

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



April 12 2016

Superstitious Thinking must be Shunned

There are different types of beliefs among human beings and unfortunately all of them are not based on logic or scientific thinking. There are many beliefs among human beings that seem absurd to the logical mind and sometimes it seems very weird how those thoughts have penetrated within human societies and within their thinking. Nevertheless, they exist and are a reality now.

Superstitions are also the types of beliefs that are not based on logical interpretations. They are based on beliefs which are supernatural and are not necessarily governed by physical laws. They basically try to prognosticate the happenings in daily life on the basis of certain incidents that have already occurred. In this way the result of a particular happening or incident is necessitated by an earlier happening not based on the theory of cause and effect and they, in scientific interpretations, are much apart from each other.

Superstitions exist in most of the cultures of the world. They are able to make their way through the generations as a part of inherited beliefs. Superstitions are also linked with the religions, but they are not the production of religions. However, there are superstitions existing in most of the religions of the world. Further, the religious people are more likely to accept the superstitions than the non-religious people.

One of the basic reasons of the transmission of superstitions and their survival is through the sanctity that is preserved for traditional values and the interests that are maintained for the folk stories and legends. In addition, there is a tendency in most of the people not to question the superstitions that are transferred to them. At the same time it must also be kept in mind that most of the superstitions are taught to the people as a part of their nourishment, while they are too small to differentiate between what is logical and what is not. It can also be observed that superstitions are more common in backward societies that are marked with religious fundamentalism and hard-line traditional values.

Superstitions may affect people in different ways. First of all the most dominating impact of superstitions is that it keeps the people away from finding out the real cause of a particular happening. Relying on the given interpretations of the happenings they do not strive for the truth and remain unbothered. This does not guarantee any struggle on their part for the improvement of their ideas and the eradication of false ideas from society. Moreover, the minds that believe in superstitions can be easily utilized by those who have their business based on such superstitious beliefs.

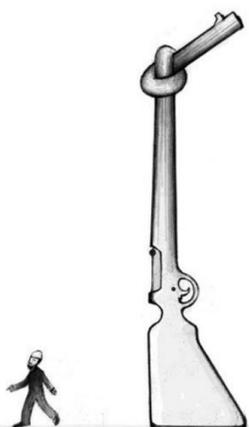
Afghan society is a kind of society that is marked with extremist religious beliefs and traditional values. There is great shortage of analytical way of thinking in ordinary life. Most of the Afghan people do not bother to challenge the superstitious ideas that are transferred to them from their ancestors. They believe on them blindly and even suggest others and their next generations to keep them intact.

Afghan women in particular are overwhelmingly influenced by the superstitions. Because of their limited exposure to the external world and modern thinking their sets of beliefs are dominantly marked with the superstitions. The dominating role of superstitions in Afghan society provides a golden chance to those who know how to utilize them to earn money. Traditional Mullahs in this regard play a dominant role. They hijack the superstitious thinking and keep on filling their pockets. We can find a lot of people in our society seeking for the services of Mullahs for making their present problems disappear or guaranteeing a prosperous future. Mullahs in this regard give them talisman which they have to tie around their necks or keep them in their pockets or even put them in their pillows and they are thought to bring good luck to them. If by chance the wearer of the talisman is gifted in some way or the other, the Mullahs become famous and have lucrative business. No one even dare to question their qualification or understanding regarding religious teachings. Moreover, there are not many people who dare to question whether such acts are religious or not.

Superstitions are undoubtedly illogical and take us away from reality, making us create a world of imaginations where things happen on the basis of false interpretations. Superstitions should be completely neglected and must be questioned seriously, especially in the societies like Afghanistan. Our people need to have proper understanding of the matters concerning their life and society and have to carry out necessary measures to curb them.

They have to develop a scientific approach, wherein they have to challenge the superstitious beliefs that are transmitted to them from different sources, most of which are untrustworthy. They also have to keep in mind that superstitions are not appreciated by religion Islam.

Islam has clearly asked human beings to think appropriately before forming a belief. There are three stages in Islam that a Muslim has to go through before establishing firm beliefs. They are IIm-ul-Yaqin, Ain-ul-Yaqin and Haq-ul-Yaqin. Without going through these three stages a Muslim does not have to establish a belief. Have we been doing it?



The BSA and Prospect of Security in Afghanistan

By Abdul Ahad Bahrami

A robust military partnership between the US and Afghanistan is crucial for the ongoing campaign against the Taliban insurgency. The government of Afghanistan hopes the existing security partnership agreement between Afghanistan and the United States would strengthen Afghanistan's security and defense forces in the fight against the insurgent groups. Though playing a crucial role in training, advising and equipping Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF), the Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA) has also been criticized for failing to provide sufficient assistance to ANSF that are fighting bitter Taliban insurgency on several fronts. While critics point to the BSA's inability to make any differences in assisting ANSF in the fight against the Taliban, Afghan authorities maintain that the pact has played an important role in strengthening ANSF.

Despite the pact ensuring continued support of the US to ANSF, the deterioration of security led to criticisms to the national unity government over its failure for using the capacities of the security pact to ensure sufficient international assistance. The criticisms forced the government to take measures for implementation of the security pact with the United States and Afghanistan introducing routine assessments for monitoring implementation of the agreement. The third round of meetings between Afghanistan and the US over implementation of the security pact was held in Kabul on Saturday attended by US Secretary of State John Kerry and Salahuddin Rabbani, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Afghanistan.

In the meeting, the two sides discussed the agreement and the situation in Afghanistan including security and counter-terrorism, democracy and governance, economic and social developments of Afghanistan. John Kerry reasserted on the US commitment to provide support to ANSF to maintain security in the country and fight the insurgent groups. According to the Afghan officials, the United States has pledged to provide more warplanes to the Afghan air force in the near future to bolster Afghanistan's anti-insurgency campaign.

Shortly after taking over presidency, Ashraf Ghani quickly moved to sign the Kabul-Washington security agreement after former president Hamid Karzai refused to sign the agreement months after the negotiations over the pact were concluded. The Afghan government hoped the pact would prevent further deterioration of security in the country at a time when NATO was going to end its combat mission in Afghanistan and the country was experiencing excruciating political and economic challenges. But security in the country deteriorated dramatically with the Taliban coming into a resurgence and expanding their insurgency across the country including to the once relatively security northern Afghanistan. BSA, however, has not been able to prevent the Taliban from taking more grounds and expanding their insurgent activities across the country.

Though the agreement was a milestone for continued security partnership between Afghanistan and the US after withdrawal of US-led in-

ternational coalition, it still had some major weaknesses. Ahead of the signing of the agreement, the US was increasingly turning exhausted with the Afghanistan mission as the war was too costly for the US and remained an open-ended conflict after fourteen years. With the American public opposing the war, the United States had chosen to hastily arrange withdrawal despite the fact that rush for exit was further emboldening the Taliban and giving them the motive to wait for the exit of the US and NATO forces by end of 2014. The hasty withdrawal approach with no doubt harmed the prospect of post-mission support for Afghanistan and the US military support to ANSF fighting a resurgent Taliban insurgency.

On the other hand, despite Afghanistan's insistence for a clearly-defined security agreement, the agreement remained terribly flawed in defining the threats for Afghanistan that would require US cooperation and direct intervention. For instance, the two countries bitterly negotiated the terms related to definition of foreign aggressions against Afghanistan and how the US would be obliged to respond in the events of such threats to Afghanistan. This led to an agreement that is remaining vague in many areas including US role in case of continued foreign support to the Taliban and US role in case of a possible resurgence of the Taliban. The Afghan government created hurdles to a robust military partnership between the two countries by limiting the role of the US troops in aerial and night-time operations both before and after 2014.

While the Taliban quickly managing to start expanding the insurgency, the Afghan government was struggling to cope with the heightened offensives of the Taliban while the US forces stood by watching the deterioration of security and failing to organize active and large-scale air and ground support to repel the Taliban. However, the national unity government did what was needed for reversing the harms done to the security partnership between the United States and Afghanistan. After quickly signing the security agreement, the Afghan government urged the US to reconsider the plans for withdrawal of bulk of troops by end of 2016 and plan the withdrawal according to the ground situation in Afghanistan.

The security pact between Afghanistan and the US ensures long-term support to Afghanistan's security and defense forces. The assistance mission is codenamed as the Resolute Support Mission as part of which US troops provide advising and training to ANSF and equip them.

Despite the shortcomings, the security pact has a major capacity for a robust partnership between Afghanistan's security forces and the US military. Expanding security cooperation between the two countries is vital for survival of Afghanistan and strengthening of the ANSF in the face of the resurgent Taliban. However, the Afghan government needs to make sure it is utilizing the full capacity of the agreement to boost the anti-insurgency campaign and better equip ANSF.

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Talks about Peace Talks

By Dilawar Sherzai

The resumption of peace process between Afghanistan and the Taliban elements is hotly debated. The four-nation group, which is comprised of Pakistan, Afghanistan, China and the United States, seeks to bring warring factions to the negotiating table. The last meeting of Quadrilateral Coordination Group (QCG), which was held in Kabul on February 23, said that direct talks between the Afghan government and militants would be held in the first week of March in Pakistan. However, this initiative came to a stalemate when the Afghan Taliban refused to attend a face-to-face meeting with Afghan negotiators. The group's representatives are expected to convene later this month to review the roadmap for starting the peace talk.

The first round of direct talks was held last summer in Pakistan, but the process quickly derailed after the announcement of the death of Taliban's founder Mullah Omar.

The Taliban, toppled from power in a US-led military intervention in 2001, has waged an armed campaign to overthrow the Afghan government and re-establish its rule. The nearly 15-year conflict has killed thousands of people and the graph of civilian casualties increases with each passing day. In other words, the Taliban's heavy offensives, suicide bombings and improvised explosive devices (IED) inflicted indescribable loss of life upon Afghan nation.

The warring parties make efforts to destroy the ground for the establishment of democracy. They deem democracy as western product and scapegoat civilians, including women and children to put pressure on the government. Afghanistan's constitution and the current government do not adapt to the Taliban's ideology. Therefore, they stage attacks against the combatants and non-combatants alike - which is a flagrant violation of humanitarian law.

Last October, US President Barack Obama announced thousands of US troops would remain in Afghanistan past 2016, keeping the current force of 9,800 troops, amid a surge in Taliban attacks.

In September 2014, Afghanistan signed a bilateral security agreement with the US that allows 10,000 US troops to remain in the country. The agreement is open-ended but vague, stating that the troops may remain "until the end of 2024 and beyond", and that it can be terminated by either side with two years' notice. A similar agreement has been signed with NATO to allow 4,000 to 5,000 additional troops to stay in Afghanistan in a noncombat role.

The "war on terror" did not give the desired result in Afghanistan and the insurgency has mounted recently despite years of counterterrorism campaigns. The US did not only spend millions of dollars but a large number of their soldiers lost their lives to eradicate violence and

terror from the country. In another item, wars have been fought and took heavy tolls of Afghan soldiers and US troops, wrecked havoc on the country's financial resources, forced great number of people out of country, razed schools to the ground, curtailed the freedom of the public and violated their rights and dignity, however, insurgency remains a serious challenge. Despite all these integral investments for bringing in peace, the emergence of the self-styled Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) is the next plight which threatens the country more than ever before. Rather than joining peace talk, some members of the Taliban's splinter group swore loyalty to the ISIL militants. Now, the question is that will the Taliban hold peace talk with the Afghan government? The Taliban have set preconditions for holding talk. The main Taliban's demand is the immediate and total withdrawal of all foreign forces from Afghanistan. The Taliban also push for constitutional reforms, such as mentioning the word "sharia" in the Afghan constitution. Currently, the constitution refers to "Islamic law" instead of "sharia" specifically. They also urge for the release of their prisoners - who were arrested from battlegrounds.

These preconditions are too hard for the Afghan government to fulfill in such a critical situation. Afghanistan is still heavily dependent on foreign aids. The complete withdrawal of foreign troops and cut-down in financial supports will be a serious blow to the political and economic situations. Similarly, sharing power with the Taliban to get them sit around the peace table will deteriorate the situation and put the government on a collision course with the public.

Contrary to the peace talk deadlock, members of the four-nation group still hope for success. As a result, the US Secretary of State John Kerry and Afghan Foreign Minister Salahuddin Rabbani welcomed the QCG's efforts in "creating an environment conducive to bringing the Taliban and its affiliates to the negotiating table with the goal of creating lasting peace in Afghanistan." The Afghan High Peace Council also said on Saturday that Pakistan has promised to bring the Taliban representatives to the negotiating table this month.

Afghan government waits for the Pakistan's commitment, which was made to broker the talk, and seeks to soften the Taliban up for talks.

The QCG's efforts will be the last gleam of hope for Afghan nation after long sufferings and great sacrifices. The war-weary Afghans look forward impatiently to having a society free of violence and bloodshed.

However, insurgency and terror linger and the warring factions keep refusing to join peace talk. To break the deadlock, it is the QCG to bring the horse to the water and make it drink. If such efforts be proved abortive once more, military option should be considered the last resort.

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