

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



July 10, 2016

NATO Support and Prospects of Peace

It is imperative that the international community must not stop supporting Afghanistan at times when it is facing serious security challenges. There are fears that the country may once again fall in quagmire of instability and chaos if it is left alone to face these challenges. The support should be persistent, honest and most importantly must be in the area of training and assisting Afghan security forces so that they are able to defeat the enemies and secure the country for the future generations. NATO can play an important role in this regard. It has been assisting Afghanistan and needs to do so until Afghan forces are able to stand on their own and can confront the challenges themselves. And it seems that it is committed to do so as it has promised to support Afghanistan till 2020. At the Warsaw Summit on Saturday, June 09, the NATO leaders, together with President Ashraf Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah, discussed the security situation in Afghanistan and the reform process carried out by the Afghan National Unity Government. They also took stock of the performance of the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces, and laid out the way ahead for their continued support for Afghanistan. They pledged funding the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) through 2020.

Addressing a press briefing, NATO Secretary General, Stoltenberg, said, "We agreed to sustain our Resolute Support Mission beyond 2016, through a flexible, regional model... Afghan security forces are now responsible for security across the whole country, they are defending the Afghan people with dedication and courage; we continue to train, advise and assist them; but Afghanistan still faces serious instability and violence; so our continued political, military and financial engagement is of great importance." Stoltenberg also highlighted three key decisions made. "First, we agreed to sustain our Resolute Support Mission beyond 2016, through a flexible, regional model. Second, we received firm national commitments to continue funding Afghan security forces through 2020. And third, we reaffirmed our support for a long-term political partnership and practical cooperation with Afghanistan... So, our message is clear: Afghanistan does not stand alone; and we are committed for the long haul," he said.

Afghanistan now yearns to see the glory of peace and tranquility and for that it requires support. However, at the same time it requires highlighting its own role and responsibilities as well.

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 possible kinds 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 many years of war and movement against terrorism, though there have been improvements, the administrative, development and security sectors still remain immature. It is really vital that these sectors should 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.

As far as the capacity of Afghan forces to guarantee secure life for Afghan people, there are grey patches. Unless there are speedy development in the capacity building, training and professionalism of Afghan forces, the eyebrows will remain tense as far as security arrangements are concerned. Furthermore, 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 have not shown their 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. In short, the security situation in Afghanistan is still not certain and future is very much ambiguous.

The impact of international assistance, though vital, 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.



Kabul Facing Severe Water Crisis

By Mohammad Zahir Akbari

Kabul city and its surrounding region are suffering from harsh shortage of water at this time let alone when the population increases and expected temperature rises. Rapid population growth and predictable temperature raise due to climate change mean the area - which just manages to support 4.5 million people today - will need six times more water by 2050, according to a Geological Survey.

Thousands of wells already have been sunk in Kabul city while the number of population are increasing due to unemployment, security issues and forced systematic migration because of insecurity. The water table has dropped unprecedentedly, and thousands of settlements face severe water crisis. The two-year Kabul basin water survey had already warned that barely exploited deep underground water sources may not be sufficient to provide for all human and farming needs. Mountain snow, which feeds rivers throughout the basin, is melting earlier each year, leaving less water for use later on, particularly during summer, when it is needed most. The majority of the people get its water from wells and storage tanks while collecting water is most often a hard task assigned to women and children, usually girls. In most areas of the county they walk miles to find water and then carry it back in large, heavy containers. The usual method of collecting the water is with manual hand pumps that are difficult to use. For children the task is particularly arduous and tiring. In addition, most of the shared water points and wells are contaminated, leading to illness. The capital, with estimated population of 4.5 million people, 80% of them lack access to safe drinking water, and 95% lack access to improved sanitation facilities. Thus, other cities still do not have access to clean drinking water despite billions of dollars invested by the international community to supply the nation with a steady supply. As a result, waterborne diseases are common. The levels of diarrhea and dysentery, especially among children, are at epidemic proportions. As well, a large number of people suffer from cholera because of dirty drinking water. The lack of clean drinking water is one of major factors to highest death rate of children in Afghanistan. According to a survey conducted by the United Nations Children's Fund, which found that 102 of every 1,000 children born in Afghanistan will die before reaching the age of five.

The underground water supplies in most large cities are under serious threat because of the lack of a canalization system, proper waste management and the random disposal of waste material. According to some reports, the medical and solid wastes are mixed together and then buried in the capital. Some is also thrown on the ground. The experts warn that over time the waste will seep into the underground water table poisoning the water. The medical waste also contains infectious viruses and is

putting the entire population at risk. Experts blame the problem on the lack of a proper waste management system in most of the country's hospitals. They also point out many industries' lack of corporate ethics for their unwillingness to protect the environment from the increase in industrial waste.

According to Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey, 43 percent of Afghanistan's populations still do not have access to improved drinking water, and 71.5 per cent do not have access to improved sanitation. Meanwhile according to the Afghanistan Central Statistics Organization, overall 57 percent of Afghans are using surface water, which is an improved source of drinking water.

As Afghans have no access to sanitation facilities 20% of the population (mostly rural) practices open defecation, often in the rivers they drink out of. The majority of the rest of the population use traditional latrines. The latrines are a better option than open defecation, but still not very good. Because they do not isolate excrement from human contact and do not dispose of the waste by moving it outside of the house they still lead to disease and infection. Even if you could move it out of the house, Afghanistan has no wastewater management right now, and has not for a long time. This is due to several factors including limited water supply (you need water to treat the wastewater), the facilities and equipment are very expensive, and the Afghans do not yet have the technical expertise to run a wastewater treatment facility.

The country's water sources are heavily dependent on annual rainfall and snowfall. But poor government policy has severely hampered the use of the country's river supplies. Climate change and drought are also severely affecting water supplies. Climate change is affected both shallow and groundwater levels.

To fight the crisis, the government needs to invest in water infrastructure throughout the country, and devise an efficient plan which should also include the control of medical waste and polluted water in urban areas that is contaminating water supplies. Water sources should be distributed through pipelines and needs clusters of water tanks should be constructed in different areas to provide drinking water. Additionally, a new research is needed to form a collective diagnosis of the strengths and weaknesses of current river basin management practices in Kabul city. This would help ensure future plans for action are rooted in a realistic assessment of the current situation and add practical value where it is.

To prevent the misuse of water, the government should step up efforts to promote public awareness through a lasting national campaign and taking necessary actions both in the rural and urban areas of the country including Kabul.

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Taliban Impose War on Afghanistan

By Hujjatullah Zia

With the appointment of Mawlawi Haibatullah Akhundzada, who is known for his radical decrees, as Mansour's successor the security situation has been deteriorated in Afghanistan. The deadly attack on the Afghan military vehicles on June 30, as they were heading from Wardak to Kabul left tens of soldiers dead and wounded behind. The attack is the latest major assault by the group and came just nine days after 14 Nepali security guards were killed in a suicide bomb attack on their bus, in Kabul.

This comes as it was reported earlier that the U.S. forces in Afghanistan have launched new air strikes against Taliban targets in recent days under a new plan approved in June by the U.S. President Barack Obama. The expanded U.S. combat role comes at a time that the Taliban insurgency has bounced back less than two years after the U.S. and the coalition forces pulled their troops out of Afghanistan, transitioning the overall security responsibility of the country to conventional forces who, according to military experts, were still in need of a strong air force and military equipment.

Reportedly, more than 50 districts in the country are facing serious security threats; nine of them are currently out of government's control. Afghan soldiers and civilians are left at the mercy of unmitigated militancy and the Taliban fighters have, seemingly, reinforced their offensives following the death of Mullah Akhtar Mansour, who was killed in U.S. drone strike in the Dalbandin area of Balochistan on May 21. So, they will never sit around the peace table and have taken the oath of revenge for their leader's death. Moreover, these attacks are also a backlash against the U.S. and Afghan soldiers' heavy strikes.

Calling Mansour an "obstacle" before peace talks, the U.S. soldiers targeted him with the intention of facilitating talks between Afghan government and the Taliban elements. To U.S. and Afghans' unmitigated chagrin, his successor has come out a greater obstacle for being more radical than Mansour - which means "out of frying pan into the fire." Now, there is not a faintest doubt about Haibatullah's profound radicalism and he deserves to be the next target of the U.S. drone strike.

This is a true fact that all the doors to peace talks have been closed. The decade-long struggles of Afghan government was proved abortive and the establishment of Quadrilateral Coordination Group (QCG) which comprises of Pakistan, Afghanistan, the U.S. and China for bringing the Taliban to negotiating table is on the verge of disintegration since the trust has been faded away among the members after Mansour's death. As a result, Afghan forces are in favor of military deal against the Taliban -

which is believed to be a wise decision after repeated failures for talks - however, Regional countries still push for talks, although, they failed to fulfill their promises in getting the Taliban to hold talk. As a result, Pakistan warned that those seeking a renewed recourse to military-oriented solution need to think through its consequences. Speaking in the quarterly debate on Afghanistan at the UN Security Council (UNSC) in New York Dr. Maleeha Lodhi, Pakistan's Ambassador to United Nations, asked "Is it (US) ready to invest in war rather than peace in Afghanistan?" She condemned the May 21 US drone strike in Naushki district of Balochistan which killed Mullah Akhtar Mansour, describing it as an "unacceptable and blatant violation of Pakistan's sovereignty and of the UN charter and international law". This strike, she said, dealt "a blow to the Afghan peace process" and added to the intensity and complexity of the Afghan conflict. Referring to Secretary General Ban Ki-moon's report on Afghanistan, she said it reinforced the firm international consensus that, "Only by a negotiated political agreement will Afghans achieve sustainable peace".

The question, for those who deem peace talks a right option, is that why the talks have never come to fruition despite Afghanistan's tireless struggles? The Taliban have constantly opened new seasons for their terrorist acts, despite persistent calls for negotiation, such as "spring offensive" last year and "Omari Operation" this year - which have taken heavy toll of Afghan civilians and soldiers. The militants never hesitate to spill the blood of non-combatants, including women and children. So, do you think that a unilateral persistent for talks ever come to fruition while the next side speaks with the barrel of gun?

Indeed, no country likes violence and bloodshed but the unmitigated militancy has imposed the war on Afghanistan. The Taliban have always exploited the generosity and good will of Afghan government. For instance, when they were released from prisons, during Hamid Karzai's administration, they rejoined battlefield and staged heavier attacks against the government - which led to larger casualties.

Therefore, it is believed that "a tooth for a tooth and an eye for an eye" will be the only effective option, if not the best, regarding the Taliban militants. The government should revenge streams of blood being spilt every day which fill our nation with outpouring of grief. Hence, the government will have to disband the High Peace Council (HPC) - which was established in 2010 to hold talks with the Taliban - and enhance tactical and military intelligence to bring the warring factions to their knees.

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