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## SCO Summit – A Platform for Addressing Regional Instability

President Ghani's participation in the 19th summit of the Council of Heads of State of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), hosted by Kyrgyzstan, and his meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping and other world leaders are likely to step up achieving regional consensus for Afghanistan peace process.

Afghan President and his Chinese counterparts reportedly discussed China's role in Afghan peace process, regional cooperation, anti-terror efforts, and regional connectivity. Meeting with Ghani, Xi is cited as saying that Chinese side firmly supported a comprehension and inclusive Afghan-led and owned peace and reconciliation process and continued to promote talks through various channels to hold the Afghan people achieve internal dialogue.

Xi added that China would support Afghanistan and Pakistan to improve mutual ties, enhance mutual trust, and carry out cooperation. China, he said, was ready to further promote the China-Afghanistan-Pakistan trilateral cooperation.

President Ghani thanked China for the active role it had played in Afghanistan's peace process and safeguarded regional peace and stability. He added that Afghanistan was ready to align its plan of reconstruction and development with the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and set up a closer trade and economic partnership with China.

Speaking at the summit on Friday, President Ghani pointed out four issues for Afghanistan's peace and stability: (1) Formation of regional and global coalition for peace and stability. (2) Formation of regional task force for the development of bankable programs and projects for regional connectivity and poverty alleviation. (3) Addressing narcotics, as a driver of conflict and criminality, within the peace making and peace-building framework. (4) Agreeing to a regional framework for fighting terrorism.

Adhering to the principle of mutual respect, China has played a constructive role in Afghanistan's peace process, mainly through bridging the gap between Kabul and Islamabad. To cement ties between Afghanistan and Pakistan, China established China-Afghanistan-Pakistan foreign ministers' dialogue. Meanwhile, China was one of the members of the Quadrilateral Coordination group, besides Pakistan, Afghanistan, and the US, to support peace and stability in Afghanistan.

Realizing the good intention of Beijing, Afghan nation and state have constantly appreciated its positive role. In the 18th SCO Heads of State summit held in China, the SCO signed a protocol with the Afghan government – which is an SCO observer state along with Belarus, Iran, and Mongolia – to establish the Afghan Contact Group to support the country for building a stable and violence-free Afghanistan.

It is believed that the regular SCO summit will promote regional stability and enhance regional interaction in terms of trade and connectivity, cultural exchanges, and people-to-people contacts. All SCO member and observer states and dialogue partners have to take more practical step towards regional peace and stability, building infrastructure, and enhancing economic activities through adhering to the principles of openness, inclusiveness, and "Shanghai Spirit".

The goals and tasks of the SCO are pointed out in Article 1 of its Charter as, "Strengthening mutual trust, friendship and good neighborliness between the member states; development of multifaceted cooperation in the maintenance and strengthening of peace, security and stability in the region and promotion of a new democratic, fair and rational political and economic international order; joint combating terrorism, separatism and extremism in all their manifestations, fighting against illicit narcotics and arms trafficking and other types of transnational criminal activity, etc." With this in mind, the tasks and objectives of the SCO are highly extensive. Thus, it has to prioritize the issues in need of immediate address.

For instance, the three evil forces of terrorism, separatism, and extremism have to be addressed first and all SCO stakeholders need to join forces to put an end to terrorist activities across the region since terrorism has changed into a regional threat.

If the issue of terrorism is not addressed forthwith, security situation will hamper trade and transit, mainly the smooth implementation of the China-proposed Belt and Road Initiative.

Overall, achieving regional consensus for supporting regional stability in general and Afghanistan's security in particular needs to be considered by SCO stakeholders. The SCO participants have to support Afghanistan in counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency and back the intra-Afghan dialogue. The Afghan government has always appreciated the constructive role of regional states and neighboring countries in peace issues and still calls on them to continue their support in this regard.

Since Afghan soldiers and civilians have paid heavy sacrifices in combating terrorism and achieving peace and stability, security issues remain the top priority for the Afghan government and should be a top priority for the SCO members, too.

In short, all SCO stakeholders have to pave the ground for mutual trust and mutual benefit, seek common ground, combat the common enemy, and adhere to the Shanghai Spirit.

## World Day against Child Labor: Children Shouldn't Work in Fields but on Dreams

By: Mohammad Zahir Akbari

The continuity war has caused a huge number of children are subject to hard labor in Afghanistan. Unfortunately, this situation has not only forced them to abandon their education but also paved the way for being recruited by terrorist groups. Globally, around 168 million children are engaged with hard labor in the world; thereof Afghanistan got a high place with 59% of its children are working in hard labor field while they should work on their dreams. As media quoted from Abdul Ahad Farzam, a member of Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, 75% child labor in Afghanistan has caused by family poverty and unfavorable social customs. He added that war and extension of insecurity has challenged the rule of law in provinces, and so a large number of children became the caretaker or breadwinner of their families.

According to an estimated report reflected by Tolonews, "Afghanistan has nearly six million children engaged in the labor market, which would give it one of the highest rates in the world. Commentators have expressed grave concerns about the trend, urging the central government to take action to stem the phenomenon." According to experts, there are many factors which contribute in increasing child laborers in the country but the main factors which are mostly blamed consist of persisting war, unemployment and addiction with increasing number of orphans and widows in the country. Thousands of children have lost their fathers, elders and so compelled to fight for living. For example, yesterday Tolonews gave out an interview conducted with few child laborers in Kandahar province: "Five years ago my father passed away, so we don't have any one else at home and I am the worker, and I must find money - there is no other way for me." Likewise, it was quoted from another young worker in Helmand province, "How will I find money if I go to school while my father is jobless and I have to work?"

Thus, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) recently reported two million children under five and 485,000 pregnant and lactating women are severely deprived of health and food security. Nevertheless, the World Day against Child Labor has not drawn much attentions in Afghanistan even the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs did not trouble itself to hold even an iconic ceremony on this occasion. Unfortunately, the political climate in Afghanistan is so busy with hot political issues as such news are easily forgotten and never gain its importance; we must accept that these news is a misfortune sign for future indicating a very weak generation that easily can be trapped by terrorist groups.

Therefore, it is very important to raise this issue so that it may lead to serious measures in the future. Children are the future citizens

and leaders of this country if we have no sound children, we would not have a sound future. However, it is appreciated that the government of Afghanistan has recently ratified the children protection law but there are many impediments which challenge implementation of this law. For example, the general security is one the main challenge; many parts of the country are completely under the control of armed opposition. The insecurity is not only one of the main obstacles which prevent children from legal protection but also impede many social and empowering programs.

Moreover, those parts of the country that are under control of the armed opposition, the children are misused and sent to the front of the war. Hence all government and non-government organization has to support and save the children lives and secure their place of residence so that they can enjoy their basic rights. However, we should not put everything on the shoulder of government; we can take part in cultivating the culture of supporting each other, especially vulnerable groups of society such as women and children. There are many children and women, even in secure provinces that are victimized by social customs, violence and lack of quality educational system.

Anyhow, the main responsibilities are on the shoulders of government relevant agencies to design serious plans for child promotion and social awareness. Programs such as making short films, short TV and radio shows can be effective in this regard but identifying the factors that lead to child labor are more important for rooting out the issues. Poverty is one of the main causes of child labor in Afghanistan and many countries in the world but many years of war and violence have unprecedentedly increased poverty in Afghanistan, and many families have difficulty in providing their daily living.

Consequently, it is necessary to eliminate poverty so that no family compelled to impose hard labor on their children. Besides, the existence of child labor is a sign of social classification in society. In fact, they are the indicators that some parts of society are deprived of equal opportunities. Child labor increases wealth accumulation to those who exploit children, thereby it increase the social class distances, increase poverty and prevent children from gaining sufficient knowledge and skills; As a result, it reduces the productivity of labor in the community. Given the above, the governments should strive to eliminate the class distances in society with distributing economic resources equally so that all citizens. Last but not least, the government should ensure that no children are misused by terrorist groups in Afghanistan.

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## Taking on Tehran

By: Richard N. Haass

US President Donald Trump's administration has singled out Iran – even more than Russia, China, or North Korea – with sustained pressure over the past two and a half years. The United States has withdrawn from the 2015 nuclear deal (the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, or JCPOA), designated an arm of Iran's military (the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps) as a foreign terrorist organization, imposed economic sanctions against nearly one thousand individuals and entities, and taken steps to make it extremely difficult for Iran to sell its oil.

US policy is working, in the sense that most countries (including those that disagree with Trump's policy) have judged it better to maintain trade and investment ties with the US than with Iran. Iran's oil exports are down sharply, and its economic isolation is real and growing. The economy contracted some 4% in 2018 and is projected to shrink as much as another 6% this year. The currency is plummeting. There are reports of price spikes, shortages of food and medicine, and reduced financial transfers to Hezbollah and various militias central to Iran's attempts to exert influence around the region.

But if the pressure is clear, its purpose is not. Many in the Trump administration appear to favor regime change. But this is unlikely to happen. Forty years after the revolution that ousted the Shah, Iran's unique political-religious system and government appears strong enough to withstand US pressure and to ride out the economic difficulties.

A more likely outcome is that US economic warfare will lead to actual warfare. Iran has made it clear that it will not just absorb pain; it will mete it out as well. Iran was almost certainly involved in recent attacks on oil tankers in the Gulf of Oman and drone strikes on a Saudi airport launched by Yemen's Houthis.

Iran's government also has announced its intention to break out gradually from the nuclear constraints imposed by the JCPOA. According to the International Atomic Energy Agency, Iran is slowly increasing its production of nuclear fuel. The country also appears determined to bring the level of its uranium enrichment closer to weapons grade.

All this raises the risk of a costly conflict between Iran and one or more of its neighbors or the US. Such a conflict would almost certainly escalate and spread, leaving the US, Israel, and Iran worse off. Somewhere between a costly war and an unlikely regime change lies a third possibility, one that would require Trump to explore diplomacy. He changed course with North Korea; he could do the same with Iran.

The Trump administration's criticism of the JCPOA was more right than wrong. While the agreement did reduce Iran's nuclear capabilities and increase the time it would need to develop nuclear weapons, the constraints it accepted were relatively short-lived, due to expire

over the next decade. At that point, Iran could remain within the accord yet put into place all it would need to build a nuclear inventory with little or no warning. This did not justify US withdrawal from the JCPOA, especially given that Iran was in compliance with it, but it does make a strong case for renegotiation.

That opportunity still exists. Despite the failure of Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's recent attempt to mediate between the US and Iran, diplomatic prospects have arguably improved, in part because the sanctions are biting. The Trump administration has expressed a willingness to talk with Iran's government without preconditions. Iran has so far rejected talks, but that might change if the US indicated that a degree of sanctions relief would be on the table. The time has come for such a diplomatic overture. Think of it as JCPOA 2.0. The accord's provisions restraining Iran's nuclear activities – above all its centrifuges and nuclear fuel – would be extended well into the future. A revised agreement would also restrain Iran's ballistic missile program. In return, Iran would receive relief from many of the sanctions that have been introduced. The US could also formalize Trump's statement that he seeks policy change, not regime change. There is a good chance the European participants in the original negotiations – Britain, France, Germany, and the European Union – would sign on to such an approach. Submitting a revised accord to the US Congress for its formal approval would signal that the US would not walk away a second time.

Some sanctions would and should stay in place, however, given Iranian activities in the region. In principle, one could imagine a negotiation that would offer to remove all sanctions in exchange for a cessation of Iran's efforts in Syria and Yemen, an end to its support of terrorism, and the introduction of liberal political reforms at home. But this would have no chance of succeeding. All or nothing diplomacy will produce nothing. As was the case with arms control between the US and the Soviet Union during the Cold War, it is sometimes sufficiently ambitious to seek to limit competition, rather than eliminate it.

This is not to suggest Iran would enjoy a free hand in the region. Israel will presumably continue to pursue targeted military action to ensure that Iran cannot establish a military presence and infrastructure in Syria near Israel's border, as it has done in Lebanon. And the US should maintain an augmented military presence in or near the Persian Gulf, keep troops in Syria, and maintain a meaningful diplomatic and military presence in Iraq.

Promoting JCPOA 2.0 would not lead to normalization of diplomatic ties with Iran, but it would dramatically reduce the chance of war or Iran's emergence as a nuclear-armed power, a development that would likely prompt Saudi Arabia and several other countries to follow suit. The Middle East is dangerous enough already without adding yet another, far deadlier dimension to the mix.

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