

Tokyo Conference, the Last Opportunity

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The last decade was a historically pivotal era for reconstruction of Afghanistan accompanied with much hope and optimism. The people, after three decades of war and suffering, had entered into a new chapter of their life where golden opportunities were available to them. A new window of hope and bright political future had opened for the people of Afghanistan. Afghanistan had come out of severe political instability and was strongly supported by the international community. At international level, the Afghan government successfully fulfilled its basic responsibilities.

At present, Afghanistan has turned into a focal point of agreements between Western and Eastern countries. These Strategic Partnership Agreements (SPAs) that Afghanistan has signed with many countries of the world, including Germany are deemed as vital achievement for the country.

Over the last decade, Afghanistan has seen some fundamental developments. For the first time, political parties, media, civil society organizations, democratic and national organizations and organizations for human and women rights came into being. Four rounds of presidential and parliamentary elections, active participation of women and people's access to education and communication technology can be counted as some important developments in Afghanistan. At the same time, achievements in various areas such as the banking sector, aviation and telecommunication as well as domestic and foreign direct investment are significant. The Afghan government has taken some critical measures to improve public health services that have resulted in reduction of morality rates among mother and infants.

The government has successfully strengthened Afghan security forces, specifically the Afghan National Army (ANA). Despite challenges, including lack of resources, faced by the army, it is hoped that it will be able to successfully take over the security responsibilities of Afghan populace after 2014.

Efforts aimed at construction and development of highways, railways, hydropower dams, power distribution networks, airports, universities, schools and government entities are counted among other achievements of Afghan government. Nonetheless, as Afghanistan is entering into the next decade, the country is still facing serious challenges:

1. In the last ten years, the Afghan government instead of establishing a rule of law framework has focused on making compromises on various important issues which institutionalized the trend of breaking the laws.
2. Afghanistan still falls in the list of six most corrupt and failed states of the world. Government's failure in bringing good governance has been a point of concern. The rampant corruption has resulted in reduction of trust in government organizations. In his recent statement, president Karzai promised bringing serious reforms. It is expected that the government would be able to take necessary measures for development of rule of law, good governance, anti-corruption efforts and political activities.

3. Poppy cultivation is another serious challenge. Recently, the Second Vice President pronounced opium as one of the greatest obstacles for Afghan government. Afghanistan continues to remain the top opium producer in the world and annual revenues from drug trafficking reaches to 70 billion US Dollars. The insurgents use drug trafficking as a major source of funding their operations. Lack of rule of law has helped the drug mafia to turn some provinces into safe havens for their activities. Alternative crop schemes have borne no success. Absence of a strong judicial system in Afghanistan has turned the country into an island where drug traffickers roam freely.
4. Prevailing insecurity and influence of neighboring countries in local affairs are deemed as serious threats to peace and stability in Afghanistan. The international community - by focusing to counter real source of terrorism – can prevent continuation of violence in Afghanistan.

Today this country is standing at an important juncture where its own security forces will have to assume full security responsibilities after 2014. The international community, for the purpose announcing its beyond-2014 support and financial commitments to Afghanistan, is coming together in Tokyo. The Tokyo conference is considered a golden opportunity for Afghanistan and its international backers.

Decisions that will come out of the Tokyo conference can put Afghanistan on the track of sustainability and development. The conference besides financial commitments should also have a focus on the following points:

1. Afghanistan would need international investment for extraction of its mineral resources to boost its revenue.
2. Investment on human resources has been insignificant over the last decade. It is expected that more investment will be made on human capacity building and fundamental steps will be taken in this regard.
3. Beyond 2014, the international community must continue to support sustainable political development, democratic values, human and women rights and freedom of expression. Political development will enable Afghanistan to experience an open political environment and ethnic and religious tolerance.
4. Support for reforms and free and fair elections can support Afghanistan to establish good governance and a workable political system. After 2014, Afghanistan can turn into a successful state only on the condition that a democratic government can come into being as a result of free and fair election.
5. Support for regional trust building, rule of law, independent judiciary, transparency and accountability can make Afghanistan move towards reconstruction and development. Therefore, the Tokyo conference is an important and golden opportunity. It is hoped that Afghanistan and the international community, by utilizing their experience of the last decade, can pave the way towards a better future.

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