

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



November 29, 2018

Geneva Conference: A Golden Opportunity for Afghanistan

The Afghan Government and United Nations co-host the Geneva Conference that was kicked off on 27 November and will end on November 28, 2018. This is the 13th high-level international conference since 2001 held on Afghanistan. This conference aims at peace efforts and development, but it is also focused on an opportunity to assess the Afghan government's reform efforts and reconfirm commitments made by donors to Afghanistan at the Brussels conference in 2016.

President Ghani left Kabul on Monday for Switzerland to attend Geneva Conference on Afghanistan and deliver a speech. About 62 countries and representatives of more than 35 international organizations have attended the summit.

This conference shows the solidarity of the international community with the Afghan people and the government in their efforts for peace and prosperity; and for the Afghan government to renew its commitment to development and reform. As a result, it is a key moment for the government and international community to demonstrate progress and commitment, and maintain the momentum for elections and opportunities for peace in Afghanistan.

The conference also is an opportunity for emphasizing on the importance of the development and reform agenda and the need to advance it as a constructive contribution to peace and security. This particular conference is also crucial in measuring results against the \$15.2 billion committed by the international community for Afghanistan in 2016.

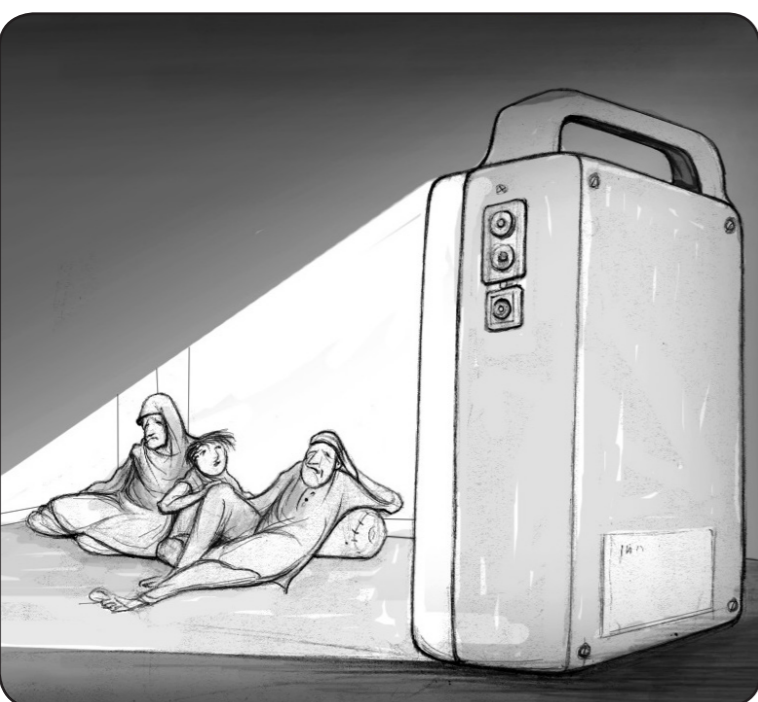
This Conference on Afghanistan is held between two pledging conferences: the Brussels Conference on Afghanistan (2016) and the next pledging conference expected to be held in 2020.

Key Messages of Afghanistan to the Conference

Afghanistan will transform from an aid dependent country to a reliable international partner. Afghanistan has developed and implemented crucial programs in public administration capacity building and revenue reform and this trend needs to continue. Based on these programs, Afghanistan has initiated reforms in customs, revenue generation, improving trade and transit systems, opening new trade air and land corridors that they would enable the country to increase its revenue to billions by 2024. Afghanistan enjoys good capacity in trade and transit. The international community shall support Afghanistan in business development, investment schemes and regional connectivity. Afghanistan requires to be supported in marketing for its high quality goods and products abroad. In addition to this, Afghanistan enjoys a relatively high skilled and qualified human resource that enables it to implement its plans according to the domestic conditions.

This summit will give a chance to the Afghan government to call on the international community to support an Afghan-owned and Afghan-led peace process. However, the conference comes at a time when the US administration is holding direct talks with the Taliban, Afghanistan's largest armed group which was toppled following a US-led invasion in 2001. As a result it is the best opportunity for Afghanistan to lay down a comprehensive road map for Afghan-owned and Afghan-led peace process to be backed by both the international community and Afghan citizens.

Geneva conference is a strategic opportunity for Afghanistan. It can serve to lay a base for sustainable peace and development in the country. In other words, the Geneva Conference will change the fate of the Afghan people and will enable the Afghan government to have breakthrough progress in peace, security and other fields in the near future.



Afghan Women Make Strides with Democratic Constitution

By: Hujjatullah Zia

Afghan women exercise their rights and freedoms equally to men and hold high political positions in the government's body following the collapse of the Taliban's regime. Afghanistan has a handful of female ambassadors, ministers, MPs, senators, etc. They also serve as provincial governors, members of High Peace Council, head of Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC), which are top and tough positions with the country's current sensitive security issue.

With the establishment of democratic government in the post-Taliban regime, both men and women have been entitled equally. That is, gender discrimination has no room in the Constitution as it is stated in Article 22, "Any kind of discrimination and distinction between citizens of Afghanistan shall be forbidden. The citizens of Afghanistan, man and woman, have equal rights and duties before the law." There is no legal barrier before women to hamper them from social, political or economic activities.

Similarly, a large number of women are serving as civil society activists and women's rights activists. AIHRC pays especial attention to the rights and freedoms of women and advocates their rights in legal and judicial cases.

Enjoying equal rights and freedoms, Afghan women play an essential role in social, political and economic arenas. They have proved that they are not inferior creature and have the ability to play as important role as men do in the country. They also serve as police and soldiers in Afghanistan despite the life-threatening danger.

Contrary to all the aforementioned issues, there still leaves a lot to be desired. Afghan women encounter a large proportion of challenges, mainly in terms of culture. Traditional culture, which holds strong sway in tribal belts, still looks down on women and deems them inappropriate for social, economic and political activities. That is, discriminatory notion and approach towards women are deeply embedded in Afghanistan's culture, which will take years to be changed. The public horizon regarding women's rights and freedoms are highly limited in remote areas and tribal belts. Therefore, violent treatment and honor-killings occur on a massive scale in those areas usually without being reported. To put it succinctly, Afghan women are vulnerable to violence due to strict traditional culture.

Women play a role in security sector, take part in peace negotiations and are involving in rebuilding after war. Based on the calculation of

Resolute Support, there are 3,231 women in the Afghan National Police, 1,312 women in the Afghan National Army, and 122 women in the Afghan Special Security Forces, which totally making up roughly 1.4 percent of Afghan security forces.

"Rewarded by NATO for their recruitment and determination, the women are often seen as "the darlings of the West" by both colleagues and their communities," Wazhma Frogh, a member of HPC and founder of the Kabul-based Women & Peace Studies Organization, is cited as saying by an Istanbul-based journalist Sophia Jones. In the article entitled "The Many Dangers of Being an Afghan Woman in Uniform", Sophia also quotes a female soldier, who is the only breadwinner of her family of seven, as saying to be viewed as "whores" by community. She also quotes a female army lieutenant that if women seek promotion, they are mostly told to offer sexual favors to their male superiors in return. Over all, women face challenges such as harsh attitudes, discriminatory approaches and unbearable rhetoric, which will dishearten them to play active role in social and political arenas. To not mention being labelled negatively by their colleagues, Afghan female police and soldiers are likely to be viewed negatively in the society and the bulk of Afghan families are not ready to allow their daughters join police or army.

More misogynistic and discriminatory practices are rampant in the Taliban-dominated areas, where women's rights are violated and their freedoms are curtailed to a great extent. Worst, a number of residents in those areas have been influenced by the Taliban's warped mindset.

The nascent democracy in Afghanistan provides a relative platform for Afghan women to play their role in social, economic and political issues in the country; however, there are still many challenges ahead. But to view the changes brought up in the post-Taliban's regime in terms of women's rights and freedoms, much has been achieved.

Changes in a country which has suffered decades of war will not happen overnight. The past gradual changes, as women hold high political positions and play key role in the country, are promising. Afghan women have to continue their efforts in line with government and women's rights institutions to overcome the challenges and change the public mindset and cultural values for better.

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Nuclear Energy; Saudi Arabia's Coming Washington Battle

By: James M. Dorsey

When Saudi General Khalid bin Sultan bin Abdul Aziz went shopping in the late 1980s for Chinese medium-range missiles capable of carrying nuclear, chemical or biological warheads he made no bones about keeping the United States, one of the kingdom's closest allies, in the dark.

It was "my task to negotiate the deal, devise an appropriate deception plan, choose a team of Saudi officers and men and arrange for their training in both Saudi Arabia and China, build and defend operation bases and storage facilities in different parts of the kingdom, arrange for the shipment of the missiles from China and, at every stage, be ready to defend the project against sabotage or any form of attack," General Bin Sultan, a son of the late Saudi crown prince and defense minister, Sultan bin Abdul Aziz al Saud, and commander of the US-led international alliance that forced Iraq to withdraw from Kuwait in 1991, recounted in his memoir.

The incident coupled with more recent Saudi statements and the kingdom's inability to present from the outset a credible and sustainable version of events surrounding the killing of journalist Jamal Khashoggi on the premises of its Istanbul consulate is complicating its negotiations with the United States for the acquisition of designs for nuclear power plants, a deal valued at up to US\$80 billion depending on how many Saudi Arabia ultimately decides to build.

Prospects of a massive deal go to the heart of US President Donald J. Trump's jobs and deals-focussed America First policy. Yet, growing criticism and distrust of Saudi Arabia in the US Congress and intelligence community as a result of the Khashoggi crisis and the kingdom's handling of the Yemen war that has sparked the world's worst humanitarian crisis since World War Two are likely to strengthen efforts to thwart an agreement that honours Saudi insistence on producing its own nuclear fuel, even though it could buy it more cheaply abroad.

The Saudi insistence has fuelled concerns that the kingdom may divert their fuel for military purposes. Those kinds of fears coupled with Iran's ballistic missile program drove world powers to first sanction Iran and then conclude a 2015 international agreement that curbed Iran's nuclear program. Mr. Trump withdrew from the agreement earlier this year, charging that it did not provide sufficient guarantees that Iran would not be able to develop a nuclear weapon.

Democrats in the US Congress have described refusing to sell Saudi Arabia nuclear technology as proper punishment for the killing of Mr. Khashoggi that the kingdom insists was done without the knowledge of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman.

While the Trump administration has as yet not abandoned longstanding strict US nuclear export safeguards to secure a deal with Saudi Arabia, it has also not unambiguously said that it would uphold them.

Like with his rejection of hard-hitting sanctions in the wake of the Khashoggi killing, Mr. Trump is likely to ultimately argue that if the United States does not conclude a nuclear deal with Saudi Arabia, countries like China, Russia and South Korea, that have less strict controls will. The argument amounts to the equivalent of committing a wrong because if one doesn't, someone else will.

Saudi officials have repeatedly insisted that the kingdom is developing nuclear capabilities for peaceful purposes such as medicine, elec-

tricity generation, and desalination of sea water. They say that Saudi Arabia is committed to putting its future facilities under the supervision of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

Yet, with a US\$56 billion military budget for 2018, Saudi Arabia is stepping up the development of a domestic military industry. The kingdom aims to source 50% of its military procurement domestically by 2030, up from its current two percent.

Speaking to CBS earlier this year, Prince Mohammed appeared to put conditions on Saudi nuclear assurances by warning that "Saudi Arabia does not want to acquire any nuclear bomb, but without a doubt, if Iran developed a nuclear bomb, we will follow suit as soon as possible."

In putting forward demands for parity with Iran by getting the right to controlled enrichment of uranium and the reprocessing of spent fuel into plutonium, potential building blocks for nuclear weapons, Saudi Arabia was also seen as potentially backing away from a 2009 memorandum of understanding with the United States in which it pledged to acquire nuclear fuel from international markets.

Nuclear energy cooperation was one of a host of agreements concluded last year by Saudi Arabia and China during a visit to Beijing by Saudi King Salman. The agreement included a feasibility study for the construction of high-temperature gas-cooled (HTGR) nuclear power plants in the kingdom as well as cooperation in intellectual property and the development of a domestic industrial supply chain for HTGRs built in Saudi Arabia. The HTGR agreement built on an accord signed in 2012 that involved maintenance and development of nuclear power plants and research reactors, as well as the provision of Chinese nuclear fuel.

A report by the Washington-based Institute for Science and International Security (ISIS) released shortly after the king's visit warned that the 2015 Iran nuclear agreement had "not eliminated the kingdom's desire for nuclear weapons capabilities and even nuclear weapons."

Much like the era of General Bin Sultan, potential Chinese sales to Saudi Arabia of ballistic missiles and cruise missiles remain one of the murkier areas of Sino-Saudi military cooperation.

Military experts say that satellite imagery of missile bases in Saudi Arabia in recent years and other open-source circumstantial evidence, including Saudi press coverage of graduation ceremonies at the kingdom's Strategic Missile Force school in Wadi ad-Dawasir, attest to ongoing transfers.

Saudi Arabia in 2014 showcased Chinese-made Dongfeng-3 missiles that have a range of up to 5,000 kilometres. Media reports said the missiles had been purchased in 2007, possibly with US acquiescence.

"Saudi Arabia has invested heavily in conventional ballistic and cruise missiles to provide the kingdom a shot of strategic deterrence," said non-proliferation expert Jeffrey Lewis. Mr. Lewis' conclusion was confirmed by Anwar Eshqi, a retired Saudi major general and advisor to the Saudi military.

"The Saudi military did indeed receive DF-21 missiles from China and the integration of the missiles, including a full maintenance check and upgraded facilities, is complete," Mr. Eshqi said referring to the People's Republic's East Wind solid-fuel, medium-range ballistic missile.

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