

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



February 27, 2018

The Kabul Process: A regional context for Peace and Security Cooperation

Peace is one of the issues that almost any Afghan wishes to be restored in the country. Lack of an Afghan-owned inclusive peace process has led to failure of peace efforts in the country. Decades of war and insecurity coupled with weak social cohesion have added to the complication of the peace process in Afghanistan; Now, Afghanistan needs more than any other time to an Afghan-led mechanism to end its conflicts through a negotiated political settlement by involving different influential partners in the process.

Necessary measures to reach a sustainable peace in Afghanistan

Considering the geopolitical position of Afghanistan, it is very difficult to reach a durable peace in the country without involving different regional, cross-regional and international partners in the peace process; to this end, the Afghan government shall be determined to lead the peace process and engage the region considering the multiple dimensions of the ongoing conflicts in Afghanistan; because the main causes of conflicts lie in the Afghan society, armed groups, neighboring and regional countries and world actors. But, the root cause of the consisting conflicts lie in the historic bad governance system in the country. Therefore, peacebuilding in Afghanistan, calls for an inclusive peace vision that ensures the conflicting interests of all players. At the national level, the government shall take all the necessary measure to improve good governance in order to distribute all the resources and opportunities equally among the Afghan citizens and it shall ensure the concerns of all Afghans, including the minority groups and women in the peace process as well.

According to the Afghan Government Peace Policy, it aims to do this through seeking sustained stability on the basis of genuine state-to state relations with the region, which encompasses diplomatic, economic, political and security cooperation. However, reaching consensus among different players of peace in Afghanistan in such a broad area is not a simple task. So, Afghanistan peace vision shall ensure that peace in Afghanistan can ensure the concerns of all the relevant parties and ensures their strategic interests at the region, as a country with huge potentials to extend either peace or insecurity to the neighboring, regional and beyond the region.

A stable Afghanistan enables a Stable Region

As the history of Afghanistan in general and current conflicts in Afghanistan in specific show, it has the potential to either stabilize or destabilize the whole region and the other countries including the United States and the European countries. Different partners of Afghanistan have two options; a) to support Afghanistan to overcome the current conflicts to ensure a stable region; 2) not to support Afghanistan and thus put the region at the verge of conflict and instability. Afghanistan already has taken the initiative by starting the Kabul process and held the first Kabul Process Conference on June 2017. And at least 27 countries and international organizations attended the event. The second Kabul Conference is due to be held on February 28 in Kabul. And 23 nations, the European Union, the United Nations and NATO will participate in this conference. One of the main lessons learned from the first Kabul Process is that, the government is determined to include more voices and ideas in the process at the meeting on the upcoming event and on ways to bring peace to the country. Therefore, the previous steps, the advices and views of the Afghan leaders, will be reflected and included in the Kabul Process Conference. Thus, this conference will ensure a mechanism to be developed by the regional partners to end violence and ensure sustainable peace, creating positive dividends for not only Afghanistan but the entire region. Indeed, such a mechanism will ensure will consolidate the regional cooperation as well. This conference aims to provide a fresh start for an open engagement and exchange that can lead to creation of stable Afghanistan, that its output will be a stable region.

As the conflict of Afghanistan has multiple causes, it requires all the participants, especially the regional actors, come to the conference with a clear vision and commitment to ensure Peace and security in Afghanistan. Such an approach not only creates synergy among the regional countries but reinforce the international commitment to the Peace Process in Afghanistan. The second Kabul Conference is a unique opportunity for Afghanistan to project its peace vision to the regional, cross regional and international actors. Afghanistan may echo the message of a stable Afghanistan leads to a stable region that can enjoy peace and partnership in economic and security areas. Such a vision can ensure and mobilize the different players in the Afghan conflict to participate in this process, because it ensures the overlapping interests of the different players and envision an Afghanistan that can engage all the partners to enjoy economic and security benefits. However, it requires a strong and dynamic diplomacy and a sustainable regional, cross regional and international engagement policy.



The Significant Role of Intellectuals

By Dilawar Sherzai

It is a crystal clear fact that throughout the decades the intellectuals and writers have not been given the position and the status they deserve. We hear that during the monarchies and aristocratic regimes the poets and writers were given rewards and presents but they were mostly to display the grandeur of the kings and the rulers and to pay for the excessive praise they would receive in the works of those poets and writers, not to pay them what they deserved as the reward for their work on truth and reality.

It can be observed in our society that the values of the commodities are gauged as per their appearance and external worth; people only see the material benefits they can gain from them. And they seem to be very hasty in order to gain such benefits. In such a scenario it is really difficult for them to develop any sort of interest for poetic thoughts and philosophical discussions. If they have the authority, they will definitely declare thinking and curiosity to learn as crimes - crimes that have no other punishment except death. It has to happen in a society where, though, philosophy and literature have some sort of respect but they do not have the capacity to fulfill the requirements of the society. It is claimed that they have neither cured any sick person, nor have given food to the poor; however, they themselves have been convicted and punished and given a poison to drink; therefore, they try to remain silent.

In the modern technological and scientific world, people do not find any achievement of philosophy and literature, as they are not directly involved in inventions and discoveries. They do not seem to need any poet or philosopher in their routines and daily activities; therefore, it is not possible for them to realize their importance and their status.

However, this sort of thinking is not only business-oriented but at the same time it is logically incorrect. If everything in the society is measured as per their capacity to fulfill the temporary material benefit, the whole system of the society would collapse and the whole world would become nothing else except a market, where people can only sell and buy commodities. Though, the world has almost been turned into a market, there is still some respect for values and ethics, which can be a ray of hope in complete darkness.

The most tragic and unfortunate aspect of this sort of thinking is that it does not try to see the actual reasons of the incidents and happenings. The whole society, based on the same sort of thinking, starts accepting the material advancements

as miracles and tends to neglect all those pillars on which the building of all these advancements is placed. If the modern technological and scientific era is analyzed, there would be few ideas of some thinkers and few thoughts of certain intellectuals and today's materialistic advancement is based on the same ideas and thoughts.

It has to be understood that the material advancement itself is not an achievement; rather it is a source to satiate the psychological and spiritual thirst. While, the wisdom and the experience, which are shared through philosophy and literature, are the real achievements - thereal creativity of human capacities. And, on the other hand the attitude of the society towards such wisdom and experience is nothing more than a bad joke. And a bad joke can never be considered a solution to the issues and problems of life.

Our society really needs intellectuals. It is really weird to note that the intellectuals are totally dependent on society and their favors, whereas, the society should depend on them and seek their favors for proper guidance. If there is any relation between the real beauty in nature and the society, it is because of the intellectuals. If there is no intellectual in a society, such a society is really orphan, as far as aesthetic sense and spiritual guidance is concerned. It is really important that in a society the intellectuals must have the authority to set the standards; only then the society can have balanced development and advancement. The advancement then would not be limited only to the materialistic aspects but would also include the emotional and the aesthetic aspects of life.

Nonetheless, it is also important to understand: "Who are the real intellectuals?"

Every profession needs some sort of practice and hard work. Even a beggar has to practice and then he is able to earn money; otherwise, he won't be able to earn even a penny. However, our poets can be the authors of tens of books and poetry collections without even reading a single book. With such a scenario how would it be possible to face the society and ask for reputation, respect and proper status? Yes, it is a fact that the intellectuals and writers must have the most reputable status in the society; however, have they really fulfilled the requirements of being the real intellectuals and have they proved themselves deserving enough for such elevated position?

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Gulf crisis upends fiction of a separation of sports and politics

By James M. Dorsey

The Gulf crisis that has pitted World Cup host Qatar against a United Arab Emirates-Saudi Arabia-led alliance for the past eight months is showing up the fiction of a separation of sports and politics.

Regional and international soccer bodies seeking to police the ban on a mixing of sports and politics are discovering that it amounts to banging their heads against a wall. As they attempted in recent months to halt politics from subverting Asian tournaments, domestic and regional politics seeped into the game via different avenues.

Soccer governance bodies have long struggled to maintain the fiction of a separation in a trade off that gave regulators greater autonomy and created the breeding ground for widespread corruption while allowing governments and politicians to manipulate the sport to their advantage as long as they were not too blatant about it.

The limits of that deal are being defined in the Middle East, a region wracked by conflict where virtually everything is politicized. While bodies like FIFA, the world soccer regulator, and the Asian Football Confederation (AFC), have focused in recent months on the Gulf crisis, Saudi domestic politics as well as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the Saudi-Iranian rivalry reared their ugly heads.

Saudi businessman Prince Alwaleed bin Talal, in one of his first public acts since being released from three months of detention in Riyadh's Ritz Carlton hotel and in a demonstration of fealty to Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, donated \$533,000 to Saudi soccer club Al Hilal FC.

Prince Alwaleed, who was among the more recalcitrant of the hundreds of members of Saudi Arabia's ruling family, senior officials, and prominent businessmen in what amounted to a power and asset grab under the mum of an anti-corruption campaign, said the donation was in response to a call by the government.

Saudi authorities said they expected to collect some \$106 billion in assets and funds from released detainees as a result of the campaign, yet that figure is in doubt.

"It has come as no surprise that the total haul will be a mere fraction of the sum anticipated... Authorities are only counting on the acquisition of \$13.3 billion in settlements by the end of the year, equivalent to the amount of revenue the country would receive from a small increase in the oil price," said Ambrose

Carey, director of Alaco, a London-based business intelligence consultancy, who has been involved in some of the most high profile asset-tracing cases in past decades, and an expert on Saudi Arabia.

Prince Mohammed reportedly had demanded that Prince Alwaleed, one of the world's richest men with investments in a host of Western blue chips, pay \$6 billion for his release. It is not known on what terms he was set free.

Similarly, limits to Prince Mohammed's power and contrasting efforts by Gulf rivals to forge closer covert relations with Israel and woo the American Jewish community played out on multiple sports arenas.

Media reporting on this month's participation of Israeli teams in a handball tournament in Doha suggested that social media criticism may have been engineered, a fixture of the Gulf crisis, that was sparked last May by fake news published on Qatari websites in a hack allegedly engineered by the United Arab Emirates. "It is not known whether the tweets critical of Doha actually originated from Qatar," Agence France Press reported in its coverage of the criticism.

Despite Israeli athletes repeatedly competing in tournaments in the Gulf over the years, Prince Mohammed, the heir-apparent to the title of Custodian of the Holy Cities, Mecca and Medina, opted not to risk criticism by barring Israeli players from participating in a chess match in December in the kingdom. The decision suggested that Prince Mohammed was walking a tightrope in prioritizing the kingdom's rivalry with Iran at the expense of the Palestinian issue in his relations with Israel and the Trump administration.

As a result, an Asian Champions League game in Abu Dhabi between Al Gharafa of Qatar and Al Jazira of the UAE constituted the first breach of the eight-month old boycott of the idiosyncratic Gulf state.

The AFC and FIFA's record in dealing with the inseparable relationship between sports and politics in the Gulf is, however, at best mixed.

In a bizarre and contradictory sequence of events at the outset of the Gulf crisis, FIFA president Gianni Infantino rejected involving the group in the dispute by saying that "the essential role of FIFA, as I understand it, is to deal with football and not to interfere in geopolitics."

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