

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



December 05, 2016

After Heart of Asia Conference

At the end of Heart of Asia Conference in Amritsar, India, 14 regional countries, that are the members of the process, adopted a declaration and called for an immediate end to all forms of terrorism and its financial support. The participating countries agreed upon the "gravity of the security situation in Afghanistan in particular and the region and the high level of violence caused by the Taliban, terrorist groups including Daesh and its affiliates, the Haqqani Network, al-Qaeda, Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, East Turkistan Islamic Movement, Lashkar-e-Taiba, Jaish-e-Mohammad, TTP, Jamaat-ul-Ahrar, Jundullah and other foreign terrorist fighters." It is really threatening to see amassing of terrorism within Afghanistan with each passing day. It is the time in Afghanistan when the scenario should be going through improvements and efforts should be made to stabilize the situation.

The coming few years are really very important and will decide the future of the country. The real transition is going on; there are great changes expected and if Afghanistan's socio-political scenario is not grounded on stable footings, expectation for a peaceful and prosperous Afghanistan would be just a wool-gathering. There has been increase in the last few months in the different forms of insurgency; and people from different factions have been targeted. The number of attacks on both the Afghan forces and civilian has increased; and there are different indications in the form of conservative and violating practices throughout the country that show that Talibanization is on the rise and will keep on rising unless somber efforts are made to control the drift. The support of the regional countries stands paramount in this regard.

Though the regional countries promisingly declared, "We demand an immediate end to all forms of terrorism, as well as all support to it, including financing of terrorism. We recognize that terrorism is the biggest threat to peace, stability and cooperation in our region. We encourage the international community to continue to assist the Government of Afghanistan. We strongly call for concerted regional and international cooperation to ensure elimination of terrorism, in all its forms and manifestations, including dismantling of terrorist sanctuaries and safe havens in the Heart of Asia region, as well as disrupting all financial, tactical and logistical support for terrorism. In this regard, we call upon all states to take action against these terrorist entities in accordance with their respective national counter terrorism policies, their international obligations and the UN Global Counter Terrorism Strategy 2006. Furthermore, we encourage early finalization of the Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism with consensus."

However, it remains of utmost importance that the countries must pursue their promises with honesty and determination. Because with the deterioration of peace and tranquility in Afghanistan there are dangers that terrorism may continue and it will ultimately influence all the regional countries. More importantly, the terrorism has to be rooted out because of the fact that it has been influencing the lives of the common people of Afghanistan to a great extent. Innocent civilians have paid a very heavy price for the prevailing conditions. They are basically the ones who have been suffering and may suffer to a further extent if instability and terrorism prevail in the country. It is really pathetic to see the civilians losing their lives when they have nothing to do with the war. As wars and clashes for decades have torn certain parts of the country and incapacitated the infra-structure in Afghanistan, people have not only suffered the hardships of the poor and miserable lives but also the horrors of war.

One of the reasons of the rise and swelling wave of terrorism is because of the indications that Taliban have been able to grow largely in the recent few years. The transition period, instead of pointing towards progress and improvement, seems to be going the other way. In fact the overall process of transition does not seem to be working well. This period did not have to be only a transfer of security responsibility from international forces to Afghan forces, rather it should have been comprehensive enough to include within its folds the overall political and economic stability and better life opportunities for all the Afghan people.

Nevertheless, there should be efforts both from the regional countries and the international community as per their promises to change the circumstance in Afghanistan in true sense. Eradication of terrorism stands as the top priority matter and the real transition period should make the country move towards a terrorism free country, and make efforts for better governance, justice and rule of law. The post transition period in Afghanistan has to be a period that can give poverty stricken Afghan people their basic requirements; provide them better representation and participation in political and social life; make them capable of governing themselves appropriately.



The Little Heroine

By Hujjatullah Zia

A woman dressed in a simple yellow dress was gazing out the window. The twinkling stars filled her eyes with a gleam of hope. Perhaps, she was waiting for the morning to see the rays of the Sun. She stood there, deep in thought. The dark days of war and bloodshed and stark realities of women's misery flashed through her mind. The pains and sufferings of Afghan women embittered her more than anything else. She was still staring at the starry sky without breathing a word or knowing about the time.

Women's confinement within the cultural restrictions and patriarchal system put her under mental pressure. She dreamed of going to school and walking out in the open the same as boys. Working in the kitchen or cleaning vegetable - as her small brother sold in the bazaar - twenty-four/seven tired her very much. She wished nothing could hamper her progress. In fact, there are many social and cultural barriers in Afghanistan that curtail women's freedoms and a number of girls, mainly in tribal belts, take the desire of going to school to the grave with them. Women are deemed an inferior creature and treated as a pariah in some Taliban-dominated areas, where traditional customs hold strong sway.

The radical interpretation of religious texts and parochial mindsets are the hotbed of restrictive traditions and violent practices imposed on Afghan women. After all, three decades of war took their toll on women and paved the grounds for violence against them. In a nutshell, domestic violence and social discriminations against Afghan women are deeply embedded in our culture and they are practiced widely despite the downfall of the Taliban's regime.

She longed to breathe a sigh of relief and break the chains of slavery from her feet. She wished not to be discriminated on the basis of her sex anymore. The pains and sufferings of Afghan women kept her engrossed. Streams of tear must have rolled down her cheeks, don't you think so?

I have no idea but it was the story of 18-year-old girl Shakila, who pictured her life, and I watched the pictures in the art therapy in a seminar. In the second picture, the woman moved to the door with a sense of hope to change her destiny - it was morning and rays of the Sun revealed the fact that 'every cloud has a silver lining'. In her dream picture, which was about freedom, a teenage boy and girl were sitting in the open pointing to the moon, which is believed to reflect the freedom of choosing life-partner. Ill-fatedly, a number of girls are forced to get married with the men of their parents' choice, in our society, and live their whole life under the same roof. Shakila wished no one could channel her emotions under duress. In

the next picture, a school was on fire and two school girls were shedding bitter tears about the incident. This picture jogged the memory of the Taliban's regime when the girls' schools were burnt down and corrosive acid was sprayed on the faces of school girls.

Although the painter intended to state the story of her own life through art therapy, but her paintings unfolded the actual story of Afghan women. In spite of democratic discourse in the post-Taliban Afghanistan and approving a constitution based on democracy, Afghan women suffer in one way or another. Irrational traditions prevail in many parts of the country and women are deprived of their basic rights. In other words, they are highly vulnerable to social, cultural and political challenges. The nascent democracy failed to alleviate their anguish or heal their bleeding wound, which was the product of three decades of war and profound influence of traditional mindsets. Constitutionally, men and women are entitled equally and the government is supposed to protect their rights and liberty regardless of their gender. However, the government has not done enough to empower women or protect their rights based on the Constitution. Therefore, domestic and social violence against Afghan women lingers up to now. Being left at the mercy of discrimination and violence, Afghan women will hardly show tendency towards social, cultural and political activities and their role will be reduced, to a great extent, in such arenas.

It is an unmistakable fact that cultural norms surpass law in Afghanistan and a large number of people practice upon their local culture without knowing a single fact about law. For instance, there are still tribal councils in villages that issue decree about the locals, especially about the women's issues, in the realm of their influence without referring to courts. The desert courts, run by tribal elders, reveal the same fact. On the other hand, there is a sense of mistrust between state and nation. Since a large number of Afghan women are illiterate, they are unable to take their case to the court and there is hardly anyone to advocate their rights. Moreover, woman cannot dare confide in a police. Referring her case to the court, a woman was called "prostitute" by a police.

Shakila plays her role through reflecting the facts about Afghan women via paintings and I call her the little heroine. There is no shoulder for Afghan women to cry on and they will have to raise their voice against the status quo and play their role for the betterment of their own future. It is hoped that the rights and dignity of Afghan women be held in high esteem across the country.

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The Last Stand Against Populism

By Dominique Moisi

There was a time, immediately after German reunification in 1990, when many French feared Germany. Today, the roles are reversed. But Germans are not afraid so much of France as for it. In the wake of June's Brexit referendum in the United Kingdom and Donald Trump's triumph earlier this month in the United States' presidential election, France, too, could fall victim to destructive populist forces, if voters choose the far-right National Front's Marine Le Pen as their next president.

Germans may be pleased to see Chancellor Angela Merkel referred to by American media as "the liberal West's last defender" - an island of stability in an ocean of chaos. But it is one thing to be described as the best pupil in class - Germany is used to that; it is quite another to feel like the only pupil showing up at all.

With the US out, there are indeed few decent pupils left. Though Trump has backed away from some of his more radical campaign promises, he is unlikely to drop his "America first" approach; as a result, the US may be about to break decisively with the universalism and global engagement that has characterized the last 70 years.

The situation is no better in Europe. Poland is following in Hungary's illiberal footsteps. Austria, another German neighbor, may well be about to elect the far-right nationalist Freedom Party's Norbert Hofer as president. And the British are on their way out of the European Union altogether.

Yet none of this will be as destabilizing for Germany as a Le Pen presidency in France. A Le Pen victory would amount to abandonment not just of Germany, but also of the values, principles, and norms that have enabled Germany to reconcile with itself and its neighbors, beginning with France. It would sever the Franco-German axis around which the EU rotates. What is needed now is precisely the opposite: a reset of Franco-German relations. The reality is that Germany and France have not played in the same league for a while. It is not that Germany has become too strong, as it may have seemed in the post-reunification period, but rather that France has become too weak, leaving Germany to lead the way in addressing Europe's myriad crises in recent years.

Now, Germany is widely viewed as Europe's hegemon. It was in Merkel's hands that US President Barack Obama placed the torch of democracy following Trump's victory, during his final official tour of Europe.

But Merkel cannot carry that torch alone. France must stand with Germany, shoulder to shoulder, as it once did. For that to happen, France must be as tall, strong, confident, and present as Germany. It must renew itself, guided by its own long-

held values - values that Le Pen and her National Front do not share.

France does not need to match Germany's economic might. What it can offer nowadays is at least as important. With Europe facing a combination of external threats, such as turmoil in the Middle East and Russian adventurism, and internal challenges, such as homegrown terrorism, security and defense cannot take a backseat to economic policy. And, in these areas, France has real comparative advantages.

Given the risks confronting Europe, not to mention Trump's isolationist tendencies, the Franco-German relationship will assume greater regional and global importance. With Le Pen in charge, that relationship will almost certainly suffer, driving events in a dangerous direction.

To be sure, France's two-round voting system, which ensures that the president obtains the support of a majority of voters, makes it extremely unlikely that a radical candidate like Le Pen can take power. (By contrast, in the US, Trump received more than two million fewer votes than his opponent, and George W. Bush lost the popular vote to Al Gore in 2000 by more than a half-million.)

But, given the electoral upsets that have taken place lately, Germans will probably not be reassured until after the votes are counted. After all, if Le Pen does manage to succeed in France's run-off system, she will gain a strong and genuine mandate to implement policies that controvert everything post-war Germany - and, indeed, the EU - is supposed to stand for. Of course, Germany has its own political challenges to overcome, with federal elections set for next October. Recent state elections indicated a popular mood that is suspicious of openness, particularly to refugees, with the National Front's German counterpart, the Alternative for Germany, making large strides in some regions.

If Germany is to remain the pillar of stability that it has been in recent years, it must avoid going any farther down that path, and instead deliver a fourth premiership to Merkel. Fortunately, that scenario remains likely, though far from guaranteed. In any case, France's political trajectory will be decided well before Germany's. To ensure a safe and prosperous future, French voters must support a person of authority, wisdom, and experience, who is willing and able to undertake urgently needed reforms without exacerbating social divisions - someone wholly unlike Marine Le Pen.

In doing so, they would prove that the current wave of right-wing populism can be resisted. And they would give the European project a real shot at continued success. (Courtesy Project Syndicate)

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