

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



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### Trump's Strategy in Afghanistan: Working or Not?

When President Trump announced his new Afghanistan and South Asia Strategy, it created many expectations. Afghanistan expected the strategy will put an end to the pro long and catastrophic war here. They expected that 20 U.S.-designated foreign terrorist organizations that were active in Afghanistan and Pakistan, would not have more safe haven to agent chaos, violence and terror in Afghanistan and the region. Afghans wanted those who slaughter innocent people be suppressed and have no chance to further slaughter them. Also, we hoped that the United States and its allies could break the will of the terrorist groups, dry up their recruitment, keep them from crossing Afghan borders and defeat them in a way not to be considered as a threat anymore to Afghanistan and other countries.

Now, after more than a year of unveiling this strategy there are two scenarios about it:

First Scenario, Trump's strategy is failing and the terrorist groups, especially Taliban is winning.

Based on this scenario, there is no clear military victory in sight in the Afghan war. Instead, insurgency and terrorist attacks are metastasizing, giving ISIS a foothold, and the Afghan government is crippling with wide spread corruption, weak security institutions and nearing another round of chaotic elections that risks undermining its legitimacy.

Military experts say that almost unpublicized change has happened in the US policy over the past months and the direct talk of the US-Taliban is the clearest symptom of this US policy Change in Afghanistan. In addition to this, according to the US military figures the Afghan government control about two-thirds of the population, a figure that has barely changed in the past year, despite an Afghan government goal of it rising to 80% by the end of 2019.

Now the terrorist groups, including The Taliban are in their most radical incarnation for years. The al Qaeda-linked Haqqani network has been given the number two military position in the Taliban hierarchy. And ISIS is one of the major terrorist groups in Afghanistan that is present in different parts of the country and is pushing a sectarian war with specific targeting Hazara Shias of Afghanistan.

Second Scenario: Trump's Strategy is Working

The supporters of this scenario hold that the Trump administration's strategy of maintaining an active U.S. military role, while setting conditions rather than timelines for success in the war against Taliban insurgents, "has been successful." They point to the first ceasefire between the Afghan government and The Taliban during the Eidul Fitr. And the truce was observed peacefully by the Taliban for three days, sparking nationwide hopes for progress in settling the 17-year war. The United States and international community have vowed to support peace process initiated by Ghani. In another bold move, Afghan President Ashraf Ghani announced a ceasefire with Taliban insurgents to mark the Muslim Eid al, Adha holiday, and in a surprised move Taliban sources said their leaders had also provisionally agreed a four-day truce during the annual Islamic feast of sacrifice. These two truce with the Afghan insurgent groups are very unique developments in the Afghan peace process and the US war on terror in Afghanistan. Some peace experts hold that this is the beginning of a peace deal in Afghanistan. However, this process is faced with numerous challenges including the future role of U.S. troops in Afghanistan which is a key Taliban demand for holding talks and they have repeatedly reiterated the removal of all foreign troops from here. Thus, as the United States and the Taliban are in direct peace talks, it is likely that the Afghan government reaches a peace deal with the Taliban and the insurgent group accepts the presence of the US troops in the country under the pressure of its strategic allies.

### China-ASEAN Expo – 'A Win-win Platform for Strategic Cooperation'

By Hujjatullah Zia

Themed "Jointly building the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road and the China-ASEAN community of innovation," the 15th China-ASEAN Expo (CAEXPO) was held in Nanning, capital of south China's Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, last week to promote bilateral cooperation and reinforce their support for the Maritime Silk Road (MSR).

Chinese President Xi Jinping proposed the MSR during his speech in Indonesian Parliament in October 2013 and Premier Li Keqiang stressed the idea of re-establishing the century-old seaway at the 16th China-ASEAN summit in Brunei Darussalam.

The MSR will start in Chinese province of Fujian and pass Guangdong, Guangxi, and Hainan before heading south to the Malacca Strait. From Kuala Lumpur, the MSR heads to Kolkata and Colombo, then crosses the rest of the Indian Ocean to Nairobi and goes north around the Horn of Africa and moves through the Red Sea into the Mediterranean, with a stop in Athens before meeting the land-based Silk Road in Venice. It is also said that two routes are considered for the MSR and it is "designed to go from China's coast to Europe through the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean in one route, and from China's coast through the South China Sea to the South Pacific in the other".

The MSR features five major areas of cooperation namely policy communication, road connectivity, unimpeded trade, money circulation and cultural contact. That is to say, the proposal will boost trade, shipping, tourism and development of maritime infrastructure and enhance connectivity.

The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and the Maritime Silk Road Bank are two major financial resources for funding the planned investments.

CAEXPO has contributed a lot in boosting bilateral mutual investment and trade. For example, the trade volume between the two sides increased from \$78.26 billion to \$514.82 billion from 2003 to 2017. By the end of 2017, China-ASEAN mutual investment had exceeded \$200 billion.

Since January 2010, China has implemented zero tariffs upon over 90 pc of ASEAN products, with average tariff rate down from 9.8 pc to 0.1 pc. In return, six ASEAN countries, i.e. Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand, adopted similar preferential policies for China cutting down their average tariff rate from 12.8 pc to 0.6 pc. From the beginning up to the 14th CAEXPO, the total

exhibiting enterprises reached 31020 and the number of exhibitors and trade visitors reached 661317.

Currently, ASEAN is China's third largest trade partner and China has been ASEAN's biggest trading partner for nine consecutive years. "Chinese firms have invested directly in over 4,000 companies in ASEAN economies, employing over 300,000 workers," said vice commerce minister Gao Yan.

This year's CAEXPO is closely connected with the MSR, which is an indivisible part of the Silk Road Economic Belt. Since the adoption of the BRI five years ago, the two sides have promoted the Silk Road spirit and consolidated the steps to build a community with shared future.

To pave the ground for a smooth implementation of the MSR and ease territorial tension, the two sides need to deepen their togetherness, friendly relations and people-to-people exchanges. The CAEXPO highlights China's import and focuses on opening the market to ASEAN. It provides an effective bridge for ASEAN products to enter the Chinese market. On the other hand, the expo, keeping close pace with the China-ASEAN Free Trade Area (CAFTA) Investment Agreement, aims to build a platform for Chinese enterprises to make overseas investment in ASEAN. The CAEXPO will further boost the trading of tariff-reduction commodities in the CAFTA and cooperation in services trade.

CAEXPO is a prominent platform that integrates friendly dialogue, economic and trade cooperation and people-to-people exchanges. The expo does not only cover cooperation in terms of trade and investment, but also cooperation in transportation & logistics, information, e-commerce, cross-border finance and other relevant fields that can extend its value chain.

Chinese President Xi Jinping said in April last year, "The CAEXPO and the CABIS (China-ASEAN Business & Investment Summit) have become landmark events of Guangxi and an important platform for bilateral opening-up between China and ASEAN."

Through this platform, China and ASEAN countries seek to upgrade their strategic partnership and reinforce their bilateral cooperation in trade and investment. With this in mind, it is believed that the two sides will share the fruit of their trade and investment with other countries, especially the countries along the Belt and Road since both the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road are indivisible and are supposed to go in parallel with each other.

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

### The Masses Are Mobilizing for Climate Leadership

By Christiana Figueres and May Boeve

This year, extreme weather conditions have ravaged our planet, subjecting vulnerable communities around the world to the ever-increasing impacts of climate change. With each passing day, we learn more about – and experience directly – the dangerous consequences of extracting and burning fossil fuels. Floods, droughts, and wildfires are becoming deadlier, and weather patterns more severe.

Later this year, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the United Nations' scientific taskforce on the subject, will deliver its first major report in four years. It will outline in detail the devastating consequences that await us if we do not keep average global temperatures within 1.5°C of the pre-industrial level. Despite existing government and industry commitments, we have already reached the 1°C mark, and the impacts are terrible. We need urgent change.

Fortunately, immediate action to reduce greenhouse-gas emissions confers immediate benefits. When eight coal- and oil-fired power plants were retired in California between 2001 and 2011, the fertility rate in mothers living close to each facility increased within just one year.

To usher in a new era of clean air and better health, communities around the world are speaking out, making it clear to decision-makers that a fossil-fuel-free economy is what the public wants. They will continue to demand action to keep fossil fuels in the ground, and to deploy more just and sustainable forms of energy.

The science on climate change is sound, the technologies for addressing it are already available, and the necessary financing is being mobilized. In addition, a rapidly growing social movement has been inspired by the universal benefits of a clean energy future: people are ready to be the change they want to see in the world.

Rise for Climate, a global mobilization of 250,000 people taking part in over 900 events in 95 countries took place on September 8. It has set the tone for a series of upcoming political events to address climate change, including this month's Global Climate Action Summit, the One Planet Summit, and the UN Climate Change Conference in Poland (COP24) this December. In each case, policymakers will be challenged to recognize the unvarnished reality of the climate crisis and

step up their actions to tackle it.

What this international mobilization of cities, civil-society groups, businesses, and individuals across five continents shows is that people power works. It has been the driving force behind civil-rights victories from the abolition of chattel slavery to the contemporary movement to secure the rights and dignity of LGBTQ people. And it has emerged at key moments in the effort to combat climate change – an effort that is very much a part of that larger struggle for justice.

In 2014, the first People's Climate March in New York brought together 400,000 people, and set the stage for escalating interventions around the world in the years to follow. Civil society helped convince world leaders to sign the Paris climate agreement in 2015, and they have brought pressure to bear on the policymakers responsible for meeting national emissions-reduction targets. Meanwhile, individuals and civil-society groups continue to demand that companies, universities, and other institutions divest from fossil fuels and invest in renewable energy. These movements have created the space for forward-thinking politicians to take action.

Nevertheless, the climate crisis continues to grow, demonstrating that we still have a long way to go. This year alone, catastrophic heat waves have stricken North Africa, Europe, Japan, Pakistan, Australia, and Argentina. Deadly wildfires have taken lives and destroyed billions of dollars worth of property in Greece, Sweden, the United States, and Russia. Droughts have struck in Kenya and Somalia; and Afghanistan and South Africa have suffered major water shortages. Hawaii, India, Oman, and Yemen have been wracked by severe storms and flooding. And ice in the Bering Sea has reached record lows. April marked the 400th consecutive month of global temperatures above the twentieth century average.

All people have a responsibility to step up and demand urgent action. Only by coming together we can build a groundswell of support for climate leadership and create the right momentum to secure a fast transition to a sustainable and equitable world.

Christiana Figueres is the former Executive Secretary at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and convener of Mission 2020. May Boeve is Executive Director at 350.org.



Chairman / Editor-in-Chief: Moh. Reza Huwaida

Vice Chairman / Editor: Moh. Sakhi Rezaie

Email: outlookafghanistan@gmail.com

Phone: 0093 (799) 005019/777-005019

www.outlookafghanistan.net



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