

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

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## Challenges for Presidential Election Teams

The date for presidential election in Afghanistan has been announced; it is expected to be held on 20 of July, if there are no further delays. The presidential candidates have already registered themselves and different teams have been formed. For these teams, there are myriads of challenges in the days to come. It is imperative that these teams must understand these challenges and decide their campaigns and agenda as per the same.

They need to understand that Afghanistan is standing at a very crucial juncture of its history. In fact, it is at a point that can decide whether the country will be able to stand on its own and move towards peace and tranquility, or whether it will be further pushed towards instability and chaos. At such a deciding time in its history, the leadership cannot be lethargic or indifferent. They have a challenging task ahead of them if they are interested in leading the country towards better future.

Currently, there are many concerns about the Afghan government; addressing them must be among the top agenda points of the candidates. These teams have to listen to the different voices in the country that are peace-loving and want a better future for Afghanistan in the form of better political system. Moreover, they can strengthen efforts so that strong foundations of a democratic setup are put in place. At the meantime, they can work on developing the political institutions and make them as much strong as possible as it is the institutions that make the evolution of political system towards stability and prosperity possible. This is possible if they are ready to adopt a flexible and democratic attitude towards different opinions regarding the political amendments in the country.

The most challenging task for the winning team will be controlling corruption. Corruption has penetrated deep within the country's socio-political and socio-economic atmospheres and will keep on doing so unless proper attention is paid to it. The winning team will also require to adopt a strict policy regarding the poppy cultivation and smuggling that have not only debilitated the lives of Afghan people but has been fueling the terrorism to a large extent, as well. The teams must layout a clear policy regarding the reconciliation process in the country. Ambiguity and indecision would not solve the issue easily. Even after the peace talks start, they are not going to end quickly. It would require a long process to finalize the talks with Taliban and then bringing them to the mainstream political system of the country. Therefore, all the teams must highlight how they are going to face these issues.

At the same time, the teams must decide how they are going to see the relations with the neighboring countries so that they should be improved. It is correct that neighboring countries have not fulfilled much as far as their responsibilities are concerned, yet they have to bring about innovations and flexibility and diplomatic prudence in their approach towards them.

They have to keep in consideration as well that as a result of decades of instability and socio-economic and political problems, the Afghan people have been suffering from myriads of problems. Though there have been certain improvements, some very concerning issues still exist that threaten the lives of the common people of Afghanistan. There are claims that changes have been brought within Afghan society; however, it should be noted that if the effectiveness of the changes have to be felt or observed, they should be observed by the changes in the lives of the common people. If there is any change in the condition of living of the common people as the outcome of the change; the change should be guarded for and even backed and supported vehemently. If not, either the claim must be discarded as wrong or the efforts should be improved to make the changes effective. And that is what Afghanistan needs to do - it has to improve its efforts to bring about necessary changes in the lives of the common people that have been jeopardized both by insecurity and lack of rudimentary requirements of life.

People are not able to have access to health and other facilities of life. The development works to improve the standard of living of the common people are not carried out because of the security threats, thus the desired objectives are not attained in this regard. People, in some parts of the country, are not able to have access to education as well. Schools are shut by force and the school going children are irritated.

Within a democratic system, when people cast their vote and choose a government, they expect and expect rightly that they should be provided their basic requirements of life by the government. In the modern concept of state, protecting the basic rights of the people and providing them the requirements to live a better life are considered as the basic functions of a state. The newly elected government of Afghanistan, therefore, would need to make sure that the common people of Afghanistan are provided their basic requirements like food, cloth, shelter and security and other important requirements of life like education, health facilities, job opportunities and other facilities.



## Belt and Road Initiative Puts Impetus to Afghan Peace and Development (Part 1)

By: Liu Jinsong

Recently Dr. Mariam Safi, founder and executive director of Afghan think tank DROPS, published her research report Integrating Afghanistan into the Belt and Road Initiative: Review, Analysis and Prospects. It is the first report by an Afghan scholar that systematically focuses on the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). My colleagues and I have read it through. I feel Madam Safi has done a lot of work with an independent mind. Her investigation has been thorough and her argument robust. As the first person to try tomato, she has filled a gap in the research of BRI and blazed a new trail for future researchers.

At the release ceremony, Dr. Safi said that Afghan people from all walks of life appreciated the China's invitation to jointly construct the BRI. While the Afghan situation is still not peaceful, the move gave Afghanistan a 'cardiotonic'. It is aligned with the fundamental interests of Afghanistan and its people and will be conducive to Afghanistan fully tapping its development potentials and becoming self-supporting once again as the Heart of Asia, Eurasian crossroads and a trade hub along the Silk Road. I agree with her. The BRI first and foremost demonstrates the Chinese goodwill and sincerity. In the Chinese and Dari languages, there is a shared proverb: a single flower does not make spring. Through this regional economic cooperation initiative, China hopes to provide infrastructure and connectivity, a global public good in high demand, and share the fruits of its own development with neighbors, to fulfill its major country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics.

The BRI is designed to carry forward the cause of the ancient Silk Road and forge ahead into the future. A pearl on the ancient Silk Road, Afghanistan made important contributions to it and to the development of Chinese cultures. The BRI will restore youth to the ancient route and return to the Afghan people the hope for peace and the capacity for development.

The BRI is the world's largest project for people's well-beings. Its central goal is common development whereby everyone makes money and has a good life. In the past five years since its launch, the volume of trade in goods between China and the relevant countries has exceeded 5 trillion US dollars, with an annual growth rate of 1.1% against the backdrop of world trade decline and negative growth. Chinese direct investment in those countries has exceeded 70 billion dollars, with an annual growth of 7.2%. The 82 economic and trade cooperation zones, constructed by China all over the world, have paid over

2 billion dollars in taxes and fees to the host countries and created more than 200,000 local jobs. Because of this, more and more countries are joining the BRI. Over a hundred countries and international organizations have signed about 120 cooperation agreements with China in this regard.

The BRI is closely linked to the development of a community of shared future for mankind and a new model of international relations. The initiative encompasses land and maritime cooperation through both official and people-to-people channels. We believe that the BRI should be jointly built through consultation to meet the interests of all and by pursuing high quality, following high standards and arriving at high levels for all projects. The initiative aims at policy coordination, infrastructural connectivity, unimpeded trade, financial integration and people-to-people bonds. Priorities are given to infrastructural connectivity, industrialization, development of energy resources, economic cooperation and trade, financial cooperation, cultural exchanges, ecological protection and maritime cooperation. Efforts have been redoubled to construct six economic corridors, including China-Russia-Mongolia, New Eurasia Land Bridge, China-Central Asia-West Asia, China-Pakistan, Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar and China-Indochina Peninsula, and to advance three-dimensional connectivity networks composed of railways, roads, waterways, air routes, pipelines and information highways.

For a landlocked country at the heart of the Eurasian continent like Afghanistan, the BRI offers not only roads in all directions but also unprecedented attention and investment by the international community on its development. By making the best use of its advantages in geography, resources, demography, connections and international attention and bypassing any disadvantages, Afghanistan may play an active and important role and make considerable gains in the development of the BRI, which thus offers a pathway to economic self-supporting and catching up.

Afghanistan was among the first to explicitly support the BRI, sign the relevant memorandum of understanding and establish relevant security cooperation mechanism with China. The Chinese side attaches importance to and appreciates the positive attitude of Afghan leaders, government departments and people from all walks of life and regards Afghanistan as an important partner in BRI and for early harvest.

Liu Jinsong is the Ambassador of the People's Republic of China in Afghanistan

## Pessimisms and Optimisms about Progress of Peace Process

By: Mohammad Zahir Akbari

The progress of Afghan peace process in Qatar has caused some optimism and also some pessimism in internal atmosphere of Afghanistan. The optimism is expressed due to the point that mutually Taliban and U.S negotiators have reached unprecedented steps of agreement to end the long senseless war in the country, but the pessimism are expressed due to lack of attention about preserving the national interests and democratic political achievements of Afghanistan. Seemingly, the main agenda of the talks were not focused on the issues which are important for the people of Afghanistan and neither the representatives of Afghanistan were present during the talks. However, Khalilzad indirectly said that nothing was agreed during the talks. "Nothing is agreed until everything is agreed, and 'everything' must include an intra-Afghan dialogue and comprehensive ceasefire," he said in a tweet. He added that "we have a number of issues left to work out".

In addition, Khalilzad, left Doha on Saturday to visit Kabul for "consultations". Earlier in the day, a spokesperson for President Ashraf Ghani acknowledged that the reported agreements which sources say have been reached between US and Taliban officials in the past six days in Doha, Qatar, have not been shared with the Afghan government. However, "Mr. (Zalmay Khalilzad) will share it with the Afghan government when agreements are finalized in Doha. We hope it will bring us closer (to peace talks) and we hope that we will witness peace talks," said Fraidoon Khozoon, Ghani's deputy spokesman. Sources familiar with the Doha talks said that on the fifth day of the US-Taliban discussions in Qatar on Friday, US officials agreed to a troop withdrawal from Afghanistan. The sources also said that Taliban has agreed not to let al Qaida and Daesh operate in Afghanistan.

According to media news, the US officials have asked for a ceasefire, but Taliban has demanded a timeline to be drawn up for the withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan before agreeing to this. Taliban says they first want to be assured by the US that there will be no threat to regional countries especially Pakistan and then a ceasefire will take place. According to Sayed Akbar Agha, a former member of Taliban, Taliban is saying that a ceasefire should be done separately which means a ceasefire with foreigners to stop their bombardments and a ceasefire with the Afghan government; this will be agreed on in a meeting (with Afghan government) and this is a different matter," said Sayed Akbar Agha.

Meanwhile, Voice of America (VOA) reported that the United States and the Taliban have likely reached an agreement for withdrawal of American forces from Afghanistan and in return, the insurgent group has given assurances that no international

terrorist groups would be allowed to use Afghan soil to threaten America or any other country in future. The plan would require the Taliban to observe a ceasefire. However, both the withdrawal and the cease-fire will be "limited and conditional", according to VOA.

While no formal statement issued to show the total outcome of the meetings. As quoted from Asad Wahidi, a Kabul University professor who was closely monitored the Doha talks was published saying that no such an agreement had reached in the Qatar talks which could be officially announced. He said though some points were agreed upon, yet it would be too early to announce them as both the sides currently share the result of their talks with their respective leadership and there would be one announcement that the talks would continue in future.

The other factor which created optimism is the appointment of Mullah Baradar as the head of Taliban peace negotiators. Heretofore, it was said that the Taliban representatives in Qatar did not have enough authority to talk about key issues and they had to consult with their Quetta headquarter about everything. Moreover, the Taliban has repeatedly rejected the Afghan government's offer of holding talks, preferring instead to talk directly to the U.S. side, which it regards as its main enemy; while Mullah Baradar was the one who had showed interests in talks with Afghan government part. Thus, it is said that the Mullah Baradar has more authority and more influence on Taliban and expectably can play an effective role in peace process. Taliban also preferred their side to be led by new political chief Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, the movement's co-founder and a former military commander who was released from prison in Pakistan. Bye and large, the Taliban are more propounded to be the winner of the Talks comparing to the Afghan government; currently they control nearly half of the country and are widely seen as being more powerful than at any point since the beginning of the US invasion to topple them. Despite the ongoing peace talks, the group has continued carrying out nearly daily attacks against Afghan government and its security forces. Last Tuesday, Taliban militants carried out a complex attack on a military base east of Kabul in which dozens of Afghan soldiers were killed. Last week, President Ghani confessed that 45,000 members of the country's security forces had been killed since he took office in the fall of 2014. Apparently, the US is also ready to give more advantages to Taliban; President Donald Trump has expressed eagerness to bring home his troops, and was reported to be considering a halving of the remaining 14,000 US forces still in Afghanistan.

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