reasons: First, one of the Afghanistan's greatest allies the United States has not been given role in the talks. Secondly, the Taliban have not given the green light and continue targeting Afghan nation indiscriminately. Hence, there is still no hope for peace and baseless optimism should not be relied upon.

The only panacea for bringing peace is to practice upon the policy which suggests "if you want peace, prepare for war".

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## Navigating the Trumpscape

By Michael Mandelbaum

To say that US President Donald Trump's administration made waves in its initial weeks would be an understatement. Large protests across the United States and around the world attended his inauguration, and have continued since. Meanwhile, Trump has already declared war on the adversarial American press, and held acrimonious telephone conversations with friendly countries' leaders. But to make sense of the new administration's overall performance, worried and perplexed observers inside the US and around the world should follow five general guidelines, rather than focus too much on discrete events.

First, all new US administrations are messy at the beginning: they stumble, create confusion, and say and do things that they later retract, or at least regret. Some officials will not be up to the job, and will leave the government after a few months.

Many of the missteps that occur early in a presidency stem from a flaw in the US political system. New presidents take office without a full team in place, and must wait for their cabinet nominees and other officials – the people who actually run the government – to be confirmed.

During Trump's first two weeks, his administration consisted of just a few aides rattling around in the White House. Like its predecessors, the Trump administration will settle down and settle in – unless it doesn't. A second guideline is to keep a close eye on foreign policy. Owing to the checks and balances built into the American constitutional order, presidents have much wider latitude in how they engage with other countries than they do in steering domestic affairs. To be sure, Trump's first weeks portend disturbing changes to US foreign policy.

For 70 years, the US has maintained global security through its network of alliances, and kept the international economy humming through free trade. During the campaign, Trump attacked both of these crucial roles. Should his administration abandon them entirely, the world will become a poorer, more dangerous place.

And yet most of the new president's principal foreign-policy appointees inspire confidence. Secretary of Defense James Mattis is a sober, experienced, and widely respected former general with an internationalist outlook. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, while never having served in government, gained extensive experience working with other countries when he was CEO of ExxonMobil, a large multinational energy company.

In fact, the new administration's ability to maintain continuity and international stability will depend on it not following the example set by its predecessor.

During Barack Obama's presidency, senior officials were marginalized, and foreign policy was generally determined by an inexperienced president and his even less experienced young White House acolytes.

A third fact to keep in mind is that Trump's most serious opposition will not come from his noisiest opponents. Public demonstrations will not throw the Trump administration off course, and they could even steel its resolve to pursue the policies that have raised the most objections. It is worth remember-

ing that the protest movement against the Vietnam War was even more unpopular than the war itself.

Like President Richard Nixon, Trump may try to exploit the public's distaste for disruptive and occasionally violent protests to bolster support for his policies.

Another loud source of opposition is the mainstream press, which has attacked the Trump administration earlier and more forcefully than any new presidency in memory. Still, the press's capacity to stymie Trump is limited, because it lacks credibility outside of the coastal states and large metropolitan areas where people already oppose him.

Meanwhile, Trump's formal opposition – the Democratic Party – is weak, demoralized, and divided. But his administration could face formidable opposition from different quarters. For starters, he cannot govern without Congressional Republicans, many of whom will frustrate any effort he makes to abandon America's long-standing alliances.

Trump may also have to deal with opposition from business leaders, who have remained largely silent, but could grow tired of his wrathful tweets. Ultimately, business leaders have a duty to their companies' health, and they will try to block any policies that threaten it. Multinational corporations with expansive international operations will resist initiatives that could spark trade wars. At the end of the day, no Republican president – not even Trump – can afford to ignore the captains of American industry and finance.

A fourth lesson to take to heart is that American democracy will survive. Fearful pronouncements about the rise of incipient (or actual) fascism are misplaced. The basic institutions of American governance have survived greater challenges than any that Trump may pose.

Although America in 2017 is deeply divided, Americans remain committed to the central tenets of democracy: free, fair, and regular elections and the protection of political, religious, and economic liberty. It is unlikely that Trump will attempt to overturn any of them; and even if he does try, he will fail. When he leaves office, the US will essentially be what it was when he entered it: the world's most powerful democracy. Finally, a key question to consider is whether the Trump administration will be "normal."

A normal president pursues predictable policies that are generally supported by those who voted for him, and opposed by those who did not. Trump's cabinet and Supreme Court nominations fit this description. An administration operating outside the bounds of normality will pursue policies that even its supporters and well-wishers oppose, and which could do serious damage to the country, and the world generally.

Will Trump's presidency be normal? At this point, we must defer to the twentieth-century Chinese communist leader Zhou Enlai's purported response to André Malraux's question about what he thought of the French Revolution: it's "too early to say." (Courtesy Project Syndicate)

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