

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

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The Actual Meaning of Community Development

In recent years there has been a fresh concern with life at the community level. This concern has arisen as a result of expression of social forces in the lives of groups and people throughout the world. But because of the different stages of development or diverse ways of life, in many countries these social forces manifest themselves in various ways and create what appears to be quite a different set of problems.

In those countries where industrialization and urbanization are relatively well advanced, the focus of concern is the loss of community as a meaningful form of social and moral association. The current popularity of such words as disorganization, disintegration, decline, insecurity, breakdown, instability and the like have relevance to trends in the community life in industrialized countries.

In the less developed or developing countries, on the other hand the problem has a rather different focus. In these countries one finds relatively cohesive communities, closely knit kinship systems and intimate inter-personal relations. But powerful political, economic and social forces are at work stimulating these countries to shift their politico-economic systems so as to make them responsive to economic development by adopting modern techniques of work and living. These forces have been at work since the post-World War II period or earlier and were accelerated by substantial aid programs of some of the major advanced countries and the United Nations assistance programs.

It has been increasingly recognized that the imposition of modern techniques on ancient cultures may destroy old values, create disruption and lead to problems which exist in all large urban centers. So there is a serious concern as to how communities in less-developed countries, like Afghanistan, may be stimulated or helped to adopt new techniques that may lead to greater economic productivity and provide better food, shelter, health and education, with the least disturbance or destruction of most of the original values relating to the traditional ways of life. If such a movement is to take place it is recognized that the community as a whole must make the adoption to the new socio-cultural environment.

There is generally some misconception regarding the meaning of community development. People mostly believe that simply the construction of more roads, schools and hospitals or an increase in agricultural production and improvement of cattle breeds is the essence of a community development program. This conception cannot be denied that physical achievements are the only visible contribution of the program and are simply undertaken to encourage the people living in communities to join the program wholeheartedly. In the real sense community development is a conscious, deliberate and organized effort to bring new man-made environment in the long run. So community development aims at both material and nonmaterial changes in the society.

Thus, the community development should aim at bringing balanced changes in the patterns of culture of the people living in a community. A community development program should bring the people living in a locality on a single platform to inculcate among them the spirit of self-help, responsibility, self-respect, initiative and confidence. It is necessary under this program to cultivate among the masses the ability to understand their problems, solve them mostly within local resources, or if necessary to approach the government administration to provide them technical and financial aid.

Community development as defined by the United Nations is a process designed to create conditions of economic development and social progress for the whole community with its active participation and fullest reliance upon the community initiative. The main assumption behind the concept of community development is that local resources, leadership and initiative if organized by innovations can find out the solution of local problems and such efforts can be positively correlated with national development.

The specific programs under community development may include improvement in health, agricultural production, education, income, housing, handicrafts, industries, marketing, means of transportation and communication, public utilities and creating or maintaining an atmosphere of primary groups. To achieve these objective changes in the behavior, beliefs and attitudes of the member of the community are required to have active participation from local population for making community development or organizational program a success.

And these are the considerations that should be kept in mind while designing and carrying out community development programs in Afghanistan. The externally designed development programs, without keeping in consideration the actual issues at the community level and without involving and engaging the people of the community and enabling them to make proper use of their own resources, are bound to face failure or they may only provide a temporary solace. The actual, permanent and lasting changes can only be made possible when the community starts understanding and learning the art of depending on themselves and addressing their problems in their own ways. Definitely, a community would require external support in certain cases, but that support should always remain a support it should not become the main player in the development of community development programs.



Presidential Candidates Fail to Touch upon Real Issues Facing the Country

By: Mohammed Gul Sahibzada

People of Afghanistan have witnessed registration of about fifteen candidates for president in the upcoming general presidential elections in July 2019. Most of these candidates and their running mates – prospective first and second Vice Presidents – have been Government officials in past and present Governments, but they badly failed to grasp the real issues facing the nation and the country. Their agenda and manifestoes seem to have rallied around trivial issues, which do not appeal to general public. Some of these candidates have promised to ‘ban beard and local dress code’ and others have pledged to ‘change constitution and government structure’ in the event they win the elections. This state of affairs and ignorance on the part of most of these candidates has ignited anger and invited scorn and pity on the part of the people of Afghanistan. Very few candidates have managed to raise major problems facing the country and the people of Afghanistan, and those messages can strike a chord that runs through different strata of society, including people in different provinces with different ethnic and religious background.

Afghanistan is currently passing through a critical juncture in history, and it is ironic to see it as coincident that major national issues knocking at the door whenever general elections take place. In 2014 general elections, United States and NATO member countries had threatened to withdraw their forces from Afghanistan in the event ‘Strategic Security Agreement’ was not signed by Afghanistan Government, which was then headed by the then President Mr. Hamid Karzai. Western Governments blocked funding to important projects and terminated assistance to support Afghan Government – which had affected normal functioning of Government institutions – including non-payment of salaries of Government employees. Further deepening of crises were averted when National Unity Government was sworn in and ‘Strategic Security Agreement’ was signed on the first day of the function of new Government. This episode has had dilapidating effects on the economy of the country to an extent that more than eighty percent of business organizations collapsed, economy was devastated and younger, educated generation of Afghans fled the country in search of job and better life elsewhere.

Exactly once again four years later when general elections are at the doorstep, the issue of peace with Taliban insurgents has sprouted. The US under Trump administration doesn’t want to ‘pay for war expenses’ in one of its longest war outside the United States, hence US Government is leaning hard on negotiating settlement of the Afghan war. This haste on the part of the US Government and realities on the ground in Afghanistan, which advises against such hasty, negotiated settlement before addressing major, critical issues are addressed, which require time and more resources, are contradicting one another. Government of Afghanistan is under pressure once again as Taliban insurgents ‘do not want to talk’ to it, which has caused stirs in Afghan Government circles concerning sovereignty and national pride and freedom. There had been rumors that Taliban insurgents demanded that present Government be dislodged and a new, temporary Government be established, which has aroused serious opposition from Afghan President and other Government circles because they saw this demand as a ‘recipe for disaster’ for Afghan defense and security institutions, and a major threat to roll back all hard earned progress and development during last one and half decade. Though the US and other NATO member countries have officially supported Afghanistan Government position, and asked Taliban to talk to Afghan Government about peace, Taliban has so far refused to agree. But the so called peace process and conditions evolving around it with the passage of time continue to haunt people and observers about the fate of upcoming elections. In the face of this uncertainty, presidential candidates, international and regional friends of Afghanistan should instill renewed purpose and spirit into the minds and hearts of Afghan people about a stable county and prosperous future for the people of Afghanistan. Candidates should present better plans for economic development, better security and defense strategies and opportunities for better education and access to job markets at different levels in the country. Projects of national importance should be outlined and ways to fund and implement such projects should be presented to the people of Afghanistan in the political manifestos of candidates.

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The Afghan Presidential Elections From Chief Strategist to Formidable Challenger

By: Naser Koshan

President Ghani and his former National Security Advisor Mr. Hanif Atmar were synonymous in many strategic moves made by the presidential palace post 2014, the year the National Unity Government was formed. The story of the Afghan presidential elections in 2014 is both fascinating and unique in regards to internationally accepted standards. Rampant electoral fraud and foreign meddling have been the key ingredients. The former NSC advisor was often allegedly portrayed as the mastermind in orchestrating president Ghani’s bold and controversial moves against political allies and rivals on different occasions. He was widely referred to as the chief strategist behind the many infamous moves made by the prevailing president. He is an ethnic Pashtoon who carries a reasonable resume when it comes to his political career. He purportedly lost a limb when fighting the Mujahedeen in Jalalabad battle in 1987 on behalf of the Soviet backed then Afghan regime. Hanif Atmar has obtained formal education in public policy from York University, U.K. As the former Rural Rehabilitation and interior minister under former President Karzai, he initiated the National Solidarity Program (NSP) which often received high praises from donor agencies. His subordinates in his both former capacities have praised his uncorrupted individuality and managerial skills. He is the leading member of the Justice and Truth party founded in 2011 under his auspices.

The chemistry between the two began when his party endorsed president Ghani then the presidential nominee in 2014. The moment the NUG agreement was brokered by the former U.S. Secretary of State, he was immediately appointed as the National Security Advisor replacing his precedent Dr. Spanta. He was labeled as a close aide and confidante of president Ghani for four years. Nevertheless the relationship turned sour when the latter expressed his plans to contest in the upcoming presidential elections against the president. He later resigned citing growing differences with president Ghani on policy matters, and a bulk of his recommendations falling on deaf ears. Similarly president Ghani was swift to find a replacement for the vacancy and gradually removed any of his former appointees and loyalists within and outside the NSC Council.

Here in the United States President Trump and his former Chief Strategist Steve Bannon enjoyed a similar relationship. During the campaign trails, the then candidate Trump and Steve Bannon enjoyed a very asymmetric equation as President Ghani and his ex-chief security advisor Hanif Atmar.

Hanif Atmar has always been a controversial figure in Afghan politics, in his recent former capacity as president’s top security advisor, political analysts and influential opposition leaders had accused him of conspiring in marginalizing their role in the National Unity Government and adhering to mischievous schemes to physically eliminate them. When the setting first vice-president’s convoy was ambushed by the militants on his way back from frontline in Jowzjan, he vehemently wasted no time to point finger to certain elements with the National Security Council headed by Mr. Hanif Atmar at that particular time. Besides that, coordinated triple suicidal attacks on a funeral held for a jihadi figure son’s burial in Badambagh Kabul was also blamed on NSC with an alleged aim to wipe out the top leadership of Jamiat e Islami a soviet era jihadi faction in an elaborately orchestrated scheme, but none of these allegations were backed with solid evidence and faded away.

No doubt as the NSC advisor he had managed to revive the very intrinsic functionality of the National Security Council, spreading both its authority and auspices on the efficacy of security establishments, while simultaneously pursuing a consolidated regional cooperation for Afghan security, during his tenure as NSC advisor the U.S. accelerated efforts in providing the much needed aerial enhancement to the Afghan air force as well as

engaging Chinese and Russians to follow suit. However, the increasing footprints of ISIS, growing Taliban offenses and alarmingly high Afghan armed forces’ casualties did indeed overshadow all the above mentioned achievements to a great extent.

Since the fall of the Taliban regime in late 2001, subsequent Afghan elections have always been marred with fraudulent voting irregularities and both alleged and explicit ballot tampering. It is yet for a credible democracy to find a tangible footprint in a society ravaged by decades of internal conflicts and nonstop foreign occupation. Regrettably Afghanistan is always victimized to the very malicious intentions of its infamous political figures. They have turned democracy into anarchy and elections into mockery. The fall of the Taliban regime and the flow of billions of dollars in international aid provided them an unprecedented opportunity to enrich themselves and subsequently buy out government officials and even form personal militias. They have stakes in the government, while using the influence to carry out business deals and illicit economic activities all over the country.

The Afghan presidential elections that was previously scheduled in mid April this year, is likely to happen with a three months delay in mid July 2019. The election commission cites technical shortcomings and tangible changes in managerial flaws that was strongly criticized and has created humongous outburst equally from the voters and candidates in the recently held parliamentary elections.

Unfortunately the international community supporting Afghanistan in its pursuit of strengthening democratic values with a large sum of their tax payers’ hard-earned bucks failed to mark red lines for subsequent Afghan administrations. They willingly bankrolled a socially repulsive trend that only a Pashtoon could take the charge while Tajiks, Hazaras acting as his wingmen, with this precedent in place, all other resident ethnicities have had no viable participation in public service and are marginalized and deprived of their very basic constitutional rights. In retrospect the Afghan election commission has lacked the autonomy and jurisdiction to oversee its operations with utter impartiality and attain the very foundational trust of the Afghan public on its independence and effectiveness. Both the structural formation of the given commission and its weary process of electing commissioners need a principled change. The proposed amended law shall keep the executive branch out the election process, especially when the incumbent president is a potential stakeholder in the process. He should be stripped out of hand picking individuals who will be later compelled to serve his prospective campaign interests. An alternative to close this loophole is to conduct a televised selection process among qualified candidates with all stakeholders involved in the process. It shall exclude political, family and ethnic ties, based solely on merit and qualification.

Last but not least, the fate of the Afghan presidential elections still hangs in limbo with an apparent effort by the U.S. to facilitate a meaningful dialogue and direct peace talks between the Taliban and Kabul government. President Trump’s special envoy for Afghan peace and reconciliation Zama Khalilzad has already conducted rounds of discreet meetings with Taliban’s senior leadership in Doha, Qatar, discussing mutual concerns and probable ceasefire with the Afghan government. The United States certainly aims to reach an applicable agreement with the Taliban before any elections take place, and bring an acceptable end to the longest American war abroad. I do personally believe that the fate of the upcoming elections will largely depend on an alternative formidable campaign, capable of giving a tough challenge to the incumbent president; this in turn will require measures to contain ballot fraud and transparent procedural voting counting system in place.

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