

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

Daily  
**Outlook**  
AFGHANISTAN  
The Leading Independent Newspaper

July 16, 2019

## Poverty Leads to Horrible Consequences

**P**overty and economic challenges are highly serious problem in Afghanistan notwithstanding the country's rich mineral resources. Poverty and unemployment linger in the country and people wrestle with this chronic issue with disappointment.

Afghanistan has a unique geographical location and was considered "Asian transit and trade roundabout", during the ancient Silk Road, connecting South Asia to Central Asia and East Asia to West Asia. It has rich mineral deposits, fertile land for cultivation, and a large number of labor forces. But poverty continues unabated.

The unmitigated poverty has led to horrible consequences across the country. As a result, a large number of Afghan children are not able to continue their education. That is, children are forced to be the bread winners of their families in early age. Remaining illiterate, they will not enjoy a bright future, either.

In addition to the increasing number of street beggars, the crime rate has surged up to a great extent, especially in large cities. Take Kabul for example, tens of people have been reportedly killed in armed robberies within the last few months. It is believed that every one person out of three has been mugged or fell victim to theft and robbery in Kabul city in broad daylight. Who does not know the story of theft and mugging in Kabul? Many robbers and street criminals carry pistols or knives with them. In most cases, it is not a single criminal, but they have formed a band to support its members. It is claimed that some strongmen are leading the criminal bands.

Second, who can claim that prostitution will not rise in the wake of hunger and poverty? Some may surrender to prostitution so as to alleviate the hunger of their family members.

Afghan citizens are on the top list of world refugees. A large number of Afghan labor forces flock to Europe and neighboring countries at the cost of their lives as a result of unemployment. Needless to say, Afghan refugees are humiliated, beaten, and killed and their rights and dignity are violated in many parts of the world. They tolerate all the difficulties to earn money so that their families could survive.

Similarly, administrative corruption within the government compounds the people's economic constraints. A number of people are not hired in the government based on personal merit but by nepotism or bribery. The same individuals will turn corrupt and will be involved in bribery and other suck ilk.

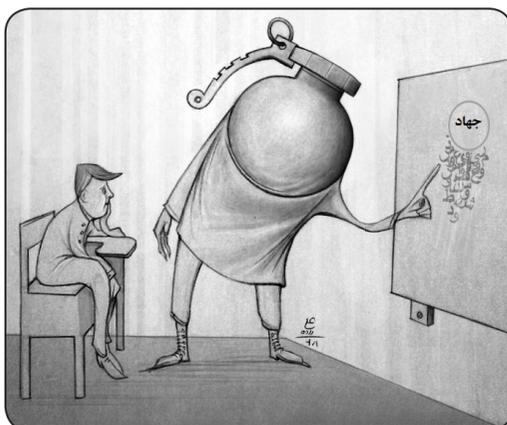
It is highly disappointing to see that Afghanistan is on the top list of insecure countries, corrupt countries, narcotic producing countries, worst countries for women, etc. If citizens hear more than 90 percent negative news and reports on daily basis, what will happen? Will they still be able to live with hope? Although I have always sought to view issues from a positive perspective, but one cannot deny the ongoing negative issues. Life is terrible and the level of public hope is extremely low if one views the issue from the eye of an ordinary citizen.

To decrease the crime rate, the government has to create job for the youth. It needs to campaign against poverty in a systematic way and reduce the level of poverty through short-term, mid-term, and long-term projects.

Moreover, the government has to prevent illegal activities such as illegal mining and smuggling Afghanistan's precious stones outside the country. It is believed that a number of strongmen are involved in committing systematic crimes, including illegal trade and supporting criminal bands.

The government has to secure the country's mineral resources for extraction. If Afghanistan's mineral resources are extracted under the government's law, the level of poverty will be reduced since mineral deposits are reportedly worth trillions of dollars. So, why should Afghans suffer from poverty in spite of having rich mineral resources and country's unique geographical location for trade and transit?

The government should also pave the ground for foreign and domestic investment. In this case, it has to fight both criminals and militant fighters. Apart from militant groups, the criminals, involved in systematic crimes, abduct family members of rich people and businesspersons, which leaves no room for inspiration to invest in the country. Thus, local businesspersons will seek to withdraw their capitals from the country and foreign investors will not think of investing here. The government is responsible to reduce poverty level through fighting corrupt individuals within the government's body, prosecuting the criminals, creating jobs, and implementing the law.



## Challenges and Opportunities of Peace Process in Afghanistan

By: Mohammad Zahir Akbari

**N**aturally, every social or political phenomenon has opportunities and challenges but the opportunities often overcome the challenges due to multiple reasons and factors. Unfortunately, this rule is reversely true in Afghanistan, especially in case of peace issues. For example, few years ago the condition of Syria and Iraq was worse than Afghanistan but now it is not comparable to the increasing crisis in Afghanistan. It seemed that the new peace process would open a new window for peace in Afghanistan but according to new reports and evidence it is more likely to face challenge or stalemate. Though the US special envoy to Afghanistan, Zalmay Khalilzad, had expressed optimism during and after the seventh round US-Taliban and also on the sidelines of the third round intra-Afghan talks in Doha, for reached some agreements with Taliban. But according to Taliban act and expressions, it is as though that no significant agreement has reached between the two parts and also between Afghan politicians and Taliban as they are persistent to their dogmatic demands and destruction in the country.

The quadrilateral summit which recently held among the United States, China, Russia and Pakistan in China has not any substantial outcome that could help the peace process, and it is more likely to have ended without any real agreement. However, they have jointly urged the Taliban to immediately agree to a ceasefire and begin direct negotiations with the Afghan government to end the 18-year violence in the war-torn country. Thus, they re-affirmed that the negotiations should be "Afghan-led and Afghan-owned" and produce a peace framework as soon as possible. "But according to some experts these diplomatic words does not convey any practical value. On the other hand, it is inferred from the latest twitted message of the US special envoy that the Beijing Meeting, like other peace talks, has not a practical result. All these interactions show that the United States Special Representative is facing significant challenges that each of them alone can bring Khalilzad's efforts to complete failure.

The first challenge is the nature of Taliban and the goals that the leaders of this group are pursuing. Naturally they are an extremist group who never showed any improvement in their mentality and ideology. This group still organizes the largest terrorist and suicide attacks victimizing the civilians and non-civilians in the country. In recent months, in spite of running peace process in Qatar, the Taliban have persistently continued violence and war in Afghanistan. In the first days of current year, the group declared the al-Fatih operation against the Afghan government, and at the same time they intensified the war against the Afghan security forces and organized the worst suicide and terrorist attacks in cities and hometown centers.

The extremist nature of the Taliban caused them not to desist from the

Islamic Emirate in all negotiations despite strong opposition by Afghan people. This illegitimate and inhumane demand may not matter to the other stakeholders, but it is a complete disaster for the people and government of Afghanistan. In all these years, the people of Afghanistan have fought and sacrificed to have a human life. Otherwise, there was no need to fight and tolerate all these 18 years of human and non-human expenses. Based on this, the question arises how the US-envoy is hopeful and how he is sure for the positive outcome of ongoing the peace process. The second important challenge lies in the multidimensional angles and factors of conflict in Afghanistan. We all know that there are dozens of important factors for the continuation of the crisis and conflict in Afghanistan; none of which have yet come to an end and they are still interested in the continuation of the conflict. Though this fact is bitter for the people of Afghanistan, now it is undeniable and publically raised as overt fact that no way to escape from. Peace is the other side of war; as much as war has hidden and unhidden factors and dimensions, peace also has the same features but there is no one who has ever thought about it or shared with people of Afghanistan.

Another important factor which challenges peace process and, ultimately will challenge the US special representatives is his personal preferences. As he was born in Afghanistan, he is an Afghani more than being an American, especially when he blamed for having personal preferences and hatreds to certain groups. That is why he tries to hide the entire process from the eyes of the media and the people; this secrecy caused that all cases, including peace process are considered as intelligence nature.

In such a situation, nothing is clear to the people of Afghanistan, and no Afghan citizen knows what is going on behind the closed doors? What are they negotiating about while the people of Afghanistan do not know anything about it? This way, no trust will shape between people of Afghanistan and the US special representatives. This kind of secrecy will damage and distrust the whole process.

The last but not least challenge is the Trump election campaign in the US; he has vigorously advocated the US disengagement from endless wars but it is the best time to get the credit for the upcoming electoral competitions. Indeed, if Trump can withdraw the US troop from Afghanistan before the presidential election next year, it could raise his standing and brighten his chances of re-election barring some adverse domestic developments. In any way, Trump wants to make a difference or achievement in Afghanistan, but a sustainable peace may not be possible in a hurry. According to a famous proverb, he wants to milk from a bull; this issue alone has put the special representatives in a difficult bottleneck.

Mohammad Zahir Akbari is the permanent writer of the Daily Outlook Afghanistan. He can be reached at mohammadzahirakbari@gmail.com

## Boris Johnson and the Threat to British Soft Power

By: Gordon Brown

**S**ince the United Kingdom's Department of International Development (DFID) was created 22 years ago, it has lifted millions out of poverty, sent millions of children to school, and saved millions of lives through vaccination programs and other innovative initiatives. Most recently, it has been a world leader in delivering development aid to poor countries facing the ravages of climate change.

Yet under a proposal now being explored by the transition team of the UK's likely next prime minister, Boris Johnson, DFID would be absorbed into the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO). The new PM would be solving one problem - the unacceptable neglect of the British diplomatic service - by creating an even bigger one: the loss of perhaps Britain's greatest global asset today: the soft power it exercises on every continent because of its pathbreaking commitment to ending world poverty.

As other countries have discovered, incorporating their international aid efforts into their external affairs offices harms both diplomatic and development efforts. No one gains when development, which thrives on transparency and external scrutiny, is subsumed by diplomacy, which requires confidentiality and is often marked by poor audit trails. Of course, the Johnson team thinks it is appealing to a public that, for reasons for which I and others must take at least some responsibility, is not fully acquainted with the facts about what UK development aid can achieve. When asked, British voters seem to think that around 20% of the national budget is spent on overseas aid, when the true figure is closer to 1%. British parents are usually shocked to learn that their government's total annual aid budget comes to around 50 pence (\$0.63) per African schoolchild, which is not even enough for a pen, let alone a teacher or classroom.

Saving DFID is not a partisan issue, for there is remarkable consensus in support of the UK-based Coalition for Global Prosperity, which has shown that diplomacy and development are distinct tasks of equal importance. The FCO, notes Tom Tugendhat, a Conservative MP and Chair of the UK Foreign Affairs Select Committee, is the country's "principle diplomat," and one should "no more expect diplomats to know how to steer the Queen Elizabeth than how to lead on international trade and development."

But there is an even stronger and more urgent argument for supporting an independent DFID. Former British Prime Minister Winston Churchill used to describe the United States, Europe, and the Commonwealth as the three concentric circles of British influence. The more influence Britain had in one circle, he argued, the more it would have in the others: when the British have a strong voice in Europe, they are taken more seriously by the Americans.

Yet, in the seven decades since World War II, Britain has too often neglected a fourth circle comprising multilateral institutions such as the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the World Trade Organization. These institutions' role in global governance is now being challenged by US President Donald Trump's administration, just when international cooperation is most needed to

solve common problems. But, because post-1945 Britain feared that stronger multilateral institutions would put even more anti-colonialist pressure on the country as it retreated from empire, we often remained at arm's length. In contrast, France has established significant influence at the IMF, and the Scandinavians have become indispensable in UN peacemaking and development efforts.

The Labour Government of 1997-2010 tried to reassert British influence in this domain. Britain assisted in the creation of two important new institutions: the G20 and the global Financial Stability Board. And if a post-Brexit UK is going to enjoy international influence and be a "global Britain," DFID is vital, as it has established a strong track record of leading multilateral initiatives in areas ranging from health and education to the environment. In each case, it has managed to punch far above its weight by working with fellow donors and leveraging the capacities of other stakeholders.

Among other things, DFID had a hand in creating the International Finance Facility for Immunization (which has provided vaccines for more than 700 million children since 2000), Global Partners for Health, and a \$1.5 billion Advanced Market Commitment fund that has financed the development of new drugs in poor countries. Through DFID, the UK is also a leading member of the Global Fund and a top supporter of the new International Finance Facility for Education that I and others have developed.

It should go without saying that in the absence of a strong DFID, Britain will lack the status to lead in important global multilateral development efforts.

The FCO cannot easily replicate DFID's unique role in bringing countries and the development community together. Without an independent budget, cabinet-level minister, and internationally-respected leaders, the UK's development program would lack the capacity to mobilize resources as quickly and effectively in response to future crises. Nor will it have pride of place internationally as a source of soft power.

Even nationalists must confront the security threats posed by fragile states, the explosion of refugee numbers, and the continuing scourge of poverty and injustice. When today's most pressing global challenges - from climate change to inequality and violent conflict - do not admit of unilateral solutions, the case for multilateral action is unanswerable. A robust, institutionally independent, and well-financed DFID is needed now more than ever.

So, while Johnson is anticipating that a post-Brexit UK will need a much stronger FCO to maintain the country's influence abroad, the relegation of DFID would undermine an even more important post-Brexit imperative - maintaining our global leadership, not least in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals agreed by all UN member states.

Gordon Brown, former Prime Minister and Chancellor of the Exchequer of the United Kingdom, is United Nations Special Envoy for Global Education and Chair of the International Commission on Financing Global Education Opportunity. He chairs the Advisory Board of the Catalyst Foundation.

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**Outlook**  
AFGHANISTAN  
The Leading Independent NewspaperChairman / Editor-in-Chief: Moh. Reza Huwaida  
Vice Chairman / Exec. Editor: Moh. Sakhi Rezaie  
Email: outlookafghanistan@gmail.com  
Phone: 0093 (799) 005019/777-005019  
www.outlookafghanistan.netافغانستان  
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