

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



December 13, 2016

Superstitions are Misleading

Human beings possess different sorts of ideas, beliefs and feelings, which have their different sources. Not all the thoughts and beliefs are based on rationality and logic.

There are many beliefs and thoughts that are the outcome of the traditions and upbringing. And, then there are many others that are largely influenced by emotions and feelings. Thus, all the thoughts and beliefs are not rational and logical.

Though, it is not something unusual to see irrational or illogical thoughts and beliefs within our societies, but sometimes, these illogical thoughts and beliefs give rise to many serious issues and therefore, they become problematic. Many of such thoughts are now the part of different sorts of superstitions that influence different societies in various ways.

Superstitions are illogical and irrational and they are based on beliefs which are supernatural and not necessarily governed by physical laws. They basically try to prognosticate the happenings in daily life on the basis of certain incidents that have already occurred. In this way the result of a particular happening or incident is necessitated by an earlier happening not based on the theory of cause and effect and they, in scientific interpretations, are much apart from each other. The clear example of a superstition is an omen. For example, if a black cat crosses your way it is considered a bad omen and is believed to bring bad luck, though in logical sense both the mentioned incident and its result are not related to each other clearly. Superstitions exist in most of the cultures of the world. They are able to make their way through the generations as a part of inherited beliefs. Superstitions are also linked with the religions, but they are not the production of religions. However, there are superstitions existing in most of the religions of the world. Further, the religious people are more likely to accept the superstitions than the non-religious people.

One of the basic reasons of the transmission of superstitions and their survival is through the sanctity that is preserved for traditional values and the interests that are maintained for the folk stories and legends. In addition, there is a tendency in most of the people not to question the superstitions that are transferred to them.

At the same time it must also be kept in mind that most of the superstitions are taught to the people as a part of their nourishment, while they are too small to differentiate between what is logical and what is not. So, they are already inculcated in them by the time they become young. It can also be observed that superstitions are more common in backward societies that are marked with religious fundamentalism and hard-line traditional values. Superstitions may affect people in different ways. First of all the most dominating impact of superstitions is that it keeps the people away from finding out the real cause of a particular happening. Relying on the given interpretations of the happenings they do not strive for the truth and remain unbothered. This does not guarantee any struggle for their part for the improvement of their ideas and the eradication of false ideas from society. Moreover, the minds that believe in superstitions can be easily utilized by those who have their business based on such superstitious beliefs. Afghan society is a kind of society that is marked with extremist religious beliefs and traditional values. There is great shortage of analytical way of thinking in ordinary life. Most of the Afghan people do not bother to challenge the superstitious ideas that are transferred to them from their ancestors. They believe on them blindly and even suggest others and their next generations to keep them intact.

Afghan women in particular are overwhelmingly influenced by the superstitions. Because of their limited exposure to the external world and modern thinking their sets of beliefs are dominantly marked with superstitions. The dominating role of superstitions in Afghan society provides a golden chance to those who know how to utilize them to earn money. Traditional Mullahs in this regard play a dominant role. They hijack the superstitious thinking and keep on filling their pockets. We can find a lot of people in our society seeking for the services of Mullahs for making their present problems disappear or guaranteeing a prosperous future. Moreover, there are not many people who dare to question whether such acts are religious or not. Superstitions are undoubtedly illogical and take us away from reality, making us create a world of imaginations where things happen on the basis of false interpretations. Superstitions should be completely neglected and must be questioned seriously, especially in the societies like Afghanistan. Our people need to have proper understanding of the matters concerning their life and society and have to carry out necessary measures to curb them. They have to develop a thorough approach, wherein they have to challenge the superstitious beliefs that are transmitted to them from different sources, most of which are untrustworthy.

They also have to keep in mind that superstitions are not appreciated by religion Islam. Islam has clearly asked human beings to think appropriately before forming a belief. There are three stages in Islam that a Muslim has to go through before establishing firm beliefs. They are IIm-ul-Yaqin, AIn-ul-Yaqin and Haq-ul-Yaqin. It is important to keep them in consideration while forming our beliefs.



The Fruition and Futility of Political Wrestling

By Hujjatullah Zia

The war on terror was ushered in following the 9/11 incident, to dismantle al-Qaeda and to deny it a safe base of operations in Afghanistan by removing the Taliban from power. The United Kingdom was the key ally of the United States, offering support for military action from the start of preparations for the invasion. In August 2003, NATO became involved as an alliance, taking the helm of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). With the increased attacks against militancy, the Taliban regime collapsed and insurgency lulled in the country. The guerilla fighters seemed to be on the verge of defeat – Afghan nation hoped to breathe a sigh of relief in a country free of violence and bloodshed.

The Constitution of Afghanistan was adopted based on democracy to build a civil society in which the rights and dignity of the individuals were protected. Freedom from want and fear was believed to be exercised by men and women across the country. The air was filled with a sense of hope and women could step out without chaperon. The presidential election on 2014 heralded democratic administrations, especially when a woman's name, Masouda Jalal, was also on the list of the candidates – it was a great milestone in the history of Afghanistan. Moreover, the Constitution underlines the fundamental rights of men and women irrespective of their race, color and sex. In other words, the presidential and provincial elections were deemed as a "celebration of democracy" and a large number of men and women flocked to ballot boxes.

The public believed that the downfall of the Taliban's regime would pave the ground for all democratic practices and the life and liberty of people would be held in great esteem. The war on terror which led to a lull in militancy filled the nation with confidence and women took high steps in social and political activities. Sadly, the nation's dream did not come true as the Taliban guerillas reorganized and resumed militancy. Violence and bloodshed were restarted and curtailed the freedoms of men and women. Life turned cheap as it was during the Taliban's regime and women lost their confidence to a great extent.

After 15 years of political wrestling and spending millions of dollars in Afghanistan, Barack Obama states that the situation in Afghanistan is still tough. However, he also believes that his administration had been instrumental in dismantling the Al Qaeda terrorist network. "We surged our efforts along with our allies in Afghanistan, which allowed us to focus on dismantling Al-Qaeda and give the Afghan government the opportunity to succeed. And this focus on Al-Qaeda, the most dangerous threat to the United States at the time, paid dividends," he is cited as saying. In fact, terrorism remains a serious threat to Afghan nation and

the war on terror did not give the desired result. The graph of civilian casualties, caused by insurgency and terrorism, is high and the violation of human rights is practiced in every nook and cranny of the country. The Taliban have intensified their offensives, mainly with the establishment of the National Unity Government (NUG), under the leadership of Haibatullah Akhundza. Democracy seems to be moribund as social, political and economic challenges increase. As a result of unmitigated insurgency, half a million Afghans have been, reportedly, displaced in the past ten months. According to UNAMA, 56 percent of those displaced are children and teenagers, 23 percent are men and 22 percent women. Furthermore, scores of Afghan youths migrated to foreign countries to escape the security crisis and economic stagnation. In a nutshell, brain drain is a highly critical issue and an irreparable loss for the state and nation.

After all, the militancy has been compounded with the emergence of the self-proclaimed Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). Currently, it is not only the Taliban fighters who pose threat to Afghanistan but also many warring factions, mainly the ISIL group. According to the public belief, the loyalists to the ISIL spilled the blood of members of ethnic minority groups on the basis of their racial and religious backgrounds and sought to stoke sectarian violence in Afghanistan.

The US President-elect Donald Trump has given few details of his foreign policy plans, with surprisingly few specifics on Afghanistan, where nearly 10,000 US troops remain more than 15 years after the Taliban were toppled by US-backed forces. In fact, Afghanistan was barely mentioned during a bitterly fought election campaign, which largely focused on domestic issues, between Republican Trump and his Democratic rival, former secretary of state Hillary Clinton.

Ghani and Trump spoke by telephone last week and the Trump transition team said in a statement they discussed the "terrorism threats facing both countries". Moreover, speaking with reporters at Bagram airbase north of Kabul later on Friday, General John Nicholson, the commander of US and international forces in Afghanistan, said it was important for the United States to remain committed in Afghanistan.

Trump will inherit a challenging security situation in Afghanistan. A number of provincial capitals have been under pressure from the Taliban while Afghan forces have been suffering high casualty rates, with more than 5,500 killed in the first eight months of this year. In the meantime, US officials, including US Defence Secretary Ash Carter who paid an unannounced visit to Kabul, and General John Nicholson, declared the US's commitment to Afghanistan. The war on terror is still to come to fruition.

Hujjatullah Zia is the permanent writer of the Daily Outlook Afghanistan. He can be reached at zia_hujjat@yahoo.com

Trump's Choice on Climate Change

By Stephen Cheney

Planning. It is the key to successful military action – and, in many ways, to success in general – and United States Marines like me pride ourselves on it. But if you've spent 30 years in the military, as I have, you know that an effective plan cannot be static; operating environments change, often in surprising or unexpected ways. Donald Trump's victory in the US presidential election earlier this month constitutes just such a change. It may be a long time before we fully understand the new operating environment. But we must begin adjusting – and continue adjusting as new facts come to light. Otherwise, we risk becoming vulnerable to serious strategic threats – the gravest of which is likely to be climate change.

The increase in the Earth's surface temperature represents a fundamental shift in the global operating environment, both economically and militarily. It is not just that some so-called "elites" think that the weather is going to warm up a bit. Climate change is not trivial; nor are its security implications.

Climate change is what we in the military call a "threat multiplier." Its connection to conflict is not linear. Rather, it intensifies and complicates existing security risks, increasing the frequency, scale, and complexity of future missions.

The urgency of the climate threat is growing quickly. Climate change is already expanding the scope of military operations, with the US Navy and Coast Guard assessing new missions in the Arctic. More intense hurricanes, typhoons, and droughts are increasing the demand for military-assisted humanitarian responses, most notably in the Pacific.

As increasingly extreme weather reshapes migration patterns, the number of displaced people (already at record highs worldwide) will rise, and competition for essential resources (such as water, food, and energy) will increase. These effects will be particularly destabilizing in already-volatile situations, exacerbating challenges like weak governance, economic inequality, and social tensions – and producing truly toxic conflicts. That is why we call climate change "an accelerant of instability."

Don't take my word for it. America's entire national security establishment is clear on this. In fact, the US military has recognized climate change as a major security risk for more than a decade, making it a world leader on this front. Last year's National Security Strategy reiterated this view, identifying climate change as a top-level strategic risk to US interests, alongside factors like terrorism, economic crisis, and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

These are not empty words. The US military has long been integrating climate change into our planning. After all, the worst security failures – for example, the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor,

which dragged the US into World War II, and the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks – tend to arise from inadequate preparation. Reflecting this lesson, during President George W. Bush's administration, legislation was enacted to require all US defense agencies to consider the effects of climate change in future strategic policy development. In the last four years, the Department of Defense has released a series of directives that put climate-change preparedness at the center of how we do business.

It is too early to say what the Trump administration will do when it comes to climate change. On the campaign trail, he promised to undo some key climate policies, even threatening to back out of the Paris climate agreement. It is critically important that he and his cabinet recognize that to follow through on his promise would be extremely shortsighted.

The truth is that it is in America's best interest, in terms of both security and the economy, to remain on the path toward a cleaner future. Already, the clean-energy revolution has brought jobs, money, and industry to rural America. It is a source of untold opportunities. And isn't identifying opportunity one of America's great strengths?

The shifting economic operating environment bolsters these opportunities. China, India, and other emerging economies are racing to be the global clean-energy superpower; it would not be in America's interest to be left behind. If America is to be great, as Trump has promised, it needs to build more future-oriented industries that can compete globally – and that can provide jobs to American workers.

Moreover, Trump's administration will need to continue the US military's work and create a more resilient national security strategy. The American Security Project, of which I am CEO, looks forward to providing the Trump administration with relevant advice and solutions. We will also call the administration to account if it fails to protect US interests adequately.

Ignoring threats might work in politics, but it does not work in security. Denying the reality of climate change will not make it go away; rather, it will erode the economy and expose the US to serious risks. That would amount to a failure by Trump to fulfill one of his most important responsibilities as president: ensuring the security of the American people.

Serious strategic risks cannot be a political plaything. The threat of climate change does not sit neatly on either side of the left-right divide; it is – and must remain – part of US strategic planning. Anyone who has been involved in such planning knows that we cannot prepare only for the wars we want to fight; we must prepare for the wars that will come, whether we like it or not. (Courtesy Project Syndicate)

Stephen Cheney, a retired brigadier general in the US Marine Corps, is CEO of the American Security Project.



Chairman / Editor-in-Chief: Dr. Hussain Yasa
Vice-Chairman: Kazim Ali Gulzari
Email: outlookafghanistan@gmail.com
Phone: 0093 (799) 005019/777-005019
www.outlookafghanistan.net



The views and opinions expressed in the articles are those of the authors and do not reflect the views or opinions of the Daily Outlook Afghanistan.