

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



April 27, 2015

Afghanistan's Financial Sustainability

With Afghanistan's national revenue generating lagging, Afghanistan is continuing to rely on foreign donors for the years to come. During last year's presidential elections, the country astute financial challenge as it had huge budget deficit at a difficult juncture of time. After a difficult year, now government officials say that the country has been able to resolve its budget deficit problem by resolving international aid payments. According to the Minister of Finance Ekilil Hakimi, \$800 million will soon be included to national budget from the American aid pledge for Afghanistan. In remarks to the Wolesi Jirga MPs, Hakimi said that the donor funds were subject to agreement of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and that the issue is resolved after an Afghan delegation negotiated the matter with the IMF.

The last year presidential elections, which lasted for months, caused a serious blow not only for international aid for Afghanistan but also for the country's national economy. As the election dragged on, Afghanistan suffered hundreds of millions of dollars in losses as result of the nationwide economic declining. With the national revenue generation declining, the government announced that it needed urgent bailout from the international donors. For months, the government had been unable to pay monthly wages of thousands of its employees. The government's announcement of its ability to resolve the issue of budget deficit comes as a major step forward. It suggests success of the National Unity Government's economic programs and initiatives to get sufficient funding for the country. However, the National Unity Government (NUG) has been in difficult situation to make ends meet for national spending and to get the economy on track.

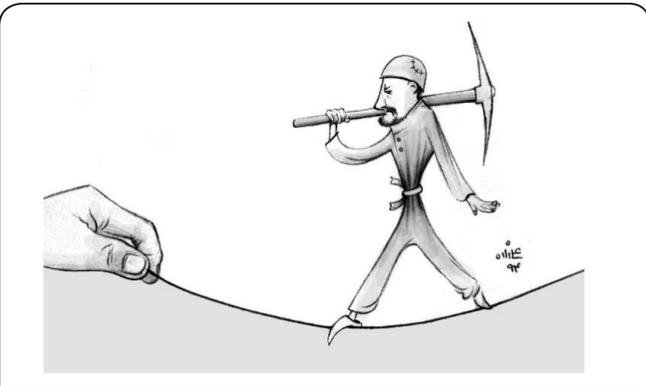
Over long-term period, Afghanistan needs to have sufficient revenues from national resources to stand on its own as the international funding is gradually declining. The international community, particularly the United States, have made concrete pledges to provide aid until 2017 to cover Afghanistan's military expenses and parts of the country's national budget. The commitment of the international donors after 2017 is not clear. The donor countries are increasingly getting reluctant the prop up the government in Kabul through funding collected from their tax-payers. The United States and other major donors for Afghanistan may continue their funding to some extent for the government of Afghanistan after 2017. However, the level of international aid will definitely decline over years.

A sharp fall in international funding will create enormous challenges for the government of Afghanistan. This is a real scenario particularly if Afghanistan fails to development viable sources of national income in the coming years. A quick halt to the international aid could plunge the Afghan government into an abyss of grave challenges in areas of security, day-to-day government administration and development affairs. Given the multitude of financial constraints for the Western capitals including Washington, it is highly probable for the donor countries to limit their aid delivery to Afghanistan.

The Afghan government hopes to be able to develop mining and other revenue generating sectors in the upcoming decade. The mining sector is the most promising area to help the country cease its reliance to international aid. However, it will take a long time for this sector to develop and to be sustainable source of revenue for the country. Afghanistan is still far from having the vital infrastructure such as roads and electricity power to quickly develop its mining sector. It is assumed that the untapped mining sector can bring billions of dollars in earnings once developed. Despite considerable investments of multinational companies, Afghanistan has been lagging in attracting efficient foreign investments for extracting its underground reserves.

In short term, Afghanistan needs international aid for meeting its military and development expenses. To be able to receive the crucial aid from the international donors, the NUG needs to be fully accountable and transparent as this is one of the key terms for the continued supports of the international donors. If the government manages to successfully fight embezzlement and curtail corruption, there is a chance for the country to get the pledged funding from the donors for the years to come. If the government fails to meet its commitments to the international community in fighting corruption, the donors' interest to back the government in Kabul will further wane over time.

Afghanistan's relation with its major financial allies is key for the future financial and economic stability. The United States has been the largest donor to Afghanistan in the post-Taliban era. As part of the Kabul-Washington bilateral strategic agreement, the US has committed to continue supporting Afghanistan's security sector and its development for the next decade. However, the relations between Kabul and Washington has seen ups and downs during recent years of former president Hamid Karzai's ruling as he refused to sign a security agreement with the US. It risked a robust relationship between the two countries which is vital for survival of Afghanistan against the hard-headed insurgency. In addition to seeking investments from regional countries, Afghanistan needs to develop robust relations with its key international backers such as the United States and the European Union.



The Enigma of Daesh's Presence in Afghanistan

By Abdul Ahad Bahrami

With the Islamic State groups or Daesh claiming a major militant attack in Afghanistan, a fundamental question is now hovering in minds: does the Islamic State group currently have any presence in Afghanistan? And what will be the future hold for Afghanistan if the group emerges as key militant player on the ground in the country. So far the Islamic State group has no major and robust presence in Afghanistan to be able to openly challenge Afghanistan National Security Forces (ANSF) or the Taliban fighters. However, there are reports of the group's presence in some provinces and recruiting extremist militants to expand its influence in Afghanistan.

Several high-ranking Afghan officials, including Abdul Rashid Dostum - First Vice President, Haji Mohammad Mohaqiq - Second Vice Chief Executive and Ajmal Obaid Abedi - spokesperson for the President have confirmed presence of Daesh in Afghanistan. The 31 passengers' abduction in Zabul province are attributed to the Islamic State; however, despite some evidences, the claim still remains controversial as so far there is no consensus if the group is behind the abduction. The Islamic State group claimed responsibility for the deadly Jalalabad bombing, which killed dozens of security personnel and civilians withdrawing salary from a bank branch in the city. Shortly after the incident, President Ashraf Ghani attributed the attack to the group based on their own claim. The Taliban also denied responsibility for the Jalalabad bombing. Also, local residents in some southern and eastern provinces have confirmed presence of foreign militants who are said to be fully equipped and armed. In a recent controversy, there were allegations of Afghan government's donations to displaced people mistakenly having reached to the families of the Islamic State militants. Despite all these claims and evidences, a number of former government officials including former president Hamid Karzai and former head of the National Directorate for Security (NDS) as well as some experts have rejected presence of the Islamic States group in Afghanistan.

With the government of Afghanistan trying to reach out to the Taliban for resuming peace negotiations, there are doubts that the government may be trying to differentiate between the pro-peace and those who are vehemently opposing talks with the Afghan government Taliban as 'good' and 'bad' Taliban in order to enter talks with the group. President Ghani's recent quick reaction - which is unclear if was based on intelligence or the IS claim - to the Jalalabad bombing further sparked doubts regarding government's approach towards the Taliban. However, if true, the scenario may be to prepare the ground for bringing the pro-peace Taliban members to table of negotiations with the government of Afghanistan. In this case, a split in the Taliban would be probable if the hardliners in the group do not choose to follow the leadership of the group in entering peace negotiations with the Afghan government.

The Taliban and its affiliated groups have been the dominant militant front fighting the US-led NATO forces and the government of Afghanistan. As an umbrella group, the Taliban had allegiance of

many other major and minor militant groups such as Hikmatyar's Hizb-e Islami and Haqqani network based in North Waziristan in its struggle to establish an Islamic Emirate in Afghanistan. However, the Islamic State group in Iraq and Syrian is now the most ambitious militant group in the world campaigning a brutal campaign and attracting jihadists from worldwide. In Afghanistan, the emergence of the Islamic State, locally called Daesh, is posing a very serious challenge to the Taliban's supremacy as an umbrella militant group seeking to dominate and influence all militant groups in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

The Islamic State's creeping presence in Afghanistan will not bode well for the Taliban dominance in the jihadi activities in Afghanistan as well. Perhaps this is a main reason behind Taliban's recent inclinations towards resuming peace negotiations with the government they fought in last fourteen years. The Taliban and the Islamic State have openly opposed each other. As the IS is in finding foothold in Afghanistan, the Taliban leadership sees themselves direly vulnerable. The Taliban would quickly lose ground in some areas to the IS if the IS manages to recruit Taliban members and fighters to its ranks. All these have come as an alarm for the Taliban leadership which has openly expressed opposition to the Islamic State. Therefore, the group seems to be consolidating its rank and leadership against the threat of the Islamic State in Afghanistan.

In addition to Afghanistan, some offshoots of the Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan have also joined the Islamic State. The Taliban see them in direct collusion with the Islamic State in Afghanistan in the future. Most of the jihadi groups that are active in Afghanistan and Pakistan are considered as allegiant to the main Taliban group and its supreme leader Mullah Mohammad Omar. However, the fact is that in parts of Afghanistan, many Taliban senior members have joined the Islamic State. The Taliban seem to be increasingly unable to control its sub groups and field commanders on the ground and prevent them from joining the newly emerging Islamic State group. The Taliban leadership fears if the Islamic State group grows powerful in Afghanistan, it will not be aligned with the Taliban in objectives and activities on the ground. Given this, if the Islamic State is going to get more influence and power in Afghanistan, the chance is for the Taliban to split into smaller factions and the main group being forced to confront IS.

The increasing presence of the Islamic State will further compound the security uncertainty in Afghanistan and the situation would further get chaotic. What is clear is that IS has some level of presence in Afghanistan, as suggested by government officials and the group's ground activities. However, the Taliban and the IS have so far avoided confronting each other directly. But the fact is that the Taliban will not be able to prevent its more hardline members and fighters on the ground from joining to the IS ranks. In this situation, the game changer would be the Taliban's decision to enter peace talks with government of Afghanistan or continue to fight militarily alongside the Islamic State.

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Education - A Panacea for Afghan Women

By Hujjatullah Zia

I don't know why I suffer so much humiliation in my house. Honestly speaking, my mother has no compassion for me. During the last years of my childhood, she never allowed me to mix with my friends and always stopped me from attending any kind of function arranged by my friends or even by my school."

Despite the progress made, women's struggle for civic and human rights still has a long way to go. Three decades of war has left many Afghans both eager for change and afraid of it. There are still many instances of ordinary women experiencing domestic violence and discriminations, precluded from attending schools in traditional areas, being sexually abused, or being forced into marriage. Women in senior leadership roles - such as in parliament or the police - are still being murdered. Some men feel threatened by the presence of women in senior positions. These men see women's rights as the "westernization" of Afghan culture and a threat to Islamic values. Zieba Shorish-Shamley rightly reflects the state of Afghan women in her poems, "They made me invisible, shrouded and non-being. A shadow, no existence, made silent and unseeing. Denied of freedom, confined to my cage! Tell me how to handle my anger and my rage?"

Radical feminists believe that women cannot get rid of sexual cruelties and atrocities by gradual changes and amendment. According to them, patriarchy is a systemic phenomenon; gender equality is possible only by demolishing the system of patriarchy. They believe that those social and cultural norms which reiterate the slender figures and sympathetic attitudes of women, aim to extend their inferiority and obedience. According to this type of feminism, objectifying women through media, models and advertisements change women to sexual objects with the intention of amusing and pleasing men.

Seema, an Afghan girl, complains that why her mother restrains only her and not her brother. Her brother enjoys all sorts of facilities. He goes everywhere and does everything. Seema believes that her mother is taking some sort of revenge on her, maybe of her own past. She says, "Whatever her mother did to her, she is doing exactly the same to me. But why? She adds that there are many factors behind it but illiteracy is the most important among them. An English writer and thinker Rushkin said that the purpose of being educated is not to be learned but to love learning, not merely to be just but to love justice. Bookish knowledge is not enough for someone to be called an educated person. Education must reach the deepest core of human nature and make the person a better human being. The aim of education is not merely to pour ready materials

into one's head but to make him/her think for themselves and to discover new things. Qualities like justice, truths, honesty, generosity, self-sacrifice and feelings for our fellowmen are cultivated by education. A large number of us claim to be educated but we are not educated till our hearts get softer, our minds firmer and our spirit ennobled.

Islam clearly says that it is the duty of every Muslim male and female to acquire education. However it is the height of selfishness on part of our men who fully take advantage of a good education but deny the same to women. It is argued that women have their domestic duties to perform and it they were educated, they would bury themselves in their books and would have little time for attending to their household chores. I believe that it is not correct, education would help them in performing their duties at home in better way. They would make better mothers, having the ability to read books on nutrition, home management and child psychology. This definitely results in a happy and healthy home.

To let women remain uneducated is to jeopardize future generations and hence future progress. An uneducated woman will unconsciously injure her children in countless ways.

The present state of ignorance and illiteracy among women is further endangering their already precarious position in this fast developing world. Every possible effort should be done to speed up the education of Afghan girls. We need more female teachers, female doctors, lawyers and social workers. Our need is not only this but we also want more education families better than their uneducated sisters and can produce better people.

Education is the best strategy to liberate women from male domination. Investing in girls' education is critical to addressing girls' needs and concerns as well as human rights. It has been shown that girls who go to school and stay in school are more likely to find jobs as adults, get married older, have fewer children, and are able to earn more for their families and communities. Beyond protective security measures, the only way to ensure women's human rights in Afghanistan and to truly empower women in the long run is through offering primary, secondary, and higher education that will foster literacy, free-thinking, and knowledge of international human rights standards.

Let us hope that, "The day will come when man will recognize woman as his peer, not only at the fireside, but in councils of the nation. Then, and not until then, will there be the perfect comradeship, the ideal union between the genders that shall result in the highest development of the race."

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