

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



February 20, 2017

Serious Concerns in Afghanistan

The opinions of the people and intellectuals towards the socio-political scenario in Afghanistan appear to be divergent and there are not clear certainties in this regard. There are many doubts and the opinions regarding the situation are very shaky. It is not just about the situation in Afghanistan, but the reaction by the Afghan authorities as a response to the situation is also doubtful. 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 our 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 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 14 years of war and movement against terrorism, though there have been improvements, the administrative, development and security sectors still remain immature. It is comprehensible that these sectors take long time for their improvement, but 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.

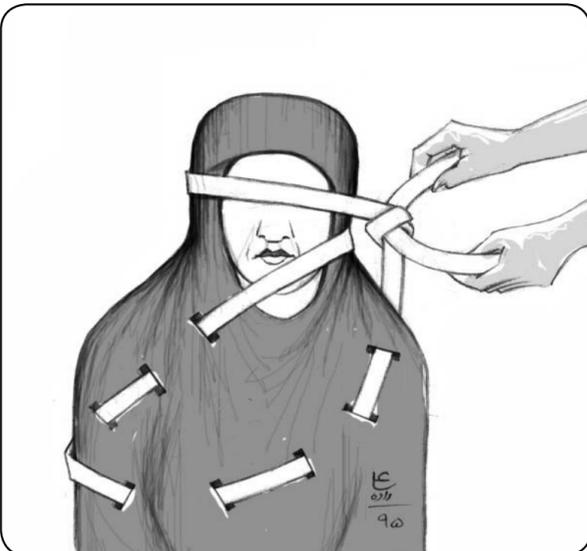
There are three basic sectors which require special attention. They include incapacity of the government to provide good governance. Good governance relates to the conduct of the public institutions regarding the public affairs in such a way so as to guarantee well-being, prosperity and definitely human 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. The diverse Afghan society has not been able to be compensated in the system that has been trying to keep the central government stronger. 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. The parliament, which represents the elected members, is not given its due authority.

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 have withdrawn and the responsibilities of security are on the shoulders of Afghan security forces. As far as the capacity of Afghan forces to guarantee secure life for Afghan people is concerned, there are grey patches. Unless there are speedy developments in the capacity building, training and professionalism of Afghan forces, the eyebrows will remain tense as far as security arrangements are concerned.

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 leadership has not shown 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.

The impact of international assistance will remain limited unless donors 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.



US Russia Relations under President Trump

By Carl Bildt

Exclusive for the Daily Outlook

Though US president Trump and Russian president Putin have not met officially, but the bromance between the two is already the talk of the town as much as it is a myth considering the bitter history between the two cold war arch nemeses. The U.S. media is already skeptical of the ongoing fondness to bolster an amicable rapport between the two leaders, and they constantly taunt white house officials over the prospects of such relationship.

President Trump is already walking a thin line confronting major Republican heavyweights both in senate and congress. A great number of core Republicans as John McCain and speaker Powel Ryan, are not in the same page when it comes to US-Russia relations and any thought of lifting the Obama imposed sanctions on Kremlin at this time. They have publically expressed their concern and discontent in giving president Putin and Russia any further opportunity to challenge American interests in the region.

No shocker, the majority of Democrats are also apprehensive about the increasing Russian aggression in Eastern Europe and above all, its recent cyber attacks on DNC (Democratic National Convention) computers prior to elections. They believe that the Russian's intelligence with a green signal from president Putin himself, orchestrated the whole cyber hack which benefited president Trump getting elected. President Trump while acknowledging the Russian cyber hacking of the DNC computers after he was presented with evidence by the FBI and U.S. cyber command officials, nevertheless, he has repeatedly stated that the hacking had no impact on the elections outcome and he won the elections fair and square. The allegations have also been dismissed by president Putin and Russia.

President Trump and his inner circle, notably Steve Bannon and other top advisors are hoping for a reset in the US-Russia relations. A goodwill gesture has already been extended from Kremlin to amend relations with the new president in the White House; as well as open a new chapter of cooperation in regards to global security and lifting sanctions. No doubt there are hurdles considering the notion of skepticism and array of outstanding issues between the two global powers, which requires both time and changes to the prevailing political status quo in the region.

In spite of all these indications, the outstanding international disagreements over the Russian aggression in Eastern Europe and annexation of Crimea by Kremlin will determine the longevity and rationality of such relationship. In contrast to the official stance of the preceding president

on Crimea, president Trump has occasionally expressed his indifference in regards to Crimea annexation, citing it not a priority for his administration's foreign policy.

Instead, he has shown his willingness to talk sanctions and reduction of nuke stockpiles between the two countries. He certainly faces strong opposition from veteran senator John McCain and Bernie Sanders along with other heavyweights in congress and senate who has called president Putin a thug and a gangster many times; believing the only way to stop Russia threatening its neighboring countries is through increased U.S. sanctions on Kremlin and isolating Moscow on the international front.

Post swearing in as the President Trump received the first blow when the story began surfacing about the leaked discrete conversations of the ousted National Security Advisor Gen. Michael Flynn with the Russian ambassador to the US in the public eye.

He was apparently discussing the prospects of US levied sanctions on Kremlin during the campaign trail with the ambassador.

He has been since criticized and scrutinized by the media and house Democrats that immediately followed his early resignation since US constitution does not allow US citizens to initiate talks with foreign dignitaries prior to holding any official position.

In an unusual 80 minute press conference, a furious President Trump weighed on the issue and criticized senate Democrats and "dishonest media" for overstretching the news and politicizing the issue, while accepting his resignation, he praised him as a capable and outstanding man who was simply doing his job.

He angrily accused low level leakers in the CIA and other intelligence agencies for leaking strictly confidential and classified information to the media. He pointed out that the very same individuals are also responsible for leaking the details of his phone calls and rough talks with the Australian prime minister and Mexican president, which were supposed to be strictly confidential.

He then promised that as soon as his appointees take charge in these institutions, these low level leakers will be identified and dealt with accordingly. President Trump went one step further, blasting the media for spreading fake news about Russia and demonizing his administration's achievements and accomplishments. He continued reiterating how wonderful it will be if he and president Putin actually get along and resolve international issues with consultation and mutual understanding...*To be Continued*

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Breaking the Shackles of Interest and Usury

By Dr. Faisal Ali

Exclusive for the Daily Outlook

Interest is the pillar of Fractional Reserve Banking which is contrary to the philanthropic objectives intended for beating the extremities of poverty and the creation of dignified channels of financial support for the down trodden with a view to achieve the lofty goal of egalitarian society in sustainable manner. In modern economics, Interest is regarded as the payment of the use of service of capital.

Charlemagne defined usury as where more is asked than is given. According to Prof. Marshall, Interest is the payment made by borrower for the use of a loan. Prof. Keynes says that interest is the reward of parting with liquidity for a specified period. Prof. J. S. Mill considers interest as the remuneration for mere abstinences.

The Islamic terminology for interest or usury is Riba which means excess, increase or addition. Riba is defined as trading two goods of the same kind in different quantities, where the increase is not a proper compensation. There are two types of Riba i-e Riba An Nasiyah and Riba Al Fadl. Riba An Nasiyah is defined as excess, which results from predetermined interest that a lender receives over and above the principle. Riba Al Fadl is defined as excess compensation without any consideration resulting from a sale of goods. Riba An Nasiyah is further classified into two types i-e Simple Interest and Compound Interest.

Simple interest is the interest calculated only on the initial investment while compound interest is the reinvestment of each interest payment on money invested, to earn more interest. Aristotle berated interest on the principle that it is a yield arising out of money itself, not a product of that for which money was provided. The father of modern day interest rate theory, Knut Wicksell in his book "Interest and Prices" reaffirmed the statement of Aristotle that money in principle is sterile. Sheikh Mahmud Ahmad in his book "Economics of Islam, A Comparative Study" says that all the theories of interest fail to answer the simple question: Why should interest be paid? According to him, the theory of price is the problem of exchange, whereas the theory of interest is a problem of distribution.

The Scholastics championed the complete abolition of interest during their era. Martin Luther condemned anyone who charged interest as a thief, robber and murderer. John Whipple, a Rhode Island lawyer arithmetically proved the impossibility of long term interest in "The Importance of Usury Laws- An Answer to Jeremy Bentham"

"If 5 English pennies.... had been.....at 5% compound interest from the beginning of the Christian era until the present

time (say 1850), it would amount in gold of standard fineness to 32,366,648,157 spheres of gold each eight thousand miles in diameter, or as large as the earth." (P-48)

The father of modern economics, John Maynard Keynes contended that without the abolition of interest, unemployment cannot be eradicated. Silvio Gesell castigated interest on the

basis that his sales were more often related to the price of money (i-e interest) than people's needs or the quality of his products.

Gesell also launched "Stamp Script Movement" to make money a public service for a use fee but all his efforts went in vain. In 1919, Gottfried Feder wrote a book "Breaking the Shackles of Interest (Brechung der Zinsknechtschaft)" about the implications of interest and wealthy bankers. His endeavors led Adolf Hitler to proclaim that the kernel of National Socialism is breaking the thralldom of interest.

Margrit Kennedy, the ink-slinger about the negative consequences of interest is considered as the mother of anti-interestmovement in modern times. Thomas Greco in his book "Money: Understanding and Creating Alternatives to Legal Tender" says...

"The banks are continually making new loans and retiring old ones as they are repaid. In the aggregate, the debts owed to banks are increasing with the mere passage of time, because interest accrues over time. The money available to repay those debts, however, can be created only by the banks as they make additional loans."

The history of laws has also incessantly lambasted interest and usury. The laws of Charlemagne categorically prohibited usury in 806 CE. In 850, the Synod of Paris excommunicated all usurers. Usury was also banned by Common Law. In 1275, Edward I of England passed the Statute of the Jewry which made usury illegal.

The bygone French law punished usurer for the first time by a public and ignominious acknowledgement of his offence and was banished. The penalty of his second offence was hanging. The Communist Party of China proscribed usury in its revolutionary base areas in late 1920s and replaced it with credit cooperatives.

The criminal law of North Korea (2009) in the chapter 5 titled "Criminal Violations of The Socialist Economic System" forbids usury under Article 118.

The article prescribes a punishment of less than 2 years of Labor training for practitioners of usury and stipulates the same punishment for up to 5 years in case of large profits gained through usury. In similar chain of events, The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly in Pakistan unanimously passed the Prohibition of Interest on Private Loans Bill on September 19, 2016...*To be Continued*

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