

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



January 10, 2017

Our Security, Economic and Political Issues

The security of a nation is a vital element to ensure its viability and survival as well as it is essential for securing an environment which will facilitate the process of national growth. Moreover, the concept of national security in itself deserves a continuing debate to determine its elements which include democracy, good governance, psycho-social and economic aspects besides the obvious imperative of defense. Afghanistan, for a long time, has been facing serious problems of both, internal and external security. However, lately the internal security has assumed threatening postures. Given the significant geo-political space in which it operates and being somewhat handicapped because of the domestic peculiarities and serving as a buffer state between the world powers, Afghanistan's security quest is almost unending. Unfortunately, with the rise in challenges of insecurity, the country has had to face economic hardships and political instability as well.

And, the interplay among the different issues within all these sectors have multiplied the sufferings that the people of Afghanistan have been facing. A strong and viable democratic, political and economic system is essential to sustain any nation. In case of Afghanistan this element of national power has been quite weak. Emergence of frequent autocratic regimes further debilitated the important national institutions and retarded their growth. The situation was further aggravated due to unholy alliance among the feudal, religious leaders, politicians and business elite. At this stage in Afghanistan's life there is an urgent need to ponder and find ways and means for developing a genuine democratic process leading to political stability, good governance and economic development. Unfortunately, Afghanistan's political system remains inadequately institutionalized and highly personalized.

The country has alternated between long periods of clashes and wars and unstable governments controlled by small elite of landed and tribal and religious leaders. Our political system, in fact, is confronted by direct action, endemic violence and powerful primordial loyalties that have come to dominate all political and economic disputes.

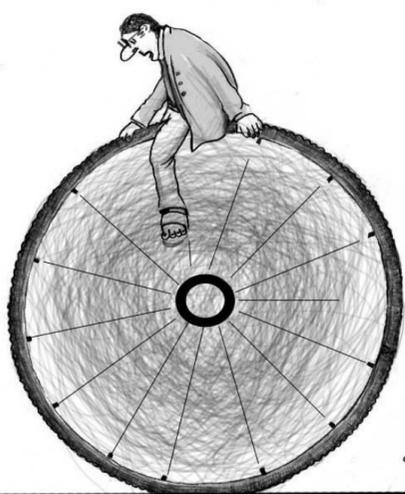
Democracy has not been able to institutionalized and kept on revolving around the individuals. The legislature and executive have not been able to complete their promises and duties of strengthening themselves and the overall democratic system. Meanwhile, the elections have been dominated by fraud and corruption. Imperative electoral reforms that could support in strengthening the democratic system have not been taken into consideration and therefore the systems of elections for both the president and the parliament have not been able to offer much. Currently, the doubts about the parliamentary elections and the election reforms have further raised doubts about the system. In addition, the ambiguity regarding the role of the President and Chief Executive has persisted and the evolution in their authorities and responsibilities that were to take place simultaneously has been forgotten. This has raised doubts and uncertainties about the nature of the political system that the country would have.

On the other hand we have forgotten that we are living in an age of economic competitiveness. In fact all elements of national power in present times are being directed towards achievement of economic objectives. The economic aspects are crucial especially for Afghanistan as a majority of our people are living below the poverty line and suffering various deprivations. Without improving the quality of the lives of our people we cannot emerge as a nation with honor and dignity.

Fortunately, we are endowed with sufficient bounties of nature to be self-sustained in the fields of basic necessities of life. The dire need is to harness our human and other natural resources and ensure that the benefits are equitably shared by all the people.

The impediments to our economic growth need to be examined and overcome through innovative strategies. We need to understand that with spectacular progress in the field of science and technology, the whole world has shrunk into a global village. It is considered that economic development is the only secure foundation for domestic, regional and global peace and security. It is also true that origins of conflicts lie deep in socio-economic deprivations, disparities, denial of human rights and true participatory democracy. The prerequisites of a modern civil society are the establishment of the viable democratic institutions, participatory democracy up to the grass-root level leading to good governance. Only then a stable and responsive social order can be established ensuring peace, stability and economic development.

This, in turn would serve as a means to channel political energy and help in creating a conducive environment for healthy cross fertilization of cultural values between our multi-ethnic society. These changes can only be brought about by the collective will and support of the people at large. Hence it is imperative that our political leadership, economic guardians and our intellectuals embark upon a strategy of compassion and cooperation with all the communities living in Afghanistan so that the quality of the lives of our people could improve and a sense of dignity, purpose and commitment infused in the society.



Sectarian Violence – A Relentless Curse

By Hujjatullah Zia

Last year, Afghan nation sustained heavy casualties and warring factions played a deadly role. The current news is also unnerving for the nation as militancy lingers and people pay sacrifice on the basis of their race, color and creed. On the one hand, the pushy peace process failed to put enough pressure on the Taliban to come to negotiating table, on the other hand, the emergence of the self-styled Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) in Afghanistan put the nation, mainly the ethnic minority groups, at the mercy of escalated militancy.

Although Afghans keep their fingers crossed and pray for the best in every New Year, warring parties never stop violence and sometimes they are at a crossroads whether to hold talks or continue insurgency.

Hezb-e-Islami Afghanistan (HIA), led by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, succumbed to Afghanistan's urge and made a peace agreement, however, the Taliban has still backed the wrong horse and keep on inflicting casualties upon the nation. The affiliates to ISIL are believed to pose serious threat to Afghan nation within the current year through stoking sectarianism.

They target the ethnic groups on the grounds of their race and color and ideological differences. Reportedly, about a dozen men were dead and wounded by a group of gunmen affiliated to ISIL in Baghlan on Friday due to their religious beliefs. Subsequently, the CEO's second deputy said that ISIL had increased its activities in the country and linked the killing to small Takfiri groups stating that out of 100 terrorist groups in the world, 20 of them were active in Afghanistan.

"They are part of Takfiri groups that are active in Syria, Iraq and some other countries. They have been active in Afghanistan for about one year," Haji Muhammad Mo-haqiq is cited as saying.

ISIL group first started its terrorist activities in Nangarhar province and then recruited fighters from Logar and Nuristan provinces. But recently the group carried out activities in Faryab, Jawzjan, Sar-e-Pul, Uruzgan and Baghlan provinces.

In addition, Mohammad Radmanesh, deputy spokesman of MoD said, "A number of armed individuals use the name of some groups to carry out some activities. They first change their flag and then their fighting tactics and carry out such activities that they did in Baghlan."

"Indeed, there are some who operate under the ISIL's flag and spread fear and terror. But the presence of ISIL is an undeniable fact and a number of individuals have apparently joined them in tribal belts.

The ethnic minority groups act is highly vulnerable to militancy not only in Afghanistan but also in Pakistan. To one's surprise, five members of the Hazara commu-

nity were injured in a targeted attack when unidentified armed persons fired at their taxi cab in Quetta, for which Lashkar-e-Jhangvi Al-Alami, a banned outfit, claimed responsibility.

Hence, the occurrence of targeted attacks in the same day and on the same group in two neighboring countries make one believe that there is a strong link between assailants, who aim to stoke sectarianism.

The ISIL group, along with many other terrorist networks, has constantly targeted ethnic minority groups in Iraq, Syria, Pakistan and Afghanistan and seeks to impose its warped mind with the barrel of gun. Warring factions attempt to fuel sectarianism so as to trigger hatred and racial tensions among the nations and practice upon the policy of 'divide and govern'.

In other words, they shed the blood of an ethnic group to arouse a desire for vengeance and make them fall for their trick. Earlier, political pundits believed that the ISIL group remained a serious threat to Afghanistan and recruited younger individuals in Nangarhar.

No wonder, they intend to strengthen their bases anywhere possible after losing the ground in Syria. If ISIL group gains stronger foothold in Afghanistan and be able to trigger racial tensions, it would be a bitter pill for the National Unity Government (NUG) to swallow.

Moreover, it should be noted that the presence of ISIL will menace the national unity and increase violence across the country in the future as this group sow the seeds of sectarianism constantly.

In addition, the escalated militancy will put the rights and dignity of the nation at stake. Life will remain as cheap as ever before and the blood of civilians, including women and children, will be spilt with impunity. To one's unmitigated chagrin, bloodshed changes into a common practice in many countries, including Afghanistan, and one will hardly feel a guilty conscience about a murder.

Democracy is undermined in Afghanistan and the NUG in not able to protect the rights and liberty of the nation – this is believed to be the main reason behind the wide gap between state and nation.

The voice of the public fall on deaf ears and the tragic stories are ended with words of condemnation from the officials. Most likely, a large number of perpetrators are at large despite trampling upon individuals' rights and curtailing their freedom.

The government is to unite the nation and eliminate all obstacles before national unity. Since terrorism and radical practices hamper unity and lead to political turbulence, combating this must be prioritized and Afghan soldiers are to be reinforced to take higher steps in strengthening democracy and counter-insurgency.

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

Trumpian Uncertainty

By Joseph E. Stiglitz

Every January, I try to craft a forecast for the coming year. Economic forecasting is notoriously difficult; but, notwithstanding the truth expressed in Harry Truman's request for a one-armed economist (who wouldn't be able to say "on the other hand"), my record has been credible.

In recent years, I correctly foresaw that, in the absence of stronger fiscal stimulus (which was not forthcoming in either Europe or the United States), recovery from the Great Recession of 2008 would be slow. In making these forecasts, I have relied more on analysis of underlying economic forces than on complex econometric models.

For example, at the beginning of 2016, it seemed clear that the deficiencies of global aggregate demand that have been manifest for the last several years were unlikely to change dramatically.

Thus, I thought that forecasters of a stronger recovery were looking at the world through rose-tinted glasses. Economic developments unfolded much as I anticipated. Not so the political events of 2016. I had been writing for years that unless growing inequality – especially in the US, but also in many countries throughout the world – was addressed, there would be political consequences. But inequality continued to worsen – with striking data showing that average life expectancy in the US was on the decline. These results were foreshadowed by a study last year, by Anne Case and Angus Deaton, which showed that life expectancy was on the decline for large segments of the population – including America's so-called angry men of the Rust Belt. But, with the incomes of the bottom 90% having stagnated for close to a third of a century (and declining for a significant proportion), the health data simply confirmed that things were not going well for very large swaths of the country.

And while America might be at the extreme of this trend, things were little better elsewhere.

But, if it seemed clear that there would be political consequences, their form and timing were far less obvious. Why did the backlash in the US come just when the economy seemed to be on the mend, rather than earlier? And why did it manifest itself in a lurch to the right? After all, it was the Republicans who had blocked assistance to those losing their jobs as a result of the globalization they pushed assiduously. It was the Republicans who, in 26 states, refused to allow the expansion of Medicaid, thereby denying health insurance to those at the bottom.

And why was the victor somebody who made his living from taking advantage of others, openly admitted not

paying his fair share of taxes, and made tax avoidance a point of pride? Donald Trump grasped the spirit of the time: things weren't going well, and many voters wanted change. Now they will get it: there will be no business as usual. But seldom has there been more uncertainty.

Which policies Trump will pursue remains unknown, to say nothing of which will succeed or what the consequences will be. Trump seems hell-bent on having a trade war. But how will China and Mexico respond? Trump may well understand that what he proposes will violate World Trade Organization rules, but he may also know that it will take a long time for the WTO to rule against him.

And by then, America's trade account may have been rebalanced. But two can play that game: China can take similar actions, though its response is likely to be more subtle. If a trade war were to break out, what would happen?

Trump may have reason to think he could win; after all, China is more dependent on exports to the US than the US is on exports to China, which gives the US an advantage. But a trade war is not a zero-sum game.

The US stands to lose as well. China may be more effective in targeting its retaliation to cause acute political pain. And the Chinese may be in a better position to respond to US attempts to inflict pain on them than the US is to respond to the pain that China might inflict on Americans. It's anybody's guess who can stand the pain better. Will it be the US, where ordinary citizens have already suffered for so long, or China, which, despite troubled times, has managed to generate growth in excess of 6%?

More broadly, the Republican/Trump agenda, with its tax cuts even more weighted toward the rich than the standard GOP recipe would imply, is based on the idea of trickle-down prosperity – a continuation of the Reagan era's supply-side economics, which never actually worked. Fire-breathing rhetoric, or raving three a.m. tweets, may assuage the anger of those left behind by the Reagan revolution, at least for a while.

But for how long? And what happens then?

Trump might like to repeal the ordinary laws of economics, as he goes about his version of voodoo economics. But he can't. Still, as the world's largest economy leads the way into uncharted political waters in 2017 and beyond, it would be foolhardy for a mere mortal to attempt a forecast, other than to state the obvious: the waters will almost certainly be choppy, and many – if not most – pundit ships will sink long the way. (Courtesy Project Syndicate)

Joseph E. Stiglitz, a Nobel laureate in economics, is University Professor at Columbia University and Chief Economist at the Roosevelt Institute. His most recent book is *The Euro: How a Common Currency Threatens the Future of Europe*.



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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