

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

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The Role of Media in Independence of Afghanistan

Before going to the main parts of discussion, we need know the term independence is relatively complex and intertwined with various concepts such as politics, economy and culture. Because of this complication there has been various interpretations and understanding in Afghanistan. However, there is a central and common element in all the combinations otherwise the world will become free from its real content and meaning. The central element is a social and political agreement which originates from national will of states and within the framework of that agreement, national sovereignty exercise over geographical boundaries, legitimate defense against foreign aggression, as well as formulation of regular international relations on basis of national interests with other states will become possible.

Meanwhile, we should not forget that meaning of independence has principally changed so far as that no country is fully independent, specially the poor and weak countries. Afghanistan has gone through many ups and downs after it gained its independence on March 3, 1919; from the occupation of Afghanistan by the Russian Red Army to the arrival of international troops in 2001 for fighting against terrorism and establishment of peace and security after the fall of the Taliban Regime. Being in center of world attention in the first decade after fall of Taliban, it not only attracted a lot of international grants but unprecedentedly expanded its relations with international countries.

Now, there is a general question among the citizens; where are we after the independence? In response to this question, may analysts believe that naturally we have not made fundamental differences from the point where we gained independence as both economically and politically we have many problems. On the other hand, we have not been able to create a strong and inclusive national government dominating over all parts of the country. Moreover, we are also stuck in many traditional ideas and understanding; many of the people contend with anything that resemble a mark of alien and unfortunately, do not distinguish between alienation and today's requirements; we should understand that we are in an age that has become known as the era of globalization.

In this era, the national sovereignty globally decreased as a result of states interdependencies though the levels of dependencies are not equal. Accordingly, the boundaries of national governments are disrupted by the communications technology. Therefore, the first important thing is ability of having interaction and utilization from capacities and experiences of the international community. We should not be deceived by some of the concepts that are now depleted from content and nature. In fact, the content of these concepts should be reconsidered, in the light of current changes.

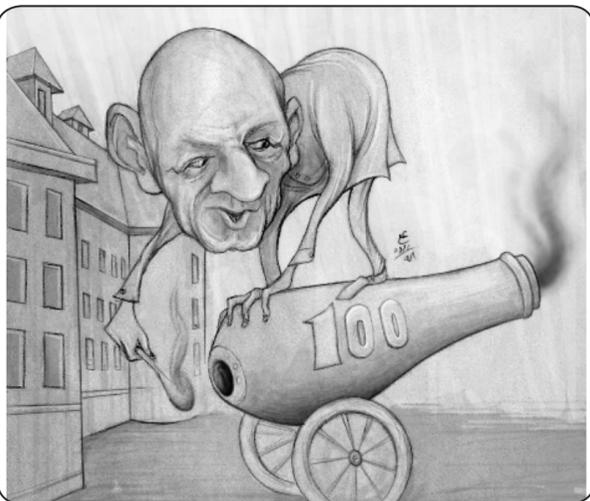
Meanwhile, we should understand that the real factor of independence in Afghanistan was national and global awareness. At national level, the idea of freedom and independence, before King Amanullah Khan, was raised and reflected by Siraj al-Akbar in the country. Consequently, the major achievement of this written media was the gain of independence from the British Indian Government. When Amanullah Khan took the power, the public opinion was ready for the topic of independence, and so he put it at the top of his national agenda. Therefore, we can conclude that the independence of Afghanistan was largely the product of media freedom.

At international level, after World War I and after weakening of the colonialist countries, various waves of liberation ideology swept across the Asian continent. In most Asian countries, including the Ottoman Empire, the movement for liberation and constitutionalism had begun to change autocratic systems to constitutional systems. During this period, different movements of independence were growing and expanding in the colonized countries. As a result of these waves of liberation, many colonies achieved political rights of independence.

The evidence for this fact was his own words at the time of his coronation. When Amanullah put on the royal throne, he declared: "I accept the crown if you cooperate with my thoughts. The government of Afghanistan must be completely independent both from interior and external elements." It is obvious that after this stage a lot changes has occurred especially it was a good time for freedom of expression. All thinkers and writers supported the government, and on the other hand, no one witnessed any media censorship or punishment of journalists.

If we wish to name the achievement of this period, the promotion of press freedom and press law was certainly among the most important ones. The media regulation at this time stipulates the conditions for publishing free journals and press offenses also well-defined. Other notable achievements in this period are serious consideration of women's fundamental rights and freedoms. In this regard, we can talk about the establishment of schools for girls and the launch of a dedicated newspaper for women, entitled "Ershad al-Nuswan" under editor-in-chief of Mr. Tarzi's wife.

The running of newspapers was very important in the traditional society of that time. In fact, the presence of "Ershad al-Nuswan", along with other publications, was a manifestation of modernism and the authority of the modernist forces. It is clear that the multiplicity of publications with relative freedoms of expression, significantly contributed to the cultivation of awareness and libertarian generation. Even, in the years after fall of the Ammani government, a number of these bright minded youths risked their lives to preserve and restore democracy. Many historians believe that the role of press in that period was very prominent in promoting liberty, nationalist, progress and modernist ideas, but media freedom were not supported by all social and political groups.



Is Peace with the Taliban Possible?

By: Amin Saikal

Despite ongoing peace negotiations between the United States and the Taliban, the bloody conflict in Afghanistan continues to take a heavy toll on the country's people. The recent suicide bombing by the Khorasan branch of the Islamic State (IS-K) at a wedding in Kabul, which killed more than 60 and injured close to 200, is a stark reminder of Afghanistan's poor security situation. It also shows that the Taliban are not the only armed opposition fueling the conflict. A US-Taliban peace pact is therefore unlikely to bring any respite.

The US-Taliban negotiations in Doha - in which the Afghan government is not a participant - are comparable to two previous peace processes: the Paris talks that resulted in the January 1973 peace treaty between the US and North Vietnam; and the negotiations that led to the 1988 Geneva Accords, signed by the Afghan and Pakistani governments with the Soviet Union and the US acting as guarantors.

These two agreements were designed to enable the US and the Soviet Union to exit with "honor" from wars they could not win, by bringing about, respectively, the "Vietnamization" and "Afghanization" of those conflicts. Both agreements failed to achieve their objectives.

By 1975, Soviet-backed North Vietnamese forces had overrun South Vietnam, humiliating the US. And in 1992, the US-supported Afghan Islamic resistance forces, the mujahideen, brought about the collapse of the Soviet-installed communist regime in Kabul.

Whereas the North Vietnamese soon succeeded in uniting their country and restoring peace, however, Afghanistan has fared much worse. The socially and politically divided mujahideen soon turned their guns on one another. And Pakistan took the opportunity to advance its regional interests by nurturing the extremist Taliban, who in 1996-98 conquered most of Afghanistan and subjected it to strict theocratic rule.

The Taliban in turn harbored al-Qaeda, which carried out the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the US. That prompted America, backed by its NATO and non-NATO allies, to intervene in Afghanistan the following month with the aim of destroying al-Qaeda and dislodging the Taliban regime. The US-led forces quickly dispersed al-Qaeda's leadership and ended Taliban rule, but failed to defeat either group decisively. The Taliban and elements of al-Qaeda staged a comeback within two years of the US intervention, and have tied down American and allied forces in a low-grade but staggeringly costly insurgency ever since.

Now, after nearly two decades of fighting, US President Donald Trump desperately wants to disentangle America from a seemingly unwinnable war - preferably through a political settlement with the Taliban. Trump's Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation, the Afghan-American Zalmay Khalilzad, has been engaged since September 2018 in shuttle diplomacy, in an eerie parallel with the unsuccessful efforts of then-US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger to bring about peace in the Middle East following the 1973 Arab-Israeli War.

Khalilzad has just begun his ninth round of negotiations with Taliban representatives in Doha. Separately, he has had numerous meetings with the Afghan government and non-governmental leaders, as well as with regional and international actors - but not Iran, with which the US is locked in a cycle of deepening hostility.

He has focused on four interrelated objectives: a timetable for the exit of all foreign troops currently in Afghanistan; a commitment from the Taliban to prevent hostile acts being launched against the US from Afghan soil; direct negotiations between the Taliban and the Afghan government, which the Taliban regard as "illegitimate" and a "puppet"; and a ceasefire across Afghanistan.

But although Khalilzad may finally manage to reach agreement with the Taliban regarding the first two aims, there is no guarantee that America's partner in the peace talks will help to realize the remaining two. The Afghan government's weakness and internal divisions would give the Taliban the upper hand in any power-sharing arrangement, particularly after US and allied forces have left. And it is very doubtful that the Taliban, whether in power or as a partner in power, would be able to control other armed opposition groups, most importantly IS-K, or enlist the support of a cross-section of Afghanistan's diverse population.

The Taliban are ethnic Pashtuns, hailing specifically from the Ghilzai tribe to which Afghan President Ashraf Ghani and many around him belong. Neither the Ghilzais nor the rival Durrani tribe of former President Hamid Karzai are much trusted by non-Pashtun ethnic groups, who (though themselves divided) collectively form the largest share of Afghanistan's population. To complicate matters further, all Afghan ethnic groups have extensive cross-border ties with the country's neighbors.

Meanwhile, IS-K has loyalty to no one inside Afghanistan. The group became operational in 2015 and is said to have about 2,000 fighters (including some Taliban defectors), who are dedicated to creating disruption and chaos. They have been responsible for horrific attacks across Afghanistan, especially in Kabul and mostly on civilian targets. Any withdrawal of US and allied forces during Trump's current term, whether phased or otherwise, must be based on conditions on the ground. Otherwise, the consequences will be disastrous. Because of the way the peace process and the situation in Afghanistan have evolved, a hasty foreign-troop withdrawal would lead to a fiasco similar to those generated by the earlier Soviet retreat from the country and by the US withdrawal from Vietnam.

To avoid such a catastrophe, the US and its allies need to remain in Afghanistan for at least another decade. But Trump is in a hurry, and thinks that a strong CIA presence in the country will manage to do what Western forces have been unable to achieve. More likely than not, that will prove to be wishful thinking.

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Managing the Next Gold Rush

By: Sharon E. Burke

The International Seabed Authority (ISA) sits perched above the concrete boardwalk of Jamaica's Kingston Harbor, across the bay from the spot where "Calico Jack" Rackham was once gibbeted as a warning to other eighteenth-century pirates. Today, this small United Nations agency rules the high seas - or, more precisely, the seafloor some three miles below - and yet it is largely unknown to the general public. But if China decides to retaliate against US import tariffs by restricting its exports of rare-earth elements, that could change fast.

Some 71% of the Earth's surface is actually underwater, and the seafloor (or seabed) is rich in rare-earth elements and other sought-after minerals - especially in deep international waters. The ISA manages the mineral rights of more than 50% of the world's deep ocean floor, and its 168 member states have the right to vie for access to the resources there. But, given the risk of catastrophic environmental consequences, all countries could lose out if this contest proceeds without due care.

Undersea minerals tend to be clustered in potato-shaped chunks of rock nestled on abyssal plains, vented in boiling-hot water from fissures in the seafloor, and crusted along the flanks of extinct underwater volcanoes called seamounts. Generally, the concentrations of minerals in these formations are much higher than in ores on dry land.

Yet even with all that wealth, the only active seafloor mining project in the world right now is off the coast of Papua New Guinea, and it is currently stalled because of financial problems. That reflects how difficult and expensive it still is to operate in the dark, freezing, and high-pressure deep-sea environment, more than 80% of which remains unmapped and unexplored.

Nonetheless, both commercial organizations and ocean scientists think new technologies will make deep-ocean mining all but inevitable within the next decade. A range of innovations, such as better satellite imaging of the ocean floor and robot submersibles, is improving seabed access. Moreover, digital-age technologies and the global clean-energy transition are driving a sharp increase in demand for materials that are abundant in the deep ocean. In addition to rare-earth elements, these include cobalt, manganese, and tellurium, which are used in a growing number of applications, including batteries, magnetic resonance equipment, solar panels, and guidance systems for munitions.

Competition for these increasingly useful materials was heating up even before the recent escalation of Sino-American trade tensions. China has a comparative advantage in critical minerals, owing to its significant domestic resources and extensive processing facilities. It also has long-standing investments in other major producing countries such as the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), which accounts for about 65% of global cobalt production and half of total reserves.

The United States, by contrast, must import many high-tech minerals. Accordingly, the US government recently deemed 35 minerals critical

to the country's economic and national security, and announced a new strategy calling for increased domestic mining, among other measures. In terms of seabed resources, there is no contest between these two geopolitical rivals. China is expected to fare well next year when the ISA issues a new mining code and begins its first-ever permit process for mineral exploitation in international waters. But America will not even be at the table, because it is not a party to the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (and thus is not officially represented at the ISA). A small clique of US senators has long blocked accession to the treaty for obscure ideological reasons, an idiosyncrasy that America may soon decide it can ill afford.

With or without US companies in the mix, economic progress is not a free ride. Recovering and refining the raw materials needed for digital technologies and clean energy inevitably has environmental consequences. All mining - including the noxious process of extracting minerals from rocks - is destructive, and it is too soon to tell if deep-ocean mining is more or less destructive than mining on land.

What looks at first like a barren and forbidding wasteland is actually the largest biome on the planet, populated by fantastical creatures such as the anglerfish, vampire squid, and ancient corals that have been around since the Bronze Age. A recent University of Hawaii-led exploration of the Clarion-Clipperton Zone, a vast international underwater territory stretching from Hawaii to Mexico, documented a plethora of deep-sea flora and fauna, more than half of which were entirely new to science.

Researchers have also recently discovered that microbial organisms in the deep ocean may play an important part in regulating Earth's climate. Some of these formations and organisms have taken millions of years to accrue; disturbing them, or even covering them in the sediment that mining would kick up, could permanently destroy them. Little is known about the role these species and deep-ocean microbes play in fisheries, the global climate, and other ecosystem processes that support both marine and terrestrial life.

The international community should aim to secure the best, least destructive supply of the minerals it needs, whether from the DRC or the deep ocean - or likely both. We should at least identify and understand the tradeoffs before crucial decisions are made, so as to weigh the possible consequences before they become irrevocable. Clearly, China and the US (if it can be persuaded to step off the sidelines) must play a leading role in this effort.

When the Industrial Revolution began, no one could have known that climate change would be one of its end results. But in the digital age, the world must be much more environmentally aware when tapping the deep-ocean mineral riches.

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