

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



December 17, 2017

Intolerance for Others Generates Extremism

Human beings are divided in various groups, cultures and ideologies. Their groups, cultures and ideologies are their identities in certain ways. It is natural to belong to a group or culture since human beings live in society and living in a society, they cannot avoid being in a social setting. Therefore, it is normal to be divided in cultures and societies, and if perceived positively, these divisions can ensure diversity and multi-culturalism. Within today's globalized world when cultures have come closer to one another, accepting the diversity can result in peace and tranquility not only within an individual society but within the world as a whole.

However, to see the differences and division with a narrow-minded approach may result in extremism. Accepting one's own self, one's culture, ideology or religion as the best and considering others as the worst or inferior can be considered as extremism, which can lead to conflicts, tussles and wars.

Extremism, of any kind and in any way, cannot be justified because it influences and disturbs others. If your religion, your nation or your sect are right and others are weirdly ridiculous, it is because you are thinking others in terms of your own motives, values or habits. If you want to understand them, you have to analyze them in terms of their values and sociological settings.

Then, they may not seem weird to you and you may not hate them to the extent that makes your use of violence and terrorism for dominance justifiable for you. You should love your religion, your nation and your cast but you do not have the right to pester others. You do not have the right to call others 'barbarians and savages' if they do not pester you.

Extremism is directly related to the intensity of the beliefs. These beliefs can be related to any of the ideologies.

It is not necessary that this ideology should be religious. It can be related to any ism or to even so-called civilized systems and political ideologies. In fact, different political ideologies, at different times in history, have proved to be more extremist than many religious examples. Thus, it is not what the extremists believe but how they believe that makes them extremists. It is basically their intolerance towards others that make them dangerous for others and extremists in the true sense of the word. The extremist beliefs are not very intense in human psychology from birth but they are intensified by looking the world from same ideological perspective or they can be intensified by religious or political leaders who do not bother much about the truth but they always have their incentives in their cunning minds.

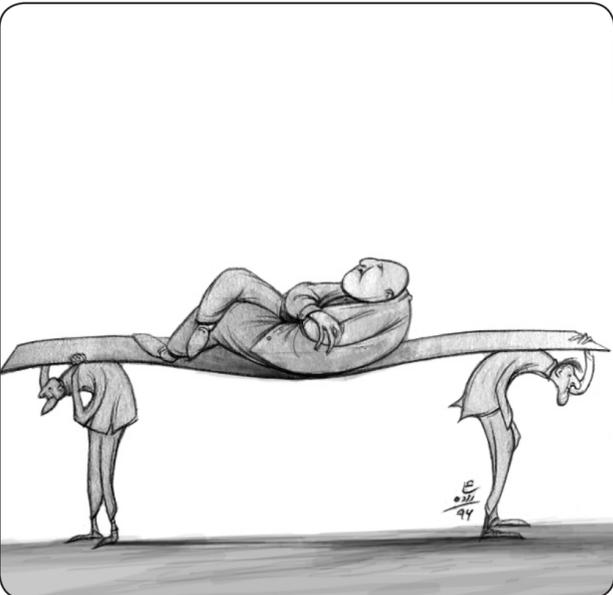
Thus, it is social and political conditioning that make them so, slowly and gradually. Though they have the option of rejecting such conditioning but it is very difficult to do so, once they are caught from their childhood. Sometimes, the political and religious leaders make the common people believe that their existence can be guaranteed and their place can be justified in the heaven if they launch war against other sects and casts. Sometimes, these leaders make the same common people believe that their prosperity lies in the dictatorial government; even they make them kill thousands of people without any justification of right and wrong.

Sometimes, these leaders make the people believe that their civilization superiority depends upon launching war against the other people because they call the third world countries as terrorists and backward in terms of civilization, but the question is who has given such leaders the authority and merit to call a single ideology or ism as the absolute truth. As a matter of fact, all ideologies and isms are relatively true and this relative analysis proves that the universal ideologies and isms are difficult to realize, and they stand nowhere in absolute frame of reference. Extremism can take us nowhere except to the threshold of destruction, where humanity would be crying at the remains of burnt human lives due to jealousies, holy wars and wars for political dominancy and economic benefits.

And those burnt lives would be of our colleagues, our fellow-beings and, above all, of the people of our own type who have been fooled by the so-called religious and political leaders and who have been the people with miseries and sufferings already in their lives. In fact, the people suffering from the difficulties and hardships within their political and social lives become the victims of such leaders.

It is a crystal-clear fact that the people who are poor and suffer because of lack of requirements and facilities of life are greatly vulnerable to terrorism because they are ready to do anything in order to get out of the suffering they are in.

While, the unfortunate fact is that the leaders and the systems that should be solving their problems and issues are themselves involved in invigorating their conditions and taking full advantage of them, which is really pathetic and highly tragic.



Story of Violence

By Hujjatullah Zia

One's mind and senses will go numb to hear the stories of violence reported in national and international media. The rights and dignity of men and women are violated flagrantly as a result of war and violence. They sustain great pain and sufferings on the grounds of their race, sex, color, and creed. Women are particularly left at the mercy of violence and injustice.

I was shocked to read the heartrending stories of Arlette and Fane. In 2002, when Congolese rebels rampaged through PK12 – a community on the outskirts of the Central African Republic's capital of Bangui – conflict first touched two females Arlette and Fane. Fighting between Muslim Seleka rebels and Christian "Anti-balaka" militias forced both Arlette, a Christian, and Fane, a Muslim, from their homes. Arlette, then 10 years old, shows a wound in her knee that still hasn't healed. "When it happened, it was dark. I heard gunshots and screaming. Then a bullet struck me in the leg," she is cited as saying. Finally in 2012, Arlette was flown to Germany to be operated on. She returned to the Central African Republic (CAR) pain-free.

Within CAR, the Movement for the Liberation of the Congo (MLC) went on a rampage, raping, killing and pillaging the local population. Liton Village lies at Point Kilometre 22 (PK22) and was the scene unspeakable atrocities including systematic rape. Only six old men were left in the village after several days of destruction by the rebels. Amzine was raped by three men when the rebels came. "The men of PK12 had fled.

We women were left behind, defenseless," she said. Her daughter Fane, who is seventeen years old by now, is the result of her rape. "When she asks about her father one day, what should I tell her?" asked Amzine. In 2014, Amzine and Fane fled to Chad as Muslims were persecuted by Anti-balaka rebels. "No one will take care of the cat. He'll be eaten. Our sleeping mats, my red backpack, I had to leave it behind," said Fane from a refugee camp in Chad in 2015. They have since moved to Congo-Brazzaville, where they now feel at home. It is said that the elementary school in PK12 was seized by Congolese rebels at the end of 2002. Over the course of two weeks, they continuously abused and raped the boys and girls attending the school.

In 2014, Arlette was forced to flee PK12 again. "There were Seleka rebels. We heard they were on the prowl. Late at night, they started to destroy the houses and loot. They kicked down our door," she said. "We can no longer stay

here." Later, Arlette fell while fleeing from gunshots, making the wound on her knee split open again. Today, she is back in PK12 where the farmer's market has reopened and she is selling peanuts to help support the family. Arlette hasn't been able to go to school.

War caused people, mainly women, indescribable sufferings. A victim of Bosnia war says that the prisoners were kept thirsty and hungry for days; whereas the dogs were given bread. According to him, prisoners even drank urine which was the only way to survive thirst. He says that his childhood friend was shot before his eyes for keeping a morsel of bread in his pocket, perhaps to carry to someone in the prison who had not probably eaten for days. Prisoners were forced to labor under hot sun without water. All these stories are a serious blow to the rights and dignity of human beings. Indeed, drinking urine for not being given water is a serious humiliation and it was done to intentionally violate the dignity of those prisoners.

Being born as a result of rape will not be only painful to Fane and her mother but to anyone who cherish humanity. Such acts are a stain on the conscience of the public. It reminds of Thomas Hobbes's saying that "man is man's wolf" and men are naturally wicked. To view the ongoing violence and atrocities, one will lose his/her trust in men's good nature and intention.

The sufferings of mankind have not been mitigated since people suffer painfully in Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Afghanistan, etc. Children's throats are sliced and women's dignity are violated during the war and peace. Perhaps many children are born out of rape in war-torn countries and their cases remain unreported. Who knows the number of children born in Iraq and Syria as a result of rape carried out by members of the self-styled Islamic State (IS) group? The IS fighters dishonored countless of women, particularly Yazidi women, on the grounds of their race and religion. Regardless of religious tenets, the IS fighters showed no iota of respect to humanity or moral principles.

Similarly there are many civilians, the same as Arlette, who have been affected by war and violence. Meanwhile, scores of men, women, and children are killed and amputated in war and going on in Syria, Yemen, Afghanistan, etc. To protect the rights and dignity of civilians, warring sides will have to observe humanitarian law or at least ethical code or humanity.

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

Can Europe Sustain the Macron Moment?

By Carl Bildt

At the start of 2017, many feared that the European project would experience a near-breakdown within the next year. The United Kingdom had decided to leave the European Union, the United States had elected a president who cheered the Brexiters on, and populists running in the French and German elections posed a clear danger to European integration. As we approach the start of 2018, the picture is very different. The European project has not only survived, but may be gaining new momentum. At least within the bubble of EU institutions in Brussels, one senses a newfound confidence.

More than anyone else, French President Emmanuel Macron is at the center of this turnaround. His post-election victory speech in May was accompanied by the EU anthem, Beethoven's "Ode to Joy" – a strong symbolic gesture. Since then, Macron has launched or proposed one initiative after another to strengthen EU institutions, while taking a lead in European foreign policy. With German Chancellor Angela Merkel struggling to form a government after September's general election, all eyes are now on Macron.

The changing mood in Europe over the past year has been influenced by three factors in particular. The first is Brexit, which is undeniably causing problems for the British – and in turn causing most Europeans to begin to understand the extent to which their economies and societies are intertwined. The once-glorious country of Great Britain is now in a state of political agony as it tries to sort out the politics, economics, and logistics of leaving the bloc. It is unlikely that voters in any other member state will envy the British experience.

The second factor is Donald Trump, whose US administration has a lower standing in Europe than any other in recorded history. According to one recent poll, Germans now regard Trump as a greater threat to their country's interests abroad than Russian President Vladimir Putin or North Korean dictator Kim Jong-un. In a true race to the bottom, Trump is ahead.

Over the past year, European leaders have accepted that Europe will have to take more responsibility for its own affairs. After a vexing encounter with Trump at the G7 summit in Italy in May, Merkel summed up a sentiment that most other European leaders now share. "We Europeans must fight for our own future and destiny," she said in an unscripted outburst at a campaign stop. "We Europeans truly have to take our fate into our own hands." The third factor is Putin's Russia, which has continued to meddle in Western elections and act aggressively in Ukraine. All told, the "BTP effect" – Brexit, Trump, Putin – has convinced even skeptical Europeans that EU-level cooperation is necessary.

But, in addition to the impetus of the BTP effect, Europe is being propelled by stronger economic growth. The dark days of the euro crisis have begun to fade into memory, as has the refugee crisis of late 2015, which had a profound political effect on Germany, Sweden, and other countries. Although the huge task of

deepening EU integration remains unfinished, the political and economic conditions for seeing that process through have improved. At the same time, the EU has suddenly emerged as the preserver of the liberal world order. In September, the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) between the EU and Canada entered into force. And, since then, the EU has moved closer to finalizing an even more important trade agreement with Japan, and, separately, with the founding countries of Mercosur – Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, and Uruguay. Britain may be leaving, but the rest of the world seems to be lining up to make deals with the EU.

Still, there is no room for complacency. Despite many positive developments, governance is becoming more complicated within certain European countries, owing to an increasingly fractured political landscape. In Germany, forming a new government after an election used to be a straightforward affair. But now the country could be under a caretaker government until March, with little clarity about what sort of government will emerge. In the meantime, Germany can hardly play its customary role as Europe's anchor of stability.

In the Danubian lands of Hungary, Austria, and Bavaria, nationalism is on the rise. And in Italy, few would dare to offer any solid predictions of what will happen in the next general election, which must be held before May 20, 2018.

Moreover, Europeans cannot rely indefinitely on the low interest rates that have contributed to the current recovery. EU leaders will need to push much harder for structural reforms than they have so far. Although Spain has revived its economy with important reforms, and Macron has tackled France's notoriously Byzantine labor code, the EU is still struggling on many fronts. For example, despite Estonia's heroic efforts to create a digital-reform agenda during its presidency of the Council of the EU, far more needs to be done in that area.

Next year will be the last chance to pursue EU-level reforms before a fateful year of reckoning begins. In March 2019, Britain will leave the EU, with or without a divorce agreement. Then, in May, come elections to the European Parliament, and new leaders will be appointed for the EU's core institutions. Before we know it, Jean-Claude Juncker's presidency of the European Commission will be over.

Macron is anxiously awaiting a new government in Berlin. As things stand, it is far from clear that the next German coalition will support his EU-reform agenda. And, with each passing day, the European Commission will be running out of time to pursue any new initiatives that could realistically be finalized before 2019.

So, while the gloom and doom of 2016 may have receded, it could all too easily return. Sustaining the momentum generated by Macron's election in France and realizing the promise that it holds will require decisive action in the months ahead. (Courtesy Project Syndicate)

Carl Bildt is a former prime minister and foreign minister of Sweden.

Chairman / Editor-in-Chief: Moh. Reza Huwaida

Vice-Chairman: Kazim Ali Gulzari

Email: outlookafghanistan@gmail.com

Phone: 0093 (799) 005019/777-005019

www.outlookafghanistan.net

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