

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



January 06, 2018

The Persistent Insecurity

The security situation in Afghanistan does not seem to be getting any better. The insurgents, even during the cold weather wherein mostly the situation gets better, have not decreased their activities. There are attacks every now and then in different parts of the country that show that the response to the aggressive US policy has been aggressive as well. Though any lenient policy towards insurgents in Afghanistan is not practical, the current aggressive policy must also be supplemented by meaningful talks. Otherwise, the security situation may not get any better and the current scenario may continue.

In the ongoing wave of insecurity, an attack was carried out on police force members in the heart of Kabul on Thursday, Jan 04. At least 20 people have been killed and 27 others have been wounded in the attack that was a suicide bombing and targeted the security personnel who had gathered in the area for a crackdown on shopkeepers involved in trading illicit substances.

While, the Kabul police spokesperson said in a statement, "Kabul police personnel were there to prevent a possible protest when a suicide bomber approached them and detonated his suicide vest." There have been many attacks in Kabul that have directly targeted the security personnel; meanwhile, in other series of attacks there have been efforts by the insurgents to ignite a sectarian rift. Such attacks have mostly been carried out by Daesh insurgents and have targeted the Shia Hazaras. In such attacks, the different mosques in Hazara dominated areas have been bombed and the people, in general, mostly involved in protests and different sorts of gatherings have been targeted.

Through these attacks the insurgents want to distract the Afghan forces, authorities and people. They want to show that they are still strong and have the capacity to fight, at the same time, they have the ill intentions of starting a civil war in Afghanistan on ethnic and sectarian basis.

It is really vital for Afghan people and authorities not to get distracted as the terrorists and enemies of Afghanistan want. They should be responsible and sensible enough to remain united and face the ongoing challenges with required will and determination. The terrorists want them to be disunited so that they are able to launch their filthy objectives. They want to ignite another civil war so that Afghanistan is not able to come out of instability and chaos; therefore, it is vital to see the traces of the conspiracy that is being built in the country.

It is really unfortunate for Afghanistan that even after so many sacrifices that are given by the country, the prospects of peace and tranquility are not very optimistic. The insecurity seems to be on the rise in different parts of the country and the response of the relevant authorities are not truly effective. It seems the authorities do not have any clear idea about how to tackle the situation and help the country go through this crucial period with triumph, and now the people are being distracted as well, which is making the task even more challenging.

On the other hand, Taliban and Daesh have spread their networks in different provinces and everyday show their presence in some way or the other. Sometimes they target the innocent civilians and at others they target the security personnel.

Afghan security forces, on most of the occasions, take actions only after such incidents and calm down the situation temporarily. When the situation seems to be normalized, the insurgents again move forward and make their attacks. In fact, the security forces do not seem to have a proactive approach, which may be because of lack of any clear strategy in the top rankings of the government officials, who, themselves, are involved in their own differences instead of standing united to counter the growing threats of Taliban and Daesh.

If the authorities do not get really serious and determined to solve the security issues, it may start haunting Afghanistan to a great extent and may even undo the achievements that have been acquired in the last 14 years or so. The insurgents will keep on carrying out their activities and terrorize the people of Afghanistan like they are doing now. The current situation clearly highlights the fact that the insurgents are not even inclined towards peace process.

However, before any hopes of acquiring peace and tranquility can be turned into reality, the security forces and government authorities must make sure that they fulfill their responsibilities with determination and untiring efforts. Definitely, Afghan people have given many sacrifices and after so many sacrifices, it is important that Afghanistan should see a future full of peace and tranquility; however, for that to happen it is imperative that Afghan leadership must prove itself capable of designing and following a workable strategy to counter terrorism in true sense.



No Hope for a Fruitful Peace Negotiation in 2018

By Hujjatullah Zia

Afghan nation left two deadly years behind. The graph of soldier and civilian casualties were very high in the two past years. Holding out against peace talks, the militant fighters, mainly the Taliban, intensified their attacks against Kabul government. With the start of New Year, there still seems no light at the end of the tunnel. Notwithstanding Kabul's frequent calls for peace talks, the Taliban seek to continue violence and bloodshed in the current year, too. Peace process has been a rocky road and there were many ups and downs within the past. But with a radical religious leader Mullah Haibatullah at the helm, peace process has come to an unbreakable stalemate. Mullah Haibatullah, who nurtures a fundamental ideology, has never decided to sit around the negotiating table. Haibatullah, along with his deputies, is masterminding deadly attacks behind the scene. His only intention is to fight against Kabul government and shed blood indiscriminately. Although his men shed the blood of innocent civilians, especially women and children, he did not condemn those inhuman acts, which indicates that he is also involved in killing civilians.

The US drone targeted Mullah Akhtar Mansour with the aim of facilitating talks as US officials called him an obstacle before peace process. However, his death deteriorated the process as Haibatullah succeeded him. After all, Mansour's death was an eye-opener for his successor who never present in the media. He is aware of his radical approach toward security situation in Afghanistan and fears to be doomed to Mansour's fate. Although years are elapsing, Haibatullah remains adamantly opposed to peace talks. Similar to the past, he is most likely to declare war under a new title in the coming spring and continue killing soldiers and civilians in the country. It is believed that holding talks with a political opponent is possible but not with an ideological discontent.

For example, the head of Hezb-e-Islami Afghanistan (HIA) Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, who was a political opponent, reached an agreement with Kabul government and stopped shedding blood. Nonetheless, the Taliban did not and will not come to peace table.

Sustaining heavy casualties within more than a decade and half, Afghan people are not optimistic about peace talks. According to public belief, one-sided struggle will not bear the desired result. The Taliban never hesitated to kill inno-

cent civilians, including women and children. To put it succinctly, there is no lull in violence and bloodshed.

Although Afghanistan's peace offering continues fruitlessly, Afghan High Peace Council (HPC) persists the Taliban to come to peace table. At the end of 2017, Kabul government offered the Taliban to open their political office in Kabul and hold talks without precondition from the Afghan government. But all this fell on the Taliban's deaf ears.

Considering the aforementioned issues, 2018 is likely to be one of the deadly years before Afghan state and nation. On the one hand, the Taliban seek to continue their war and violence, but on the other hand, the self-styled Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) also pursues its sinister goal in Afghanistan.

To reduce violence and bloodshed, Afghan government and its international allies need to intensify their attacks against militant fighters, especially the Taliban and ISIL. Increasing the number of troops in Afghanistan, as it was suggested by the US President Donald Trump, is the right strategy. If the militants are not persuaded to hold talks, they have to be shot on the head. Indeed, persisting too much over peace process has gone beyond the tolerance of the public. Secondly, Afghan government and its international allies need to reinforce their intelligence so as to target the right purpose. That is to say, the Taliban change their tactics of war almost every year, but Afghan government continues the same traditional method in combating terrorism, which will not come to fruition as ever before. To reduce the graph of casualties in 2018, Afghan government must deal with the Taliban militarily since the Taliban hold out against talks.

To sum up, the Taliban are left with two options: whether hold talks or will encounter military consequence. They do not succumb to peace negotiation continuing their deadliest attacks against Afghan combatants and non-combatants and foreign troops. Hence, Afghan government should adopt a strong military mechanism as a last resort to bring the Taliban to their knees. It is hoped that Kabul government and its international allies will adopt more effective strategy to mitigate violence and bloodshed and prevent from civilian casualties in 2018. If the tactic of war is not changed in the current year, Afghans will sustain heavy casualties similar to the past two years and militancy will continue unabated.

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Irony of Afghan Abundant Resources and Pressing Energy Crisis

By Sayed Niyam Alami

Recently Pajhwok Afghan News (PAN) has published a report on cutting off power supply to our northern provinces by Turkmenistan. Our northern neighbor demanded double price for the imported electricity and the Afghan side denied paying more than the already agreed upon prices. Cutting power supply in the harsh winter of northern provinces was not less than a punishment of the consumers and crisis for the country.

The irony is that despite having abundant amount of natural resources with potential to generate electricity, Afghanistan is still craving for imported electricity. On the other hand, the neighboring states exploit the energy starvation of the war-torn country. In such a time, the government must take concrete measures to rescue its people from external energy dependency. Unluckily, our neighbors create hurdles for Afghanistan in every facet of development. The Iranian President Rouhani in July, 2017 expressed his intent of jeopardizing and preventing the construction of water dams on our own rivers. The eastern neighbor (Pakistan) is also hampering Afghanistan's efforts to build power dams as Afghanistan shares nine rivers with the country. So it is imperative for the Afghan government to find a solution and relieve the people from the power shortage crisis at hand? As electricity happens to be the most wanted necessity of life in modern days, Afghanistan still imports the utility despite being able to harness its natural resources for generating power. Only a meager amount of energy is produced within the country. According to Da Afghanistan BreshnaShirkat (DABS), 280MW to 320MW of power is currently produced in Afghanistan and 1,000MW electricity is imported from Iran, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. In addition, the Ministry of Water and Energy (MoWE) says Afghanistan requires 2,000MW of power in order to cope with the nation's energy needs. This is while the ministry claims the country has the potential to produce 318,000MW of power. Currently, 20 out of 34 provinces in Afghanistan are not connected to the power grid supply which increases cost of doing business, leads to environmental pollution, and subdues sustainable development indicators. This is while demand for energy in Afghanistan is increasing by almost twice its economic growth rate. On one hand, calls for power are growing rapidly across energy-starved Afghanistan for its economic development, and on the other income opportunities depend on sufficient energy supplies. Therefore, the implementation of short-term, medium-term and most importantly long-term power generation projects is badly needed to address the issue.

Afghanistan's potential

Using its hydel, solar, gas, wind and coal resources, Afghanistan can become self-reliant in electricity production and irrigation. The country can even export power if its resources

are properly managed. Tapping both the renewable energy and non-renewable energy sources can help Afghanistan stand on its own feet.

The country has a lot of renewable energy resources with water being at the top because Afghanistan has significant hydro resources with the river catchment area of 677,900 square meters, annual average rainfall of 300 mm and wide spread hilly topography. Abundant water, a precious commodity, is fortunate reality for Afghanistan if utilized.

Generating Hydropower is the best currently available option. Our rivers such as Kabul, Helmand, Amu, Panj River, Farah, Murghab River and many others are feasible for constructing hydropower dams upon. The geographical location of Afghanistan is extremely mountainous which makes the construction of Hydropower dams a favorable choice; however, unfortunately not much hydro-power projects have been implemented yet, thanks to the decades-long war combined with government's negligence.

Sunshine is also sufficiently available for producing power as annual average solar insolation is over 300 days of sunshine per year in the country. Wind is another power source with western Herat province known for its seasonal speedy blowing winds. Besides wind and sun, potential alternative energy sources for Afghanistan include biogas and geothermal energy. Afghanistan is also enriched with non-renewable resources such as coal, oil, natural gas, and uranium. The country is reported to have coal reserves totaling 100-400 million metric tons. These mines are located from Badakhshan and extend up to Herat Province. The natural gas and oil deposits situated in northwest of the country including Jawzan and Sar-i-Pul could also be utilized for the best. In addition, the Helmand Province in southern Afghanistan has sufficient uranium reserves, confirmed by the Ministry of Mines and Petroleum.

The way Forward

Increased access to efficient and sustainable energy sources can help Afghanistan meet its economic growth aspirations. The power generation capacity is far below the needed level. By increasing the generation capacity with efficient use of the natural resources already copiously available in Afghanistan, alternative energy sources could be directed into industrial development.

It is not questionable that the availability of electricity for the population directly contributes to an increase in a country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). It will result in new job opportunities and will consequently enhance economic activities. Afghanistan by managing its water and producing electricity can get rid of dependency on other countries; hence water management for energy must be one of the government's high priorities. Therefore, I strongly recommend to National Unity Government (NUG) leadership to prioritize this sector so that -- if not us -- at least the future generations of the country benefit from the utility.

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