

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Most Kind

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Core Values and National Integration

Afghanistan as a geo-political entity with diverse ethnic, language and religious groups is faced with terrorism, ethnic and religious crises that threaten the survival of the nation. Sociologists hold that Afghanistan is bedeviled by myriad problems which, despite its mineral riches, inhibit its development. Historical analyses indicates that people of diverse historical and cultural backgrounds migrated and settled in different parts of the territories now referred to as Afghanistan. As a result Afghanistan has witnessed ethnic based agitations and politics in the course of its history. This has strengthened the ethnic bias and intolerance that exist among people from different parts of the nation. In such society, people hate each other, they fear each other, and they do not know each other because they can't communicate with each other due to structural ethnic barriers. They are separated strategically by power elite that arrogate powers to it and retain such power by upholding the principle of divide and rule. In Afghanistan, the practice of ethnic politics has sustained the belief that each of the ethnic groups must struggle for its own share of the national resources. Today, the emergence and growth of ethnic militias as well as the Taliban and ISIS insurgency constitute great threat to the stability and unity of the nation.

The socio-political background pointed above and almost the little emphasis placed on core-national-values in Afghanistan are mainly responsible for the unpatriotic, disunity, inter and intra-ethnic and religious violence that characterize the nation. The predominant value system of wealth and material acquisition, ethnic, tribal and religious loyalty are fundamental obstacles to national integration and survival of Afghanistan as a nation. This is the reason why sociologists argue that a community populated with people without appropriate positive value will not survive. In such a context educational system only contributes to nourishing the ethnic and religious core values, and as such, it instead of producing thinking and objective human beings, has produced many fearful and uncritical citizens who are also selfish and indifference to public affairs in the Afghan society.

Therefore, Afghanistan cannot attain national integration that could foster expected development and national transformations except Afghans acquire and demonstrate required values and traits. According to research findings conducted by Isola, value development is the major factor in national development. Afghanistan not grounded in non-perishable values will not make progress. Thus, Afghanistan needs urgent innovative value orientation initiatives that can enable the development of core values as well as civic and political ideals in its citizens. It is against this background we examine the development of core-values as means of promoting national integration in the country.

Core Values required for National Integration in Afghanistan
Values are basic and fundamental beliefs that guide or motivate attitudes or actions. Values describe the personal qualities we choose to embody to guide our actions; the sort of person we want to be; the manner in which we treat ourselves and others, and our interaction with the world around us. They provide the general guidelines for conduct. So, values determine where people put most of their energy, what they work for and the way they go about that which they do.

Core values are the fundamental beliefs and selected standards of behavior that are central to developing a stable and progressive nation. According to sociologists core values are the acceptable, right and cherished pattern of behavior that is capable of enhancing national integration and unity.

The Afghan dream of national integration, peace and development can only come to reality with the internalization of the core values enshrined in the National Anthem and constitutions which reflect the national value of honesty, obedience, loyalty, cooperation and patriotism. And to create a prosperous and progressive society based on social justice, protection of human dignity, protection of human rights, realization of democracy, and to ensure national unity and equality among all.

In a nutshell, if Afghanistan is going to continue as a unified nation, the development of core values in the Afghan citizens is a vital task. The Afghan leaders and followers must attain the values that would facilitate them to put the interest of the nation first before those of self, social, religious, political and ethnic groupings.

Vigilance is Vital in Democracy

By: Dilawar Sherzai

Achievements in life are difficult to attain. In order to make achievements in life, it is necessary for an individual to have the urge and the iron will. Without having the urge and the motivation, achieving anything worthwhile would be really difficult. Same is true for a nation; unless a nation has the urge to do something positive it would be really difficult for society to make developments and improvements.

A nation keeps on moving with the pace of time unless it realizes that there are shortcomings in its way of living and there are problems that are needed to be concentrated upon and eliminated. In fact, the very first step in eradicating a problem is realizing that the problem does exist and it has to be solved. Considering a problem something very normal and making adjustments with it is a serious error and must be avoided in any case.

The people in Afghanistan are also having the attitude of making compromises with their social and political problems. They, instead of considering them a hurdle towards evolution of the society and designing efforts to overcome them, change themselves to go ahead with the problems untouched. For example, one of the most serious problems that Afghan society is facing today is corruption and the tragedy is that it is getting more threatening with each passing day. The Afghans must realize that this issue is generating disorder in almost all the spheres of life and there must be an urge to take measures to curb it. Unfortunately, the people strive to compensate with it and in the process further strengthen its roots.

It is believed that becoming part of an evil and not taking actions against it, in fact, means favoring the evil and supporting it to nurture further. Every person in our society just wants to live for his own self and would never concentrate on any problem that would affect society as a whole. He thinks that dragging himself out of any unpleasant situation would solve the issues but, as a matter of fact, it does not.

We need to realize that we have to play an active role in the society and that is only possible when we have the feeling that there is always room for improvement and the status quo needs to be changed. We require being proactive and must fulfill the responsibility of a vigilant nation.

It is also one of the most demanding requirements of de-

mocracy. In a democracy, it is vital that the people must be active and ready to participate in the affairs of the country. Their inputs in different forms are vital for the evolution of the society as a whole. The responsibilities of the people are not only limited to casting votes, but they extend to keeping eyes on the actions and policies of the government and criticize or encourage them as per the requirement.

In the current scenario in Afghanistan, particularly, in the ongoing political arena, the role of the people is significant. This is the time that is going to decide the future of the country. The leaders and their steps must be checked, and they should be held accountable for them. They should not feel that they can use the authority, which has been bestowed to them by the will of the people, in any way they want. They must be scrutinized so that they should feel pressurized and, at the same time, responsible.

Afghan media and civil society can also play a dominant role in this regard. They need to provide current and timely information to the people and guide them towards informed decision making and active civil life. They have to disseminate to the people the message that their fates cannot be decided in secretive conference room, behind closed doors. People must feel that that they are being informed and they are being given proper opportunity to make important decisions for their country.

Thus, every change within a society starts with an urge or realization that a change is required. It is then further strengthened through consistent efforts. These efforts must be ensured through active participation within social and political life. It is also a democratic norm to be vigilant and participatory in a socio-political sphere. This can also support in keeping an eye on a country's leadership. However, it is also vital that the democratic institutions must play their part in democratization of the society, and the nourishment of the individuals into responsible social and democratic beings. Democracy is not only an ideology that can be implemented on a particular people or nation; rather, it is a complete way of life that must be nourished through civil education, and that demands that the people of words must convert to the people of action for bringing better changes and blocking the negative ones.

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Economic reform in the Gulf: Who benefits, really?

By: James M. Dorsey

For Gulf leaders, long-overdue economic reforms were never going to be easy.

Leaders like the crown princes of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, Mohammed bin Salman and Mohammed bin Zayed, quickly discovered that copying China's model of economic growth while tightening political control was easier said than done. They realised that rewriting social contracts funded by oil wealth was more difficult because Gulf Arabs had far more to lose than the average Chinese. The Gulf states' social contracts had worked in ways China's welfare programmes had not. The Gulf's rentier state's bargain – surrender of political and social rights for cradle-to-grave welfare – had produced a win-win situation for the longest time.

Moreover, Gulf leaders, struggling with mounting criticism of the Saudi-UAE-led war in Yemen and the fall-out of the killing of journalist Jamal Khashoggi, also lacked the political and economic clout that allowed China to largely silence or marginalise critics of its crackdown on Turkic Muslims in the troubled northwestern province of Xinjiang.

The absence of a functioning welfare-based social contract in China allowed the government to powereconomic growth, lift millions out of poverty, and provide public goods without forcing ordinary citizens to suffer pain. As a result, China was able to push through with economic reforms without having to worry that reduced welfare benefits would spark a public backlash and potentially threaten the regime.

Three years into Mohammed bin Salman's Vision 2030 blueprint for diversification of the economy, Saudi businesses and consumers complain that they are feeling the pinch of utility price hikes and a recently introduced five per cent value-added tax with little confidence that the government will stay the course to ensure promised long-term benefit.

The government's commitment to cutting costs has been further called into question by annual handouts worth billions of dollars since the announcement of the reforms and unilateral rewriting of the social contract to cushion the impact of rising costs and quash criticism.

In contrast to China, investment in the Gulf, whether it is domestic or foreign, comes from financial, technology and

other services sector, the arms industry or governments. It is focused on services, infrastructure or enhancing the state's capacities rather than on manufacturing, industrial development and the nurturing of private sector.

With the exception of national oil companies, some state-run airlines and petrochemical companies, the bulk of Gulf investment is portfolios managed by sovereign wealth funds, trophies or investment designed to enhance a country's prestige and soft power.

By contrast, Asian economies such as China and India have used investment to fight poverty, foster a substantial middle class, and create an industrial base. To be sure, with small populations, Gulf states are more likely to ensure sustainability in services and oil and gas derivatives rather than in manufacturing and industry.

China's \$1 trillion Belt and Road initiative may be the Asian exception that would come closest to some of the Gulf's soft-power investments. Yet, the BRI, designed to alleviate domestic overcapacity by state-owned firms that are not beholden to shareholders' short-term demands and/or geo-political gain, contributes to China's domestic growth.

Asian nations have been able to manage investors' expectations in an environment of relative political stability. By contrast, Saudi Arabia damaged confidence in its ability to diversify its oil-based economy when after repeated delays it suspended plans to list five per cent of its national oil company, Saudi Arabian Oil Company, or Aramco, in what would have been the world's largest initial public offering.

To be sure, China is no less autocratic than the Gulf states, while Hindu nationalism in India fits a global trend towards civilisationalism, populism and illiberal democracy. What differentiates much of Asia from the Gulf and accounts for its economic success are policies that ensure a relatively stable environment. These policies are focused on social and economic enhancement rather than primarily on regime survival. That may be Asia's lesson for Gulf rulers.

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