

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



January 17, 2016

## Mining Sector Victimized by Corruption

It is one of the most unfortunate facts in Afghanistan that the resources that can benefit the country to a great extent are not utilized the way they should be; instead they are used for personal gains by authoritative individuals or anti-state elements. Mineral resources are also very important for Afghanistan and they are present in large amounts in different parts of the country. According to some calculations by US, Afghanistan may possess mineral deposits worth around \$1 trillion. However, the fact is that most of these mineral resources remain untouched and the ones that are being used are not used wisely or properly. Therefore, the mining sector in Afghanistan is suffering to a large extent.

Afghanistan's mining sector, if developed appropriately, can support Afghan economy greatly. As Afghanistan would require standing on its own especially after the international community withdraws its troops completely and diminishes the financial and economic support. It can also support in providing job opportunities to thousands of people who are suffering from the evil of unemployment and are becoming a part of other social evils and terrorism. Ill-fatedly, this sector is also being influenced by corruption.

In a report on Saturday, January 16, Integrity Watch Afghanistan, (IWA) disclosed that rebels and unauthorized individuals continued to exploit the country's natural resources, but no tangible steps had been taken to protect such sites, involving huge funds. And the funds and sites were still being exploited in callous ways.

He also added that the absence of coordination and planning were the main reasons behind irregularities and embezzlement. The international community injected money into the sector without a proper strategy to get revenue. He warned that the mining sector, whose revenue was going into the pockets of top government officials, powerful individuals, lawmakers and others, was faced with a serious crisis. The lack of professional workers to excavate mines is also damaging the sector. He also claimed that the militants are out to fuel insecurity in areas where natural resources are excavated. They take control of these areas and the revenue line their pockets; while the government has failed to take any serious measure.

Earlier in the week, a report from the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan's Reconstruction (SIGAR) revealed that \$488 million investments in Afghanistan's mining sector did not prove to be effective and there were still chances of the country's riches being misused.

This information depicts a very pathetic state of affairs. Misuse of funds and corruption in the sector would mean that there are more challenges than the other basic ones that have hampered the growth of the sector. If the resources that can support the government and the people of Afghanistan are helping insurgents, it would ultimately result in the victory of the insurgents against the country, which means that the people of Afghanistan would not see their dreams of peace and tranquility come true.

Apart from the corruption in the sector, insecurity is also hampering the sector from getting any boost. Terrorism seems to be rising in some of the most important parts of the country and the security situation still remains a question mark. Threatened by insecurity major projects regarding the mining sector have been postponed. The ones that have been started are lagging behind their schedule. The international investors are losing their interest as they do not feel that their investment would bring fruit in such uncertain circumstances. Moreover, the regional ties regarding peace and security seem to have just started and the reconciliation process is still vague. Thus, reliable security still remains dubious.

In such circumstances, development of a strong mining sector seems a herculean task. The mining sector is not just about digging the minerals out of the earth. It includes a complete development of an infrastructure. It involves complicated processes, machinery and latest technology. Most importantly, it requires a reliable and working transportation system that must be free of risk and must prove helpful in transporting heavy equipments and human resource to the mountainous areas where minerals are located. In addition, the same transportation system must transfer the minerals that are dug out to different plants for being refined and changed to usable conditions.

The mining sector also requires strong, cheap and reliable communication system that must remain undisturbed by the culprits. As a matter of fact, for the whole process, in order to reach to its final phase, a lot of investment and a decade or more of peaceful socio-political circumstances are required. While forming expectations about mining sector, it is necessary for the government officials to keep in considerations all these facts.

Definitely, generations of instability have incapacitated Afghanistan to work on these resources but at the same time it would require, at least a generation if not generations of stability to bring these resources in use. It is not impossible; neither the purpose of this article has been to promulgate pessimism about the circumstances. Its main objective has been to remind the people of Afghanistan and most importantly the Afghan authorities to analyze the socio-political and politico-economic conditions rationally and try to comprehend the challenges appropriately.

After the challenges are understood appropriately, measures can be carried out to find out proper solution of the challenges. It is really encouraging that there are expectations from the mining sector, but these expectations must not be converted to fantasies rather they should be changed to realities through prudence and positive attitude.



# Resolving the Electoral Reforms Stalemate

By Abdul Ahad Bahrami

The Afghan government and the parliament in recent weeks have been exploring ways to resolve the legal stalemate over the process of bringing reforms to the election laws and system. The MPs at the Wolesi Jirga have asked President Ashraf Ghani to propose an amendment bill to the parliament to make the required amendments to the election laws. In an attempt to resolve the legal stalemate over the election laws, the president has met a number of Wolesi Jirga lawmakers. The reports suggest, MPs emphasized that the previous decisions of the house over the presidential decrees on amendment of the electoral laws were valid and binding, requesting Ghani to present a proposed amendment to the electoral laws. While Ashraf Ghani has tasked the electoral selection committee to work on the list of their proposed names for membership of the Independent Election Commission and the Electoral Complaints Commission, some members of the parliament maintain that the work of the selection committee for recommending new members for the two election commissions is illegal.

The rejection of the two presidential decrees on amendment of the electoral laws as well as the law on structure, function and responsibilities of the two election bodies has led to growing uncertainties over the electoral reforms process which was set to result in a reformed electoral system in Afghanistan. The current legal stalemate over the electoral reforms is coming along with many other shortcomings and limitations to the country's crucial reforms process. The stalemate is going to further put into uncertainty the prospect of the upcoming parliamentary and provincial councils' elections. While the parliament has refused to amend the electoral laws based on the presidential decrees, the continuation of the task of the selection committee may face legal challenges and the legitimacy of the process could be potentially at risk.

The electoral reform process has come a long way ahead from within the initial political disagreements and polarization of politics of the country by the two major election camps. Both the parliament and the government need to redouble efforts to safeguard the process and find a way out of the current legal and procedural complications of the reform process. There is too much at stake if the process fails to deliver a reformed electoral process acceptable to all major stakeholders of the politics in the country. The political processes in the country would not be sustainable and transparent in absence of a reformed, fair and transparent electoral system. The controversial presidential election risked the legitimacy of the current political system and the formation of the government. The political crisis resulting from the 2014 presidential elections endangered long-term stability of the country while the insurgency is wreaking havoc in the country.

All sides of the government, the parliament and the Afghan political spectrum should focus on avoiding repetition of the past mistakes which endangered the country and bring in system and political pro-

cedures for safe political transitions in the country. The current reform process needs to go ahead considering both a comprehensive national consensus and legality and legitimacy of the whole process. Any reforms to the electoral systems and procedures should result to long-term enhanced stability and legitimacy of the state and serve long-term interests of the country. Afghanistan will no longer be able to afford flawed and fraudulent political processes and elections which would potentially lead to political instabilities. The government and the parliament need to do more to agree on a procedure for amending and approving the laws.

There is now growing disagreements among political groups and stakeholders. The polarization of the country's politics would neither serve anyone's interests nor the long-term stability of Afghanistan. Recently two more political groupings or coalitions came into exist, calling for reforms to the electoral laws and system, and even one recently-established political coalition led by former finance minister Anwarul haq Ahadi called for an early presidential election in the country. The formation of the two groups indicate the scale of political dissent and polarization of the politics in Afghanistan. The government needs to heed to calls from the political parties and the groups being formed by former officials and other politicians. There is a bitter conflict raging in the country. The insurgents are once again going to mount another round of their bloody violence across the country. This is while there is no clear prospect for the future of the conflict in the country. The government and the rest of the political spectrum in the country have been struggling in the past over a decade to help stabilization of the country. However, despite the past fourteen years of military efforts against the Taliban and other militants, stability and security still seems to be a distant dream for the people of Afghanistan. It is highly likely that the war continues in the upcoming years unabatedly and the government of Afghanistan remains engaged in a bloody conflict with the Taliban, while the peace process not yielding any positive results for peace in the country. A sound and politically inclusive reform process for the electoral laws and system would help stabilization of the country's political establishment. Therefore, a reformed electoral system and the relevant laws and the responsible commissions would play a determining role in leading the country into the right direction. All stakeholders of the Afghan politics must commit themselves to safeguard the future political development. It is crucial for the reform process to conclude as quickly as possible to enable the authorities to make the preparations for holding the upcoming parliamentary elections. The preparations for the elections would be a time-consuming and lengthy process. After the formation of the two electoral commissions, the election commission should set a date for the elections for some time between summer and autumn next year. Success of the whole process lies with the success of the ongoing efforts for delivering a reformed electoral system in the county.

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## Peace Talk Resumption

By Hujjatullah Zia

News of Mullah Omar's death was leaked just a day before a second meeting between Afghan government and Taliban elements was supposed to have taken place. The first meeting on July 07, 2015 near Islamabad, in Murree, initiated the so-called Murree Process. The revelation of Mullah Omar's death and subsequent struggle for succession in the Taliban leadership threw the whole process into uncertainty. Although, the July meeting was celebrated as a breakthrough, some believed that Taliban were not there through choice but after intimidation from Pakistan.

The Afghan government was relying heavily on Pakistan for reviving the long-moribund peace process. Turning to Pakistan for facilitating peace talks probably emerged as the most viable option after Kabul felt it had reached a deadlock in its own attempts to reach out to the Taliban. The Afghan government had tried informal intermediaries, such as the uncle of President Ashraf Ghani, Qayum Kuchai, and formal, direct contacts. The head of the National Security Council, Hanif Atmar, visited Qatar in early March 2015, possibly with the hope of meeting the Taliban political office members. President Ghani himself, according to the presidential office, was supposed to visit the Gulf state in late May 2015, but the visit was cancelled. That trip also was reported to be linked to start direct talks with the Taliban's political office. It seems the Afghan government, after unsuccessfully trying to reach out to the Taliban directly, felt they had little choice but to seek Pakistan's help.

Additionally, there is another reason that can explain why the National Unity Government went to Pakistan for peace. It is believed that President Ghani sees the conflict mainly between states, Afghanistan and Pakistan, and thus sees the anti-state actors Kabul fights as mere proxies of Islamabad. He has made this point clear twice in statements. On August 03, 2015, he told journalists via a teleconference from Germany that "Our main goal is peace, peace between the sovereign states of Afghanistan and Pakistan, as Pakistan has been in a state of undeclared war with our country over the last fourteen years."

In March, he told an audience at the US Institute of Peace in Washington that "The problem, fundamentally, is not about peace with Taliban...The problem is fundamentally about peace between Pakistan and Afghanistan."

The National Unity Government (NUG) has been beleaguered and under pressure from all sides. The growing militancy and increase in civilian and security forces casualties, slow progress on forming a government, emerging political rivalries and a sinking economy - all make a quick peace deal attractive. However, seeking a quick fix may ruin the chance of getting a real peace process going.

The most essential element of a peace process is building trust among the warring parties. An external force intimidating one party into coming to the table can be no substitute for genuine interest in seeking a negotiated end to the conflict.

However, it seems it was not only the Afghan government that wanted a rushed peace deal enough to buy into the Pakistan channel. It appears the dominant thinking among US officials has been that Pakistan can bring the movement to talks by hook or by crook. According to a western official familiar with the key international actors involved in Afghan peace efforts, some of these actors prefer to have the most inclusive Taliban deal possible. If that is not achievable, it would be sufficient to include the Pakistan-based Leadership Council and Haqqani network and forget about Qatar or other Taliban figures living outside Pakistan. "The thinking is that the train, the Taliban core leadership, is based in Pakistan," he is quoted as saying.

"That will soon start moving. Those in Qatar have to either jump in and join the train or they will miss it." Another western diplomat said the focus on sticking to the Pakistan channel was not aimed at excluding the Taliban's political office, but rather "to create enough momentum, so that those in Qatar and elsewhere jump in." So far, however, Pakistan has only been able to bring the appearance of representation of the Leadership Council and Haqqani "network" to peace talks, but nothing more.

During his most recent visit to Kabul, Pakistani army chief Gen. Raheel Sharif promised Afghan leaders that he would press Pakistan-based Taliban leaders to resume peace talks and take action against those who resort to terrorism and violence.

Afghan High Peace Council (HPC) expressed optimism regarding the reconciliation process and said on Friday that the second quadrilateral meeting between Afghanistan, Pakistan, China and the United States will assess the structure of direct talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban.

Zalmay Khalilzad, a former American ambassador to Afghanistan wrote, "Pakistan's interest in a negotiated settlement to the Afghan war seems real enough, but the Pakistani military has never been willing to take the very steps most likely to advance the process, which are to close down Afghan Taliban and Haqqani network operations in Pakistan and imprison any of their leaders not actively negotiating peace with the government in Kabul." He further added, "Without Pakistani initiative, talks with the Taliban are unlikely to succeed. Perhaps with Pakistani consent and support the Taliban will continue to push their advantage on the ground.

Alternatively, given ground realities, the Taliban might demand that the United States and Afghanistan cede provinces in the east and the south to them."

Pakistani officials kept insisting on resuming peace talk when it was stalled with the revelation of Omar's death. Finally, with the involvement of China and US official delegates, Afghanistan has put trust in Pakistan - following ebbed and flowed relations between the two countries. Now, both the countries express optimism over resuming the negotiation but the passage of time will reveal if it gives the desired result.

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