

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



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People Losing Confidence in the Government

The performance of a state or particularly a government can be gauged by the services, facilities and opportunities that it provides to its people. If it fails to provide the necessary requirements of life, equitable opportunities and security, its performance and legitimacy is always controversial. Only the governments that are able to ensure good governance to its people, can establish real legitimacy and can expect its people to have trust and confidence in it.

There are cases when the people, who do not get what they deserve as citizens of a country, are left with negative sentiments for the government and even the country certain times.

The case of Afghanistan can be best studied in the same perspective. As instability and wars have reigned the country for several decades and the governments have not been able to perform well as far as the providence of basic requirements are concerned, the people have lost confidence on the government and do not feel sure if their lives are guaranteed in Afghanistan. Therefore, Afghanistan has been one of the countries with highest number of people who have migrated out for better and more secure lives. It is also imperative to note that the people who have migrated from the country do not include only the poor and helpless people, rather there have been many among them who were not economically very weak but feared that their lives were threatened by the prevailing insecurity and the discriminatory or extremist attitude of certain people. It is the reason that there were many people from media and even security institutions themselves who left the country for their security.

This is the irony in Afghan society that the security personnel who should guarantee the security of the people as a whole, feel threatened as well. And, it is also justifiable as they are the ones who become the targets of the terrorists the most. There have been many instances wherein Afghan personnel visited other countries for training and development but never returned to Afghanistan. Finding the developed countries which they visited far better in security arrangements and life standards, they took refuge there and now live more peaceful lives.

It would be wrong to blame them individually for escaping their responsibilities in the country; rather the situation has to be seen in perspective of the overall situation. The security, governance and many social issues make the decision of returning for them a very difficult one.

Particularly, if the individuals are women, they would think thousand times before they return because they are the ones who do not only suffer from instability and war but also discriminatory behavior of the society as a whole. Recently, the news surfaced that Nilofar Rahmani, an Afghan pilot who won an international bravery award for women in 2015, and went to the United States for training has said she is not ready to return home. According to the New York Times she is not willing to return home due to the deterioration of the security situation in Afghanistan. According to U.S media reports Rahmani applied this summer for asylum. Rahmani said she does not feel comfortable or secure working in Afghanistan and her male colleagues treat her badly and insult her. Rahmani was supposed to return home after 15 months of training last week but she has said to her trainers she still wants to be a pilot but not for Afghanistan and instead wants to fly for the U.S air force.

This is really tragic and shows how a female, awarded bravery award, feels about the situation in the country.

Though there have been complaints by the Afghan Air Force members about their salaries and working conditions several times, the complaints by female member would be doubled as should would have faced discriminatory behavior by the male colleagues who would not feel comfortable to accept that women can take such a role.

Unfortunately, Afghan society has a history of discriminatory behavior towards women and it can be easily observed that even now the incidents violating women rights have not been stopped though there have been many claims of developments.

In fact the changes are prevalent only on the exterior while from within the Afghan society still lacks the modernity and development it needs in order to reach to a respectable position. The Afghan social structure has been vehemently dominated by religious extremism and tribal nepotism. Women have been intensely influenced by these factors. Most of the self-designed religious doctrines and tribal norms are against the women and discriminate their basic rights. In accordance to parochial tribal norms and extremist religious beliefs women are not meant to get education.

Their duties are bound to be inside the boundaries of their houses, which they do not have the right to leave in any condition except after the permission of an authoritative male member. It is unfortunate to note that Afghan authorities and many important personalities themselves have favored the recommendations and suggestions to limit the participation of women in social and political lives.

It is really important that government must discourage the discriminatory ideas against the women. And it the same time it must make efforts to ensure better governance and security to all the people of Afghanistan so that people start having confidence in their country.

Why Not Taking a Shorter Route to Peace?

By Hujjatullah Zia

The peace agreement signed with Hezb-e-Islami Afghanistan (HIA), led by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, on September 29, 2016, is considered a breakthrough and shows Afghans' strong will for peace. Afghan government called warring factions, through thick and thin, to stop violence and bloodshed and come to negotiating table. Seeking peace talks, within the last decade, was a highly complicated issue in the political history of the country which came to standstill for one reason or another.

In spite of the recent agreement with HIA, militancy continues unabated in the country and Afghan soldiers and civilians paid great sacrifices in 2016. In other words, with the initiation of peace agreement with HIA, political pundits maintained that Gulbuddin's party was marginalized in political arena and was vulnerable to the Taliban's menace as sporadic clashes between the two groups were reported. Therefore, this agreement is believed not to carry much weight in bringing peace in the country.

In addition, the post-Taliban Afghanistan took high steps towards democratization and intended to establish a civil society where the individuals could exercise their rights and liberty without fear and anxiety. The approval of Constitution, after Bonn Conference, implanted a strong gleam of hope in the nation and boosted their trust in having a society void of war and violence. The hegemony of democracy affected not only political issues but also cultural arena, in some parts of the country, as people showed tendency in liberalizing their traditions. Believing to be free from the bloodbath committed during the Taliban's regime, the nation heaved a sigh of relief and prayed for their dream utopia. The colorful queues of men and women in presidential election in 2004 filled the air with a sense of hope and optimism. The nation celebrated democracy through casting their votes and enjoyed their participatory role in the government. But could the ballot prevent people from bullet?

The Taliban insurgents were reorganized and waged war against the government. The nation's dream for a civil society did not come true since violence and bloodshed began after a lull. This time, the Taliban came with the ideology of "Jihad" against the "puppet government" and foreign troops - they justified all their terrorist acts and inflicted heavy casualties upon civilians, including women and children. From the very establishment of democratic state, the Taliban continued their insurgency up to now and there still seems to be no bona fide intention for peace talks - which is believed to be changed into a political game.

Peace remains elusive in this unending game and the unmitigated insurgency has outraged the public conscience. There

were many ups and downs before talks and the Taliban adopted various attitudes, regarding this issue, with uncertainty. Despite decade-long efforts in persuading the Taliban to come to negotiating table, which was proved abortive, Afghan government leaves the door open for talks and calls warring factions to join the peace process.

The only positive outcome of High Peace Council (HPC), established in 2010 to hold talks with the Taliban, seems to be the agreement with HIA. The officials deem it a major breakthrough. The question is that has this issue reduced insurgency in the country? Of course not! The graph of civilian casualties remains high and neither "war on terror" nor peace offering bore the desired result. Therefore, the peace agreement with HIA, with the passage of more than half of a decade from the establishment of HPC, is a pyrrhic victory.

The futility of peace process triggered a sense of mistrust between Kabul and Islamabad and Afghan officials talked with serious tone about the sanctuary of terrorist groups. As a result, in the Heart of Asia Conference held in Amritsar, India, Afghan President Muhammad Ashraf Ghani refused Pakistan's \$500m aid stating that it could be spent to combat terrorism. However, Pakistan's Foreign Affairs Adviser Sartaj Aziz countered the claim, calling the criticism "simplistic". The Afghan government, Mr. Aziz said, "has also signed peace agreement with HIA."

The implementation of this peace deal can serve as a model for talks with other insurgent groups in future." The peace process for talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban has not yet produced positive results, he noted, adding that the option needed to be explored in a sustained way. Ill-fatedly, terrorist networks have been changed into a bone of contention between Kabul and Islamabad and the gap widens with the passage of time. Fishing in this troubled water is one of the advantages of terrorist groups. The two countries have common enemies and must bury the hatchet to overcome their enemies. It should be noted that, if not the flame, the smoke of fire in a country will go to the eyes of neighboring countries. We witness the same fact in Syria's war since its neighbors are highly vulnerable to the harm of the self-styled Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIL) - even Pakistan and Afghanistan are not immune to their threat.

Afghanistan is, historically, considered the heart of Asia and if the heart does not beat normally or be in trouble, the entire body is in danger. Hence, this heart needs to be kept safe and free from the poison of the militant fighters. Isn't it time for nurturing the spirit of brotherhood to stand as an iron fist against terrorism? It will be the only panacea for the endless problem and the shorter route to peace.

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Role of Young Generation

By Mohammad Zahir Akbari

The young generation is able to change their life and ultimately change a nation if they do not exclude from long term policies and programs. Young people are often heralded as the leaders of tomorrow, yet in reality they are already leading important changes today. Young people have proven capabilities, and are contributing to national life - whether they work in private enterprise, public sector or with voluntary organizations. They should be seen not only as the beneficiaries or as passive recipients of support rather, they should be recognized in their own right as dynamic human capital, custodians and innovators in development. The common refrain - that "young people are the leaders of tomorrow" - is true, but it can do this rising generation a disservice because young people are leading tomorrow's change today.

In spite of least investments, the achievements of young Afghans give reason for optimism. They have made their people proud, given them moments to celebrate, and have inspired others through their accomplishments in sports, education, politics, media, and entertainment. Cricket, for example, a game becoming increasingly popular around the world, has helped unify people in Afghanistan. During the 1980s and 90s, Afghan kids learned to play cricket in refugee camps in Peshawar, Pakistan. In 2002, they came back home and started playing for their country, forming Afghanistan's first national cricket team. In just 10 years, with very limited resources, these young people went from playing in refugee camps to obtaining "One Day International" status enabling them to play against cricket giants like Australia, India, and Pakistan.

Afghanistan's first Olympic appearance was in 1936 in Berlin. Due to the Soviet invasion and civil war, for decades, the country's participation in the Olympic Games was inconsistent. Slowly, Afghan athletes began getting back on track, and, in 2004, they participated in the Olympic Games in Athens. Rohullah Nikpah, an Afghan taekwondo player, made history in the 2008 Olympics in Beijing when he won Afghanistan's first ever Olympic medal. He won a second one at the London Olympics in 2012 defeating his British counterpart.

The Afghan media environment has particularly benefited from the energy and commitment of the country's young people. In a country that a decade ago had only one radio and one TV station strictly controlled by the Taliban, there are now over hundreds of independent TV and radio stations. Young graduates from university journalism faculties, and even from high school, have been flocking to these stations to report on news, produce entertainment programs, and develop a solid media sector. Some young journalists opened their own stations in their villages.

The challenge is whether they can sustain these promising developments. If the international community and the Afghan government are committed to a better Afghanistan, they must work to help mitigate the brain drain that continues to threaten the country's future, and ensure its young people feel hopeful and

confident that there will be a better tomorrow. The Youths are talented but perishable; if the national policies do not support them they can play destructive role: they join enemy or mafia groups; they can be addicted; they can be kidnappers; eventually they can fill the prisons or leave the country. Last year with sixty eight thousand refugees Afghanistan got the second place in the world while they had left High School or universities.

Bolstering the private sector and encouraging entrepreneurship are important solution toward lessening the issues.

But unfortunately, the approach is contrariwise in Afghanistan, as it is already reported that 50% private sectors mitigated just within current year due to wrong policies. These can make thousands of young Afghan whether leave the country or join the criminals. Military force and foreign aid have long been considered the optimal way out for Afghanistan's long-standing instability. Ill-informed military generals and hawkish policies, reckless and unaccountable international aid, and an enterprise of corrupt Afghan politicians have resulted in increased violence, civilian casualties, corruption, and impunity. No one in this Afghan quagmire seems to be taking the right steps and learning from their mistakes. This has made Afghanistan the center of many failures, a laboratory for testing military and civilian strategies, and a lawless land where corruption has become the national currency and impunity a motto for top Afghan politicians. Having suffered heavy human and material losses, Afghans remain in an uncertain situation.

Afghans expected foreign military intervention would bring long-term security. They expected international aid would help their country develop political institutions, economic infrastructure, and the professional capacity for self-reliance that would break the old dependence on outside assistance. They expected their leaders would work together to improve day life for average Afghans, create employment opportunities, and establish the rule of law. Unfortunately, all dreams came out untrue.

The ultimate solution is that young people should be at the forefront of national programs and priorities. Empowered, they can be key agents for development and peace. Future of Afghanistan should rest in the hands of Afghans themselves, especially the younger generation.

The majority of Afghanistan's population - about 60 percent - is between 15 and 25 years old. These young people are a great asset for the stability of their country. Afghanistan's future depends on how they are integrated into society, the kind of educational and employment opportunities they have, and how they are inspired to contribute to rebuilding efforts. If they are left on society's margins, all of us will be impoverished.

"No one is born a good citizen; no nation is born a democracy. Rather, both are processes that continue to evolve over a lifetime. Young people must be included from birth. A society that cuts off from its youth severs its lifeline." -- Kofi Annan

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