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Unabated Issues and Concerns - Afghanistan

It seems the de-facto authorities cannot conceive the realities in the country, have an immediate path forward to change their skeptical minds, adopt reconciliatory policies in the short run, or exercise their newfound power toward a just and brighter future for the people.

The past decades' cycle of conflict and foreign agendas and occupation, ethnic favoritism, practice of adopting preferential treatment to particular political allies rooted in the diversified ethnic tribal structure, linguistically close to the political leader, geographic areas of influence, ideological tendencies and biased attitude towards non -Pashtun population and linguistically distant ethnic groups, fraudulent elections, the politicization of ethnicity, the prevalence of conflict, inefficiency in governance, high levels of corruptions, etc. exacerbated the crises and serial internal conflicts resulted in successive weakening of the governance institutions, legislature and judicial apparatus of the state and effectiveness of civil societies.

The Afghan centralized system of government did not in principle adopt fiscal and budgetary policies whereby the lowest tiers of subnational government excluded to deliberate on issues with direct relevance to their well-being. Too many decisions were taken out of the hands of citizens and the elected parliament. Ideally, dependency on the central system of government created lesser accountability for spending and threat to the financial security of allocated public funds.

The question of building strong institutions for peace and harmony has remained divisive. Political divisions among the ruling group and competition have superseded national interests in rethinking the systems of democratic governance. This question links into the larger role of military in the governance system, a scenario which negatively impeded efforts to see institutions of accountability that ensure checks and balances.

In the years 2022 -2024, Afghanistan was in the midst of a crisis on an unprecedented scale to cope with profound economic crisis, political isolation, ever greater humanitarian crises, natural disasters, environmental shocks, and progressive rollback of human rights, especially for women and girls.

Before addressing the crises in Afghanistan, the existing conflicts need close analysis of the cause and determinants of the past failed states. It represented more complex picture where deep political and economic development failures, ethnic hatred or diversity were the root causes of the ongoing socio-political conflicts.

Currently the absence of recognized government, political dominance, and unaccountability of elites are cited as a major challenge to see the integration of traditional governance systems into a more- decentralized structures. The ethnic identity politics and inclusion challenges have made it difficult to develop a participatory governance structure or initiating an all-inclusive constitution- making process in the country.

In national contexts, it is the constitutional rights of the people to alter, abolish and institute new form of government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form that seem appropriate, and introduce changes whenever any form of government becomes destructive to these ends.

Work toward establishing a more transparent and accountable government to improve policies such as civil and political rights, economic prosperity, safety, equality and justice in favor of the citizens. It is a recall petition and initiative in a series of actions for a vital change, a political action that would show willingness to get things done, take responsibility, and starting a national movement with the hope that it will continue. On the positive side is the emergence of close to a million university graduates, brighter than ever, mostly not affiliated with the religious groups, active and conversant in social media, well aware of the national issues, and already started regrouping politically for a better system of government.

In light of the decades of distrust among the ethnic groups and immense challenges from disbelief that have led to disunity, there is need to advocate increased attention from Afghan scholars, practitioners, and policy-makers, initiate internal knowledge sharing by highlighting the historic underdeveloped conditions, poverty caused by central systems of governance, and the intensity of needs for a decentralized system.

Keeping in mind the national conflicts, the exiting non-functional de-facto authority, and to improve resilience in the face of major disruptions in the country, the following measures are necessary to ease political tensions, avoid further disintegration and prevent possible secession:

The Constitution- Analysis of government change needs to focus on how the de- facto authority, the Afghan elite or mass- led characters could influence the drafting/ emanating of a national constitution, magnitude, exigencies and aftereffects. The Afghan Republic approved constitution contained civil, political and economic rules for the people to govern themselves which has not been recognized by the de-facto ruling group. It is argued widely whether the nature of changes and emerging constitutional order would continue to act neglect and disregard legality and contribute to cycles of constitutional instability, or it would recognize the autonomy of its own de -facto constitutions.

Functional Democracy - Is an inclusive political framework to enable participation, inclusion and consensus-building among the diversified social and ethnic groups, and effective economic management institutions and active role for a dedicated national government. A functional

democracy is a prerequisite for mitigating the disruptive and risk-prone nature of social diversity that would lead to a bargaining process and sustainability of the existing dysfunctional rulers. Historically, civil conflicts have been the extreme case of non-cooperation among various ethnic and tribal groups. Therefore, meaningful conflict prevention strategy and critical institutional design for compatibility of decentralized versus centralized approaches will be in order for taking equitable economic development measures.

Multi-ethnic State – There is need to rigorously study an integration theory and understanding of diversity and class divisions for a multi-ethnic state design and multicultural system of government. When differences are not just about policy but include the very identity which a majority rule by one tribal group impacted on the freedom and rights of other ethnicities. The country is better off united while protecting the autonomy and rights of diverse people along with reconciling the political division, diversity of culture, lifestyle, livelihood and ancestry for a decentralized structure.

Economic Inclusion- To address structural inequalities through disintegration policies in all sectors at different levels of government, because poverty levels directly affect economic inclusion strategies at local levels and accentuate ethnic and regional marginalization.

Decentralized Local Autonomy- Drawing from international and regional best practices and taking into consideration the specific features of diverse societies, level of development, human needs, cultural and other societal characteristics, a decentralized full local autonomy is seen as the key guarantor of national unity and prosperity. This mechanism would integrate and empower the regional provinces into a self-rule multi-ethnic structure in light of the impacts of historical exclusion of ethnic groups in the political spheres and practical way dealing with the challenges of coexistence in diverse Afghan societies. There is need to rethink strategies to depoliticize the longstanding political questions around ethnicity, population, region and resource distribution, and carry out cross-studies to look at indicators of success in supporting of the regions.

Success of a decentralized governance model depends on the institutionalization of public financial management and strengthening technical competence to ensure programmatic fiscal autonomy of provincial bodies and ending control by central government. It is significant that the extensive rounds of local governance programs over the past decades have raised awareness in local self-government in average citizens and managed resources of the three layers of central, provincial and district plans, program design and implementation. If democratized and capacitated in due course, the national workforce will prove vital force and transformed into a more authentic, decentralized and democratic system of government.

The Rural Development Programs in line with the Afghanistan National Strategy embarked on a vast province-based planning processes with the aims to build national consensus for development strategy; acceptance of democratic norms, state legitimacy, acceptance of central government authority, perceptions and quality of sub-national government, state-building and stimulating growth and laid the groundwork for a sustainable process. (Example: The overall result was local governance structures centered on democratic processes, establishing 32,000 Community Development Councils (CDCs) across 361 districts in all of Afghanistan's 34 provinces and financing nearly 65,000 development projects.)

Thinking Federalism - Federalism is not a feasible option because it has some distinct, defining characteristics which make it different from other forms of de-centralization. There is a need

for reforms including legal, institutional, governance, accountability, fiduciary and transparency systems. As experienced by other countries, the fundamental questions associated with transition to federal states include: strong political leadership and goodwill during its formulation and implementation; consensus building among political factions; hardship in managing multiple layers of government; protection of diversified minority groups within one territory; building strong national ownership and consensus around the intertwined issues of federalism and managing diversity; laying the foundations of expenditure framework linked to development mechanisms; the potential scope and limits of wealth sharing away from a spatially uneven and unfair distribution of resources and corresponding inequities; use of fiscal equalization in transfers to narrow the disparities among regions; a well-defined natural resources; formula for sharing customs duties, tax revenue and proceeds from natural resources, to name a few.

Social Cohesion - Depend on efforts in improving governance, including building social trust, increasing accountability of policymaking, and improving capacity of the government to deliver quality services to citizens of all demographic groups - regardless of ethnicity and religious practices. Social inclusion to include promotion of ethnic visibility, defining self- shared rules, and access to social interaction, political representation through elections, territorial autonomy, ethnic balancing, measures against incitement to ethnic hatred and violence are all factors to be incorporated in a national constitution.

Public workforce Performance - Leadership skills; engagement and accountability that bring stability and confidence among people; facilitate recognition of the government by international community; receiving further economic support; receipt and coordination of humanitarian supply and service; reinvigorate the financial sector and budgeting; and access to the international banking system and offshore foreign exchange reserves; release of the Afghan blocked currency abroad through diplomatic and legal means; and allowing NGO, PVO, civic bodies and aid workers to manage the funding processes for humanitarian support. Disruption and uncertainty led to sharp declines in investment confidence, and tens of thousands of highly skilled Afghans fled the country.

Domestic Agenda - Towards improving government capabilities to track financial flows and harnessing domestic resources for revenue generating systems and understand diversity management and realizing decentralization goals by engaging the stakeholders dominating political and economic sphere. There is now greater awareness about the set- apart centralized ruling group, their wrongful authoritarian religious practices and mistreating the country diversities. When the few in society rule, they become the system's chief beneficiaries. Hence, the need for de-facto authorities' new vision and rethinking.

Security Strategy- Under the circumstances, the de-facto group challenges are clearly the root cause of conflicts. It must increase burden sharing with partners in the intelligence community and develop the capability in data sharing as appropriate to coordinate its own security strategies. While criminal acts and insecurity are often the consequence of weak democratic

norms and institutions, foreign illicit actors exploit areas of weak governance to establish a safe haven and grow their influence. This has already undermined the stability and squandered public trust in the country.

Participatory Government- Allow technocrats and skilled personnel in a joint participatory government because increased support to peace processes will promote civilian protection and normalization. Only a shared government would be able to fight the current deadlock. The advisory approach, technical expertise and knowledge of governance can help in devising national planning strategies; more efficient administration, managing fiscal rules; budget formulation; assessing well-being and urgent social needs; resource management and general acquisition contracting for urgent public needs.

Socio- Economic Gains- Take the lead in consolidating the past socio-economic gains and promoting stabilization, adhere to the Sustainable Development Goals already advanced by the previous government; efforts to manage conflict peaceably; enable reintegration of the Afghan civil servants and survived ex-military forces into the system; create jobs by developing transparency in the current unstable condition to fight poverty, improve humanitarian conditions and holding illicit public land- grabbers and perpetrators of atrocities accountable.

Public Private Partnership- Due to the weak economy and limited sources of revenue, limited banking and foreign commercial services, the government partnerships with private sector and civil societies could mobilize support resources and shape confidence in public opinion. The joint efforts already supported the design and implementation of various small to medium -size construction and mining projects nationwide and helped grow the food market and domestic routes of supply.

Restoring Public Trust- Strengthen safety of the inhabitants, ownership, private initiatives, workforce and physical assets. The de-facto authorities need to resolve the unpaid government employees pension funds; strengthening property rights and land/ resource tenure; Women's economic empowerment to include them in public and private sector services, engaging in small income-generation activities, receiving grants and financial incentives, working in health clinics, etc. to remove political and social distrust.

International Cooperation- There is a halt to foreign development funding on which the national economy depends; Many economic, social and development gains made on the path toward the sustainable development goals over two decades are being lost; Policy framework needs to collaborate activities with the foreign delegations, work amicably and engage with the donors for development and more humanitarian assistance.

Humanitarian Assistance - As a result of ceased foreign aid to Afghanistan, the United Nations with support of donors, developed and implemented the Transitional Engagement Framework that identified three strategic priorities: Provide life-saving assistance; Sustain essential services; and to Preserve social investments systems for basic human needs. In December 2022, the program was extended for another (6) months until June 2023. Since July 2023, the Strategic Framework 2023- 2025 guides the human needs programming. The narrative report of

the UN's activities in 2022 provides details on the activities undertaken. [2022 UN AFGHANISTAN ANNUAL RESULTS REPORT | United Nations in Afghanistan.](#)

(Note: More articles will follow on Declaration of Human Right and other international conventions, treaties, humanitarian law and state responsibilities therein that Afghanistan has acceded and signatory.)