

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



April 29, 2018

Treating Every Citizen Equally

It is really imperative that a society must ensure that all its residents get their due rights. And these rights must be ensured without any sort of discrimination as all the members of the society stand equal as far as justice and fair play are concerned. The societies that are multicultural and consist of different ethnic or religious groups must make sure that the rights of minorities are properly guarded. In the similar fashion the rights of the special people - the people suffering from different sorts of disabilities, must also be ascertained through proper policies and actions by the relevant authorities.

The underdeveloped and the developing countries, in particular, need to give proper attention towards the disabled as such countries face many other problems to tackle with; therefore, they are not capable of giving time and attention to them. Moreover, in such countries the opportunities and proper arrangements are not in place that can help the disabled to fight with the harsh challenges of life and be the part of normal lives. Afghanistan is one of the similar types of countries where the opportunities are limited for the people with disabilities.

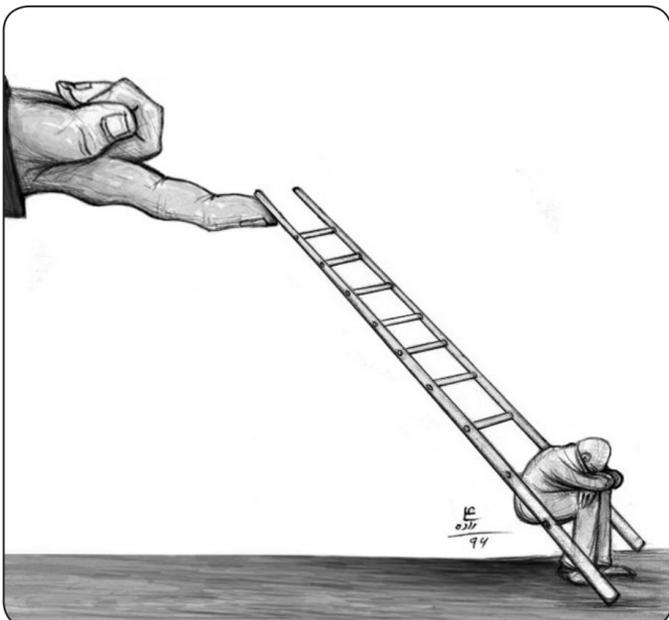
Some NGOs on certain occasions have made some efforts in this regard. They have provided fund and support to uplift standard of living of PWDs. Such efforts, if followed and monitored with determination, consistency and honest intentions will definitely support the disabled to live a normal life and become productive members of the society. In addition, positive attitude of the society can assist the disabled in developing optimistic approach towards life and bring prosperity and development not only to themselves but to the country, as well.

Nevertheless, it must not be forgotten that the negative attitude of the people towards the disabled may discourage them to a large extent. Unluckily, it can be observed in our country that both the government and the people do not treat them properly. Although Afghanistan has signed the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, concrete steps are not taken yet in that regard. According to the convention people with disabilities must be given all the opportunities of having proper treatment and the feasibility to live their daily lives normally. Unfortunately, the government of Afghanistan has been suffering on both the fronts. The medical facilities for the disabled are in no way sufficient. Hospitals and care centers for them are not enough, while the existing ones suffer seriously from the lack of modern equipments. The methods of treatment are obsolete. The compensations or improvements that can be made in their lives are not realized appropriately and they go unchecked. Furthermore, the endeavors of government to support them in their daily lives need to be invigorated and they should be supported voluminously. However, it should be noted that the financial compensation alone is not enough to support their families. In some cases, the disabled people receive a nominal amount from the government, which seems negligible, keeping in mind the rising inflation. It should be noted that more important than the compensation is the job opportunities and vocational training. That will support the disabled people in standing on their own and live a life of self-esteem and reverence. They cannot keep on depending on the favor of the government indefinitely - if the government feels sympathy they should get their share, if not, they will stay under privileged. It would be a better option to make them stand on their own and equal to their fellow citizens. Indefinite dependence on the kindness of the government or fellow citizens can in fact cripple them. They will get used to it and shun hard work; some of them may even opt begging. It is not peculiar to find the disabled people begging on the roads, taking advantage of the sympathy of the passersby.

Another important issue in this regard is the response of the fellow citizens towards the people with disabilities. Instead of assisting them out, most of the people further torture them by their discriminatory and even abusive attitude. There are so a lot of instances when such people are socially neglected. Since, they are not able to do the things in the way the other people do, they are considered weird and even called with various inaptitudes.

The families with economic hardships and other difficulties curse their children with disabilities and treat them as burden on the family. Many of them are forced to go for begging; in addition, it is hard to find people who readily get into any type of relation with the disabled people. In particular, the females who are with disabilities do not get proper chances of getting married. They remain neglected throughout most part of their lives and suffer from severe kind of social isolation. It is really imperative to understand the difficulties faced by the people with disabilities; whether the disabled are so, naturally or as the aftermath of disasters or wars they should be treated appropriately.

The government has to make sure that they receive all the facilities for their treatment and modern facilities are available for them free of cost, and they get feasibility that may support them in living their daily lives about normally. On the other hand there should be marked changes in the attitude through which the fellow citizens treat the disabled people; in particular, they should be considered equal human beings.



China's Role in Bridging the Gap between Afghanistan and Pakistan

By Hujjatullah Zia

The relation between Afghanistan and Pakistan has undergone many ups and downs in the post-Taliban Afghanistan which induced China to mediate between the two neighboring countries. The issue of terrorism and porous border triggered a blame game between Afghan-Pak officials and brought them to dead end. Exchanging harsh rhetoric against each other led to further frustration. Although Afghan-Pak officials exchanged trips to defrost the icy relation, there was no palpable result.

In recent years, China has sought to play a mediatory role between Kabul and Islamabad and is concerned about the security issue in Afghanistan. For instance, China is a member of the Quadrilateral Coordination Group (QCG), which comprises of Afghanistan, Pakistan, China, and the US and established in December 2015 in the Heart of Asia Conference, to broker peace talks between Kabul government and warring parties.

Similarly, Beijing hosted the first China-Afghanistan-Pakistan Foreign Ministers' Dialogue on 26 December 2017 to strengthen mutual trust between Kabul and Islamabad, deepen cooperation based on the Five Principles of peaceful coexistence and advocate Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace talks. This dialogue was held with the efforts of Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, who made trips to Afghanistan and Pakistan to arrange the dialogue. According to Wang Yi, China, Afghanistan and Pakistan were strategic cooperation partners and shared integrated interests and people-to-people relations. He added that the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC) put forward to build a community with shared future for mankind and deepen relations with neighboring countries.

In his recent trip to China, Afghan National Security Advisor (NSA) Hanif Atmar met with Wang Yi and discussed the need for deepening bilateral relations. Meanwhile, the two sides stressed the need for continuation of trilateral dialogue. Atmar said that Kabul will host the next round of trilateral meeting of foreign ministers consisting of China, Afghanistan and Pakistan. He added that China could play a significant role for strengthening regional peace and stability and promoting economic cooperation.

China is believed to play a key role in bridging the gap between Kabul and Islamabad through minimizing the mistrust and putting an end to the blame game which has deteriorated the mutual relations for a long time. Initiating

the foreign ministerial-level meeting has been a significant step taken by Beijing. The forthcoming trilateral meeting is hoped to strengthen Afghan-Pak relation and reinforce their determination in combating terrorism.

It is self-explanatory that terrorism has inflicted heavy casualties upon Afghan and Pakistani nations. In other words, the death toll in the two countries is outrageous. A handful of terrorist networks seek to fuel sectarian violence in Afghanistan and Pakistan. For instance, the attack on Christians in Pakistan in early April and attack on Shiites in Afghanistan in late April - the responsibility for both of which were claimed by the self-styled Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) - suggest two facts: First, terrorist networks intend to spark off sectarian violence in the two countries. Second, terrorists are a common enemy of the two neighboring countries. Hence, it is time for both states to stop the blame game and combat terrorism with strong determination.

China's push for strengthening a lasting relation between the two countries is to play its role in stabilizing the region so that all nations could live a peaceful life. That is to say, a peaceful Afghanistan and Pakistan will contribute to regional stability, overcome the security challenges, and pave the ground for economic activities. A fruitful campaign against terrorism is not possible unless the two countries cultivate a friendly relation; this is what China is in pursuit of.

A number of political pundits, especially in Pakistan, believe that reconciliation process will be more fruitful than military deal. China also shows tendency in advocating peace process between Kabul government and the Taliban. In such a case, the QCG will have to play its part more seriously to nudge the Taliban to negotiating table. Chinese officials are most likely to believe that if Afghanistan and Pakistan - who are the two instrumental members of QCG - cultivate a strong tie, they will be able to push the Taliban to peace table.

To sum up, China's concern about regional peace and stability is easily noticeable. China does not only seek to deepen its friendly relation with neighboring countries but also bridge the gap between them. If all states, including Afghanistan and Pakistan, play their part in contributing to regional peace, peace and prosperity will be just around the corner. It is hoped that the upcoming trilateral dialogue will end mistrust and build a strong trilateral tie among the three neighboring countries.

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The Case for Secret Diplomacy

By Graham Allison

When New Jersey Senator Robert Menendez announced that he will oppose Mike Pompeo's nomination to US Secretary of State, he explained that he would do so because Pompeo, currently Director of the CIA, had failed to disclose that he had traveled to North Korea over Easter weekend as President Donald Trump's envoy.

For Menendez, the audacity and secrecy of the Trump administration's preparations for a planned summit between Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong-un was unacceptable. "Now I don't expect diplomacy to be negotiated out in the open," Menendez said in a recent speech, "but I do expect for someone who is the nominee to be Secretary of State, when he speaks with committee leadership and is asked specific questions about North Korea, to share some insights about such a visit. I believe our nation's top diplomat must be forthright."

The US constitution assigns senators the responsibility to confirm, by majority vote, the president's cabinet nominees. America's founders sought to ensure that individuals serving in high positions of public trust would be well qualified, not just in the judgment of a single individual, but after thoughtful review by an independently elected Senate.

In exercising their constitutional duty, senators should consider carefully their criteria for providing what the constitution calls "advice and consent." There are many good reasons why senators may decide to support or oppose Pompeo's nomination. But Pompeo's withholding of the fact that he was engaged in secret diplomacy is not one of them.

To be sure, despite being a mainstay of US foreign policy, secret diplomacy has always had its critics. Some argue that it is a type of deception that undermines the transparency and accountability on which American democracy is based. Others do not oppose secret diplomacy per se, but they believe that maintaining a reasonable degree of democratic accountability requires that a small subset of congressional leaders be informed. In criticizing Pompeo for failing to be "forthright" even with the "committee leadership," Menendez expressed both of these concerns.

Yet the history of secret diplomacy, under Republican and Democratic administrations alike, clearly illustrates its benefits. The most important diplomatic breakthrough of the Cold War, the opening to China, began with secret negotiations between Henry Kissinger, then President Richard Nixon's national security adviser, and Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai. Kissinger's top-secret trip to Beijing in 1971 laid the groundwork for Nixon's historic visit the following year. And the warming of Sino-US relations helped widen divisions between China and America's Cold War adversary, the Soviet Union.

Likewise, President Barack Obama's signature diplomatic achievement, the 2015 Iran nuclear deal, could not have been achieved without secret talks. In March 2013, Obama sent two senior State Department officials, William J. Burns and Jake Sullivan, to begin secret conversations with the Iranians in Oman. Given that diplomatic relations between the two countries had

been severed for more than 30 years, and that each country was radioactive in the domestic politics of the other, holding preliminary negotiations in public would have been a non-starter.

Soon enough, the secret conversations led US officials to conclude that the Iranians were serious about entering into formal talks. In secret, US and Iranian negotiators worked on an outline of what would ultimately become the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action. The JCPOA blocked all of Iran's major pathways to becoming a nuclear power, by preventing the country from reprocessing plutonium or enriching uranium to weapons-grade levels. It also eliminated two-thirds of Iran's centrifuges and 98% of its stockpile of enriched uranium; and it established the most intrusive verification and inspection regime ever negotiated.

But as difficult as the talks with Iran were, negotiating with Kim's Hermit Kingdom will be harder still. The United States and North Korea are technically still at war, because a formal peace treaty has not been concluded since the 1950-1953 Korean War, which ended with a ceasefire and an armistice. Moreover, every past denuclearization agreement between the two countries has collapsed, and, since Trump took office, he and Kim have been lobbing insults and threats at each other. In this context, sending a secret envoy to Pyongyang to lay the groundwork for productive negotiations is precisely what the US should be doing.

Even so, there is still the question of why that envoy would not inform Senate foreign-policy leaders of his work, especially when he is seeking to become America's chief diplomat. One answer is that the Trump administration probably believes that informing Congress would make the secret negotiations no longer a secret. During the past year's investigation of possible collusion between the Trump campaign and Russia ahead of the 2016 US presidential election, Congress has leaked like a sieve, and many congressional Democrats have made it clear that they will "resist" Trump at every turn. Thus, it was reasonable for Pompeo to fear that knowledge of his secret talks would be leaked in an effort to undermine the summit and deny the administration a potential political victory.

Transparency and accountability are still important American norms. But the history of US diplomacy has shown that secrecy often is essential for success. And besides, the constitution gives the president wide latitude in foreign policy. That is why even some of Menendez's Democratic colleagues, who may oppose Pompeo on policy grounds, cheered the news of his visit to North Korea. As Connecticut Senator Chris Murphy put it, "I'll just be honest with you, I'm glad there is someone at a high level in the Trump administration talking to the North Koreans about what may be the parameters of this meeting."

Murphy is right. There are valid reasons to oppose a nominee for Secretary of State. But a failure to disclose secret preparatory talks for the most important presidential summit of the century is not one of them.

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