

## Afghanistan - Post - 2014?

Is it really a question, or do we make it complex and uncertain?

As you all know, Afghanistan is currently undergoing a security, political and economic transition. We are about to complete the security transition - transition of security responsibility from International Security Forces to National Security Forces (ANSF). The National Security Forces are practicing leadership and ownership of security operations, while facing a lot of challenges such as capacity, coordination, air-force support, as well as complexity of the security situation. ***The key questions and concern is not the ANSF capability to conduct and lead security operations, but the capability to maintain security in the critical districts.***

The Presidential and Provincial Council Elections are imminent and happening tomorrow (5<sup>th</sup> Apr 2014). They are the foundation for better future, and despite all the challenges: insecurity, political tensions, loss of hope, and decrease in international community observers, the election process is more vibrant when compared to the past election. This election is associated with massive engagement of the public, government support and impartiality are convincing, civil society's efforts are more organized, coordinated and systematic. Also, candidates' programs and perspectives are much more enriched and seem convincing – there is not so much of big messaging but rather more of addressing how change is being seen and would happen. ***This election is a turning-point, given its result, we may take Afghanistan to the next decade of democracy, peace and state-building, if negative, we may go back to early 1990s – internal conflict and devastation.***

The flood of aid to Afghanistan since 2001 and in particular post 2008 (World Bank Report) has created a fake economy. With no boots in the ground, the scenario of a major decrease in aid will simply intensify and create a huge gap in socio-economic development in the country. The flourishing economic-bubble will burst and create massive unemployment, and will cause socioeconomic chaos to the country, with more damage in the rural areas.

Despite the past 13 years of development, the country is still fragile, and it is not a post-conflict state, rather it is a country still in conflict. Democracy, state-building, peace and human rights are being fought for, while fighting continues, abuse of power and corruption is pervasive, violence against women prevails, as well as a dominating culture of conflict is affecting the whole development process in the country. ***But yet progress is there, and the key progress is a shift from one generation to the other.***

In spite of the past 13 years of effort and suffering, massive progress has been made; 10 million kids going to school, 67% of the population has access to basic health services, 12,000 km of roads were constructed, even though there are questions about the quality in all these areas. But the key progress is in the new generation of Afghanistan that has arisen. This generation has started to believe in peace, democracy and human rights. They have been assured that state-building and peace is possible after 40 years of conflict and turmoil. ***Therefore, the government efforts and the international community's support and their generous public funds contributed to development process in Afghanistan have not been wasted.***

But the recent extreme political tension related to the signing the Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA) with United States, international community troops withdrawal, and decrease in aid support has made the new generation and the general public in Afghanistan disappointed and lose hope. One has to understand that Afghanistan is becoming yesterday's agenda to International Community. As the result, a massive brain-drain is being witnessed in the past months. ***The key question and concern is not the international community withdrawal, but it is whether the Afghans and in particular the younger generation will stay and continue building this country.***

Therefore, what needs to happen in order to create hope, build trust and sustain security, peace, and socioeconomic development – here are some general highlights, but no doubt that require further more debate and analysis.

- 1. Election and New Administration:** The base for better future is the 2014 election. Despite all the challenges, the election is a must and should happen, and must deliver a convincing result. But given the experience of the past 13 years of state-building, and existing challenges, Afghanistan needs a state and administration that is able to both compromise (with clear boundaries set) and be able to continue with the current pace of development. It needs to take tough decisions to enable transformation. The new Administration has to be inclusive, it needs both strong and committed political and technical teams. More technical leadership has to be given to the younger generation of technocrats that possesses proficiency, energy and commitment to build on the past 13 years' achievement and enable a smooth transition and transformation to better future.

Therefore, given the presidential candidates' past and stated perspectives and programs during the campaign, Afghanistan cannot adopt extreme compromises or an administration that is pushing for aggressive reform, nor an administration that is continuing with the current state of functioning. We need a little bit of both. We need inclusiveness, we need genuine political consensus and commitment to reforms and to fight corruption, we need a strong and capable technical team, and we need the whole of the state and all state-actors to contribute to state building rather blaming and conflicting with each other. ***Therefore, might collaboration among the three prominent presidential candidates be the solution???***

- 2. The Security Triangle:** Insecurity is turning into a very complex matter. To sustain security, we need the NATO-ISAF continued support in building the National Security Forces' capacity to lead security operations and maintain security in the critical districts. But sustaining security in the critical districts requires a multi-dimensional approach. Supporting local police and people who stand against insurgents, as well as to ensure coordination and partnership among security and non-security entities with focus on rule of law, fighting corruption and delivery of services are vital to maintaining security in the critical districts and setting an enabling environment for local development.
- 3. Good Governance & Strong and Legitimate State:** The election will happen, and a new administration will be introduced, but what will make the new administration fail would be its inability to fight corruption and make tough decisions on reforms and state-building priorities. Fighting corruption should be a key priority both for the government and the general public. Stopping the use of parallel structures, process and practices would contribute to effective state functioning. State functions require clarity and redefinition at all levels, and delegation of authority to the periphery, local capacity building and systems of checks and balances should be adopted accordingly.

***State-building is not only the responsibility of the government, but the responsibility of all state-actors such as the government, private sector, civil society and the general public: such a partnership and cohesion should be enabled.***

- 4. Sustaining Local Development:** expectation management, tough prioritization, delegation of authority to local entities, local capacity, as well as a balanced development approach is the key measures and principles that should be adapted to sustaining local development. International

community earmarking funding to specific areas should be avoided: rather, a commitment to system-wide reforms, and an economic approach to service delivery should be focused and adopted. Last but not least, to sustain local development and service delivery, we would need a more balanced approach; more of on-budget potential support, off-budget partnering with Afghan NGOs and firms, as well as local community actors. This will enable effective Afghanisation, continue service delivery even in critical districts and importantly enable central and local efficiency in function, response and accountability.

- 5. Key Enablers:** Revival of trust among International Community and the Afghan Government, successful election and signing of the BSA, support the leadership of the new generation of technocrats and leaders, as well as adoption of comprehensive approach to stability, peace and socioeconomic development in the country are the key enablers to make the above proposed measures and solutions be adopted and enabled.

I hope that the Afghan Politicians, the International Community and the Afghan public understand how far we have come along the road to enable the current level of development in Afghanistan. I hope that we will not overlook these efforts and have a decade of development lost at the cost of BSA not being signed soon, or focusing on the intention of winning election, but actually losing a state and generation.

Dear all, the key success and wining is to get Afghanistan to the next stage of democracy and state-building, not to fall in the hands of terrorists, rather to focus on how to enable Afghanistan to flourish and be the hub for tourism and trade in the region.

Last but not least, you might have heard of great sentiment said - **“With great power comes great responsibility”**. Each of our efforts are being judged by our future generations, let’s not be thrown off-track on our mission which is fighting terrorism, and helping Afghanistan be peaceful and prosperous, and contributing to global peace, prosperity and happiness.

Regards,



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