

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

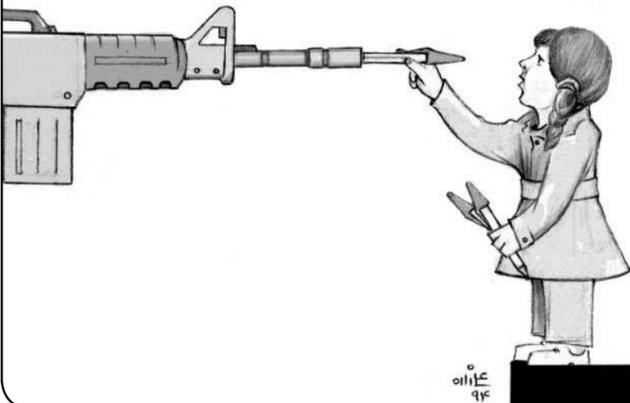


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Strengthening Democracy in Afghanistan

Achieving a satisfactory democratic system that has the will and support of the people in its essence is a difficult task. There are various requirements that must be achieved in this regard. All of them stand paramount in nourishment of democracy and must not be neglected by the nations of the world. The first and foremost prerequisite for growth of democracy is unanimous acceptance of the sovereignty of people. Perceptibly, democracy is about such a concept of sovereignty and its realization. The sovereign people elect representatives from amongst themselves to rule the country with power the 'sovereign' delegates to them for a limited period. It is conditional that those representatives would rule to the fullest satisfaction of the 'sovereign' people. If they do not come up to their expectations, in the next general elections those elected representatives can be voted out of government. No one else has a right to dismiss elected representatives. Obviously, the 'sovereign' could delegate power towards a well-defined end. In this case it is good governance as it ensures that the solution of the problems the people face is ensured effectively only when they themselves have political and social awareness. Hence, the higher the literacy rate, the more powerful the electorate is. What makes democracy effective is the democratic political process whereby every political party or entity strictly abides by inner party democracy and party elections. The first requirement is, democracy at grass-roots level - neighborhood and village where partly cadres work among the people, provide better learning of the problems. The people face and share the problems with the political workers who are one among them and one of them. The other aspect is the people's participation and their empowerment to directly handle things in their day-to-day affairs. One of the biggest means is democracy working at lowest administrative level with cities and rural areas both being administered by elected representatives, not by self-imposed individuals. A city is best administered by an elected mayor with the help of an elected corporation and a rural area by elected district council heads and their staff members. Democracy has not been able to have strong roots in Afghanistan because of a number of reasons; the foremost being that no effort was ever made to politically educate the people. The very foundation of democracy and political education of the people remains weak due to mass illiteracy and extremely low standard of education.

Secondly, hardly any one of the national political leaders is from among the common people. They are mostly elite - tribal lords, religious leaders, and even warlords. Another reason that democracy is not able to flourish properly in Afghanistan is the absence of democratic political process. Basically, it is the result of non-existence of democracy within the political units or entities that have been in power. The elections in Afghanistan have been the witness to this fact. The political alliances that were made were not on political basis and the different groups that were formed did not have any attribute of a political party. In fact, there has not been any healthy evolution towards forming strong political parties and running elections based on party politics; the process has only paved the way for dependence on individual attributes and attractions. Another unfortunate fact is the failure of political leaders to acquire political education themselves, let alone educating masses politically. The problems regarding evolution and growth of democracy that Afghan society faces are many but some of them, the most daunting ones are mass illiteracy, divisions on linguistic and ethnic basis, subdivisions into castes and tribes, suffocating grip of feudal culture with disdain for those doing manual work, respect for parasites and a worried business class. There are many more such problems that our society faces. But none has been known to political leadership or they have turned their faces away from them and instead concentrated on prolonging their rule and acquiring their personal benefits. It is important to look at the countries that have excelled in their democratic development for guidance. The developed democracies in the world respect their constitutions, strengthen their democratic institutions and hold regular, timely and fraud-free elections, which have triggered a political process and educated and trained the political leadership. The result is that majority of members in national and state legislatures are working politicians, who come from middle and working classes. They, therefore, understand their duties properly and also understand how to run the political affairs in the country. They are also closer to the common people and can understand their actual problems. Therefore, they are in better position to work for the country as a whole. On the other hand, the political leadership in Afghanistan is mostly elected by the help of wealth and power. Even the people who do not have any prior education, training or experience regarding democracy can contest for election and may even win it. The institutional arrangements that are very much imperative for the democratic process and development is nowhere to be seen and the result is a democratic system that lacks the true spirit and attributes of democracy. Democracy in Afghanistan still revolves around personalities and depend on them, much like a feudal or dictatorial system.



New Economic Ties

By Muhammad Zahir Akbari

For the sake of Afghanistan's stability, the neighbors, though sometimes part of the problem, can be made part of the solution and won as partners in a cooperative effort. Due to several reasons such as inactive diplomacies, unfriendly policies and overriding bilateral conflicts made this sometimes a difficult task. By linking Central Asia to South Asia and the Near East, Afghanistan occupies a strategic location. With better security and an improved infrastructure, Afghanistan could transport natural gas and electricity from Central Asia to South Asia, export mineral resources to China, and serve as the international hub for overland trade from ports in Iran and Pakistan. These developments have a greater potential to transform Afghanistan's economy than any direct international aid or domestic investments. It is one the rarest happy news that Afghanistan trade deficit balance is gradually increasing as the recent news indicates. "Our export has enhanced 12 percent and its import was 88 percent," said Minister of Commerce and Industries Humayon Rasa. He also said that two years ago Afghanistan import was three percent while the export was 97 percent. "Comparing with two years ago, trade balance has moved toward positive," Rasa added. He said that National Unity Government (NUG) runs different economic programs in order to gain people and private sector's trust. Dialogue is going on between government and private sector to support private business for further achievement. He stated that membership of private sector in economic high council as an important governmental decision maker address is another positive step has been hold by the government. It is said that Afghanistan used to import \$2 billion different commodities annually from Pakistan, where the number significantly decreased up to \$900 million imports in a year. Both Pakistan and Afghanistan have faced significant challenges in their respective security, political relation and economic realms over the past years. Afghan businessmen constantly blame Pakistan for transportation barriers. Earlier huge number of truck drivers who were carrying goods from Pakistan to Afghanistan had staged days of demonstration for illegal extortion from Torkham up to Kabul city. Opening of the new business route has been one of the main demands of the Afghan businessmen to grow business with other neighboring countries; eventually, the need led Afghan Governmental officials to seek alternative business routes for growing economy of the country. In the past 15 years, Afghanistan's trade deficit had been widening as import was quite imbalance comparing to export. Afghanistan import has been reached around \$10 billion and its export was over \$500 million. Afghanistan main exports are carpets, rugs, dried and fresh fruits and medical plants and main imports are petroleum; machinery and equipment and food items. Afghanistan's main trading partners were Pakistan, Iran, China, India, Russia, Turkey but recently Officials in Government of Afghanistan called Uz-

bekistan a good alternative business source instead of Pakistan, saying 15 years of business ties with Pakistan were full of ups and downs, amid Officials at Uzbekistan expressed readiness to be a good business partner with Afghanistan. Minister of Public Works Mahmood Balegh said, "Negotiations made, main points were marked, and necessary measurements were taken to pave the way for both sides take part in launching projects."

Moreover the President's economy Advisor Homayoon Qaumi assured that security will be ensured for the Governmental and private Uzbekistan companies trying to invest in Afghanistan. It was also said that Afghan ministries have drafted different agreements to be signed with the Uzbekistan government in order to boost up mutual trade and transit deals. Afghanistan and Uzbekistan Inter-government commercial and economic commission on Tuesday launched the 2nd conference in Kabul attended by ministers of agriculture, commerce, public works, transportation, energy and water, as well as public health. Officials reported of establishing different draft agreements to be signed with the government and different organs of Uzbekistan at the objective to foster trade and transit deals between Kabul and Tashkent. Voicing hope over railway line between Afghanistan and Uzbekistan, he said that Afghanistan work over expanding transport and transit relation between Afghanistan and Uzbekistan. He highlighted that daily 30-40 trucks coming from Uzbekistan to Afghanistan soil, but due to lack of road pass and visa for drivers Afghan truck cannot go to Uzbekistan. "The ministry is working to address visa and road pass issue with Uzbekistan as soon as possible," Batash stated. Minister of Public Health Ferozuddin Feroz said that Uzbekistan pharmaceutically progressed well, thus we will struggle to import medicine from this country as well in order to create a health competition as well as foster quality of medicine in the country. He stated that the MoPH also will struggle to establish standard laboratories for medicine checking in the country Ministries of Public Work and Energy and Water also informed of different drafts to attract Uzbekistan cooperation in fields of railway, energy and water. Peaceful and active economic cooperation between Afghanistan and neighboring countries are in interest of all. With improving trade and transit facilities and connecting South Asia to Central Asia will create a lot of economic opportunities to all neighboring countries. For example, it can provide foreign exchange to import commodities manufactured more cheaply than a distant part of the world; it can also create a lot of job opportunities which can largely decrease the number of economic migrations and brain drain from these countries, especially, from Afghanistan. Finally, all neighboring countries need to realize that a peaceful and land-link Afghanistan is far better than an insecure and landlocked Afghanistan.

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Syria's War - An Infected Wound

By Hujjatullah Zia

The heart-wrenching stories of war victims and disgusting rehearsal of radical ideologies fill one with a sense of fear and hatred. Streams of blood oozing from riddled bodies and sliced throats compound the public tragedy. Aylan Kurdi - a three-year-old Syrian boy whose image made global headlines after he drowned on September 02, 2015 in the Mediterranean Sea - was also the sacrificial lamb of war and his family intended to heave a sigh of relief in foreign country. Syria and Iraq bore the brunt of militancy and sustained large casualties, mainly with the emergence of the self-styled Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). Last year, at least 6,878 civilians were, reportedly, killed 12,388 more were wounded in Iraq as the government sought to maintain security. However, figures did not include casualties among civilians in Iraq's western Anbar province for the months of May, July, August and December. The monthly UN casualty report for December 2016 showed that a total of 386 civilians were killed and another 1,066 were wounded. The worst affected area was the northern province of Ninevah, where government forces are fighting to retake the ISIL-held city of Mosul, with 208 civilians killed and 511 injured. The capital, Baghdad, came next with 109 civilians killed and 523 injured. In the last week alone, ISIL claimed responsibility for a string of bombings in Baghdad that killed more than 50 people. The deadliest ISIL attack was in July when a massive suicide bombing in a bustling market area in central Baghdad killed almost 300 people, the bloodiest single attack in the capital in 13 years of war.

The Syria's war posed serious threat not only to the region but to the entire world as the ISIL fighters involved super powers in war. Basically, the Syrian freedom-fighters intended to gain democracy through devastating the Assad's regime, however, the war inflicted heavy casualties upon the Syrian nation as the ISIL fighters fished in the troubled waters and capitalized on it. They channeled the war to racial and religious backgrounds and imposed large casualties upon the ethnic minority groups. According to the UN, approximately 400,000 Syrians have been killed in the conflict that dates back to a 2011 popular uprising against Assad's regime. In addition, about five million have fled into neighboring countries over the years, while six million remain internally displaced. The UN has described the situation as the "biggest refugee and displacement crisis of our time". Considering this fact, gaining democracy will be a pyrrhic victory and Syria has paid great sacrifices. It is believed that the war has come to a stalemate, especially with the involvement of many parties

in this war, and Syrian nation is unable to put an end to this devastating war. The more this war continues the heavier casualties it will cause and the civilians and ethnic minority groups will be burning in this fire. The international community will have to stop violence and bloodshed in Syria as soon as possible or at least bring the government and anti-government group to the negotiating table.

It is said that Russia and Turkey have brokered the stalemate and the truce was to have been followed by talks between mainstream rebel factions and government representatives in the Kazakh capital of Astana. But while fighting has largely ebbed in Syria's north, where Turkey holds influence over most rebel groups, troops allied to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad have continued to press an offensive in the Damascus suburbs.

In a statement published late Monday, 10 rebel factions said they were suspending talks relating to the Astana negotiations or any discussions related to the cease-fire "until it is fully implemented," citing "major and frequent violations" in the rebel-held areas of Wadi Barada and Eastern Ghouta outside the Syrian capital. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan hailed the truce as a "historic opportunity," but experts say it had problems from the start. Most notably, the Syrian army said that "terrorist" organizations would be exempt, implying that Jabhat Fatah al-Sham, an al-Qaeda affiliate and an influential component of what remains of Syria's armed opposition, would continue to be targeted. The deal's shaky progress also underscored the fact that no single player can now fully deliver the government or the rebel side. While Russia has burnished its reputation as a mediator in weeks of talks with Turkey, it now appears unable to bring the Syrian government in line with the cease-fire. Turkey has also struggled to bring the most important rebel factions on board. While two of the highest-profile Islamist groups, Ahrar al-Sham and Nour al-Din al-Zinki, have agreed to uphold the cease-fire, they have not signed any agreement to attend peace talks.

Needless to say, war will lead to devastation and fatality and pave the ground for radical rehearsal. Furthermore, it will destabilize the world as terrorist networks spilt the blood of innocent civilians throughout the world on the grounds of their race and religion. It is hoped that the international community will stop turning blind eye to human casualties and violation of human rights and humanitarian law. The elimination of the ISIL group is believed to be the first precondition for peace and stability in Syria and Iraq. In short, if ISIL continues to operate, the war will never come to an end.

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