

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



April 18, 2019

Why Interim Government is not in the Interest of Afghanistan

Interim government and caretaker government are the options that some Afghan political figures and presidential candidates including Hanif Atmar have proposed to replace the National Unity Government when its tenure ends. The NUG's tenure will end in May 2019. Imran Khan, the Prime Minister of Pakistan, in late March, suggested that forming an interim Afghan government would smooth peace talks between U.S. and Taliban officials. These statements received mixed responses from the Afghan government and Afghan citizens. While Afghan government and the majority of the people rejected this idea, some politicians and presidential candidates embraced it warmly.

Why Interim Government is not in the Interests of Afghanistan

Legally the interim government is a vague political terminology in the country. It has not been considered in the Afghan Constitution.

The reasons why the majority of Afghan people and the NUG reject the interim government include there is no possibility for the creation of an interim administration, as it does not support the interests of the country. As the Afghan Constitution has been identified as one of the redlines of the peace talks by the National Reconciliation Leadership Council, such a set up may lead to change the type of the political system of the country from the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan to Islamic Emirate or any other form of totalitarian system that is against the National interests of Afghanistan. Thus, the Afghan government has repeatedly called on the Taliban that they can only join the peace talks under the umbrella of the Afghan government. According to Dr. Abdullah, if the NUG talked about an interim government, then it would not have been an interim government in which Dr. Simar Samar served as deputy and he had served as foreign minister. He said he did not think that this time, the arrangements would be like that, and Afghan politicians could realize this fact and it would not happen. If it happened, it would not be in the interests of Afghanistan.

Further, considering the root causes of the conflicts in Afghanistan, it is nearly impossible that Afghan leaders reach a consensus on the type of political system, tenure of the interim government and conducting fair and free elections under an interim government. In addition to that, political analysts hold that for establishing an interim government, there must be a symbolic figure who is widely respected by rival factions and most of the population – someone who can help to facilitate contacts and communication. Considering the current context of Afghanistan, it is nearly impossible and seems very challenging to find such a figure in Afghanistan.

Peace talks are a time-consuming process. The international community and Afghan government must give it a good deal of time in order to reach a consensus on different issues of the peace talks. As a result, all parties shall peruse a political settlement cautiously arranged and with patience. Such an approach would lead to a peace deal that preserves the current constitution, can further legitimize the current state, ensures the post-2001 democratization process, include all the involved parties and contribute to state building and the stabilization of Afghanistan. Ultimately, this is the only mechanism that can ensure a durable peace that can prevent Afghanistan from producing further grievances that may potentially intensify the war in the country.



Managing the Rapidly Increasing Population

By: Dilawar Sherzai

A state cannot exist without population and, at the same time, the size of population greatly influences the nation. In today's societies, the size of population has to be maintained as per the resources of the state because the larger population does not always bring prosperity. There are many examples wherein the states do not have enough resources as per their large population and, therefore, they suffer. It is important to manage the population and try to keep it under control, otherwise, it may give rise to different sorts of problems which would prove to a hurdle in the way of development and progress of the nation. Therefore, if a country has enough resources to support large population it may keep that population, but states that cannot support larger populations should limit their population, or else, they will suffer from different types of economic and social problems.

Afghanistan is one of the same sorts of countries that suffer from myriads of economic and social problems. Severe poverty prevails in most parts of country because of continuous wars and natural catastrophes. The political and economic infrastructures are almost non-existent. In such circumstances Afghanistan is having a considerable population. The number of people living in Afghanistan at the moment is more than 32 million, which is just a rough estimate.

As a matter of fact, this number is deduced from an earlier census that was half-finished, and does not represent Afghan population correctly. The actual number may be more than the one mentioned above. It has been one of the greatest misfortunes of the country that there has not been any comprehensible scientific population census in the country, which is really necessary for better political, social and economic decision making. It is really difficult to administer a population without knowing its composition correctly.

Regrettably, the population growth rate in Afghanistan has been in elevation, as well. The rate for Afghanistan, according to the Central Statistics Organization (CSO) is 2.5 percent. If the same rate retains the population in the country will be doubled within two decades.

Currently if it is accepted that the population of Afghanistan is around 32 million, in 2025 it may reach to more than 42 million. This clearly indicates the serious nature of the growth taking place in the country. Definitely, this growth rate is going to test the capabilities of Afghan resources and Afghan government in the times to come.

The most dominant reason behind the rapid population

growth in Afghanistan is that the people are not cognizant of the issue at all. Most of them consider children as the blessing and never ever think that they can turn into curse if not nourished properly and there are not enough resources to feed them, educate them and make them responsible members of the society. Ill-fatedly, most of the people in the country do not know that many of the problems that prevail in their personal lives and in the country are linked to unchecked population growth.

Especially, the people belonging to the remote areas of the country do not understand what their basic right and responsibilities are. It is, therefore, impossible to expect from them to have right understanding of the issue. Unfortunately, even the well-educated people in the urban areas do not deliberate on this issue completely. One of the greatest troubles with the Afghan society is that it has been vehemently dominated by strict tribal norms and values and fundamentalist interpretation of Islam.

Therefore, most of the people consider it against their traditional norms or religious teachings to have a family planning. They consider it a sin to go for birth control. There have been many occasions when such endeavors have been opposed violently. Furthermore, the rise in health facilities has been able to control the mortality rate to a certain extent, which would ultimately have effect on the growth rate.

Apart from that there are financial barriers that restrict the families to go for a luxury, like birth control. People thrive for their basic requirements like food, cloth and shelter; how should they cogitate about the problem which they consider very much supplementary in nature?

Population growth rate in our country has been unchecked and can really lead to numerous problems. The government in this regard has to take serious and practical steps to control the issue as soon as possible. There should be intensive awareness programs for the people as a whole. Such programs should rather be started from the college and university level, wherein the citizens must be given complete understanding of threats that can be faced because of unchecked population growth. As far as the remote areas are considered, the endeavors must be doubled as in such areas it is not just about communicating the message to the families; rather the endeavors must go through strict and narrow-minded tribal norms and religious teachings.

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Ode to Our Lady of Europe

By: Bernard-Henri Lévy

As I write this from Berlin, I am prostrate before the images of fire, devastation, and ash engulfing Notre-Dame de Paris – Our Lady of Paris. She is a treasure of civilization, both for those who believe in heaven and for those who do not. She represents the Europe of beauty, of holy hopes, of greatness and gentility. Like you, like everyone, I am heartbroken.

The tragedy invokes a slew of memories. Victor Hugo's immortalization of the cathedral in The Hunchback of Notre Dame, of course, comes to mind. So, too, does the verse of Louis Aragon:

"Nothing is as strong, not fire, not lightning,
As my Paris defying danger
Nothing is as beautiful as this Paris of mine."

One also recalls an opening line from Baudelaire: "I am beautiful, O mortals, like a dream in stone." It was not written about Notre Dame, but it certainly could have been.

The memories extend well beyond the written word. The cathedral itself has borne witness to centuries of French history, including episodes that are now the stuff of legend. It has stood with France through its mystic knighthood, in its glory and in its gloom. I think of the mass in celebration of Paris's liberation in 1944, and of a younger sister's conversion there. I weep with her, as I weep with all Christians who have had to watch their visible church go up in smoke, the plume perhaps taking a part of their invisible church with it. The next morning, I think of Notre Dame as the France of the Resistance. She embodies the Gothic holiness and tranquility of the Seine. She is faith and beauty made manifest. And, of course, the words of Hugo and Aragon are still there, dancing in my insomniac head. I ask myself how I will face the day. How will we face tomorrow? Hugo supplies the answer: "Time is the architect, but the people are the mason." By noon I can only hope that the fire is completely out. For a Parisian, it is torture to see the looped images of the city's

heart being gripped by the violence of the flames. More than a church has fallen. In a way, Notre Dame is the soul of humanity itself, and a piece of that humanity has now been scarred.

We Parisians believed our venerable lady to be immortal. Yet there she slumps, wounded and helpless against fate, as were we all while watching the inferno. Yet in the wake of those sorrowful images has come a wave of fellow feeling. Italians, Swedes, Irish, Spaniards, Chinese, Algerians – all have joined in communion with the people of France. As after an attack, all are saying, "Je suis Paris."

Finally, in burning, Notre Dame reminds us of the fragility of our history and heritage, of the precariousness of what we have built, and of the finite nature of millennial Europe, homeland of the arts, to which Notre Dame is one of the loftiest testaments.

Looking ahead, what are we to think? What should we do? We must hope that Notre Dame's sacrifice will awaken slumbering consciences; that, through this disaster, people will realize that Europe is Notre Dame writ large. More than a political union, it is a great work of art, a brilliant bastion of shared intelligence, but also home to an endangered legacy. That legacy is too important to lose. We cannot allow pyromaniacs to divide the people of Europe. We must remember that we, together, are builders of temples and palaces, creators of beauty. That is the lesson of Notre Dame in this Holy Week.

French President Emmanuel Macron, who for two years has appealed for unity in rebuilding Europe, now is appealing for unity in rebuilding Notre Dame. Together, we must restore the heart of France. My literary review, La Règle du Jeu, will contribute to the national fund for that purpose. I urge all readers to do the same. We the people are the masons.

Bernard-Henri Lévy is one of the founders of the "Nouveaux Philosophes" (New Philosophers) movement. He is the author, most recently, of *The Empire and the Five Kings*.



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