



Role of United Nations in re-building Afghanistan

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Abstract

A new phase of Afghanistan project is about to begin. It is believed that in the post- 2014 period, the country is going to face at least three major challenges: security, political and economic. On the basis of recent experience, and I would like to explore of presidential elections role for UN as well as regional players. In reconstruction, more than seventy nations have committed their resources and significant gains have been made in areas like education, infrastructure, health care, women empowerment etc. In a situation of declining western interest and resources, I would also like to suggest ways in which achieved gains are maintained through effective implementation of limited projects. I will discuss other issues, the protection of human rights, Support for peace and reconciliation efforts, elections, humanitarian support and counter-narcotics as the major areas of the world body's work in Afghanistan. This cooperation between the United Nations system and Afghanistan goes many decades back. This is not just the last eleven years of UNAMA, and although not without challenges and not without questions and not without problems, this kind of cooperation brought a lot of positive experience in this interaction between the UN system and Afghanistan. In particular, political and security uncertainties undermine business confidence. It has also been estimated that the planned foreign troop withdrawal by the end of 2014 will directly lower annual growth by two or three percentage points, as a result of reduced local spending by these forces and by the concurrent withdrawal of foreign civilian organizations with international and national staff. In addition, while traditional donors such as the European Union have provisionally committed to supporting Afghanistan beyond 2014, they have made it clear that aid will be conditional on improvements in governance and a reduction in corruption, which few analysts believe can realistically be achieved. The background of my paper seeks to find out the problems and prospects of peace in Afghanistan United nation's role in it challenges, and way forward.

Keywords: peace building, re-building, elections, humanitarian support, security, UNAMA

1. Introduction

Afghanistan has been the most traumatised country in the latter half of the 20th century. It is the only country which faced the attack and occupation of world's two super powers, the Soviet Union and the United States in the quarter of a century. The civil war shattered the entire economic structure and nothing was left intact from 1992 to 1996, Kabul and other cities saw worst form of destruction. Reconstruction of country's shattering infrastructure and transition from a war-torn economy based on smuggling narcotics and arms is crucial for the overall success in Afghanistan. The daunting talks of rebuilding Afghanistan not only involve rebuilding of security structure but also rebuilding country's human resource, judicial and administrative system.

Afghanistan emerged from three decades of civil war after the defeat of Taliban regime by the U.S.-led intervention in 2001. In Afghanistan, over two decades of civil conflict were brought to an end in December 2001 with the Bonn Agreement. This agreement laid the framework for building functioning and democratic governance in Afghanistan. It also set out the framework for rebuilding the political institutions of the country, along with a time frame for accomplishing these goals. After the withdrawal of NATO and US forces in 2014, Afghanistan is amidst transition which will set the stage for its future trajectory. The question of whether that

trajectory will be relatively stable or whether Afghanistan is on a path to a renewed civil war has been a subject of vigorous and inconclusive debate. While skepticism coexists with great hope for the future of post-2014 Afghanistan, there currently remain many uncertainties about the future political, security and economic environment in the country. Notably, there is a combination of factors poised by different variants to shape whether Afghanistan will slide back to a crisis or whether it will sustain itself on a stable path. Those factors include: a level of overall Western assistance, implications of inevitable foreign aid cuts, sustainability of the Afghan National Security Force (ANSF), the outcome of the 2014 elections, the prospect of a political settlement, future of the insurgency, and regional dynamics.

In a sense, the UN's credibility is tied to Afghanistan's future. In this paper I would like to discuss the UN role in Afghanistan from the beginning of the Soviet withdrawal in 1989. The paper broadly looks into three aspects such as: UN history of Involvement in Afghanistan, Challenges of transition and lastly Post 2014 mandate in Afghanistan. Apart from these three major important issues I would also like to throw an on transition part which will reflect the role and activities of UN in the rebuilding and re-construction of Post-War Afghanistan and more specifically how the nature and dynamics of development as undertaken by the UN.

2. UN history of Involvement

Afghanistan became a member of United Nations in 1946. UN's role had started with political mission in 1979, with the first mission of a personnel representative of UN's secretary general Trøyve Lie. Humanitarian aid had started with UN's intervention through UNHCR for the Afghan refugees' crossing over to North Western Frontiers of Pakistan. Afghanistan has long suffered from great power rivalry and foreign military intervention, including the bitter Anglo-Afghan wars of the nineteenth century. Beginning in 1979, the country again descended into a prolonged period of devastating conflict. A Soviet military intervention (1979-1988) took a heavy toll, as US-backed Islamic militants fought a bitter conflict against the Soviet occupiers. There followed a period of civil war and warlordism from 1988 to the mid-1990s, then rule by a government organized by the Islamic Taliban, and finally in 2001 a military intervention by the United States followed by further violence, instability and civil war. After the end of cold war in 1989 until 9/11, various international organizations along with UN were also engaged in several humanitarian support programmes in Afghanistan. I would like mention the historic Geneva and Bonn agreements which were signed in 1988 and 2001. Both these agreements played an important role in the history and political development of Afghanistan.

3. UN role in Afghanistan's Economic Development

The issue of economic development and stable inclusive economic growth is one of the most difficult task and challenges before the state of Afghanistan. Afghanistan is trapped into chronic poverty cycle and underdevelopment. Due to the extensive under development the revenue base is very small therefore it is able to fund only 18 % of expenditure from its own revenues. The area of socio-economic development tries to include factors like education, health care, women empowerment and humanitarian assistance.

3.1 Education

Education is universally recognized as one of the key determinants of socio-economic security and welfare. The link between education and increased individual earnings has been widely documented: there is a large body of cross-country evidence that education enhances the employability, productivity and income earning capacity of individuals. United Nation is playing a good role in the eradication of illiteracy, reducing the drop-outs rate, and specially women education. Many organizations, especially UNESCO, ACEM, UNICEF, the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank are sponsoring and organizing education initiatives. The Government of Afghanistan similarly views education is the key to the long-term success of the Afghan state. In the sphere of adult and youth literacy, USAID's large-scale literacy, numeracy, and productive skills (vocational, business, and microfinance) program is trying to improve the livelihoods of women and men aged 15 and older. A USAID-funded technical advisory unit within the Ministry of Education is helping the National Literacy Center develop and implement the National Literacy Program. It also provides access to training, materials, and modern teaching techniques in 20

provinces (US AID Afghanistan Report 2013).

3.2 Health Care

Health care is considered one of the most important parameters to understand the health of the nation-state. After 23 years of conflict and political instability, collapsed economy, and three years of severe drought, Afghanistan's health system is among the poorest in the world. Afghanistan has one of the highest maternal and child mortality rates in the world. Every year, one in ten children dies before the age of five. Every two hours, one Afghan woman dies from pregnancy-related causes. These statistics, from the 2010 Afghan Mortality Survey, are tragic reality of health parameters of the state (USAID Afghanistan 2013). Existing health services only cover limited geographical regions and even in the districts where health services are available, needs are only partially met. The impact of the conflict and remaining deadly land mines and unexploded ordnance daily adds victims both through physical injury and mental stress, affecting every family in Afghanistan over time (Ministry of public Health 2011). WHO remarks that population having access to safe water is only 23% (18% rural, 43% urban) and access to adequate sanitation is 12 % (28% rural, 6% urban) which is a very poor statistics. Immunization coverage is a matter of worry as less than 40% of Afghan children receive life-saving vaccinations (WHO 2012). To rebuild the health system in Afghanistan, several donors have suggested establishing Performance-based Partnership Agreements (PPAs) between NGOs and the Afghan government. There has been widespread support for this approach, which has the backing of the World Bank (WB) and the Government of Afghanistan. Some donors, including the European Union (EU), the French government, USAID and Govt. of India have started to question its appropriateness, while WHO seems absent from the debate (Ridde, 2005).

3.3 Women Empowerment

Women rights around the world are an important indicator to understand global well-being. For any society to progress, women empowerment is an indispensable aspect. Gender equality furthers the cause of child survival and development for society, so the importance of women's rights and gender equality should not be underestimated. If we will limit our consideration to the status of women in Afghanistan, after the fall of the Taliban in 2001, women in Afghanistan have been able to gradually claim their basic human rights - including access to work, school, and voting in local and national elections. Some have entered politics at great personal risk. But since the re-emergence of insurgency in 2005 by armed groups, including the Taliban, the basic human rights of women and girls are under attack once again. It is a serious concern now by several global human rights bodies that, as the Afghan government enter into discussions with the Taliban, women in the country are at real risk of losing the basic rights they have been able to claim in the last decade (Amnesty, 2013).

The government should focus on long-term programs to improve women's education, and to create a monitoring mechanism that enforces gender equality in the education sector. Public awareness programs that reinforce the Islamic

notion that all men and women should have access to knowledge in order to mitigate discrimination against women are critical. Such programs could be implemented by religious scholars and clergy, civil society organizations, or government institutions (Mobarez 2010: 8, 9). In this way only, they can gain greater access to education and freedom of life which will protect their human rights and paving their way for a larger role play in stabilizing their country.

According UNAMA reports on Women the Government has a way to go to fully protect women and girls from violence through implementation of the end violence against women (EVAW) law. The way forward however is clear, apparent and achievable. UNAMA calls on the Government of Afghanistan to act on the recommendations in this report and on the recommendations of the CEDAW Committee as a matter of priority in its continuing efforts to end violence against women and girls in Afghanistan.

3.4 Humanitarian Assistance

The humanitarian impact of the transitions in Afghanistan in 2014 is also likely to be compounded by their direct effects on the ability of the humanitarian community to respond. First, humanitarian access is likely to decrease. According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), active hostilities continue to impede delivery of assistance to affected people in Afghanistan (Koser 2013).

4. Role of UNAMA in Rebuilding Process

United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan which is a political mission established for assisting the Government of Afghanistan and the people of Afghanistan in laying the foundations for sustainable peace and development. United Nations Security Council Resolution 1401 established UNAMA on 28 March 2002 Supporting Bonn Agreement of 2001 was its key mandate and it is reviewed annually. UNAMA's current mandate has prominent elements as follows:

- To support the Government in its efforts to improve critical areas, including security, governance and economic development, and regional cooperation,
- To support the full implementation of mutual commitments made on these issues at the London Conference in January 2010,
- Obeisance of subsequent Kabul Conference in July 2010 agreed in the Afghanistan National Development Strategy and the National Drugs Control Strategy (UNAMA 2013).

Promotion of human rights; technical assistance monitoring and continuing to manage and coordinate all UN-led humanitarian relief, recovery, reconstruction and development activities in Afghanistan are the major areas of UNAMA's work.

Considering the commitment and implementation of mandate vested with it, while renewing the mandate of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) on 19 March 2013, resolution 2096 (2013) adopted unanimously by the UN Security Council set out the scope and range of activities it must undertake over the coming 12 months, as Afghanistan continues its political and security transition. Overall, the resolution calls for UNAMA continue leading and helping in international civilian efforts by assisting the

country with its transition within the mandate with the principle of reinforcing Afghan sovereignty, leadership and ownership. The Mission is having a particular focus on supporting the organization of future elections including the 2014 presidential and provincial council elections (McKechnie 2003).

While observing its mandated functionalities in Afghanistan, key priorities to support Afghan-led efforts in areas of reintegration and reconciliation, regional cooperation, aid coherence and electoral assistance are progressive in nature. Successful elections and encouraging women participation, reconstruction and humanitarian assistance invested on the land by several international actors are showing fruitful results. UNAMA is working in tandem with the Afghan government as well as with global actors for whole round of stability and developmental progress in Afghanistan.

To assist the state of Afghanistan in its journey towards becoming an ideal democratic state, UN Security Council established United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) in 2002. It was a political mission trying to establish sustainable peace and development in the war ravaged country. The original mandate it carried was to support Bonn Agreement of December 2001. It has 8 regional offices and 12 provincial offices. For reconstruction and development efforts, it was the highest body and was responsible for all UN activities in the Afghan state. Development issues and political matters were supervised by two deputy special representatives. Departments of policing, drug control, military, human rights, relief efforts and gender issues were its structural pillars of work distribution. Effective delivery of aid and infrastructural reconstruction along with other components of the society were its goals serving to Afghan people.

The most serious challenge it faces in its activities was vulnerable security condition of the state. The pace of development and growth of economy have got some stumbling blocks in their way in form of recent Taliban insurgency, on the rise since some time. Other problems it now faces which threatens its development objectives includes continuing instability and corruption in the government in management of aid funding, problem of returning refugees inside Afghan territory, increasing agricultural reliance on opium cultivation and ethnic up rise in some border areas of the state demanding their rights of representation.

In the scheduled presidential elections of 2014 and following general elections of 2015, UNAMA has a greater role to play. For making these electoral processes more vibrant, free and fair with achieving maximum representative mandate of the people of Afghanistan, it must coordinate well to bring all actors together. United Nations as an active partner of the Afghan authority, the new UN mandate of 2012 acknowledges the ownership of electoral process, a complete state entity of Afghanistan.

5. Post 2014 Challenges of Reconstruction

UNAMA has special responsibilities in the areas of national reconciliation (supporting the work of the Special Commission on the Emergency *Loya Jirga*, recently completed); human rights (monitoring, reporting, investigating violations and recommending corrective action); rule of law

(supporting the Judicial Commission established by the Bonn Agreement); the role of women (supporting women's rights and participation in society); and humanitarian affairs (coordinating U.N. relief, recovery, and reconstruction efforts within the U.N. system and with the Afghan Interim – and now the Transitional – Authority). In establishing UNAMA, the Security Council “stressed... that while humanitarian assistance should be provided wherever there was a need, recovery or reconstruction assistance ought to be provided, through the Afghan Interim Administration and its successors, and implemented effectively, where local authorities contributed to the maintenance of a secure environment and demonstrated respect for human rights.”(Henry Ll. Stimson 2002) [3] Like every other state Afghanistan has its own problems and challenges during transition period. The major challenges for Afghanistan are issues of security, ethnic conflict, and I would like to explore 2014 Afghanistan election challenge which is in conducting free and fair elections and how UN is going to engage with Afghanistan in the Post-Election scenario.

5.1 Issues of Security and Stability

Issue of security and its related are one of the most difficult challenges in the process of rebuilding and reconstruction of Afghanistan. Inadequate security provision on the part of government is a challenge which often hinders development and reconstruction activities. The Afghan National Army (ANA) is the strongest of these institutions which finds itself incapable dealing with emergency situations. The United States, Britain, and France have had the primary roles in training the army.

Afghanistan is embarking on a myriad of reforms such as political, economic, educational and legal, among others. But analysts, aid workers and government officials are all in an opinion that none of the reforms will help Afghanistan without countrywide security. As President Hamid Karzai, observed that "Security is a big problem, not only in the city, but in the countryside. It's a big problem because of warlords. And so they have the power, and anything they want to do it, they can do it," Habiba Sarabi, the Afghan minister of women's affairs, said that the humanitarian workers have also suffered from the tenuous security situation. Two aid workers from the Afghan Red Crescent Society and a driver for a U.S. aid agency, Mercy Corps, were killed in attacks in mid-August. An ambitious nationwide disarmament program, organized by the Afghan government and the United Nations, is planned to encourage an estimated 100,000 former combatants to turn in with their weapons in exchange for benefits or other incentives aimed at reintegrating the fighters into civil society. (Hoch, 2003) The U.N. Security Council resolution establishing the mandate for an international mission should, as appropriate, describe and authorize development of specific elements of the judicial and law enforcement system in the post-conflict society (Guéhenno, 2003:8) [2].

5.2 Ethnic Conflict

Afghanistan, the largest ethnic groups are Pashtuns at 40 percent and the Tajiks at 20 percent. Besides it, the rest groups are the Hazaras, Uzbeks and Aimaq. Both spatial and ethnic obscurity has prevented Afghanistan from ever forming a

consensual and coherent sense of nationalism. Furthermore, interference by western countries such as U.S. and its allies (NATO) and countries bordering Afghanistan has imparted to the fragmentation of the Afghan polity. In many instances, tribal politics is still determining factor by ethnic loyalties to bordering states. Although there have been unpredictable attempts to bring hold of tribes together. At no point has the Afghan nation experienced a strong centralized state with a common legal system (Moghadam 1997). Afghanistan, ethnically, consists of Pashtuns at 40 percent and the Tajiks at 20 percent. Besides it, the rest groups are the Hazaras, Uzbeks and Aimaq. Both spatial and ethnic obscurity has prevented Afghanistan from ever forming a consensual and coherent sense of nationalism.

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6. 2014 and the Way Ahead

Most importantly, the 2014 presidential elections focus on the ethnic composition of the government and thereby require an understanding of ethnicity in the country by the major players. Most importantly, for a regional power like India, which is a major strategic partner of Afghanistan and contributes economically, politically and socially to its development, understanding the ethnic dimensions of Afghanistan becomes necessary to chart out its foreign policies in the region. Despite having a favorable response from the Pashtuns dominated Karzai government; India still needs to strengthen support towards ethnic-minorities such as the Hazaras and Tajiks in other parts of the country. UN needs to understand and maintain the ethnic sensitivity in the region and also contribute to the overall development of the people of Afghanistan, irrespective of their ethnicities.

For the last ten years, the United Nations has been, in principle, the leader of the international community in Afghanistan. Throughout the last decade the UN support for capacity building and the strengthening of Afghan institutions, as well as its role in humanitarian and reconstruction efforts have been crucial for the country, as it emerges from over thirty years of war and crisis. As Afghanistan continues to transition full responsibility for security, governance and development to the Government of Afghanistan, the UN will continue to play an important role in the coordination of international civilian activities and in support of the Government in the years to come. The next decade of the UN work in Afghanistan must be defined by effective support for Afghan leadership and ownership, which is central for building a peaceful, stable, and prosperous nation. For the transition process to succeed, the UN will be required to play a more enabling, facilitating and supporting role. The challenges of UN coherence and the transition to Afghan leadership and ownership are the principal factors shaping the nature of the long term engagement of the UN in the country. A thorough understanding of such challenges as well as the UN multifaceted, evolving role in Afghanistan can be a

starting point from which to draw lessons for enhancing the work of the United Nations in other contexts as well (Afghan mission 2012).

Talking about the 68th UN Security Council General Assembly meeting held in New York, Jan Kubis said that council has promised to provide security during the elections in Afghanistan. He expressed optimism over the readiness of the country for holding the Presidential and provincial council's elections in a free, fair and transparent manner and he also discussed about Afghanistan elections is creating more positive environment for Afghanistan and is giving hopes to those who are committed to provide long- term support to Afghanistan, also after 2014 (Abrahamkhil 2013).

6.1 State Strengthening

Strengthening of the state and government institutions such as Independent Election Commission (IEC) and Electoral Election Complain (EEC), etc are the important aspects of strengthening the state which will not only help able to conduct free and fair elections but also increase the people participation in the election process which ultimately help to deepening of democracy. All these issues are difficult challenges in the highly conflict ridden society.

6.2 UN Security Council Resolution

The Security Council and resolution 1325 (2000) deals with the issues violations of human rights, including those of women and their access to education and public office. Explicit language with regard to resolution 1325 (2000), however, made an appearance relatively late in the various Council resolutions. UNAMA-related resolutions only began making references in their preambles to resolution 1325 (2000) in 2007, and it was only in the 2008 resolutions that terms were added to condemn the continuing discrimination and violence against women and girls and the need to implement resolution 1325 (2000) and report on it. Until then, the texts of UNAMA's mandates only referred to the recommendations contained in the reports of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan, which, however, systematically detailed all that was happening concerning women's human rights and participation during the initial Bonn process, as well as progress made on institutional set-ups. Resolution 1386, deals with the establishment of ISAF in December 2001, stressed that 'all Afghan forces must adhere strictly to their obligations under human rights law, including respect for the rights of women, and under international humanitarian law', but did not make explicit mention to the protection of women. No language on women or gender issues appeared in there solutions extending the ISAF presence between 2002 and 2006.

Afghanistan was analyzed at the General Assembly as well as in two functional commissions of the Economic and Social Council (the Commissions on the Status of Women and on Human Rights) and expert bodies, such as the Sub-commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights, where the Special Report on Afghanistan at the UN Human Rights Commission gave frequent updates and raised concerns over the continued abuses and violations of the human rights of women and girl child. In addition, the situation of rights of women in Afghanistan was highlighted

by the Secretary-General's Special Representative on Children and Armed Conflict. There was, however, no working mechanism for the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000) specifically responding to the Security Council, apart from the UN system-wide Action Plan on said resolution. Women's organizations were lobbying the Security Council for it to appoint a working group on women, peace and security with a task force on Afghanistan but they had not been successful so far.

7. Conclusion

There is this big question: How far has United Nations succeeded in bringing stability and security to the country? The answer remains ambiguous even after more than a decade. The UNSC resolution 1401 passed in 2002 had talked about great importance of bringing security, stability to the country along with securing Afghanistan's sovereignty and strengthening state's institutions. The resolution was effusive regarding the problem of drugs trafficking which is now ubiquitous now in the country. Where does the country stand twelve years after UNSC passed this resolution? The picture of instability and the political uncertainty that hangs there speaks for itself. There are assassinations of political nature which means that democratic institutions have not taken root there. Drug trafficking still flourishes there. There is uncertainty regarding the post-2014 scenario where every neighbouring country is likely to first secure its own interests. These are not the signs of stability. Making things difficult for UN Mission is the fact that UN has been perceived as the attachment of US forces. The cultural insensitivity shown by some members of US forces has dented the image of even UN mission. In fact, the biggest irony is that despite making best efforts in a situation where it is hamstrung by some interests and actions of US, UN does not receive adequate attention for its job. One gets to hear only about the geopolitics, the hard politics that involves maneuvering, backdoor work. The most visible developmental work remains invisible despite remaining so visible. The reason for this has to be seen in the failure of all the forces involved in the country to give it the basic prerequisite of a state: stability and state institutions. UN's record, like other actors remains in grey zone.

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