

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



February 25, 2016

Compassion Must be Promoted

Man is a social animal; he has to live in society along with other people as he has no other option. He has to love them, hate them, fight with them, be kind and compassionate with them, but he has to be with others. And, while living with others he has to make sure that the more helpful, kind and compassionate he is, the more society moves towards improvement and betterment. In fact, kindness and compassion are the two most sacred values for men. Without these values it is very difficult for men to call themselves as human.

A society like that of ours where there are myriads of social problems and people are deprived of peace and tranquility and mostly hatred and violence are given priority; it is really important that there should be some remarkable and exemplary acts of kindness. There are thousands of people who basically thrive for compassion. They have to be loved and cared for. Decades of instability and insecurity have gifted them misery and poverty and the authoritative individuals and institutions have failed or neglected to assist them at all. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the people as a whole to help them and be compassionate to them.

And, the people of Afghanistan have started realizing this fact and every now and then we can see some actions that fill our hearts with optimism. In one of such actions members of a civil group have set up a "wall of kindness" in capital Kabul for needy people to collect and keep clothes and other things left behind by others on the wall. Their message is simple - if your economic condition is good, come and hang some unwanted clothes and other things so poor people can benefit from them. The wall of kindness has been set up in Golan area in the limits of the third police district of Kabul. The organizers have written messages on the wall including: "If you don't need it, leave it."

If you need it, take it." The organizers urged civil society activists to erect similar walls in various parts of the city in order to promote the culture of charity and restore faith in humanity.

This act of kindness is really worth appreciation and there should be such efforts by other members of the society as well so that the poor and needy people of Afghanistan get some sort of solace. It is really imperative for the people as whole to understand that accepting others, supporting and assisting them are the only way to live in today's world that is turning to be more and more mechanical with each passing day. Human beings require adopting compassion as their top priority behavioral trait, if they want to guarantee their existence in the world. So much hatred, bloodshed and differences have been promulgated just because human beings have forgotten the habit of compassion.

Mahatma Gandhi had said, "It is easy enough to be friendly to one's friends. But to befriend the one who regards himself as your enemy is the quintessence of true religion. The other is mere business."

Compassion, in fact, has that capacity. It can turn enemies into friends. The policy of hatred can only generate further hatred; it creates a never-ending chain. If you hate others; others will hate you as well and process will continue. In order to break the chain of hatred and enmity, it is important to adopt compassion from the very beginning.

An imperative point to understand is that every person must start compassion from his own self. He must understand himself and his true nature first and then he can understand the worth and reality of others. Loving himself and developing his own personality will really help him in being kind to others. And, it must be realized as well that being compassionate to others does not mean that a person is superior to others - that he is on the giving end and others are on receiving end. It is mutual - compassion for others is vital for one's own self and personality as well.

Some may argue that it is only an ideal thinking that compassion alone can win hearts and turn enemies into friends. They base their observations and their thinking on the happenings and events that take place in our society.

They see the hatred in it; the war and the discrepancies. There is uncontrolled bloodshed in different parts of the country. People seem thirsty for the blood of their fellow beings. Politics and religions have turned into monsters that further push us towards hatred and disdain. They hold a strong point in claiming that compassion may not be influential in such circumstances. However, they need to see the point from another perspective as well.

It is crucial to comprehend that the current policy of animosity and envy will lead us towards extinction.

Is it wise to continue the same policy? Never! So we require changing ourselves. Realizing this fact is of utmost importance. Having realized it, we can further debate the viability of the policy of compassion in our society.

Saying Yes to Europe

By Carl Bildt

In 1963, French President Charles de Gaulle stunned the United Kingdom by rejecting its application to join the European Economic Community, the predecessor of the European Union. The logic behind de Gaulle's famous "non" was simple: Britain was not sufficiently European.

"England in effect is insular, she is maritime, she is linked through her exchanges, her markets, her supply lines to the most diverse and often the most distant countries," explained de Gaulle. "It is possible that one day England might manage to transform herself sufficiently to become part of the European community.... In this case... France would raise no obstacle."

De Gaulle's veto held for as long as he lived; it was not until 1973, under his successor Georges Pompidou, that France lifted its objections to British membership. In the more than 40 years since, the UK has played a major role in shaping the course of European integration, while transforming itself from a "sick man of Europe" into one of the world's most competitive economies.

Few today remember that it was UK Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, despite her vocal euroskepticism, who restarted Europe's integration process after a decade in which it had stagnated. Thatcher's ally, Arthur Cockfield, EU Commissioner for the Internal Market and Services, led the push for a truly integrated market for goods, services, people, and capital - an effort that ultimately led to the creation of the EU Single Market in 1992. Thatcher even broke the old Gaullist dictum that each EU member must hold a national veto on all decisions, paving the way for majority voting.

Likewise, few European politicians have argued more eloquently for a truly common European foreign and security policy than former UK Prime Minister Tony Blair. For him, preserving peace was certainly important, but making Europe a global player was the priority.

So it is ironic that a significant swath of the British electorate seems to share de Gaulle's verdict on their country's affinity to Europe. On June 23, in a decision of momentous importance for all of Europe, UK voters will decide in a referendum whether to exit the EU. If they choose to leave, they risk not only unraveling their own economic successes, but also destroying the very underpinnings of a unified Europe.

A British exit - or Brexit - would cause severe damage to the entire continent. In the 1970s and 1980s, the magnetic promise of integration helped stabilize democracy in Greece, Spain, and Portugal. In the 1990s, when ten countries and 100 million citizens broke from the Soviet empire and joined the West, the promise of EU accession eased, encouraged, and to some extent guided the transition. The soft power of an integrated Europe inspired democratic reform for decades in Turkey; and only two years ago, the promise of Europe inspired democratic change in Ukraine. Although both cases reveal the limits to the EU's soft power, it remains the key to overcoming the legacies

of strife in the Balkans.

If the UK leaves, that power will quickly wane. Other, grimmer models will become more powerful. The demons of history have yet to be definitively banished in Europe. And a Europe that begins to fracture would not only be weaker; its vulnerability to the destabilizing forces already gathering within its borders would make it more dangerous as well.

Only by acting together can European countries secure the continent's stability and, to some extent, that of its adjacent neighborhood. Without the UK as a central part of its structure of peace, Europe may simply lack the necessary mass and begin to spin apart.

At a minimum, Brexit would throw the EU into years of uncertainty. Negotiating a complicated divorce and a new relationship with Britain could consume the EU's political oxygen (especially if, as is quite possible, the UK itself breaks up, with Scotland rejoining Europe). This would distract Europe from other serious challenges such as Russian aggression, instability in the Middle East, and its own moribund economy.

For the United States, Brexit would be a betrayal of a key element of foreign policy championed by every American president since Dwight D. Eisenhower. Meanwhile, Russian President Vladimir Putin would certainly rejoice. And nationalist forces across Europe would suddenly feel that the future is theirs.

Advocates of Brexit are remarkably reluctant to explain with any precision their plans for their country's future. Their vision seems almost entirely defined by what it opposes. A key question is whether a post-European UK could remain part of Thatcher's creation, the single market, especially as it is extended to the digital domain and augmented with free-trade treaties around the world. Leaving the single market would cause grave uncertainty for the British economy, especially its financial sector. Even the US has said that it would be unwilling to negotiate a separate free-trade deal with the UK.

Remaining in the single market, however, comes at a cost - one that British voters may not support. The UK would have to adopt the sort of satellite status that Norway, Iceland, and Liechtenstein now have, accepting and implementing decisions that it takes no part in shaping. If that democratic deficit is unacceptable to the UK, it will be left alone, out in the economic cold. To be sure, de Gaulle was not mistaken when he pointed out that Britain's political culture was different from France's. But the same is true of Sweden's, Poland's, or Austria's. The European project is not about denying diversity or trying to force everyone into the same mold. Indeed, Europe's diversity is in many ways its greatest strength. Much rides on British voters' decision in June. A UK that cuts itself adrift would be at risk of tragedy. A fractured EU would unleash untold dangers. And a world without a strong, unified Europe would be poorer and less safe. (Courtesy Project Syndicate)

Carl Bildt was Sweden's foreign minister from 2006 to October 2014 and Prime Minister from 1991 to 1994, when Sweden joined the EU.

Will Persistent Push for Talk be Fruitful?

By Hujjatullah Zia

At least 13 people, including nine civilians, were reportedly killed and 19 more were wounded by member of the Taliban insurgents in Kabul on the eve of the latest round of quadrilateral talks. The suicide bomber targeted Afghan police and Taliban claimed responsibility. An increase in civilian casualties demonstrates the fact that the Taliban fighters have intensified their attack since the end of NATO's combat mission in late 2014. Moreover, the appointment of Mullah Akhtar Mansour as the Taliban's leader led to splinter groups and created a gap among the Taliban. As a result, a number of the Taliban group pledge allegiance to Al-Baghdadi's caliphate rather than operating under Mansour's leadership.

Since the Taliban's spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid claimed the responsibility via Twitter for the recent attack, it is a lukewarm response from the Taliban to peace talk. However, the fourth round of Quadrilateral Coordination Group (QCG) meeting was held in Kabul on February 23 to bring the Taliban to the negotiating table. Issuing a joint press, the four-nation group released that the first round of direct talk between the Afghan government and Taliban will take place in March. The press said, "The QCG member states invite all Taliban and other groups to participate through their authorized representatives in the first round of direct peace talks with Afghan government expected to take place by the first week of March, 2016." It further added that the next meeting will be held in Islamabad following the first round of face-to-face talk with the Taliban elements. Afghan government urged all warring factions to give up violence and bloodshed and join the reconciliation process. The government has frequently announced the door to peace talk is open for all insurgent groups and Afghan officials and Ulema Council have condemned spilling the blood of innocent civilians - as the Taliban fighters have perpetrated flagrantly.

"Security forces will move against those who reject peace. We will continue to pursue all possible avenues to ensure this rightful demand of our people for dignified peace that strengthens our constitutional system," Afghan Foreign Minister Salahuddin Rabbani is quoted as saying. He hoped that the QCG meeting would reach agreement on early initiatives by Afghan and Pakistani religious scholars in support of reconciliation in Afghanistan and against terror and bloodshed. He said that the entire nation desired peace with dignity, but the elements refusing to quit the insurgency would be dealt with sternly in accordance with the law.

In the last meeting of the Quadrilateral Coordination Group (QCG), which was held in Islamabad on February 6, the participants called for direct negotiations between Afghan government and Taliban by the end of February. Most probably, the Taliban did not signal positively since the fourth meeting backtracked by saying that the direct

talk will be held in March. Have the warring parties stated regarding peace talk?

It is believed that the Taliban's heavy inroads made in recent months indicate their reluctance towards the talk. Moreover, The Taliban and the Hizb-e-Islami (HeI), the second largest resistance movement in Afghanistan, have given a negative response to the diplomatic efforts for peace negotiations before the fourth round meeting. HeI said it would take part in the intra-Afghan dialogue only if there is no foreign interference in the process, casting doubts on its participation in the four-nation effort.

It was a formal response from the movement to the peace talk offer after seeking Hekmatyar's opinion.

Similarly, Taliban sources with the organization's Qatar office also said they did not plan to join the talks "unless they get a positive response to their calls for certain steps ahead of the negotiations". The Taliban want reopening of their political office in Qatar, lifting of travel curbs on their leaders, release of their prisoners and end to "propaganda in Afghanistan". "If we join the dialogue without response to our calls, then we have serious concerns that the Islamic Emirate could face a split, as fighters in the battlefield would not accept such talks," The Express Tribune quoted a Taliban leader. He is said to confirm that the Qatar office had been contacted and invited for the talks but "we have made it clear that it would be difficult to join the talks in such a situation".

Despite the QCG's urge for resuming peace talk, militancy and civilian casualties have not been mitigated and the Taliban continue their attacks in restive provinces of Afghanistan. In other words, the insurgent groups answer the government's peace offering with the barrel of gun as ever before. So, one will conclude that the Taliban have not yet succumbed to the QCG's urge.

In the meantime, the US President Barack Obama has proposed to "once and for all" close the military prison at Guantanamo Bay and transfer remaining detainees to a facility in the US. Speaking to reporters on Tuesday, he said, "I don't want to pass this problem on the next president, whoever it is. Are we going to let this linger on for another 15 years?" he added. "Keeping this facility open is contrary to our values. It undermines our standing in the world. It is viewed as a stain on our broader record of upholding the highest standards of rule of law."

This seems another generous movement towards the Taliban - perhaps to bring them to the negotiating table. The passage of time will figure out if the generous acts and pressures give the desired result, but Hamid Karzai's extreme generosity, during his administration, did not give a positive outcome. Hence, the fruition of the QCG meeting is still under suspicion.

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