

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



November 18, 2018

## People's Worries During the Cold Weather

As the winter season has approached, the problems of our people seem to be rising as well. The people of our country, who have been suffering for years from poverty, war, unemployment, displacement, deprivation and the special difficulties of the winter season, are also overwhelmed. This multiplication of the problems of our people at the time of difficulty and the natural disasters is, of course, because of the irresponsibility of relevant authorities.

The people of Afghanistan are people who are at odds with their own lives. In the midst of the problems generated by cold weather, rising fuel prices and unemployment are also disturbing people's lives. Given the fact that in winter, poverty, unemployment and fuel prices rise to a high level, so it can be said that with the arrival of the cold season, the death of poor people also reaches to alarming levels around the country, but their voices are foreign to the officials of the country, who do not pay any attention to them.

While the winter has not hit the houses seriously, the signs and symptoms have caused concern for the people. In particular, clear signs of this have originated in the form of rise in the price of some essential items, especially fuel.

The problem of the rise in the price of fuel in absence of any plan and the lack of readiness of the government to deal with the chilling problems of this season is not new. Unfortunately, a number of opportunistic traders and vendors also exploit the lack of government oversight and control, and exploit this for more profit.

The issue of the winter problems of people has always been mentioned and discussed every year before the coming of this chapter. It is unfortunate that the government has not been able to respond to the needs of the people and their concerns in the last few years, despite the awareness of the possible situation and warnings given over the past few years. Of course, it should not be forgotten that some other facts, regardless of official policies, have contributed to the increase in the number of items required by the people in the winter.

Often, these facts relate to the natural state of the country and the lack of facilities and routes. However, the existence of natural disasters and obstacles should not prevent the authorities from neglecting the people's concerns and problems during the winter months. The responsible ministries that need to be active in meeting the needs of the people are unplanned, in spite of the comments made by their authorities. They have always tried to propose different slogans for people by taking some decisions and designing very superficial plans.

In fact, winter in Afghanistan is one of the opportunities for some traders to gain profits. Recently, the prices of goods in the markets of the country have increased significantly, and pressured the weak and disenfranchised society to a large extent. Each year, there has been a discussion of rising prices with the coming of the cold season, and, on the other hand, the government and relevant institutions have not taken any serious measures in this regard.

One of the other factors of inflation is the supply pressure: that is, if the supply of goods is reduced in a country, then the price of goods will rise and inflation will arise. Since Afghanistan is a country that mostly imports, it depends on the main import factor that if imports in Afghanistan decline in a particular season, the supply pressure will increase the price of the goods. On the other hand, another reason for winter prices in Afghanistan has been inflation, which has increased commodities in neighboring countries, which will increase commodity prices in Afghanistan.

Given the fact that the economy of Afghanistan is based on the market economy, the government has the least interference in this regard, but this approach is not justified. If the government wants the economy to reach balance and curtail increases and inflation in different chapters, then there is a need to think in this direction so that the poor and low-income groups of the society are not insecure.

Winter has always been a source of trouble for most Afghan residents. In this country, the millions of people living below the poverty line, while not having access to urban services, are undoubtedly adding to the number of people's problems due to the cooling of the weather and the snow and rain.

What is certain is that the country's citizens are facing a lot of difficulties in the winter season, but the government as a whole, and the responsible institutions, in particular, have no plans to overcome these problems.

There are families who do not have shelter and live in tents, or families who are poor and can not even buy their food. This has made most families unable to produce their winter fuels, and as a result of the severity of the cold, they often suffer from various illnesses and lose a number of their lives. What should be reminded is that the government and the responsible authorities should have established system to cooperate with the people in need and should have precise control over the markets so that people can be facilitated.



## The Rocky Road of Peace Talks

By: Hujjatullah Zia

Despite the fact that the Taliban have come to negotiating table with the US envoy Zalmay Khalilzad to talk end of 17 years of conflict in Afghanistan, insurgency continues unabated as the Taliban guerilla fighters have intensified their attacks against Kabul government.

Afghanistan, which established the High Peace Council to stress Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process with the Taliban's leadership, feels being sidelined in the talks between US envoy and the Taliban as the two sat around the table without Kabul's representatives.

The negotiation with US envoy and the 'Moscow Summit', in which the Taliban shared the platform with members of Afghan HPC, provided the Taliban with greater international recognition, strengthened their position and boosted their confidence in the battlefield.

The Moscow forum was hosted by a permanent member of the UN Security Council despite the serious reservations of Kabul government, which sent members of HPC rather than diplomats to oversee the forum. The Moscow summit was scheduled for September 4 but delayed after Afghan President Muhammad Ashraf Ghani called Russia to cancel it.

The trip of the Taliban's delegates to Moscow "was not just to reiterate this position but also to show the US that they have 'alternatives'; that is, if Washington does not engage, then the Taliban would seek political and even military support from its perceived competitor, Russia," said Arkady Dubnov, a Russian expert on Central Asia and Afghanistan.

Although Russia is concerned about its security as the IS group is spreading its tentacles in the region after losing ground in Iraq and Syria, the Moscow summit on November 9 was likely to be symbolic and ended without a positive result. Perhaps it was an indication to the US not to turn a blind eye to the regional stakeholders in Afghanistan's peace talks. And the Taliban's positive response to Russia's invitation was to simply capitalize on the opportunity since they are on the prowl for every chance.

So far, no headway has been made in the negotiations with the Taliban, who have refused to back down from their headline stance of not negotiating with Kabul government. To bargain for much higher price in the talks with their US interlocutors, the Taliban have intensified their attacks against Afghan government in recent weeks.

Meanwhile, they are believed to prevent form Afghanistan's presidential election, which will be held after six months, through increasing their insurgency and bargaining in their negotiations with US envoy. Rumors say that Khalilzad asked Kabul government for delaying the election, which was reacted negatively by Afghan grassroots and officials. Based on the rumors spread on social media, halting presidential election and establishing a government based on "Sharia" rather than "Constitution" in a national Jirga (assembly) were parts of the Taliban's preconditions put on the table with US envoy.

It is self-explanatory that the Taliban seek political share in the government and will try to disrupt the upcoming presidential election. However, such a government will not be acceptable by Afghan people, who showed their strong will for democracy through active participation in parliamentary elections despite the life-threatening warnings from the Taliban.

It is believed that the wide political rift between Afghan officials in the government's body on the one hand and the cleavage between state and nation on the other hand have led to the deterioration of security situation in the country and lack of support to Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process. The National Unity Government failed to mobilize support from the public and stronger support from the clerics. The life of NUG is coming to end, but not a single challenge of the country has been resolved. Worst of all, the security has been deteriorated.

To strengthen the Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process, Kabul government has to win the national support besides the international backup. Now it is too late for the NUG to earn the public support as officials, including President Ghani, are preparing to be nominated for the upcoming presidential election.

Now the US President Donald Trump, who called himself "problem solver", is in the limbo whether or not to accept the Taliban's preconditions for pulling out his troops from Afghanistan. It is highly tough decision and hard to trust the Taliban. If Trump's administration makes a mistake in this regard after the US sacrificed thousands of its soldiers' lives and billions of dollars, his nation and his successor will strongly denounce him.

Hujjatullah Zia is the permanent writer of the Daily Outlook Afghanistan and freelance writer based in Beijing. He can be reached at [zia\\_hujjat@yahoo.com](mailto:zia_hujjat@yahoo.com)

## Europe's New Political Battle Lines

By: Zaki Laïdi

French President Emmanuel Macron has framed the European Parliament election in May 2019 as a battle not between the traditional right and left, but between populists and pro-European progressives like himself. Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras recently adopted similar rhetoric, declaring that "all progressive, democratic, and pro-European forces have a duty to stand side by side on the same side of history." Would such a fundamental Europe-wide political shift - much like the one in France that brought Macron to power last year - actually come to pass?

The European People's Party (EPP) on the right and the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D) on the left have long shared control of the European Parliament, where they have governed by compromise. But, over time, this has produced a kind of political homogenization in Europe, leading to mass abstentionism. Those who do vote increasingly choose anti-establishment parties that often espouse extreme views.

As a result, whereas the EPP and S&D controlled 61% of the European Parliament in 2009, they won only 54% of the vote in 2014, meaning that the body was very nearly dominated by extremist parties. The 2019 election is likely to produce even more losses for the establishment parties, which are expected to win only 45% of seats.

At this stage, it is doubtful that anyone would consider running a campaign on the basis of left-right divisions - not least because of deep rifts within the parties themselves. On the right, the EPP is divided between pro-European liberals and conservative Euroskeptics, despite endorsing Manfred Weber of Germany's Christian Social Union as the EPP Spitzenkandidat.

At the recent EPP Congress in Helsinki, European Council President Donald Tusk was explicit: breaching the rule of law is incompatible with belonging to the Christian Democrat family - a message obviously aimed at Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán. In the European Parliament, the EPP even voted in favor of invoking Article 7 of the Treaty of Lisbon against Hungary, a move that would impose sanctions in response to the Orbán government's systematic violations of judicial independence, freedom of speech, and the rights of minorities and migrants.

But the EPP's vote was largely motivated by its desire to preserve its chances of remaining the largest EU party and ensuring that Weber becomes the next European Commission leader. More broadly, strong political pressure forced the EPP's hand; under different circumstances, the party probably would have been happy to allow Orbán to continue breaching democratic norms unchecked, in order to preserve its own hegemony in the EU Parliament.

But in refusing to clarify its position on Orbán or expel him, the EPP is taking an enormous risk. If the European Council chooses Weber as the next European Commission president, both social democrats and liberals in the European Parliament could refuse to vote for a candidate from a party that keeps Orbán in its ranks. That is why Macron, who has an interest in dividing the EPP and luring its liberal wing to join him, opposes the Spitzenkandidat system.

There are three alternatives. First, the European Council could choose an EPP candidate who is less ambiguous on Hungary. Brex-

it chief negotiator Michel Barnier could be a serious substitute for Weber - probably the only one within the EPP.

The second alternative would be to endorse the Dutch Labour Party's Frans Timmermans, who took a very strong position against Orbán and is acceptable to German Chancellor Angela Merkel and EPP liberals. To be sure, Merkel might prefer Weber. But if the European Council is deadlocked, and the European Parliament opposes her choice, she could endorse another candidate. The decline of the S&D also makes it implausible that Weber could get their support.

The third option could be a candidate endorsed by the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE), such as Margrethe Vestager, the EU competition commissioner. Some observers argue that the Danish government will never propose Vestager as their candidate. But Macron, who strongly supports Vestager, could endorse her as the French candidate - an unprecedented move that would accelerate the Europeanization of continental politics.

Overall, populist forces could well secure a majority in the European Parliament, though they will not operate as a unified force under a single political banner. In such a scenario, Macron would need to build political coalitions with either the EPP or the S&D, whose views largely align with his vision for EU - and, more important, eurozone - reform. In fact, like the rule of law, eurozone reform is a key fault line along which political alliances will be established.

Macron is already marshaling support among center-right leaders in Spain and the Netherlands, who are more sympathetic to his vision for European integration. He has established a good rapport with Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte, even though Rutte opposes the eurozone reforms Macron advocates.

Two other issues will likely shape the outcome of the European Parliament election. First, Europe's leaders will have to address the need to reinforce the EU's external frontiers, especially through the long-overdue deployment of a European border patrol. Such a proposal will undoubtedly rile nationalist populists, who will oppose the deployment of a European force, even as they rail against migration.

Second, Europe's leaders will need to commit to combating tax evasion and avoidance by major companies, especially the big tech firms. This is a high-stakes issue, as it will determine the capacity of states to remain fiscally solvent in increasingly digital economies.

Some progress has already been made on this front, thanks largely to Vestager. But stronger action is needed, not least because EU countries continue to grant corporate tax abatements. And with Germany reconsidering its support for a French-backed plan to tax the revenue of large technology companies at the EU level, further progress is far from guaranteed.

Perhaps Europe's ongoing political realignment will enable the realization of Macron's vision of a stronger, more integrated Europe. While recent challenges - not least Italy's budget battle with the European Commission - indicate that such an outcome is far from assured, it remains the most credible counterweight to the rise of populism.

Zaki Laïdi, Professor of International Relations at Sciences Po, was an adviser to former French prime minister Manuel Valls.

Chairman / Editor-in-Chief: Moh. Reza Huwaida  
Vice Chairman / Exec. Editor: Moh. Sakhi Rezaie  
Email: [outlookafghanistan@gmail.com](mailto:outlookafghanistan@gmail.com)  
Phone: 0093 (799) 005019/777-005019  
[www.outlookafghanistan.net](http://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.