

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



August 11, 2015

## Deteriorating Security Situation

As the security situation in the country, particularly in capital Kabul is worsening, there are more questions being asked regarding the peace process and the future of Af-Pak relations. Currently, the confidence started building up regarding the role of Pakistan in supporting the peace talks with Taliban, particularly after the facilitation of talks in Murree, Islamabad. However, since the news of the death of Mullah Omar, things seem to have changed though Mullah Omar himself was never part of the negotiations.

The Afghan leaders seem to be getting frustrated regarding the deteriorating security situation. The gigantic attack in Shah Shaheed area of the capital Kabul, in addition to other two attacks on the same day, has made Afghan leaders question the future of Af-Pak relations as after every such attack the public opinion gets critical of the role of Pakistan in Afghanistan.

Afghan President Ashraf Ghani on Monday, August 10, said that the recent wave of violence showed suicide training camps, facilities used for making explosive devices and sending them to Afghanistan to kill innocent people were still functional in Pakistan. He is said, "We hoped for peace, but war continues to be declared against us from Pakistani territory. In fact, it clearly shows vivid hostilities toward a neighboring nation... Now it is proven to the region we have been right, but in Pakistan still there are gatherings of slaves and captives who send the message of war to us."

He called the Peshawar school attack killing more than 150 school-children a significant point in the history of Pakistan. "The recent incidents in Kabul mark a significant point for us as well. We want to tell friends and enemies apart," he said.

He went on to pose the Pakistan nation and the government this question: "If a massacre similar to what happened in the Shah Shahid area of Kabul takes place in Islamabad and the groups behind it have sanctuaries in Afghanistan, offices and training centers in our major cities, what would be your reaction? In such a situation, will we be your friend or enemy?"

These statements clearly show that Pakistani government is not doing as much as President Ashraf Ghani has been expecting. Since the very beginning of its government, Ashraf Ghani has been very clear regarding his stand in Af-Pak relations. He has clearly shown that he believes in a cooperative role of Pakistan in peace negotiations with Taliban.

Similarly, the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Abdullah Abdullah has also criticized Pakistan for not showing willingness to make the peace talks result-oriented.

Presiding over the council of ministers meeting on Monday, August 10, he said that the people had hoped that Unity Government would be able to bring peace and stability to the country, but that has not been materialized yet. He said that lack of cooperation from Islamabad in peace process and recent deadly attacks in Kabul damaged public confidence over the government.

He blamed Taliban for the growing insecurity in the country but also added, "Every one of us knows the culprits behind these inhuman acts have safe heavens in Pakistan and they feel pride to claim responsibility for deadly attacks in Afghanistan." He also mentioned that the unity government had been cooperative with Pakistan and waited for reciprocity from the neighboring country, but Islamabad did not materialize its pledges and tried to deceive Afghanistan.

The statements by the leaders of National Unity Government clearly depict that there are concerns in Afghan government regarding the security situation in the country and the talks with Taliban particularly after the death of Mullah Omar. The death of Mullah Omar has, in fact, undone the progress made so far regarding the peace talks.

The controversies of leadership in the group would definitely influence the talks and their effectiveness. There are fears that Taliban may further divide in various groups and many of them may even join ISIS or Daesh, which is another growing terror in Afghanistan.

Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) are facing serious challenges as the international forces have withdrawn and they are leading the combats against Taliban. They are not fully equipped and trained to face all the security challenges that arise in different parts of the country and that can give Taliban a high hand in those areas and can encourage them to spread further from those areas.

At the same time, the country is going through severe economic challenges. The rising poverty and unemployment are making the security challenges even more difficult. People, compelled with the conditions readily join the ranks of Taliban or other terrorist groups every day and pose more threats to the country.

All these result in more insecurity to the common people of Afghanistan. The civilian casualties are on the rise and the recent UN report also approves it. People have started losing their confidence over the government they had voted for in severe security challenges.

It is important that the government must serve the people in the best possible way; guarantee them a safe and secure life, which is also their right. In this regard government must revise its relations with Pakistan and should have a clear strategy regarding the peace talks with Taliban.

## Taliban's Ambiguous Policy

By Hujjatullah Zia

The Taliban militants are wreaking record-breaking casualties on the Afghan civilians and security forces. As predicted, Afghan policemen are surrendering in hordes after the withdrawal of US-led NATO forces, and allowing the Taliban to make crucial gains across Afghanistan. Similarly, civilians, including women and children, are targeted by the militants to a large extent. The recent spate of suicide bombings - mainly a massive truck bomb in a heavily populated civilian area of Shah Shaheed on early Friday which led to the death of dozens and injury of hundreds - in Kabul demonstrates the Taliban's persistent thirst for violence and bloodshed. In other words, with the election of Mullah Mansoor as Omar's successor, the militants show fewer tendencies towards reconciliation.

Previously in an audio message, Mullah Omar's successor gave mixed signals on the peace process. While calling peace talks the enemy's propaganda, Mullah Mansoor did not rule out negotiations along with "Jihad" to achieve the group's objectives.

However, news report that the election of Mullah Mansoor as Taliban's leader has split the Taliban group. As a result, the family of deceased Taliban leader Mullah Omar has refused to pledge allegiance to his successor, calling on religious scholars to settle a deepening rift within insurgent ranks over the power transition.

Splits have emerged between Mansoor and those who challenged his appointment, including the late leader's son Yaqub and his brother, Mullah Abdul Manan. "Our family... has not declared allegiance to anyone amid these differences," Manan is cited as saying in an audio message. Mullah Manan said his family would only "serve the new chief" if he was elected in consultation with the founding fathers of the Taliban, Islamic scholars and all those influential personalities who had played a key role in strengthening the "Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan".

A Pakistani newspaper said that senior Taliban members, who are opposed to Mullah Mansoor's ascendancy, launched a parallel Shura (Council) last week and declared themselves as "Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan".

On the other hand however, a senior leader of the ultra-Orthodox militia has ruled out any change in the new leadership, saying that "a few people" opposed to the election of Mullah Akhtar Mansoor had no role in the 15-year-long resistance against the US-led "occupation of Afghanistan". The statement came amid reports that a group of top-Taliban Afghan Ulema has started mediations to resolve differences over the successor of the movement's longtime leader Mullah Omar.

In an interview with The Express Tribune, Abdul Hayee Motmaen, a Taliban's senior leader, said Mullah Mansoor had been practically in charge of all organizational matters for

five or six years and all commissions, all shadow governors and all senior leaders had been working under his leadership even when Mullah Omar was alive.

About the new leadership's policy vis-à-vis peace talks with the Afghan government, Motmaen said the Taliban believed in the political option alongside armed resistance. "However, all Mujahedeen and leaders think there is a need for such an understanding that should not discredit the ongoing Jihad. This policy should not harm the achievements and sacrifices of Mujahedeen," he added.

Motmaen reiterated the Taliban's longstanding stance that their Qatar office has been tasked to pursue peace talks. "I also want to categorically state that the Islamic Emirate has delegated all affairs of the reconciliation process to the Political Commission in Qatar. The responsibility rests with Qatar-based negotiators. All efforts should be carried forward through them."

Asked why Mullah Omar's death was kept secret for so long, Motmaen replied that the family of the deceased Taliban supreme and some key Islamic scholars had issued a decree against disclosing the death of Mullah Omar, saying this could create problems.

Taliban have never adopted an outright policy towards peace negotiation regarding Afghanistan - and it is the great reason behind peace talk futility. The clash in their ideology or political interests has constantly caused a rift between them, as it does now. In another item, the radical ideologues and mercenary fighters do not share a common goal: the first group fights to die whereas the second fights to earn priority in worldly life. Similarly, a number of ultra-Orthodox leaders show persistent tendencies towards war while there are some who give the green light for negotiation.

It is believed that Afghan officials encounter with the same challenge and it is hard for them to unravel the mystery of the Taliban's ambiguous policy. The question is that should Afghan officials push for peace talk or compound the military deal regarding the Taliban? It is simply said that "the one who hesitates is lost." The civilians will continue falling victim to terrorist acts unless Afghan officials take a serious decision. To be precise, despite the ambiguous policy, the Taliban militants will go on with targeting Afghan security forces and civilians. Hence, a serious strategy is to be taken to counter terrorism effectively - be it negotiation or military deal.

It is the state's responsibility to bring security for the citizens as its commitment is articulated in the Constitution, "To form a civil society void of oppression, atrocity, discrimination as well as violence, based on rule of law, social justice, protecting integrity and human rights, and attaining peoples' freedoms and fundamental rights..." Thus, it is better to come out of the dilemma and put an end to the violence and bloodshed - which have changed the civilians into sacrificial lambs.

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

## What Greece Needs to Prosper

By Edmund S. Phelps

Some economists overlook the modern idea that a country's prosperity depends on innovation and entrepreneurship. They take the mechanistic view that prosperity is a matter of employment, and that employment is determined by "demand" - government spending, household consumption, and investment demand.

Looking at Greece, these economists argue that a shift in fiscal policy to "austerity" - a smaller public sector - has brought an acute deficiency of demand and thus a depression. But this claim misreads history and exaggerates the power of government spending.

Much of the decline in employment in Greece occurred prior to the sharp cuts in spending between 2012 and 2014 - owing, no doubt, to sinking confidence in the government. Greek government spending per quarter climbed to a plateau of around €13.5 billion (\$14.8 billion) in 2009-2012, before falling to roughly €9.6 billion in 2014-2015. Yet the number of job holders reached its high of 4.5 million in 2006-2009, and had fallen to 3.6 million by 2012. By the time Greece began to cut its budget, the rate of unemployment - 9.6% of the labor force in 2009 - had already risen almost to its recent level of 25.5%. These findings weigh heavily against the hypothesis that "austerity" has brought Greece to its present plight. They indicate that Greece's turn away from the high spending of 2008-2013 is not to blame for today's mass unemployment.

Another finding casts doubt on whether austerity actually was imposed on Greece. Government spending has certainly fallen - but only to where it used to be: €9.6 billion in the first quarter of this year is, in fact, higher than it was as recently as 2003. So the premise of austerity appears to be wrong. Greece has not departed from past fiscal norms; it has returned to them. Rather than describing current government spending as "austere," it would be more correct to view it as an end to years of fiscal profligacy, culminating in 2013, when the government's budget deficit reached 12.3% of GDP and public debt climbed to 175% of GDP.

The "demand school" might respond that, regardless of whether there is fiscal austerity now, increased government spending (financed, of course, by debt) would impart a per-

manent boost to employment. But Greece's recent experience suggests otherwise. The huge rise in government spending from 2006 to the 2009-2013 period did produce employment gains, but they were not sustained.

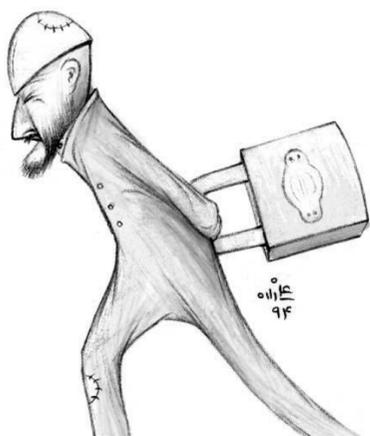
The real sticking point is that the government would have to issue bonds to finance its extra spending. Assuming a limit to foreign investors' willingness to buy these bonds, Greeks would have to buy them. In an economy unequipped for growth, household wealth relative to wages would soar, and the labor supply would shrink, causing employment to contract.

So spending more is not the remedy for Greece's plight, just as spending less was not the cause. What is the remedy, then? No amount of debt restructuring, even debt forgiveness, will suffice to achieve prosperity (in the form of low unemployment and high job satisfaction). Such measures would only help Greece to revive government spending. Then the economy's stultifying corporatism - clientelism and cronyism in the public sector and vested interests and entrenched elites in the private sector - would gain a new lease on life. The European left may advocate that, but it would hardly be in Europe's interest.

The remedy must lie in adopting the right structural reforms. Whether or not the reforms sought by the eurozone members raise the chances that their loans will be repaid, these creditors have a political and economic interest in the monetary union's survival and development. They should also be ready to help Greece with the costs of making the necessary changes.

But it is Greece itself that must take charge of its reforms. And there are encouraging signs that Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras is willing to take up that cause. But he will need a sense of the required reforms. Greece must dismantle corporatist arrangements and practices that obstruct whatever innovation and entrepreneurship might emerge. Nurturing an abundance of imaginative innovators and vibrant entrepreneurs requires embracing a vision of venturesome lives of creativity and discovery. (Courtesy Project Syndicate)

Edmund S. Phelps, the 2006 Nobel laureate in economics, is Director of the Center on Capitalism and Society at Columbia University and author of *Mass Flourishing*.



Chairman / Editor-in-Chief: Dr. Hussain Yasa

Vice-Chairman: Kazim Ali Gulzari

Email: outlookafghanistan@gmail.com

Phone: 0093 (799) 005019/777-005019

www.outlookafghanistan.net



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