

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

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What are Factors of Backwardness in Afghanistan?

Comparing to the current world advancement, it is obvious that Afghanistan has remained as one of the least developed countries in the world. However, since the collapse of the Taliban government in 2001, the economy has been growing but it was too steadily due to political and climate challenges in the country. According to experts and also according to the recent world bank reports, the security threats, political challenges, lack of infrastructure, drought and endemic corruption have been the main factors hampering economic and social development in Afghanistan. Among these, the continued violence, political instability and chronic drought could severely dampen investment and growth. So, any rapid decline in international aid flows would drive difficult fiscal and external adjustments and undermine the capacity of government to maintain basic services. On the other hand, the ongoing peace talks may unlock substantial investment and growth if they lead to a comprehensive and sustained improvement in security.

Given the increasing awareness of Afghan people from its position in the current world advancement, the public opinion seems becoming more sensitive about the retrogressive factors and barriers of this issue. Few ago in a gathering, the second vice president insisted on unbelieving of Taliban on peace, prosperity and security. He argued in era of the Taliban government Millions of people were deprived of the right to education and freedom. During the past year, the educational centers were systematically targeted with suicide attacks but the worst of which was attack on Mawood educational center. The last attack on education centers or academic centers was on Kabul university students that dozens of students and civilian were killed and wounded. The brutal killing of innocent people, including children, women, and men are never acceptable at any reason. These blind attacks indicate that Taliban and its favoring groups are naturally hostile to progress and development. Based on the current public opinion, Afghans neither want to repeats the past mistakes and neither wants to remain back from the convoy of world civilization. In fact, Afghans reject the Islamic Emirate and other extremists groups because they are opposing to social and political development in the country. As Afghans tries to develop further, the Taliban are doing their utmost to bring people back for the dark centuries; Form their view, the best age in human history is the age of prophet of Islam. The interpretation of the Taliban from that age, unlike all other views, it had been the best age for humans not only in terms of content but also in terms of appearance, and should be a model for today's era. Even the manner of dressing, social custom and Arabic traditions, which was very a primitive product of that age, not oracle root, must be the model for today's Muslim life. Therefore, they struggle to convince or force temporary human to 1400 years ago. The best evidence of this is the rule of Taliban regime in the late 20th century.

One of the very controversial and shallow understandings of extremist groups is emphasis of deprivation of women from freedom and humanitarian rights. However, according to moderate Islamic understanding and theoretical sources there is no logical bases on what they insist. In the era of Taliban, Women as half of society, were deprived of education, and did not have the right to go outside of their home without their family members. Moreover, universities and schools were to teach special education curriculum and were not allowed to educate them with new books and humanitarian values. Thus, there was no media in Afghanistan, except the government Sharia Radio, which only covered the publication of Taliban news and press releases of the group's commanders. Anything that represented the civilization and progress was fully forbidden, and the perpetrators were simply sentenced to death. Nevertheless, there is now a false belief as it is trying to surrender everything and everyone by force to the Taliban. Some of the recent cases and unilateral moves have largely contributed to the Taliban's interests and willing to submit the system to Taliban and ignore everything they did in the past or would do in the future. The Taliban figures, which were viewed as a complete symbol of terrorism, backwardness and ignorance, have now changed to a symbol of peace. However, the world of politics has such a feature and miracle, but we should not forget that the people of Afghanistan know these faces more than anyone else. They have personally seen how they are intrinsically on contrary to peace and development.

In addition to the Taliban and extremist factors regarding backwardness issue, there are some other factors which are usually highlighted by Afghan new generations. These can comprise of weak political culture, ethical extremism, lack of higher education development, lack of accountability and lack of political national leaders who can open the path to development and eradicate the barriers. Meanwhile, the geopolitical location of Afghanistan has largely been blamed for contribution to the political crisis while it can reversely change to economical opportunities. However, the last factor has greatly received the attention during the national unity government. As a result, transitionally, Afghanistan is not any more a landlocked and dependent country to Pakistan in terms of reaching to Karachi seaport.

Anyhow, given the current political awareness and serious threats of extremist groups, Afghanistan lies at a crossing route towards modernization or retrogression. If Afghanistan is surrendered to an ignorant group, it will take a long time to return it to the current stage. Therefore, the government and political leaders are expected to prioritize their historic responsibility over their personal interests and never retreat from their righteous national position against Taliban.



Trump's Remarks Hurtful to Afghans

By: Hujjatullah Zia

Declaring his military plan about Afghanistan and South Asia in August 2017, US President Donald Trump, in addition to going on tirade against Pakistan, did not rule out the possibility of talks for political settlement as he said that "military power alone will not bring peace to Afghanistan or stop the terrorist threat arising in that country. But strategically applied force aims to create the conditions for a political process to achieve a lasting peace". He also said, "We are not nation-building again. We are killing terrorists."

In his recent meeting with Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan in White House, Trump said, "We have been there for nineteen years in Afghanistan... We don't want to stay as policeman." It indicates that the US calls on Pakistan to facilitate its honorable exit from Afghanistan and put pressure on the Taliban to hold talks with the Kabul government to find a political settlement. Meanwhile, Trump said that he could win the war in Afghanistan in a matter of days but he did not want to kill 10 million people. He added, "If I wanted to win that war, Afghanistan would be wiped off the face of the Earth, it would be gone, it would be over in, literally, in 10 days."

Afghan officials have reacted to Trump's abovementioned statements and asked for clarity. In a backlash to Trump's remarks, former Afghan Ambassador to Pakistan Hazrat Omar Zakhilwal said that Genghis Khan and other invaders had same intentions. Perhaps Trump's reference to the death of 10 million people and Afghanistan's destruction if he continued war, means that war could lead to heavy casualties and mammoth destruction in Afghanistan and he would have no option other than dropping bombs in the country.

The horrible consequences of war are clear to Afghan people. For example, New York Times reported that the United States had dropped more than 7,000 bombs, missiles and other munitions in Afghanistan - up from 2,365 in 2014. As a result, the UN reported that there had been 3,804 civilian deaths, including 927 children, in 2018. The report added that 32,000 civilians had been killed over the last decade.

But it should be considered that the Taliban militants are using civilians as "human shields". They are the main cause of civilian casualties, in addition to being widely involved in their deaths in the wake of carrying out indiscriminate attacks against civilians.

The US forces also dropped the 21,600-pound GBU-43 Massive

Ordnance Air Blast (MOAB) - nicknamed "mother of all bombs" - against IS-K in the Achin district of eastern Nangarhar province in April 2017.

Although I believe that Trump would have referred to the horrible consequences of war that would harm the country, he has to explain his words so that there will be no misunderstandings. It should be noted that Afghanistan does not want the US to be the "policeman" but to end the conflict and support a stable and peaceful Afghanistan. Since the US has invested "blood and treasure" in the country, it should not be in vain. The US has to leave a stable Afghanistan behind or else the issue of 1990s will be repeated.

Meanwhile, Afghan people have made great sacrifices within almost the last two decades. A countless number of Afghan combatants and non-combatants have been killed and wounded by both sides - the Taliban militants and Afghan-US forces. To value their sacrifices, the US and NATO forces have to struggle for peace and stability.

Trump's decision for seeking political settlement through negotiations is supported by the Afghan government and approved by regional states. Political pundits reiterated the failure of military deal saying that talks would be the best possible choice.

It is self-explanatory that civilian death toll is one of the highly sensitive issues for Afghan people and politicians. Former Afghan President Hamid Karzai, in the last period of his presidency, criticizes the US strongly for the night-raid and civilian casualties. In turn, he refused to sign the Bilateral Security Agreement with the US. Hence, the rule of war has to be observed in fighting against terrorism. That is, killing terrorists does not mean to simply drop as many bombs as possible - no matter where they hit. Killing 10 million people and destroying a country in 10 days would only mean that all NATO states were allowed to drop as many heavy bombs as they could without regard to the rule of war - such remarks are really hurtful to Afghan people who have suffered severely in the last 18 years.

Warring parties have to observe the humanitarian law and respect the rights and dignity of civilians. Meanwhile, the International Criminal Court should be allowed to investigate war crime in Afghanistan and the war criminals have to be prosecuted and punished.

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Can Europe Become a Global Player?

By: Mark Leonard

The last five years have not been kind to the European Union's foreign-policy prospects. A new great-power competition is shunting aside the international rules-based order, and aspects of globalization - from trade to the Internet - are being used to divide rather than unite countries. Meanwhile, the EU's geostrategic neighborhood has become a ring of fire.

These challenges mainly reflect a shift in the global balance of power, which has fundamentally changed the United States' foreign-policy outlook. As the European Council on Foreign Relations explains in a new report, global developments have left EU countries increasingly vulnerable to external pressures preventing them from exercising sovereignty. Such exposure threatens the EU's security, economic, and diplomatic interests, by allowing other powers to impose their preferences on it. Making matters worse, the EU's governing institutions have done little to overcome the divisions among member states, and they have not played a relevant role in responding to crises such as those in Ukraine, Syria, and Libya.

With the nomination of Josep Borrell to serve as High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, the EU has an opportunity to relaunch its foreign policy. Currently the foreign minister of Spain - itself one of the EU's new power centers - Borrell's task will be to unite EU institutions and national foreign ministries behind a common EU-level foreign policy.

Beyond that, Borrell will face three challenges. The first is to secure Europe's strategic sovereignty. From day one, Borrell will need to start developing strategies for managing the bloc's most vexing diplomatic and security issues, from the threats posed by Russia and China to the potential powder kegs in Syria, Africa, and the Balkans. Borrell must chart a new course forward, neither ignoring dissenting views from member states nor settling for the lowest common denominator of what all members say they can accept.

To that end, Borrell should consider offering a package deal, similar to the one agreed by the European Council in nominating a new EU leadership team. Any such compromise should balance a tough stance on Russia with creative engagement on the EU's southern flank. The EU doesn't necessarily need new foreign policies, but it does need new mechanisms for implementing its agenda, as well as competent leadership that can inspire confidence within all the member states. In reasserting the EU's sovereignty, the new high representative will have to deal with everything from US secondary sanctions and the weaponization of the dollar to growing cyber- and hybrid-warfare threats from around the world.

Borrell's second main challenge will be to re-operationalize European defense. While the EU has made progress in launching defense-related industrial projects, its operational capacity has shrunk. To reassure its Russia-facing flank, all member states will need to increase their forward presence there; simply establishing

a small "Camp Charlemagne" in Poland would serve as a powerful symbolic gesture. Europeans could also take over certain military operations from the US, not least the mission in Kosovo, where Europeans already provide most of the troops. Moreover, with the US vetoing United Nations support for the G5 Sahel (Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger) and potentially planning a troop drawdown in some of those countries, the EU may need to increase its presence in Africa.

In fact, this may be a good time for the EU's high representative to take up the idea of a "European security council," which was originally floated by German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Emmanuel Macron last fall. Such a body could offer a forum for honest strategic discussions among the member states, while also leading the diplomatic engagement with the United Kingdom after Brexit.

Borrell's third challenge will be to restore trust between member-state foreign ministries and the European External Action Service. He cannot possibly tackle all of the EU's foreign-policy issues on his own; he will need a strong team and broad-based support within the EU. In appointing his deputies, he should choose members of the Commission who already have a mandate covering the key regional issues of the Sahel, the Balkans, and the Eastern Partnership.

Better yet, Borrell should assign specific policy issues to individual foreign ministers, who would then have to report back to the member states and the EU Political and Security Committee. There are some precedents for this, such as when former High Representative Catherine Ashton assigned the Georgia brief to Polish Foreign Minister Radek Sikorski and German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier, and then the Moldova brief to Sikorski and Swedish Foreign Minister Carl Bildt.

Finally, Borrell should consider appointing core groups of member states to convene workshops on divisive issues, with the goal of identifying common positions and raising the lowest common denominator. At a minimum, this could give each member state some "skin in the game," possibly discouraging them from abusing EU processes or pursuing unilateral action.

By adopting the broad agenda outlined above, Borrell can help the EU confront the challenges of the coming years as a united bloc. His top goal should be to secure Europe's strategic sovereignty. The EU is still the world's largest market, comprises some of the largest national aid budgets, accounts for the second-highest level of defense spending, and can deploy the largest diplomatic corps. If it can put these assets in the service of a larger strategic agenda, it can become a player in the twenty-first century, rather than the plaything of other great powers.

Mark Leonard is Director of the European Council on Foreign Relations and co-author, with Carl Bildt, of the ECFR report *From Plaything to Player: The Next 5 Years in European Foreign Policy*.

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