

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

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We Should Embrace Positive Changes

It is the nature of culture which directs social change. There are cultures around the world which encourage social change in technology, others in biological factors of individual, and some in other cultural factors. The Western cultures direct social change towards industrialization. They emphasize on technological and industrial expansion. Our culture, to a certain extent, encourages our activities towards a new phase of life and that is developing state of agriculture, peace and tranquility and education. Most of the cultures encourage technological development but there are a few cultures that undergo faster changes in the social implications of non-material culture. So, the structure of a society on its patterns of normative behavior will determine social changes slowly or rapidly and in any field of life first. A culture, keeping its dogmatic values hardly changing, will show changes hardly in attitude and in the application of material objects. On the other hand, the other culture not holding its cultural values as stagnant is likely to accept social changes in technology and other environmental factors.

Some of the cultures provide a condition for resistance to change. The customary ways of life and cultural values have been laid so deeply in their nature that any external element does not find a room as to become a part of their culture. Such a way of life does not accept social change due to cultural inertia. Nomadic people wandering from one part of the region to another and contacting people of various regions stick to their own cultural ways of life. It is basically due to their cultural inertia.

It is important to understand that the aspects of human life do not accept changes altogether and at the same time. Human life is a component of various material and non-material aspects of environment. Material includes tools, implements and their complex systems of mechanical plants. It gets a change in its structure and function readily, but the methods and techniques in handling them and attitude about their use and the adoption of machine products in society are matter resting with non-material culture. It also happens that the material aspect of culture changes rapidly than the non-material one. Both the material and non-material aspects are related and must go hand-in-hand. By this irregularity, the non-material aspect remains behind the material one. This creates disharmony and disorganization between the two aspects. This unequal rate of change creates social disorganization in people. They are unable to adjust themselves in such rapidly changing economic order. This leads to frustration, aggression and even neurosis, which then lead to serious social problems.

Our country Afghanistan is facing this issue to a large extent. The tribal values are not able to cope with the technological developments, therefore, the cultural as a whole faces a cultural lag and also giving birth to frustration, aggression and even contempt. Moreover, economic factors can also play a role in hindering cultural change. For example, people may want to live in modern buildings equipped with most of the facilities of life, but they cannot do so because of insufficient economic resources as their disposal.

On the other hand, geographical factors, and even certain religious beliefs isolate the people to a certain extent and then when they are brought into contact with the speedy technological changes, they may fail to absorb most of the things in their culture and bring required changes in their non-material culture and they may not be allowed to do so, as well.

Social and cultural changes are inevitable and the rich and successful cultures mostly have mechanism that help them in readily accepting those changes and making them a valuable part of their society. There are certain factors that are really necessary for a society, like that of Afghanistan, which can support it in making the changes acceptable.

There should be high prestige for the innovators and innovations. The higher the prestige of the innovator the more readily the innovation may be accepted. By finding the society giving honor and respect to those who are involved in paving the way for innovations, the people would definitely turn in the favor of the changes. For example, currently our society values money and give prestige to the people who are wealthy and can earn money; therefore, wealth and wealth earner are readily accepted by our society.

Therefore, our society requires changing its ethical values regarding the worth of the positive changes within the society. It is now an accepted fact that we cannot live with the advancements in science and technology and we need to make use of them in the most beneficial ways; therefore, they must become part of our everyday life and we must change our attitude and behavior towards them and also towards the modern developments and researches in the various fields of life. It is the only way we can move towards a better society.

Blame Game will Harm Peace Process

By: Hujjatullah Zia

Following the marathon Doha negotiations between the Taliban and US special envoy Zalmay Khalilzad, the outcome of peace talks has been doubted. Meanwhile, the Taliban's refusal to hold direct talks with Kabul government leaves Afghan officials with the idea that Afghanistan's neighboring countries are not playing their role committedly.

The recent peace talks re-provoked the blame game between Afghanistan and Pakistan, especially at the media level. Dawn, a Pakistani Newspaper, claimed in its editorial titled "TTP sanctuaries", that TTP militants are operating from Afghan soil against Pakistan. It said that the Afghan Taliban's agreement to one of Washington's key demands that they would not allow international terrorists wage attacks against the US or its allies from Afghan soil was an opportune moment for Pakistan, which seeks "a similar pledge from the Taliban to eliminate TTP sanctuaries in Afghanistan". It added that a number of the Taliban and several al-Qaeda operatives escaped into north of Pakistan following the downfall of the Taliban's regime as a result of the US-led NATO attacks. "Even if they disapprove of TTP's attacks inside Pakistan, the Afghan Taliban have rarely voiced condemnation of them," said the editorial. It further claimed that Kabul used the TTP "to pressure Pakistan into withdrawing its alleged support for the Afghan Taliban, especially the Haqqani network". It referred to the death of TTP's leader Mullah Fazlullah in Afghanistan in return for the three-day ceasefire between Kabul government and the Taliban arranged by Islamabad.

Nonetheless, Afghan President has said that the war key is in Islamabad, Rawalpindi and Quetta, which indicates that Pakistan has strong leverage on the Taliban and she is able to push them to negotiating table with Kabul government. Afghan officials have claimed on several occasions that Afghan Taliban are enjoying safe haven across the border and operating attacks against Afghanistan from there.

In his book titled "The Envoy", Khalilzad writes, "Afghan insurgents were comfortably ensconced in Pakistan, using camps to recover, train, and equip their fighters. Even al Qaeda appeared to have reconstituted camps."

It is self-evident that the death of 45,000 Afghan security personnel since 2014 shows that Afghan government has paid the highest price in campaign against terrorist networks and the reported agreement between the Taliban and US envoy that Afghan soil should not be used for terrorist acts is the very demand of Kabul government.

Afghan former President Hamid Karzai and the incumbent President Muhammad Ashraf Ghani have been urging Islamabad to use its leverage on the Taliban to push them on the peace table. However, their demands were given cold shoulder.

With Imran Khan's administration, the relations between Kabul and Islamabad seem to have developed as Afghan and Pakistani high-level officials exchanged several trips to Islamabad and Kabul. Afghan officials believe that Pakistan is able to organize talks between Kabul and the Taliban since it has leverage on them. However, Pakistan has signaled its positive response to talks only through releasing Mullah Baradar Akhund, a deputy of Mullah Omar and co-founder of the Islamist militia, from its prison in October last year.

The blame game between Afghan and Pakistan officials only led to strained relations between the two sides and deteriorated security situation.

It is crystal clear that peace in Afghanistan will stabilize the region. Afghan government urged the Taliban to resolve the issue through negotiations and stop their indiscriminate attacks against Afghan state and nation. However, the Taliban have turned down the peace offer so far and intensified their attacks in recent years.

In the meantime, Kabul government urged regional countries in general and Pakistan in particular to bring the Taliban to the table. Regional countries either helped Afghanistan to hold some conferences or they themselves hosted conferences without the presence of the Taliban, which made no headway regarding the peace process. But no countries, despite their persistence on holding talks rather than continuing war, have played a crucial role in ending Afghanistan's conflict or arranging a fruitful face-to-face talks between Kabul and the Taliban.

Since the relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan began to thaw, resuming the blame game between the two countries will lead to further mistrust. The two countries need to put the differences aside and play their role constructively to end the conflict.

Moreover, the two countries have to pledge to combat terrorism and eliminate the sanctuaries of all terrorist networks indiscriminately. It is believed that the serious fighting between Afghan government and the Taliban and the high price paid by Afghan security personnel show its strong commitment in combating terrorism. Now the ball is on the neighboring countries' court to whether or not to push the Taliban to the table with Kabul.

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The Franco-German Pact Is Not the Problem

By: Zaki Laïdi

All too often, important contributions to public debate go almost unnoticed, as was the case with Sigmar Gabriel's recent commentary on the Franco-German relationship. A former leader of the Social Democrats (SPD) who has also served as German minister of foreign affairs, Gabriel has issued a rather violent charge against the new Franco-German Treaty of Aachen, which he sees as the first step in a plan for a European Defense Union.

No such plan exists. Yet, according to Gabriel, the treaty represents a renewed bid for European strategic autonomy along Gaullist lines. As such, he condemns it for being "at odds with Germany's own longstanding approach of balancing the friendship with France alongside strong transatlantic relations with the [United States and the United Kingdom]." In his view, Germany has already yielded too much to Gaullist France (a label he does not apply as a compliment).

Gabriel's main objection is that the new agreement will pull Germany away from NATO. He points out that the earlier Franco-German friendship pact – the 1963 Élysée Treaty – was specifically amended by the Bundestag to reaffirm Germany's transatlantic ties, provoking the fury of then-French President Charles de Gaulle. Hence, he sees the Treaty of Aachen as yet another attempt to cut the US out of the European security equation.

Yet, curiously, he never mentions the fact that US President Donald Trump has himself threatened to withdraw the US from NATO. Does Gabriel believe that freezing the Franco-German relationship in place is necessary to appease Trump? If so, that would mean Europeans should not pursue any form of deeper integration whatsoever.

Putting aside the fact that geopolitical conditions in 2019 are nothing like they were in 1963, the contents of the new agreement simply do not justify Gabriel's fears. Article 4, for example, states that France and Germany "are committed to strengthening Europe's capacity to act together to fill its capacity gaps, thereby strengthening the European Union and the North Atlantic Alliance."

To be sure, the treaty does call for the creation of a "Franco-German defense and security council as a steering body." But this would merely be an additional mechanism for advancing France and Germany's shared strategic interests within the confines of existing international commitments, particularly "Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty."

Gabriel accuses France of wanting to separate Germany from the US in the interest of European, rather than Atlantic, defense. But the fact that France sought a degree of independence from NATO 53 years ago does not mean that it still wants that today. In 2009, France rejoined NATO as a full member, and has since been active in NATO operations, particularly in the Baltics. Moreover, Franco-American relations remain particularly strong at the operational level in both the Sahel and the Levant. As a result of these joint efforts, the US now considers France one of its strongest allies.

By contrast, if German-US relations are souring, it is because Ger-

many has come to seem like a free rider in security matters. As such, the biggest threat to transatlantic relations is not the Franco-German treaty, but rather Germany's own reluctance to step up its defense efforts. Why should America defend a Europe that does not want to defend itself? If the US is exerting pressure on Germany – and if its ambassador in Berlin behaves with a level of arrogance that would be unimaginable in Paris – that is because Trump is convinced that Germany is completely at America's mercy.

As for France, it has no interest in weakening NATO, on which it depends, as we have seen in Libya. The French message is simply that Europe has its own interests to defend. It cannot subcontract its security to the US forever, and the presence of NATO does not absolve it from thinking and acting for itself.

It is worth remembering that France was ready to intervene in Syria in 2013. But after the US suddenly changed its mind, France, too, stood down. Still, had Europe mustered the will to act militarily without the US, it could have done so without harming American interests. In other words, there is no zero-sum conflict between Atlantic and European defense. On the contrary, the crisis of the former stems directly from the absence of the latter, which the US has come to resent.

The biggest threat to transatlantic relations, then, is the reluctance of Germany's political class to debate German security and make clear that defense is an existential issue for Europe. If Germany wants the Americans' respect, it must bolster its own military credibility. In today's world, the strong only respect the strong.

Gabriel's dubious reasoning seems to reflect his own bias. He is critical of the concept of European strategic autonomy as envisioned by French President Emmanuel Macron. But while the meaning of strategic autonomy can be debated, the real question is whether Europe itself has interests apart from those of the US, China, and Russia.

If the answer is yes, there is no reason to fear European strategic autonomy in military, geopolitical, and economic affairs. But even if the answer is no, Gabriel's reasoning would still be worrying, to say the least. After all, his own successor at the German foreign ministry, Heiko Maas, regularly acknowledges the need for Europe to be more autonomous in the face of diverse new forms of external pressure. That is why Germany is now at the forefront of the effort to protect European-Iranian trade against US sanctions and strong-arming.

Contrary to what Gabriel seems to think, "strategic autonomy" is not a watchword for placing Germany under French command or pulling it away from the US. Moreover, Gabriel himself supports the idea of European sovereignty, even as he objects to strategic autonomy.

The two go hand in hand. There can be no separating the economic from the strategic; everything is linked. Gabriel's case against the Treaty of Aachen misses the mark; worse, it does a disservice to Europe and Germany alike.

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