

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



May 31, 2016

Developing Infrastructure and Economy

Afghanistan has come a long way over last fifteen year. Much has been accomplished in the areas of reconstruction, state-building, poverty alleviation and relief and assistance delivery to impoverished masses with the help of the International community. Although fraught with many shortcomings, significant strides have been made in the area of political development. Wolesi Jirga has been established and empowered to include the representatives of the people in the governing process. The separation of powers - the Legislature, the Executive and the Judiciary - as the foremost principle of democracy has been upheld in the constitution. Elections, universal franchise and elected office are guaranteed as rights of every citizen of our country. In the area of economic development, the performance of our country has been dismal and the past years are annals of wasted opportunities with rising anger and frustration among the people. Our country, despite being on the receiving end of generous assistance of the international community is still not able to feed its own people and provide decent livelihoods to the bulk of its population. Chronic poverty leaves millions of our countrymen destitute and drives many of our youth to embrace the forces of darkness bent on distorting our democracy and enslaving our people.

In the initial years of the post-Taliban political dispensation, a grand and ambitious program of reforming the economy of our country involving a shift to a market economy was initiated. The economic growth and development was designed to be private-sector led and the government is, over the long run, slated to assume the role of a facilitator rather than the main economic actor. In the initial years, the participation and zeal of the private sector in investing in many sectors of our economy from manufacturing to services showed encouraging signs. Various telecommunication companies and banking institutions started operations and within a relatively short period, millions across the country had access to mobile telephones, internet connections, digital communication channels as well as banking services. However, the economic development of the country, despite the promising initial years has slowed down in recent years and the prospects for the economy to return to the high-growth trajectory of recent past is bleak.

Infrastructure is one of the crucial areas in the present state of affairs in the country. Lack of sufficient infrastructure in the form of roads, bridges, tunnels, power generation facilities and transmission grids, hospitals, sufficient urban housing, sewerage and solid waste management systems, railways and water supply systems in both rural and urban sectors have significantly slowed down and hampered the process of economic development and has led to denial of income and means of livelihood to our impoverished people. Infrastructure constraints or lack of it hamper the process of development and make it virtually impossible. It is high time that our policy makers and planners devise and announce ambitious programs of infrastructure development in the country. Adoption of a National Infrastructure Policy by the government of Afghanistan as part of the existing Afghanistan's National Development Strategy seems to be an ideal vehicle for prioritizing the infrastructure needs of the country and placing infrastructure development on fast track as well as mobilizing sources of finance from both the public and private sectors.

What Afghanistan requires at this juncture, is a grand plan on the lines of the European Recovery Program or Marshall Plan that rebuilt the Europe after World War II and paved the way for the eventual emergence of these countries as developed and prosperous nations. The onus is on the Government of Afghanistan to take the initiative into its own hands and, in a meaningful way, address the infrastructure needs of the country. The attempts so far to develop infrastructure in the rural as well as urban areas of the country have been haphazard and disconcerted and lacked coordination at the national level. The quality of the work done is poor in many instances and the infrastructure developed so far has been confined to roads, bridges, culverts and river-side fortifications. The volume of the work done is far less than what is required to revive the Afghan economy and provide lifelines to the country.

The cost and the technical know-how of developing the infrastructure needs of the country are, no doubt, massive. As the government of Afghanistan can not accomplish the task single-handedly, it requires active participation of the Afghan private sector and international donors as well as private sector players from other countries in order to procure the huge financial resources needed for the purpose. Over the long term and after the semblance of a functioning infrastructure propels our economy into higher growth and development, developing and improving our infrastructure base will be easier. The Government then can leave many areas to the private sector and in other sectors join hands with the private sector in Public Private Partnerships (PPPs). The Public Private Partnerships have proved to be effective models for reducing the huge financial burden of infrastructure development on the government and mobilizing the financial resources readily available with the private sector. Before all this can materialize, Afghan government needs to enhance and improve the capacities and capabilities of our government. Nurturing and fostering a vision for growth, plans for the long term, commitment and political will on the part of the government and international community, removing the bureaucratic bottlenecks and red tape from the corridors of Afghan government and providing security all are pre-requisites for implementing a grand, national infrastructure policy that can revive the economy of our country.

Crying for the Moon

By Hujjatullah Zia

The death of the Taliban's leader Mullah Akhtar Mansour, who was killed in US drone strike in the Dalbandin area of Balochistan on May 21, makes headlines on national and international newspapers. He held out against peace talks and staged heavy attacks in Afghanistan. Mansour consolidated his authority among the Taliban fighters through declaring offensives against Afghan government and signaled talks as "enemy's propaganda". He inflicted heavy casualties on Afghan civilians and police and changed 2015 one of the deadliest years in the country.

Following the arrests of Mullah Omar's deputies Mullah Obaidullah Akhund and Mullah Abdul Ghani in 2007 and 2010 respectively, Mullah Mansour became second-in-command to the Afghan Taliban founder. When the news of Mullah Omar's 2013 death surfaced in July 2015, Mullah Mansour was officially made the group's supreme leader. Key Taliban commanders and clerics were opposed to the appointment initially, especially because the news of Mullah Omar's death was kept secret for a long time. But after he won the support of the late emir's family, he was able to consolidate his grip on the movement.

Initially, Mansour was believed to hold negotiation with Afghan government but it was proved false. While he was in the office, the Taliban carried out the deadliest attacks in many parts of the country. In a bid to prove their strength, the Taliban even held the northern city of Kanduz for almost 15 days.

However, the Afghan government declared peace and urged all warring parties to lay down their arms and join peace process. Afghan officials and members of High Peace Council (HPC) left no stone unturned to get the Taliban to resume talks and Pakistani officials deemed talks the only solution for peace.

In his trip to Pakistan, President Ashraf Ghani asked it to prevent the Taliban from spring offensive, which was initiated last year, operate against Haqqani network and bring the Taliban to the negotiating table. He remarked these messages directly and clearly. Persisting on resuming peace talks, which was stalled with Omar's death, Pakistan promised to get the Taliban to hold talks. In March, Pakistan's Prime Minister's Adviser on Foreign Affairs Sartaj Aziz had admitted that the Taliban leadership lived in Quetta, and that Pakistan was using this as a leverage to persuade them to engage with Kabul. Militancy and terrorists attacks, however, continued unabated in Afghanistan leading to massive casualties. As a result, a suicide attack against an elite military unit in central Kabul, in April, more than 80 people and over 350 others. Following the attack, Ghani asked Pakistan again to take action against Taliban sanctuaries on its soil. So, the Taliban, under Mansour, announced Omari Operation this

year and did not intend to hold talks despite efforts made by the Quadrilateral Coordination Group (QCG) of Afghanistan, China, Pakistan and the United States to revive the stalled peace negotiation. Subsequently, the US officials and Afghan government lost their patience which led to the denouement of Mansour's role. Days after the strike, on May 25, the Taliban announced their new leader Mullah Haibatullah Akhonzada. Sirajuddin Haqqani and Mullah Yaqoob, the son of the founding emir Mullah Omar, have been named his deputies. Haibatullah is not known for his bravery on the battlefield rather he is respected as a religious cleric having been a leading member of the Taliban judiciary.

It is believed that Haibatullah's seat will also remain vacant around the peace talks forever the same as Mansour and further persistence for resuming the reconciliation process will be in vain as ever before. In my previous commentaries, I expressed pessimistic views regarding the fruition of peace talks and believed that one-sided persistence, while the Taliban continue their attacks, would never give the desired fruit. Indeed, since warring factions signal talk as propaganda, seeking it would be tantamount to crying for the moon. Therefore, I suggested military deal as a last resort and the only option left before the Afghan government after the failure of peace talks.

The Taliban should know that holding out against peace talks will be playing with a fire. The US seems determined in pursuing its attacks against the Taliban's sanctuaries and Afghan government will also intensify military actions against the militants who fight across the country. In his recent statement, President Ghani has aired in a serious tone as, "We want close relations with neighboring countries, but not in exporting terrorism, but if they send us terrorists, we will kill them and eliminate them." Furthermore, it is believed that if the Taliban's newly-appointed leader Mullah Haibatullah follow Mansour's inflexible path, he may be doomed to Mansour's fate.

Mansour's death has caused a rift and mistrust among the members of QCG group and it seems to be on the verge of collapse. Similarly, the QCG's meetings - in which the Taliban representatives were not present - are believed to have met failure and peace talks reached a real deadlock - which has been more complicated now. Persuading Haibatullah to resume talks will break the stalemate and bridge the emerging gap among the QCG group, which is near to impossible, otherwise military action and intensifying counterinsurgency campaigns will be the only option for the US and Afghan forces. This tension will ebb if the neighboring countries either support Afghanistan in combating terrorism or facilitate the talks honestly.

Hujjatullah Zia is the permanent writer of the Daily Outlook Afghanistan. He can be reached at zia_hujjat@yahoo.com

Republicans Ride the Trump Tiger

By Theda Skocpol

During a typical week in late May, Donald J. Trump, the presumptive Republican nominee for the US presidency, grabbed headlines yet again. He declared a popular former president to be a "rapist," flipped his position on one policy after another, bragged that his running mate could be "anyone" who supported him, and told the National Rifle Association that Hillary Clinton, the likely Democratic nominee, would "release violent criminals from jail."

Perhaps most worrisome from a global perspective, just hours after an EgyptAir plane crashed into the Mediterranean, and long before any certain facts were known, Trump began stating his own conclusions about what had happened and denouncing American "weakness" in the face of terrorism.

Virtually all efforts to prevent Trump's nomination have ended, and establishment Republicans are moving steadily to reconcile themselves with their party's capture by an uncouth, narcissistic, unprepared, and mercurial bully. "You're better off riding the beast than trying to ignore it," explained a former GOP Senate aide.

Many certainly did try to ignore it. No sooner had Trump announced last summer that he would seek the Republican nomination than pundits and political scientists started to find compelling reasons to dismiss his bid.

I was less certain, because I assessed Trump's emergence and prospects against the backdrop of my ongoing research on the US political right. Back in 2010 and 2011, Vanessa Williamson and I studied the popular and elite forces that gave rise to the Tea Party and helped pull the Republican Party further rightward.

More recently, I have worked with Alexander Hertel-Fernandez and other researchers to decipher shifts in organized conservative politics. Such shifts include the rising influence of Charles and David Koch, billionaire brothers whose network of think tanks and advocacy organizations has encouraged an ultra-free-market economic agenda among Republican candidates and officeholders at state and national levels. Pulled in different directions by plutocratic funders and angry nativist populists, the GOP became ripe for a Trump-style hostile takeover.

Starting early in Barack Obama's presidency, as Tea Party populists took center stage, Trump became popular, because he championed efforts to delegitimize America's first black president. An April 2011 opinion poll found Trump leading all GOP presidential contenders for 2012, with especially strong backing from Republicans who firmly believed that Obama, as Trump insisted, had not been born in the United States, as the US Constitution requires.

Trump did not run in 2012, but grassroots Tea Partiers were already focused on illegal immigration and hatred of Obama. Over the course of that year's presidential primaries, at least half of GOP voters repeatedly tried to find an alternative to the eventual Republican nominee, Mitt Romney, but could not coalesce around a viable contender.

GOP leaders' failure to stop Obama in 2012 and roll back his initiatives intensified populist Republicans' anger at their own party. By the beginning of the 2016 presidential cycle, it seemed clear that many would seek a unifying "anti-establishment" candidate.

In an effort to capture this voter rebellion, Senator Ted Cruz of Texas repeatedly bucked GOP congressional leaders. But the media-savvy Trump blindsided Cruz and all other contenders. Starting in the summer of 2015, he embraced extremist rhetoric appealing to nativism, Islamophobia, and anger at GOP elites. Media outlets provided as much as \$2 billion worth of free coverage, helping him grab and hold leads in polls and most primaries. Trump's core supporters are wrongly thought to be displaced and economi-

cally insecure blue-collar workers. In fact, his voters' average annual income, about \$72,000, is well above the US median of \$56,000. His supporters resemble the Tea Partiers: overwhelmingly older, male, middle class, and white. They report anxieties about the economy - as most Republicans do - but what sets them apart is disbelief in Obama's legitimacy, anger about immigration, and resentment over America's supposed national decline.

Trump supporters are more likely than other Republicans to hold negative stereotypes about blacks and Latinos. And it seems quite likely that, as we found for Tea Partiers in 2011, Trump backers approve of social-welfare benefits that go to "real Americans" like themselves, while opposing public spending on minorities and low-income people.

Trump's agenda thus resembles that of many European populist parties: a mix of anti-immigrant toughness, economic patriotism, and social benefits for native-born citizens. But no major US party has offered such a program, and even now GOP leaders and major funders, having moved the party further toward the free-market right during the Obama years, oppose it. In Congress and state legislatures, Republicans hew to generally unpopular extreme positions - tax cuts for the rich, evisceration of business regulations, lower social spending, and curbs on union activities.

But, arguably, the GOP's ultra-free-market extremism has backfired. When virtually all GOP contenders for 2016 signed on to that agenda, Trump exploited an opening for "America First" nativism and protectionism. In Trump's disparagement of Latino immigrants, independent women, and "uppity" minorities, his base hears a promise to "make America great again" by reasserting white male hegemony.

None of this is surprising. For years, GOP elites have played with fire by stoking popular nativism and racial fears to mobilize older white voters. With US conservative media putting out a steady stream of racial innuendo, the GOP's discourse was thoroughly debased well before candidate Trump, himself a media player, came along.

Could Trump actually win? Elected GOP officeholders, afraid to buck voter sentiment, are starting to declare their support. While some wealthy donors are redirecting their money to congressional and state-level candidates, many others have jumped on board - and others will, too, to the degree that Trump seems able to beat Clinton.

In any two-party system as polarized and closely balanced as the current US electoral system, a single crisis, such as a terrorist attack, could tip the balance. GOP politicians, funders, and advocacy group leaders are now trying to convince themselves that Trump, in the White House, could be managed to implement the Republican agenda. A pivotal Supreme Court nomination is at stake, and Speaker of the House Paul Ryan has a government-slashing budget ready for a Republican president to sign.

Ryan, who has not yet officially endorsed Trump, will come under growing pressure to do so. The Republicans will ride the beast they created - and hope that it does not consume them. (Courtesy Project Syndicate)

Theda Skocpol, Professor of Government and Sociology at Harvard University, is the co-author of *The Tea Party and the Remaking of American Conservatism*.



Chairman / Editor-in-Chief: Dr. Hussain Yasa
Vice-Chairman: Kazim Ali Gulzari
Email: outlookafghanistan@gmail.com
Phone: 0093 (799) 005019/777-005019
www.outlookafghanistan.net



The views and opinions expressed in the articles are those of the authors and do not reflect the views or opinions of the Daily Outlook Afghanistan.