

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



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## Will Past Scenario Repeat in the New Year?

The solar year of 1394 was initiated with the Taliban's spring offensive which took heavy toll of Afghan civilians and police. The protracted war and insurgency lingered up to now and the warring parties denied holding peace talk, mainly following the revelation of Mullah Omar's death. The Quadrilateral Coordination Group (QCG), which held its fourth-round meeting in Kabul on February 23, yet to bring the Taliban to the table of negotiation. But disinclination towards talk goes on and Afghanistan will have a hard year ahead.

The Kunduz takeover on late September 2015, which led to tens of dead and wounded, disgrace of some women, release of the prisoners and financial loss, was the worst-case scenario that happened – it was the first time the extremists managed to capture a major city since 2001. The Taliban insurgents also captured Sangin district of Helmand province and killed not only the civilians but also more than hundred of Afghan soldiers.

Moreover, the emergence of the self-proclaimed Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) – which was pledged allegiance by some Taliban fighters – in Afghanistan has aggravated the political instability and put our nation at the mercy of greater casualty. The people's rights to life, liberty and property were violated on a large scale. Similarly, a number of civilians fell victim to terror on the grounds of their race, sex, color and beliefs – the ISIL fighters were believed to be responsible regarding these deadly episodes.

In his recent statement, the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for Afghanistan Nicholas Haysom has said that Afghanistan will encounter a great political challenge which needs to be addressed. According to him, "The insurgency is really active in all parts of the country – in Helmand in the south to Baghlan in the north. And although there are hopeful signs that the Afghan National Security Forces are going through a period of adaptation and lesson-learning, no one, either from the member states or from the UN, really assesses the challenges as anything other than daunting". Regarding civilian casualties, he pointed out that "the ever-growing number of civilian casualties, which now tops 11,000, reflecting an intensification of the conflict. I like to point out that 11,000 civilian casualties doesn't capture the full tragedy and the drama." Unless the government overcame "five distinct hurdles" it would face "severe consequences", Haysom said listing a contracting economy, intensifying insurgency, fractious political environment as well as desperately needed funding from the international community and the need to demonstrate progress toward a sustainable peace. "For 2016, survival will be an achievement," he believed.

Similarly, NATO's secretary general Jens Stoltenberg said that Afghanistan will have a tough year ahead and insurgents will continue their attacks. "We have seen different terrorist organizations trying to establish themselves in Afghanistan. We have seen the presence of al-Qaida, IS, the Taliban and all the groups, and they are still in Afghanistan. There is going to be continued fighting and we have to expect that there are going to be new attacks on the government forces," he is cited as saying.

The U.N. mission in Afghanistan says more than 11,000 civilians, including women and children, were killed and wounded last year. Afghan people suffered painfully, mainly following the withdrawal of US-led NATO forces and the unsuccessful "war on terror". The establishment of National Unity Government (NUG) was not a panacea for the wounded hearts of people and did not mitigate terror and militancy. Currently, since the Taliban elements deny resuming peace talks despite the pressures put on them, the security situation will not get better – political pundits predict the future based on the same fact. Not surprisingly, the splinter groups and ISIL's emergence is the next reason behind insecurity and this trend will continue unless the government reinforces the soldiers or bring the warring parties to negotiating table – this second option has met repeated failure.

Moreover, violence against women does not seem to be abating either. In other words, the 27-year-old woman Farkhunda was killed by angry mob on the Eve of 1394, which was widely shared on social media. Likewise, some desert court was imposed on women in tribal belts by the Taliban elements without legal investigation – which is in direct conflict with the Constitution.

"Disregard and contempt for human rights" – which is the main reason behind violence and bloodshed – have been widely practiced not only last year but for many past years. It is believed that warring factions are highly responsible in this regard and major violators of human rights. Weary of war and insurgency, Afghans pray for having a peaceful and violence-free year ahead and expect the government to prevent from civilian casualties in one way or another and address the political crisis. The rights of men and women should be protected equally and without discriminations. The last year's deficiencies and inappropriate approaches towards instability should be an eye-opener for the government.

Although there is a sense of fear and chagrin in the air, the public hope that the Quadrilateral Coordination Group (QCG) will get the Taliban elements to resume peace talks.



## The Challenges Hampering the Development Efforts

By Abdul Ahad Bahrami

Representatives of twenty member countries of G7+ group – which comprises the conflict-affected nations – came together in Kabul to discuss common experiences and challenges facing fragile conflict-affected countries. Since its establishment in 2010, the aim of the platform has been to advocate for better policy-making at both national and international levels for helping development of fragile conflict-hit nations and tackling factors that lead to instabilities and conflicts. Speaking at the conference, President Ashraf Ghani emphasized on reforms and fighting corruption as crucial for development of conflict-hit nations, saying that the G7+ group is an initiative where member countries could use their experiences. He said that stability of fragile states is important for global peace and stability and peace requires strengthening of fragile and under-developed nations. Afghanistan is one of the most instable countries of the world and could learn much from experiences of other nations in areas of development, security, fighting corruption and reconstruction. Almost all of the conflict-affected countries experience the same challenges to development and stability, and some manage to find effective ways for dealing with those challenges and implementing development programs. Such international platforms will not only help Afghanistan to learn the ways how other states deal with the challenges arising from conflicts, instability and poverty but also enable it to better organize the international aid for the development of the country. However, what is crucially important is that there need to be a robust political will for bringing reforms and promoting good governance as a key prerequisite for development.

Afghanistan has come a long way ahead in last fifteen years seeing enormous achievements in development and reconstruction. However, it is still far from being on a stable course of development as still struggling with a hard-headed insurgency, pervasive corruption and a shrinking economy. Setting in a direction that could be considered as a stable course of development is the most important priority for Afghanistan. There has been a mixture of progresses and setbacks in all areas that are key factors of a sustainable development. While the country has seen remarkable progresses, there are areas where Afghanistan has not making any progresses or even have had setbacks. To find an unbreakable momentum for development, Afghanistan needs to build on its successes and focus on areas where it has made achievements. At the same time it has to focus on resolving the challenges in areas where it has been struggling such as fighting corruption and getting rid of weak governance.

Afghanistan has had considerable achievements in improving some key socio-economic standards such as health, education, poverty reduction, war rehabilitation and freedom and rights. It has had remarkable leaps in expanding health and educational opportunities from a nearly zero-base to the level that are today, where most of Afghans have access to a much better health care compared to fifteen years ago and millions of Afghan boys and

girls join schools. During the Taliban, regime, a large part of the Afghan society was reliant to aid donations of the UN and other international humanitarian organizations. Since then, the situation has largely changed as the lives of many of Afghans have improved due to the economic boom as result of the flow of international aid in the past over a decade.

However, Afghanistan is still facing multi-faceted challenges that could derail the development efforts of the past fifteen years. There are perhaps two most daunting challenges to the ongoing efforts to safeguard the future of the country and direct it into a stable and sustainable course of long-term development. Obviously, the most important one is security. The protracted conflict has hampered all efforts for developing and stabilizing the country. Afghanistan will need to find a way for ending the long-running conflict through a political settlement with the insurgent groups along with keeping military pressures aimed at breaking the momentum of the insurgency. The development efforts would get nowhere if the Afghan government fails to either end the conflict or weaken the insurgency.

The second most challenging issue is corruption. The current level of corruption is a major blow for development of good governance in Afghanistan. Corruption would fail attempts to promote governance, implement economic programs and bring about law and order in the country. No large-scale economic initiative would be successful if the government fails to effectively fight corruption.

Making headways in fighting corruption would open the way for starting to promote good governance and establish accountable and effective administration. Therefore, the Afghan government would need to redouble efforts in fighting corruption and developing a sound and good governance.

President Ashraf Ghani complained of ineffectiveness of international aid for development of the country due to lack of efficient mechanisms governing the flow and implementation of the international aid. Here too, the case is that only a capable and corruption-free government would be able to channel and implement the aid in a more efficient manner. He has promised to take the anti-corruption efforts into the next level this year. However, it is unclear what the government can do in this regard without bringing changes to its anti-corruption and state-building strategies. The government would not be able to start leading an efficient anti-corruption campaign if it maintains the arbitrary and ever-shifting approach to fighting corruption. The government needs to take broad but sustainable anti-corruption policy and institutionalize the campaign over time.

Afghanistan can learn much from experiments of other countries in the world. Forums such as the G7+ can provide crucial expertise, experience, coordination, political support and coordination in the international stage to the governance and development efforts in the country. Afghanistan needs to learn from developed countries.

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## Fast-Tracking Climate Action

By Achim Steiner and Christiana Figueres

Last December in Paris, world leaders came together to agree on a set of goals and pathways for decarbonizing the global economy and increasing our capacity to adapt to climate change. It was a landmark achievement, but it was just the beginning. Every country – with the support of cities, the private sector, and citizens – must now move swiftly to fulfill its promises and bring climate change under control.

The need for urgent, concerted action cannot be emphasized enough. Any delay will cause negative consequences to continue to accumulate. This will not only cause tremendous suffering, especially to the world's most vulnerable people; it will reverberate for decades to come, making the key goal of keeping the increase in global temperature below 2° Celsius (relative to pre-industrial levels) increasingly costly.

The rapid progress that is needed will require major reductions in carbon dioxide emissions, achieved through increased investment in the development and expansion of cleaner and more efficient energy. At the same time, efforts to conserve and expand carbon "sinks" – that is, the forests, wetlands, grasslands, mangroves, and sea grasses that absorb much of the CO2 being emitted – are crucial.

But even under the most optimistic scenarios, it will take time to engineer a global shift away from fossil fuels toward renewable energies and to restore the world's badly depleted ecological infrastructure. That is why it is important to pursue measures to reduce short-lived climate pollutants (SLCPs), which also cause climate change. These include black carbon or soot (the primary component of particulate matter that is also a major and growing health concern); hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs), used most commonly in refrigeration; and methane and tropospheric (or ground-level) ozone.

Pound for pound, these "super pollutants" cause much more warming than CO2. Indeed, the warming impact of soot is about 900 times greater than that of carbon, and the impact of methane is about 28 times greater; many of the HFCs have a warming impact that is about 2,000 times more powerful than that of CO2.

The problems caused by SLCPs extend beyond climate change. Black carbon and tropospheric ozone pollution are traditional air pollutants, which together kill nearly seven million people a year and destroy hundreds of millions of tons of food crops.

The United Nations Environment Programme's Climate and Clean Air Coalition to Reduce Short-Lived Climate Pollutants estimates that fast action to reduce SLCPs, especially methane and black carbon, has the potential to slow down the warming expected by 2050 by as much as 0.5° Celsius. Moreover, it could save over

two million lives annually, while preventing the loss of more than 30 million tons of crops per year.

There is reason to hope that we can reap these benefits. Under the Paris agreement, individual countries are to achieve emissions reductions according to their own nationally determined contributions. More than a dozen countries have included SLCPs in their national climate action plans. Furthermore, the Climate and Clean Air Coalition is working with its 50 member countries, as well as the World Bank and World Health Organization, to cut the super pollutants.

But, to be successful, efforts must go above and beyond the Paris agreement. Fortunately, progress is being made here, too.

Already, measures to mitigate HFC production and consumption are being pursued through the Montreal Protocol on protecting the ozone layer. Governments opened formal negotiations last November, and are aiming to reach agreement by the end of this year. This builds on an impressive phase-out of older chemicals, such as chlorofluorocarbons and others, that has averted the equivalent of 135 billion tons of CO2 from entering the atmosphere, while accelerating the recovery of the ozone layer.

Of course, the reduction of SLCPs should not come at the expense of efforts to cut CO2 emissions. On the contrary, the world can and must reduce both simultaneously. And, indeed, efforts to reduce CO2 emissions are also occurring outside the Paris agreement framework. The International Civil Aviation Organization is working to reduce emissions from air travel, having reached a preliminary agreement on the subject just a few weeks ago. The International Maritime Organization is pursuing similar goals for shipping. Warming from any climate pollutant is dangerous and sets in motion a series of potentially irreversible effects, including the continued rise of sea levels, destruction of forests, depletion of Arctic sea ice and glaciers in Greenland and the Tibetan Plateau, and melting of permafrost. Making matters worse, these effects can reinforce one another, tipping the world into a vicious cycle that becomes ever more difficult to escape.

But if we act fast, harvesting fresh momentum on HFCs under sister agreements like Montreal and a growing array of cooperative coalitions, we can avoid disaster and ensure long-term economic development, including by supporting progress toward achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

Simply put, the rate of action on all climate-related emissions will determine our success in eradicating poverty and will shape the world our descendants will inherit. With governments preparing to sign the Paris agreement on April 22, there has never been a better opportunity to press ahead toward a brighter, cleaner, more prosperous future. (Courtesy Project Syndicate)

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