

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



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## Escalated Militancy Looms Large

The indiscriminate attacks carried out by the terrorist groups, mainly the Taliban and self-styled IS group, have filled the air with fear and disappointment and prompted people to lose their trust in the government. The officials' frequent messages of condolence to the nation add more insult to the public injury.

The death toll rises on day-to-day basis as terrorist groups target people indiscriminately. In turn, Afghans are highly frustrated with the National Unity Government and accuse the government of turning a blind eye to their pain and sufferings as it never happens that a member of their family falls among casualties.

With the concrete walls set around government buildings to protect officials from terrorist attacks, the wall of mistrust between state and nation has also grown taller. Based on popular belief, terrorists kill, people sustain casualties and officials send messages of condolence and this cycle goes on and on without any effective mechanisms from the government to stop this trend.

The recent escalated insurgency reveals two facts: First, the government is not able to safeguard the rights and freedoms of people. In other words, the insurgent groups have changed their tactic of offensives, but the government goes with the same traditional system, which has been proved abortive and obsolete. Hence, the traditional counterinsurgency mechanism will fail to bring peace and stability in the country.

Second, despite losing ground in Iraq and Syria, the IS group has extended its power in Afghanistan seeking to foment sectarian violence. Therefore, this group is systematically targeting the Shiite Muslims in the capital city of Kabul. With the emergence of IS group in the country, Shiites came under severe attacks as their mosques, mourning proceedings, educational centers and sport clubs were not immune to their harm. In short, sectarian violence increased to a large extent, which in long term, will have a horrible consequence on national unity.

The US still hesitates whether to intensify its air strikes against the insurgents or simply wait for the positive response of the Taliban for peace talks. The exploratory talks between senior US diplomat Alice Wells and the Taliban's representatives in Qatar made the US optimistic about peace talks. But it is believed that the Taliban use such signals sporadically not to come to the table with bona fide intention but to put the US or even the Kabul government in limbo. For example, soon after holding talks with the US senior official, the Taliban stormed Ghazni province, which shows their lukewarm response to peace and insincerity to peace talks.

Initially, Donald Trump adopted a strong decision to follow aggressive strategy against the militants to remove them from the surface of earth. Hence, the US dropped "mother of all bombs" – a 20,000-pound weapon that costs an estimated \$170,000 per bomb, according to the US Air Force – in the Achin district of Nangarhar province last year to target the IS members. But his strategy is yet to come to fruition and the IS group has increased its attacks against civilians.

One of the reasons behind the government's insufficiency, according to the public, is that the heads of the NUG do not see eye to eye on country-level decision making. The gap and disagreements between high-ranking officials are beyond doubt. Whatever the reason is, but what is certain is that the NUG is not able to ensure the security of citizens or safeguard their rights and freedoms. With the establishment of the NUG, challenges emerged from all sides and Afghans' dream for a society void of violence and discrimination did not become a reality.

The series of attacks in the heart of Kabul shows that the militants have simply reached the capital and they are able to directly target the presidential palace, as rockets were fired at presidential palace on Eid Day.

Rumors suggest that the Taliban intend to carry out a strong attack, similar to that on Ghazni, on Kabul – this is shared in social media in recent days. With the inability of the government and poor intelligence, this does not seem far from reality. That is, if Kabul government does not reinforce its intelligence and carry out more offensive attacks, rather than only defensive ones, an attack with the same nature will be probable.

Afghan officials, who were promising citizens of a utopia and society free from violence, poverty and discrimination during their presidential campaign, have to answer to the public about all their irresponsibility and insufficiency. With the endless cycle of: terrorists have their bombs, people have their bodies and officials have their messages of condolence, the government is the loser so far. Thus, such large-scale attacks in the heart of capital or anywhere in big cities are a stain on the face of the NUG, which has lost the trust and support of the nation.



## AFGHANISTAN: Way Forward (Part 3)

By Mohammed Gul Sahibzada

In order to achieve this end, a team of experienced political figures should come to the fore and commit themselves to salvage Afghanistan in particular and the region plus the whole world in general from the scourge of instability, terrorism, poverty and the entailing hostility. A stable Afghanistan can offer much more positive prospects to the region and the world than an unstable Afghanistan. Afghan politicians, who enjoys very big support from the people of Afghanistan – including Doctor Zalmai Khalilzad, should come to the fore and discuss building a team with engaging the country's experienced political personalities and technocrats – including some members of the present government – and other influential figures to form a political alliance for the next presidential election. Some members of the Taliban movement should also be approached conditionally for national reconciliation for the sake of lasting peace in the country. This is the way forward for Afghanistan of today in the political arena.

Educational: - Education is the major and undisputed factor that can uplift a nation in many areas including security, economy, civil society and institutions. In fact a nation's main security guarantee is its educated masses. Afghanistan is now standing at a very low level when it comes to education. 18 percent of the total population is educated by high school graduate standard. Negligible percentage is highly educated. This phenomenon presents grave challenges for Afghanistan's next administration. The present Afghan government has taken steps to allow private educational institutions. Millions of children – including girls – are going to school across the country. This policy should be continued with more emphasis on regulations in areas such as quality, effective use of time in schools, proper training of teachers and allocating much greater portion of national annual budget for building more quality educational institutions in the country. Afghan government should enforce with full show of force the rights to education and training of Afghan girls and boys across the country. Keeping in view century old traditions and conservatism in rural areas, the risk of girls not allowed to attend school in these areas is high. The new Afghan government should utilize local power houses such as religious leaders (Mollas, Maulawis) and tribal chieftains to encourage families to allow their girls to attend schools. This can be best done by mobilizing Islamic teachings and traditions of Prophet Muhammad (PBOH), which encourages both girls and boys to obtain education. These tasks are achievable by using local and traditional mechanisms that already exist.

The role of the state or future government in Afghanistan should be very inclusive in the operation of informal schools called Madrassas in the rural areas of Afghanistan. These institutions impart religious teachings to the youngsters and exist since hundreds of years in Afghan society. Sometimes, Masjids (Mosques) are used to impart religious teachings to Afghan kids. The reason for involvement of the government regulatory arm in these informal institutions is due to the use of these education houses by intelligence agencies to radicalize the youngsters and then use them under the influence of religious sentiments to gain political scores. Just as ISI trained thousands of Afghan kids in these Madrassas in Pakistan during the decade of war against Russian red army during the 80s, which to the oblivion of everyone, emerged as major force under the banner of Taliban. Friends of Afghanistan have offered scholarships to thousands of school graduates in various fields including engineering, medical, business administration, accounting, police training and other areas. These countries include India, Turkey, some European countries and Pakistan. These are positive signs that can drastically bring norm, discipline and professionalism in very near future to Afghanistan. Afghan private and state run universities cannot accept all the school graduates due to limited number of seats. More than 30% of school graduates cannot make it to universities

every year. Therefore, friends of Afghanistan should extend more scholarships to Afghan students in their universities. Such assistance will benefit Afghanistan as well as the countries where these young students studies and reached professional level. In addition, the next Afghan government should provide training and educational opportunities for trainers and professors of higher education institutions. The quality of education in these institutions depends on the knowledge and academic standards of higher educational institutions.

The next government of Afghanistan should design educational policies with specific benchmarks to check progress and implementation. A considerable portion of annual national budget and a sizeable chunk of international assistance should entirely be set aside for education on yearly basis. This trend should continue for at least a decade or more in order to achieve tangible progress on this front. In fact, to uplift education level and remove the hurdles on this road should be declared as priority number one of the next government. The experience of South Korea is a telling example in this regard. Immediately after the bloody war that lasted for three years until 1953, the establishment in the South Korea designed policies that gave number one priority to education. Within less than two decades, huge portion of South Korean masses were highly educated, highly skilled and the government policy to support talent and entrepreneurship has turned South Korea in to one of the miracles of the 20th centuries. I am sure – notwithstanding the challenges – Afghanistan can be changed as well.

Economic: - Afghanistan is setting on a cross-road in a region where economic power houses – including India, China, central Asian countries, which are rich in resources and oil, Europe and far east – are competing to establish logistics and transit basis to facilitate trade with and among them. Though Afghanistan is a land-locked country, but the significant geographical location of this country cannot be denied. According to the United Nations economic survey, a country without open ocean port is seven times poorer than a country that has open ocean port. But this cliché begins to lose its meaning when it comes to Afghanistan owing to the limited resources, strategic locations and alternate routes that Afghanistan can utilize.

The United States geological department completed a survey of Afghanistan's natural, precious minerals and other important resources in 2007 and established its findings. These findings show that between two to three trillions dollar worth lithium is available in the central highlands of Afghanistan. Lithium is the matter that is used to build mobile phones and laptop computer batteries. In addition, hundreds of billions of dollar worth of copper, iron and nickel are shown in the findings to be available. Southern and Western regions are setting on mines of gold. The Northern regions include untapped natural gas and petroleum. A copy of these findings was handed over to President Hamid Karzai during a visit by a delegation from the United States Government to Afghanistan in 2008.

These resources are untapped except for a very small part where a Chinese company was awarded the Mes Aynak copper mine in the province of Logar for \$3.5billions. Another Chinese company was awarded a portion of Amu Basin oil field in the North of the country. 99% of Afghanistan's resources mentioned before are still untapped and need to be exploited. These economic facts and figures give all out guarantee to the international community and regional players to support Afghanistan's stability. Significant efforts are needed – both by Afghans and international community, regional players – to find a way out of this current debacle. A dollar invested in bringing stability in the Afghanistan of today, will give back hundred fold more in value by a stable Afghanistan of tomorrow. **To be Continued...**

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## Will the New Scheme Improve the Security Condition in Kabul?

By Mohammad Zahir Akbari

After the successive attacks in west of Kabul, President Ashraf Ghani has ordered Kabul's division into four security zones and the west of Kabul will be changed into security Green Zone. Holding a meeting to the representatives of Dashte Barchi, he announced his new security scheme and stressed that the current war is against our people and our constitution. "The measures in this area are not enough and I have directed that Kabul be divided into four security zones, including West of Kabul, and that now the Security Coordination Center is active in western Kabul and will become a core security center in the future," Ghani said. He also said that a Joint Security and People's Committees will be formed on the basis of the people's suggestion, and a clear monitoring and reporting mechanism will be created for the Supreme Headquarters.

During the meeting he also welcomed the security measures prepared for Muqarram and martyr's week by the Kabul Garrison chief General Murad Ali Murad; "Good progress has been made in coordination with the civilian institutions, according to the clear guidance of the President on securing the West of Kabul, the martyr's week and ceremonies of Muharram," Murad said. According to Murad no one is allowed to disturb security. In addition, some heads of security and intelligence departments for Kabul city have dismissed due to failure to control the recent incident; commander of Kabul police, commander of 111 army division in Kabul and also head of NDS for Kabul are among those dismissed. Such changes will happen in other parts as well," Najib Danish, spokesman for the interior ministry said.

Earlier the residents of Kabul's Dasht-e-Barchi had called on government to hand over the security responsibility of the area to the people. They argued that they can ensure their safety better than government forces. Ghani, referring to the suggestions of people on the distribution of temporary weapons in the mosques, directed the relevant authorities to examine the practical ways of this request comprehensively and to take a supervisory approach to the mosque's guardians in order to prevent disturbance of security. But later the suggestion rejected by Nusrat Rahimi, deputy spokesman for Ministry of Interior. "It is impossible that people say the ordinary people should be given weapons," if they have any comprehensive plan for safeguarding people's lives, they should share it with the security department," he said.

As aforementioned, the changes are happening after the repeated deadly attacks targeted civilian in the west of Kabul and spread a wave of fear and harsh criticism among the people. In the latest attack, at least 26 civilians, including several sportsmen and two journalists, were killed and 95 others wounded after a suicide bomb blast targeted a sports gym in Dasht-i-Barchi west of Kabul on Wednesday evening. According to a Pajhwok

Afghan News report, around 18,000 people have suffered casualties in the first eight months of the current year compared to 17,000 last year in the same period across the country.

Most of the people including security analysts are not optimistic about the changes; the former chief of the National Directorate of Security Amrullah Saleh, believe that dividing the capital into security zones will not result in better security. Saleh said the only way to keep the country, especially the capital secure, is to work with the security forces and for government to gain the people's trust. "People should be put at the center, as they always have said. Putting people at the center means that they ask the people who the enemy is and where the gaps are," said Saleh.

Thus, a number of Wolesi Jirga or lower house members in their first session, after summer vacation, expressed concerns over insecurity in the country and 'fraud in the election process' asking the government to take decisive action for dealing with them. They have also called for summoning security officials for accountability, saying security forces do not have the capability to provide the security of people. The lawmakers accused security officials of incompetence and emphasized that more than 40 thousand people were killed or wounded since the formation of the National Unity Government (NUG). "Government is responsible for every drop of the people's blood. The government should respond why they cannot provide the security of people?" Ghulam Hussain Naseri, representative of Maidan Wardak said. The representative of Kandahar, Muhammad Naem Lalay Hamid Zai also said, "The agenda should be on security. At least twelve terrorist attacks were carried out just in one specific area of Kabul." In the meantime, MPs called for disqualifying the security officials after summoning them to Parliament. "The National Unity Government fails to provide security. This government has become a cancer for the people. The security officials should be disqualified without any question and declaration," MP Abdul Rahim Ayoubi asserted.

Jafar Mahdawi, representative of Kabul also warned that the people would take their security themselves if the government cannot provide the security. he said, "In the past, we were witnessing one massacre incident in the west of Kabul, but now we see it every week, people are disappointed due to the weakness of Afghan forces," Around 200 people killed or wounded in suicide attacks and car bombing, that targeted an educational center and a sports club in Dasht-I-Barchi area of Kabul on August 15 and September 5. Finally, Abdul Rauf Ibrahim, the chairman of the Parliament said, "We demand the Parliament's security commission to summon the security officials to report about the recent bloody incidents that the lawmakers can decide over them."

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