

### **Humera Iqbal**

A roundtable discussion was held at the Institute of Regional Studies, Islamabad on February 12, 2015 at 11 a.m. with Mr. David S. Sedney, former US Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Afghanistan, Pakistan and Central Asia. While talking about Afghanistan's political situation, Mr. Sedney pointed out that the elections and post-election political process were very important in building a mature political culture in Afghanistan. Mr. Sedney praised the 2014 presidential elections, though he noted that the elections in the second round had a lower turnout than the first. The significant development was that the elections were held and President Karzai resigned. In the long term it would help evolve the Afghan political society. Mr. Sedney mentioned that US Secretary John Kerry played a constructive role in bringing about the Unity Government in Afghanistan, already consensually desired by the top electoral candidates; Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah. Mr. Sedney estimated that the hopes among almost 80% of the Afghans were for the success of Unity government as they feared the return of Taliban. Mr. Sedney praised Ashraf Ghani's book, "Fixing Failed States: A Framework for Rebuilding a Fractured World", that discusses various factors causing state failures and ways to resolve the crisis.

On the question of possibilities of Taliban's transition, Mr. Sedney expressed his views that no matter how fragmented Taliban might seem, they were loyal to Mullah Omar; and thus united. Basically they were of mix of nationalism and radicalism. Moreover, Taliban considered themselves to be still the actual rulers of Afghanistan. The only talks Taliban were interested in aimed at Afghan government's surrender in their favor. On ethnic balance and powerbrokers issues concerning President Ghani, Mr. Sedney answered that these were instrumental problems that were manageable with time.

While discussing the security situation of Afghanistan, Mr. Sedney mentioned that the annual turnover rate of Afghan force's personnel was about less than one-third. Moreover, he said that the Afghan forces at the Officer's core level were representative of all the Afghan ethnicities in proportion to their estimated population and professionally qualified. The Afghan army in Afghanistan was not only new but different from what the Soviet had built in the past. Mr. Sedney appreciated the recent military-to-military interaction between Pakistan and Afghanistan security officials, which was absent during the last decade. More interactive exchanges to work together would result in fewer threats in the region. Besides mutual military exchanges, media and society from both sides needs more engagement too. Mr. Sedney also

## Report: Roundtable with David S. Sedney, on February 12, 2015

---

suggested that the Pakistani Corps Commanders in Peshawar and Quetta should be meeting at least every month with their Afghan counterparts in Jalalabad and Kandahar.

On the Socio-economic subject, Mr. Sedney informed that since the US kept its focus on financing military it did not pay attention to the Public Works Ministry. This resulted in poor system of railway and roads etc. Mr. Sedney informed that on electricity the US was still trying to revitalize and increase the capacity of the Kajakai Dam in the Helmand Valley from the current 35MW to 100MW and hopefully the third turbine would be installed by the end of 2015. The problem was that the Taliban dominated the area and it was difficult to operate without full military protection. He informed that there had been a large number of private security contractors in Afghanistan which were lately cut down with troop's drawdown to almost 15,000 to 20,000. There were many Afghan private security companies who now worked for US and other businesses.

Mr. Sedney clarified that the US was committed in Afghanistan till 2017. Nevertheless, a final deadline was not there. The budgetary funding is decided by the US Congress on annual basis, thus constraining policy projections. Mr. Sedney noted that US is not leading any combat operations in Afghanistan but only assisting in providing intelligence, night raids, air support and drone attacks.

On Indian involvement in Pakistan through Afghanistan, Mr. Sedney believed that prior to Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's government, India was involved in such tactics; however that was not the case now.

Lately, the ISIS (Daesh) terrorist group has become a primary threat to the Islamic world and a primary concern for US. The group was a strong ideological magnet for the deprived youth from all over the world.

Mr. Sedney concluded by acknowledging that the US had pursued a flawed vision; strategy; and tactics while handling the Afghanistan crisis which resulted in its failures on many fronts. US remained focused only on al-Qaeda and later when Taliban resurged, the US pursued policy of degrading them instead of resolving the matter politically.