

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



December 05, 2017

Embracing True Democracy

Since the best form of democracy is by and through the people, it is important that the people who live within democratic societies must have an active role within the making, sustenance and development of democracy. Democracy is not possible without people, but it is not strong without vigilant and active citizens who both understand the demands and the challenges of democracy but also play an active part in the affairs of the state. This participation should be both at individual and institutional levels.

Strong democracies have always had strong institutions. The institutions that are not run by the whims of the individuals but the ones that guarantee the collective objectives and wellbeing. The basic institutions that can ensure proper democracy are the ones that are part of judiciary, legislature, executive and media. These institutions should ensure that they perform their duties by prioritizing the democratic values and principles and they contribute in the nourishment of democratic culture. If these institutions favor the interests of certain individuals or the group of individuals, they can never support in strengthening democracy.

At the individual level, the most important prerequisite is that the people must bring change in their behavior and attitude. A democratic behavior is largely based on the art of proper speaking and the patience to listen carefully. Democracy supports the freedom of expression and allows everyone to say what they want to say. In democracy, we basically accept the sort of environment wherein we can be opposed openly. Those people who support democracy fundamentally want that the issues should be solved through dialogue and reasoning not through violence. They want that the opposite reasons should be listened to sufficiently and the claims should always be reconsidered.

Within democracy, as an essential element, we need to develop the preparedness to accept that the truth may not be with us and it may be with others. Democracy is never suitable for those who believe that their views are absolute and final and they do not have the patience to listen others. That is the basic reason that Taliban do not favor democracy. They believe that only their ideas and thoughts are correct, while all others have 'false' and 'non-Islamic' ideas and thoughts.

It is really vital to understand this basic truth that the absolute truth has never been known by the people. Yes, certain aspects of a complete truth have been known and people have to compromise with the same. These aspects are present within different circles. Within the circle of politics, the aspect of truth lies within a system which considers the welfare of the people as its basic pillar. And, democracy strives to establish the sort of circumstances that are suitable to guarantee welfare of the people.

Though we have had considerable strides towards democracy, yet there are many behavioral issues that we need to deal with. We have dishonesty in our intentions and extremism in our actions. The difference in opinion and thoughts are dealt through intolerance and even violence. Mahatma Gandhi had said that intolerance is itself a form of violence and an obstacle to the growth of a true democratic spirit. Our statements have taken the shape of threats. Some people have even started the attitude of calling others with different opinions as non-Muslims and infidels.

The true spirit of democracy can only be found in the theories and promises; therefore, the people do not see the true practice of it and are ambiguous about it. This is really unfortunate that at this instance of hope and great expectations, we are suffering from these problems; yet, we do not have to be disheartened. Acquiring a true and stable democracy is a difficult task and it requires a lengthy process of evolution. The great democracies in the world have been able to achieve their distinct positions only after many decades of political evolution. We, therefore, require giving it time and never give up struggling for it.

If we really like democracy and democratic values, we would require making its prerequisites possible. We would need to feel our responsibility in order to lead our country towards true democracy; otherwise, the dream of democracy may shatter and we will not be able to recreate it.

Though the roles of government and the people are vital within a democratic system, most of the responsibilities go to those leaders and religious scholars who have great influence in forming the opinion and the attitude of the people.

They need to understand that instead of sowing the seeds of hatred and intolerance in the minds and hearts of the people, they can spread love and tolerance and they can really participate in forming an environment that is suitable for democracy. Thus, the dream of a stable and well-developed democratic system can change to reality in our country if there are honest and dedicated efforts at both individual and institutional levels – efforts that are not aligned with the personal benefits but support the democratic principle and democratic values.



Terrorism Remains a Serious Issue

By Hujjatullah Zia

Afghan nation paid heavy sacrifices in combating terrorism. The militant fighters, mainly the Taliban and self-styled Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), carried out indiscriminate attacks. Scores of selfless soldiers who were killed in protecting the rights and dignity of nation and their homeland left their spouses and children behind, which has not only filled them with an outpouring of grief but also left them with great sufferings.

The heroic rehearsals and selfless acts of Afghans soldiers in terms of combating terrorism is really jaw-dropping. They played their role in the best possible way with the hope of safeguarding the rights and freedoms of all individuals and building a society where all could exercise their rights freely and respect one another on the basis of being human. Afghan soldiers had their blood shed to save the blood of others from being spilled by terrorists. They fought with high ambition. They donated their blood to the society to strengthen democracy and form a civil society, which are stated in constitution.

Fighting terrorism is a global objective and the sacrifices made by one nation will affect the global security. For instance, a peaceful Afghanistan will contribute to regional peace and prosperity and vice versa. NATO's top commander in Afghanistan said that Afghan security forces were fighting for the security of their own people as well as the world. He further added that NATO troops would firmly fight shoulder to shoulder with their Afghan partners to counter the scourge of terrorism and stabilize the war-devastated country.

Despite the sacrifices made by Afghan soldiers in combating terrorism, militancy remains a serious issue in the country. After losing ground in Iraq and Syria, the ISIL is most likely to extend its realm in the region, particularly in Afghanistan. Although Afghan President Muhammad Ashraf Ghani said that the ISIL is on the run, it has again come to limelight seeking to wage more serious war against Afghan soldiers. Afghanistan has been one of the ISIL's target after Iraq and Syria and sought to build a stronghold in restive provinces. Being pledged loyalty by some members of the Taliban after the death of Mullah Omar, the ISIL gained foothold in the country and killed some members of ethnic minority groups for two reasons: First to display its footstep in the country. Second, to spread fear in public air. Observing the extremely cruel practices of ISIL in Afghanistan, people were taken aback. This group seemed far

more cruel and aggressive than the Taliban. When it was said that ISIL's loyalists beheaded some members of the Taliban, a strong sense of fear spread across the country and the public believed that ISIL would show no mercy to others, if not to Taliban. The Taliban and ISIL have many things in common. For example, both warring factions carry out terrorist activities, fight against government, kill civilians, and interpret Islamic Sharia in a radical manner.

Notwithstanding these common points, there were bloody battles between the two terrorist groups.

To mitigate militancy and defeat ISIL in the country, Afghan government has intensified its attacks. Addressing the 7th Ministerial Conference in Baku, Afghan President said that the government carried out heavy attacks, including 300 airstrikes, against the ISIL group. He added that the ISIL had failed in building a base for their so-called caliphate in Afghanistan. ISIL was on the run in Nangarhar, Kunar and other provinces and nine provinces had been cleared from the ISIL he insisted, saying the insurgent outfit will wipe out. On the other hand, Ghani called terrorism a serious threat to international peace and security, not just to Afghanistan, stressing the need for unified global action to eliminate the scourge.

Earlier, a global study by the Institute for Peace and Economics has ranked Afghanistan the 2nd worst country, out of 163, in terms of terrorism in the world. The Global Terrorism Index (GTI) put Iraq at number one and Afghanistan at number two, followed by Nigeria, Syria, Pakistan and Yemen – in that order. Based on the report, Afghanistan had the second highest number of deaths from terrorism in 2016. According to the report, the ISIL group continued to be active in Afghanistan in 2016. The group undertook 51 attacks that killed 505 people. This is a significant escalation from 2015 when 120 people were killed by the group.

To sum up, Afghan people bear the brunt of militancy since terrorist groups carry out indiscriminate attacks. The graph of fatalities is as high as ever and war continues unabated. Within the two past years, Afghan soldiers sustained heavy casualties leaving their families behind. They fought with bona fide intention to bring peace and stability in the country and region. It is self-explanatory that only Afghan government is not able to defeat terrorists. Therefore, the world needs to fight against terrorism so as to secure the region. Otherwise, militancy will continue and people's sufferings will not come to an end.

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Europe's Crisis Starts at Home

By Mark Leonard

Deep divisions within Europe are increasingly threatening the values upon which the European project of "ever closer union" is based. In 2015, during the refugee crisis, many commentators saw a divide between German Chancellor Angela Merkel's Willkommenskultur (welcoming culture) and Hungarian Prime Minister Victor Orbán's vision of ethnic purity: a Western Europe of bridges versus an Eastern Europe of walls.

But another threat to European unity comes from within individual countries. In Germany, talks to form a center-left, center-right coalition have broken down. In the Netherlands, it took Prime Minister Mark Rutte 208 days to form a new government after elections in March. In the United Kingdom, the political establishment is in disarray over Brexit. And in Poland, white nationalists and neo-Nazis recently staged a massive march through the streets of Warsaw.

Which gulfs are wider – those between member states or those within them? The answer to that question matters a great deal. If Europe's biggest problem is that it is divided along national borders, then liberal-leaning countries like France and Germany could try to change the balance of power within increasingly illiberal countries.

Every EU country agreed to a set of liberal-democratic standards (part of the so-called Copenhagen Criteria) when it joined the club. But, over time, the governments of Hungary and Poland have decided that they no longer want to abide by the rules. One solution could be to create a smaller club with better benefits. Countries that wish to join this privileged inner circle would have to agree to a new – or rather, the original – set of rules; and countries that break the rules would be left out. There would finally be a cost to breaching EU standards. But this solution could work only if the biggest problem is the divide between member states.

As for the divisions within member states, consider Germany. After the federal election in September, Merkel embarked on a fascinating experiment, in which she tried to unite her center-right Christian Democratic Union (CDU), its more nativist sister party, the Christian Social Union (CSU), the pro-business Free Democrats (FDP), and the left-wing Greens.

Merkel is a talented negotiator, and far better suited to write about "the art of the deal" than others we won't bother mentioning. But it remains to be seen if she can heal the divisions in her own country.

While the Greens would like to uphold the Willkommenskultur, the CSU's position on migration is closer to that of the Visegrád Group (the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia). In fact, at the height of the refugee crisis in 2015, the CSU hosted Orbán at one of its party conferences.

Moreover, while the Greens are European federalists who support greater economic solidarity with Greece and Italy, the FDP channels the fiscal discipline of the Finns, the Dutch, and German Swabians. They are staunchly opposed to deeper European economic integration.

Many hoped that Merkel would succeed in forging a "Jamaica"

ca" coalition (named after the colors of that country's flag). But, in the end, the experiment failed. The FDP abandoned the talks out of frustration that, as its leader Christian Lindner put it, "The four discussion partners have no common vision for modernization of the country or common basis of trust."

Even without a Jamaica coalition, Germany still has a stable liberal majority in the Bundestag. The same cannot be said for the rest of the EU, where almost every other member state is now a "50-50 society": half cosmopolitan, half communitarian. In these countries, the government at any given time represents whichever side won the latest round in an ongoing culture war.

In the UK, for example, 52% of voters opted to leave the EU. The country is now hurtling toward an isolated state of provincialism and xenophobia, but its leaders keep telling the public that Britain will be better off on its own. For those who believe it, the fact that the UK will lose a say in EU decisions affecting its economic environment doesn't seem to matter.

France, on the other hand, has an energetic new pro-European president, Emmanuel Macron, who is committed to preparing his country for the years ahead. And yet France is not much more cosmopolitan than Britain. In the first round of the presidential election this spring, the nativist campaigns of Marine Le Pen, Jean-Luc Mélenchon, and Nicolas Dupont-Aignan collectively won 46% of the vote – almost as much as the UK's "Leave" campaign.

Clearly, the EU is both a society of states and of citizens. That means intra-national divides are as important as the diplomatic spats between countries.

Earlier this year, a Brookings Institution report tried to determine if Europe is an "optimal political area," a concept borrowed from economist Robert Mundell's theory of "optimal currency areas." The report concluded that cultural and institutional differences between EU countries have not changed much over the past three decades of European integration. But it also found that the divisions between countries are far smaller than the differences within countries. Or in other words, on the issue of freedom of movement, there is greater polarization between London and the British Midlands than between the UK and Poland.

Creating a flexible or multi-tiered Europe could solve some short-term problems, by bringing together coalitions of the willing to address specific issues. But it could also introduce new dangers. After all, most European countries, regardless of what tier they are on, will still be 50-50 societies that could opt in or out of deeper integration with a single election or referendum. In the future, one cannot rule out the possibility that Le Pen will be elected president of France, or that the anti-EU Five Star Movement will come to power in Italy. By the same token, the more moderate Civic Platform might return to power in Poland. Confronting the intra-societal challenge to the European project will not be easy. It is a deep, generational problem that goes to the heart of national identity, history, and geography. No quick institutional fix can solve a problem like that. (Courtesy Project Syndicate)

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