

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



October 04, 2016

Kunduz City Dominated by Taliban, Again!

Different sources confirmed yesterday that after a threatening attack by Taliban in northern Kunduz province, Taliban militants entered the capital of the province and they captured the city's main square, raising their white flags. News reports revealed that one person was killed and 35 people including civilians and security forces were wounded after the insurgents stormed Kunduz city from four directions. The attacking rebels captured several security posts. Some photos on social media also showed Taliban reaching the main square in the province and raising their flags. However, the Ministry of Defence said security forces were in control of the strategic urban center. Meanwhile, Governor Asadullah Amarkhel told a press conference, yesterday afternoon, that the Taliban attack on the provincial capital had been pushed back and normalcy had returned to the city. He said the attack on Kunduz city followed an operation security forces conducted a few days ago in Aqtash, Dasht-i-Archi, Qala-i-Zal districts, inflicting casualties on insurgents and driving them away from some areas.

Taliban seem to have intensified their attacks as the Afghan government authorities are preparing for Brussels Summit, where they are expected to demand more support and assistance for Afghanistan. Definitely, security would be the most dominant issue in the Conference and Taliban want to give the impression that they have their dominance in certain parts of the country. And, to a certain extent, the facts and figures favor their claim. There are certain parts of the country that are totally under their control and now they have claimed that their targets would be the provincial capitals, where mostly Afghan security forces have their dominance.

National Unity Government (NUG) would be faced with great difficulties while defending itself in Brussels as there are not many achievements on its chest. Since the formation of NUG, there has not been any improvement in security and many other sectors still suffer from lack of attention. As a matter of fact, the arrangements to tackle the security situation are not up to the mark. The government authorities do not see eye to eye with each other regarding the security situation and the measures to control it. As there is no guideline or consensus on the higher level, the operational teams are not sure about what sort of steps they have to take. In most of the cases, they respond only after the insurgents attack somewhere. They, in short, have only a defensive mechanism to follow.

The security situation in the country demands that there should be a comprehensive strategy. The complex networks of the terrorists and their growth and expansion cannot be eradicated only through defensive approach. The security authorities must develop an approach where they are able to press the insurgents and bring them to the point where they understand that there is no solution through violence and terrorism and they should come to negotiation table. Without being dominated by the Afghan security forces, it is very difficult that Taliban insurgents get ready for any sort of negotiation.

The confused and incoherent security arrangements by the government, at a time when the country is going through the most challenging security situation, have been criticized by different analysts. They have said that though the government has made several promises over the past six months to eliminate insurgents and clear areas under their control, the presence of militants and their activities reveal that Kabul's security plans are mostly symbolic.

There are many provinces in the country that were once far away from insurgency but now they are seriously threatened by Taliban. Since, Afghan security forces have shouldered the responsibility of security, they have faced serious challenges. There is no doubt in the fact that they have the capability to defeat the insurgents, but the problems is the lack of a comprehensive and practicable strategy. The higher ranks of the government and security personnel themselves are not sure about how to handle the situation. Their overall stance against insurgency is non-coherent and lack a true vision. They are not sure where they want to go; whether they want a negotiation with Taliban through military offensive so that the insurgents are compelled to come to the negotiation table or they want to adopt a defensive mechanism only to respond after the attacks of the insurgents.

Moreover, they are not sure about how to coordinate the different fights that are taking place in different parts of the country. The insurgency in the country has turned complex, with ISIS posing even more threats. The different Taliban factions have different ways of fighting with the government. And, the main issue in such circumstances is that different authorities themselves are not on the same page on how to face the situation. Therefore, the government needs to design a clear strategy, involve all the authorities in the decision making and improve the coordination. Only a clear, united and well-coordinated approach can defeat the insurgents in today's situation.



Saving Afghanistan From the Edge of Failure

By Mohammad Shafiq Hamdam

In the last two years, Afghanistan has been facing unprecedented challenges. However, several major development projects have initiated, launched or completed. But the government has failed to deliver its promises. Thousands of Afghans died in violence. The government lost control of several districts across the country and hundreds of thousands of Afghans forced to flee their home. Unemployment and corruption is at its peak. Disunity among the Afghans have increased and the country is more fragile than ever. If the world community does not engage immediately, Afghanistan will turn into a second Iraq.

After a major election crisis and controversy, the coalition government of national unity inaugurated in September of 2014. Without release of the election results, in a mediation of the US Secretary of State John Kerry, Mohammad Ashraf Ghani introduced as a president and his political rival Dr. Abdullah Abdullah as his chief executive.

Since its establishment, the legitimacy of the National Unity Government (NUG) has challenged and called unconstitutional. Following the deal for the new government, Afghanistan and the US signed the Bilateral Security Agreement and NATO Status of Forces Agreement, allowing the US and its NATO allies to stay in Afghanistan, beyond 2015.

Paying \$4 billion a year to the Afghan National Security and Defense Forces (ANSDF) and \$1 billion for development projects, the US is the largest donor of Afghanistan. In 2011, during the second Bonn Conference on Afghanistan, the world community has agreed to support Afghanistan for ten years, the Decade of Transformation (2015-2024). Overall Afghanistan is more prosperous than ever. Beyond the repetitive stories of Afghanistan's new constitution, three times presidential elections, ten million students enrolled in schools, 352,000 ANSDF, international partnerships and global recognition of the government, women's rights, use of cell phone, internet and much more, there are some other great stories as well.

In July 2016, Afghanistan became a member of World Trade Organization (WTO). In continuing efforts for reviving the modern Silk Roads and Afghanistan as the main gateway, several transit agreements inked or completed.

The recent significant and tangible development projects are: finalizing the \$997.00 million Central Asia, South Asia Electricity Transmission and Trade Project (CASA-1000) agreement. The launch of Turkmenistan-Uzbekistan-Tajikistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan (TUTAP) electricity power line, which would connect South and Central Asia via Afghanistan. Signing the trilateral trade agreement to use the southern Iranian port of Chabahar, which will give India trade access to Iran, Afghanistan, and Central Asia. On September 7 through a 4600 miles trade route, for the first time Afghanistan connected to China and Central Asian countries by rail.

Good governance is at the top of its to-do list of the NUG. Appointment of prominent reformists, Nader Naderi as the chief of the independent administrative reform and civil service commission and Mohammad Farid Hamidi, Attorney General of Afghanistan, in two key positions, is widely welcomed by the Afghans. Establishment of the anti-corruption justice center, the high council on governance, the rule of law and anti-corruption, national procurement committee along with substantial reform by the Attorney General are significant moves towards good governance. But the problems are chronic and a lot needs to be done.

Afghanistan is still at the bottom of transparency index. Brussels conference on Afghanistan is just around the corner and it will be held 4-5 October. This is another great opportunity for the NUG to pledge to fight against corruption and appeal for further aid to the major donors.

Through Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework, Afghanistan has

agreed to fight corruption, reform the government and respect human rights. However, the government has failed to do so, but the international community has not closely monitored the commitments. As a result, Afghans have experienced the electoral, political, economic and security crisis.

An expired parliament, fragile civil society organizations and weakened political parties are not in a position to hold the government accountable. Therefore, the Brussels conference should be a tribunal to set the Afghan leadership accountable.

Unconditionally backed by the world community, Afghan leaderships think of themselves above every law and privileged. The nation is suppressed, starving, divided and living in fear. They do not have the power to set their politicians and civil servants accountable. Therefore, it gives a chance to the insurgents to recruit angry and hopeless Afghans into their lines.

The government should be responsible for securing and building on the gains made possible by the blood and treasure of Afghans and their allies. However, in the absence of accountability mechanism, a regime which is politically, financially and even militarily backed by the world community, might not be accountable to its ordinary citizens.

Of course, Afghanistan is a partner of several donor countries, but this should not be an excuse to ignore the crisis and risk billions of dollars and thousands of innocent lives. Report of the Afghan casualties for the last two years, is shocking. The UN estimates 10,000 civilian casualties a year, which is a record high in this century. Operating from Pakistan, the Taliban are responsible for the majority of these casualties.

The Taliban has not welcomed any peace deal yet. However, a major peace deal between the government and the armed opposition group of the Hezb-i-Islami Afghanistan led by Gulbadin Hekmatyar inked on September 29, 2016. □

As a part of the NUG deal, the leaderships of the NUG have agreed to reform the election commissions immediately and amend the constitution. Two-year letter, still the commissions are not reformed. Therefore, the parliamentary and district elections have been on hold and the Loya Jirga (grand council) to amend the constitution and change the presidential system to a parliamentary system, is suspended.

It might look awkward, but as the biggest supporters of Afghan leadership, this is a responsibility of the world community, led by the US to hold and set them accountable.

Every month, thousands of Afghans leave the country because of poverty, unemployment, and insecurity. According to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, more than a quarter of the one million refugees and migrants who arrived in Europe in 2015 were Afghans, coming second after Syrians.

The country is rich in natural resources, gas, minerals and oil worth estimate around 3 trillion US dollars. But still poverty is one of the major cause of the ongoing crisis in Afghanistan. Therefore, promoting a healthy investment in extractive industries and trade will support Afghanistan's Self-Reliance strategy, agreed by the world community in Tokyo in July 2012. Helping Afghanistan establishes peace, encourage investment in infrastructure could help decrease the flow of refugees to Europe, which represents a brain drain for Afghanistan and an addition to the refugee crisis in the European countries. Afghanistan is in a serious economic, political and security crisis. The upcoming Brussels conference is an opportunity for the world community to review and renew their long-term commitments and to set clear benchmarks and mechanism for accountability of the NUG. In order to ensure Afghanistan can never again be a safe haven for terrorists, there has to be a two-way street. Not a dirt one, but a two-way paved street. It is in the interest of the world community and the Afghan people.

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"Good" Urbanization: An Investment and A Way of Life

By Dr. Joan Clos

Exclusive for the Daily Outlook

Urbanization is a human process that has led to profound changes in the daily life of more than half of the world population. The way our cities are planned and organized affects our lives more than we can imagine. The design of a city affects the time we spend commuting from one place to another; our housing modalities namely public, private, or informal; streets, parks and public spaces; education and job opportunities; urban poverty; space for different cultures and ethnicities; integration; cultural activities; pollution and environmental sustainability among others. However, the attention, consciousness and global debate over the negative trends of the current urbanization of the world and its impact have not been sufficiently analyzed in the last decades: decrease in planning, diminishing densities, increased urban expansion, less public space, more energy consumption. The lack of attention also applies to the tremendous benefits that can be generated from good urbanization. Although it is a very complex human process, the advantages that urbanization offers can be an important contribution to the solution to many of the challenges that the world is facing today.

It is now time for a paradigm shift. Habitat III, the Third United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development, 17-20 October 2016, Quito, Ecuador, is offering us the opportunity to adopt an ambitious New Urban Agenda that can drive the wealth, prosperity and human progress for present and future urban dwellers, who are expected to represent 70 per cent of the world population by 2050.

We cannot miss this opportunity. The recognition of the power of well-planned urbanization as an engine for sustainable development is a historical paradigm shift embraced by Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development. In UN-Habitat, the leading agency on

human settlements and urban development, we have not only assessed the associated problems of unplanned urbanization but we have also tested the immense opportunities of good urbanization all around the world. Sustainable urbanization is a powerful engine for growth, social cohesion and environmental protection. We strongly believe that the New Urban Agenda is an opportunity for all.

On World Habitat Day, October the 3rd this year, we would like to continue promoting a culture and a consciousness about the importance of cities in our daily lives and the enormous opportunities that the New Urban Agenda is bringing to the prosperity and sustainability of our lives.

In the lead-up to Habitat III, we specifically want to call for repositioning housing at the centre of good urbanization. Indeed, where we live defines who we are in many ways; it also defines our ability to participate in the fabric of our cities through access to basic services, education, job opportunities and culture. On this day, we urge urban decision-makers to remember that adequate housing is a universal human right, and it means much more than four walls and a roof. We must globally commit political will and public intervention and adequate investment to ensure housing at the centre of good urbanization, and improve the living-conditions of over a billion slum-dwellers and urban poor.

The prosperity of our growth will be intimately related to the quality of our urbanization and planning of cities. The historical transition from the primary sector towards more productive sectors of the economy is intimately linked to urbanization. Implementing the New Urban Agenda is the best investment for our quality of life. To this end, this October, let's celebrate together World Habitat Day, Urban October, Habitat III and World Cities' Day (October the 31st each year) in this very special October of 2016, and renew our global commitment to good urbanization.

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