

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



March 15, 2017

Challenges for Afghanistan

Many years of war against terrorism in Afghanistan have proved to be tiring. The international forces that were involved in the war have mostly withdrawn and the remaining are making preparations to do so. However, the situation of peace and tranquility has not changed much for the people of Afghanistan. In the early years of war, there were certain successes and there were hopes that the country would move towards better socio-political conditions; nevertheless, that never happened and today the country is once again being highly influenced by insecurity that is promoted by Taliban and other insurgents; particularly Daesh. NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg also believes that Afghanistan faces serious security challenges. Speaking about Afghanistan, at the launch of a report, he said, "There are many challenges in Afghanistan and there is still violence. The Taliban is still a real threat and we have many different terrorist groups that operate in Afghanistan."

Today, Taliban are active in many parts of the country and unfortunately, they are active even in the areas that were previously not under their control. Some analysts even believe that the number of districts under the control of Taliban is the highest currently. And last year's report also revealed that the year was the deadliest for civilians, particularly the children. However, he seemed hopeful of the future and said in his statement, "NATO is projecting stability in many different ways and is contributing to the fight against terrorism. It's a fight we have been in for over 15 years. We have 13,000 troops deployed in Afghanistan as part of our mission to train Afghan forces. They are from 39 NATO member states and partner countries. They are training Afghan forces to help secure their country and deny safe havens to international terrorists. We have one approach in Afghanistan and we must not forget that Afghanistan is about fighting terrorism. The reason why we went into Afghanistan was a direct response to a terrorist attack on the United States and the main reason we still are in Afghanistan is to prevent Afghanistan from becoming a safe haven for international terrorists."

However, the opinions of the people and intellectuals towards the socio-political scenario in Afghanistan appear to be divergent and there are not clear certainties in this regard. There are many doubts and the opinions regarding the situation are very shaky. It is not just about the situation in Afghanistan, but the reaction by the Afghan authorities as a response to the situation is also doubtful.

Especially, in the last some months the situation seems ambiguous as to where the country is leading and what would be the future of socio-political scenario in the region. Though, since the downfall of Taliban there have been major contributions on the part of international community to help our country out of instability and in that regard billions of dollars have moved in, especially from U.S., the major issues still remain with major concerns. There are many serious minds that doubt the future of the peace, stability and prosperity in the region.

Afghanistan has seen many decades of wars, including both international and civil wars. 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 kind of economic, social and political crisis. They are not very hopeful about the future and in one of surveys last year, most of the people commented that they were not confident about the performance of the government and the future of their country. After years of war against terrorism, though there have been improvements, the administrative, development and security sectors still remain immature. It is comprehensible that these sectors 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.

To guarantee peace and tranquility in country and take the war against terrorism to a fruitful conclusion a great deal of work still needs to be done. Most of the responsibilities of security are now on the shoulders of Afghan security forces. As far as the capacity of Afghan forces to guarantee secure life for Afghan people is concerned, 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.

Further, 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 leadership has not shown 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.

Thus, it is important that optimism about the future must be backed by practical steps. Most importantly, Afghan authorities and people must shoulder the responsibilities themselves as international community cannot support us indefinitely.



Basic Requirement

By Dilawar Sherzai

Human beings are fortunate that they are blessed with variety of energy resources that have enabled them to live their lives on the planet Earth. It is because of these energy sources that human beings have performed miracles by inventing various ways of ensuring satisfaction and facilities for themselves. From the facilitation of very basic requirements of ordinary life to the costly inventions of modern science and technology, the stores of energy have always supported human beings without much difficulty.

However, it should be noted that if the use of energy can make human beings display marvels, its careless use and wastage may make human beings suffer. Therefore, human beings have to be careful and must use the resources through proper planning.

Moreover, Human beings have to make sure as well that the economic and political systems must ensure providence of natural resources to all the human beings alike - unfortunately that is not the case in contemporary world of ours. The short-comings in our economic system have made the basic requirements seem lesser and inadequate though it is yet to face a serious threat of inadequacy.

Analysts and reports time to time suggested that the basic requirements of life and the energy sources may decline to a considerable extent and may not be able to compensate the increasing requirements of growing population. The world population is more than 7 billion and according to calculations it may reach to 9 billion by 2040 and the world is not ready to provide for this increase and may push a considerable number of people towards poverty.

The world, according to UN estimates, would need 50 percent more food by 2030. Apart from that it would also require 45 percent more energy and 30 percent more water. Some of other figures in this regard are very much concerning as well.

United Nations' high-level panel on global sustainability had mentioned, "The current global development model is unsustainable. To achieve sustainability, a transformation of the global economy is required... Tinkering on the margins will not do the job. The current global economic crisis ... offers an opportunity for significant reforms." The panel, in fact, has suggested that 'a new political economy' has to be developed so as to ensure proper providence of rudimentary requirements of life to all.

It would be better for the world that it must cogitate seriously about every possibility of a new political economy so

as to enable the world to compensate for the food and other shortages for the poor countries will have to suffer to a considerable extent as a result of the shortage of basic requirements and sources of energy.

Unfortunately, Afghanistan is one of the same countries and it will have to face serious challenges in the times to come to provide food to its people.

Decades of war in Afghanistan have affected the country to a large extent. Different sectors have been influenced by this menace. The basic infra-structure has not been able to get proper attention and people are suffering because of basic needs, among which food is the most basic one. It is one of the preliminary physiological requirements of human beings and it is really sorry to note that there are millions of people in Afghanistan who lack this basic need.

Even a decade of development has not been able to provide proper or even sufficient food to a large number of people. The prospects, in this regard, display a bleak picture for the coming years.

Though Afghanistan is an agricultural country and wheat is its staple crop yet there has been and there will be major shortage of food for the people of Afghanistan who already suffer from myriads of problems. In order to fulfill the food requirements of the country, Afghanistan has been largely dependent on foreign aid.

Unfortunately, there are signs of decrease in the aid that is going to be provided to the country in the coming year and the years to follow; one of the major reasons being global economic depression, which means more people would remain without food in the years to come that would add suffering to the lives of a common people.

It is really important that a decade of struggle for betterment in Afghanistan must not only end in peace and tranquility but also better living standard for the common Afghan people; and if that is not convenient, they must at least be provided the rudimentary requirements.

With the growing concerns about the international food and energy shortages, the concerns, on the national level will in fact multiply. The concerned authorities in this regard have to make sure that they make proper arrangements for such times and save our country from going through further miseries. They have to bring about necessary changes in their economic system so that it can be better from what it is at the moment; that is what the world is thinking about.

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How much Europe Can Europe Tolerate?

By Dani Rodrik

This month the European Union will celebrate the 60th anniversary of its founding treaty, the Treaty of Rome, which established the European Economic Community. There certainly is much to celebrate. After centuries of war, upheaval, and mass killings, Europe is peaceful and democratic. The EU has brought 11 former Soviet-bloc countries into its fold, successfully guiding their post-communist transitions. And, in an age of inequality, EU member countries exhibit the lowest income gaps anywhere in the world.

But these are past achievements. Today, the Union is mired in a deep existential crisis, and its future is very much in doubt. The symptoms are everywhere: Brexit, crushing levels of youth unemployment in Greece and Spain, debt and stagnation in Italy, the rise of populist movements, and a backlash against immigrants and the euro. They all point to the need for a major overhaul of Europe's institutions.

The Year Ahead 2017 Cover Image So a new white paper on the future of Europe by European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker comes none too soon. Juncker sets out five possible paths: carrying on with the current agenda, focusing just on the single market, allowing some countries to move faster than others toward integration, narrowing down the agenda, and pushing ambitiously for uniform and more complete integration.

It's hard not to feel sympathy for Juncker. With Europe's politicians preoccupied with their domestic battles and the EU institutions in Brussels a target for popular frustration, he could stick his neck out only so far. Still, his report is disappointing. It sidesteps the central challenge that the EU must confront and overcome.

If European democracies are to regain their health, economic and political integration cannot remain out of sync. Either political integration catches up with economic integration, or economic integration needs to be scaled back. As long as this decision is evaded, the EU will remain dysfunctional. When confronted with this stark choice, member states are likely to end up in different positions along the continuum of economic-political integration. This implies that Europe must develop the flexibility and institutional arrangements to accommodate them.

From the very beginning, Europe was built on a "functionalist" argument: political integration would follow economic integration. Juncker's white paper opens appropriately with a 1950 quote from the European Economic Community founder (and French prime minister) Robert Schuman: "Europe will not be made all at once, or according to a single plan. It will be built through concrete achievements which first create a de facto solidarity." Build the mechanisms of economic cooperation first, and this will prepare the ground for common political institutions.

This approach worked fine at first. It enabled economic integration to remain one step ahead of political integration - but not too far ahead. Then, after the 1980s, the EU took a leap into the unknown.

It adopted an ambitious single-market agenda that aimed to

unify Europe's economies, whittling away at national policies that hampered the free movement not just of goods, but also of services, people, and capital. The euro, which established a single currency among a subset of member states, was the logical extension of this agenda. This was hyper-globalization on a European scale.

The new agenda was driven by a confluence of factors. Many economists and technocrats thought Europe's governments had become too interventionist and that deep economic integration and a single currency would discipline the state. From this perspective, the imbalance between the economic and political legs of the integration process was a feature, not a bug.

Many politicians, however, recognized that the imbalance was potentially problematic. But they assumed functionalism would eventually come to the rescue: the quasi-federal political institutions needed to underpin the single market would develop, given sufficient time.

The leading European powers played their part. The French thought that shifting economic authority to bureaucrats in Brussels would enhance French national power and global prestige. The Germans, eager to gain France's agreement to German reunification, went along.

There was an alternative. Europe could have allowed a common social model to develop alongside economic integration. This would have required integrating not only markets but also social policies, labor-market institutions, and fiscal arrangements. The diversity of social models across Europe, and the difficulty of reaching agreement on common rules, would have acted as a natural brake on the pace and scope of integration.

Far from being a disadvantage, this would have provided a useful corrective regarding the most desirable speed and extent of integration. The result might have been a smaller EU, more deeply integrated across the board, or an EU with as many members as today, but much less ambitious in its economic scope.

Today it may be too late to attempt EU fiscal and political integration. Less than one in five Europeans favor shifting power away from the member nation-states.

Optimists might say that this is due less to aversion to Brussels or Strasbourg per se than to the public's association of "more Europe" with a technocratic focus on the single market and the absence of an appealing alternative model. Perhaps emerging new leaders and political formations will manage to sketch out such a model and generate excitement about a reformed European project.

Pessimists, on the other hand, will hope that in the corridors of power in Berlin and Paris, in some deep, dark corner, economists and lawyers are secretly readying a plan B to deploy for the day when loosening the economic union can no longer be postponed. (Courtesy Project Syndicate)

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