

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



January 09, 2017

Ensuring Women Right

The women have been deprived of their basic rights and freedoms as they have been treated as an inferior class in the society as well as the families. For instance, for a typical Afghan girl, particularly in rural areas, it has been less likely to have the permission of her family to go to school, university or workplace, virtually leading to her deprivation from opportunities critical for a better life. The decades of war and violence have played a major role in violation of women's rights and limitation of their freedoms. In fact, the women have been direct victims of war and instability and the most affected segment of the society during the past decades of wars. Afghanistan is still far from the global efforts for improvement of women's conditions and rights. Yet in Afghanistan, there are concerns of a possible reverse in women's rights.

Particularly after two major transition processes, the 2014 NATO withdrawal and the presidential elections, concerns regarding the future of Women's rights increased. The causes of violence against women are mostly driven by the dominant conservative culture and the decades-long conflict. However, the most dominant reason behind the widespread violence against women is the fact that the Afghan society is deeply conservative. The widespread domestic violence or violent behaviors against women are closely related to the conservative attitude of the male members of the families to the women, seeking superiority in form of guardianship over them. Inevitably, efforts from the male family members in seeking superiority result to conflicts in the families and consequently violence against women. The major reasons behind the attitude of violent domination of male members are traditions, religion and the low rate of literacy.

The threats against women in Afghanistan have been alarmingly on the rise since last couple of years. Amidst the uncertainty and as the violence against women are growing, the National Unity Government leaders with the help of the international community must act to ensure the conditions of Afghan women would not deteriorate.

The militant groups still target the women activists as well as those who are going to school or working outside.

The insurgents continue to target women activists and school girls to discourage them from their social activities and attending public schools. Despite extensive pro-women campaign during past fifteen years, each month there are many cases of violence against them in the society and family levels. Time and again, there are reports of violence against women, such as honor killings, rapes and tortures. Many wonder that what would happen in 2017 and how it would affect the status of women and on the hard-gained achievements since 2001. However, the fact is that Afghanistan has changed and the status of Afghan women has considerably improved. The programs aimed at improving the life conditions of women, have worked and helped in shaping the opinions of people towards the women. The policies and strategies of the Afghan government towards promoting the rights of the women have been effective - though inefficient. It has supported the media, human rights organizations, women activists and other groups. The collective efforts of Afghanistan and the international community have helped to encourage other parties in the society to step in the campaign for the cause of women's rights.

Human rights organizations and women activists bear the brunt the campaign against extremists and in the conservative society. Public awareness campaign for promoting women's rights is the most major driver of change and the achievements made so far. But it has not been carried out with potent momentum which could effect all parts of the society. Public awareness gradually changes the conservative mood of the society and makes it ready for embracing the new way of life and accepting a new set of rights for the women. In order to carry out such public awareness, general education is the key. By generalizing education to the far-reach corners of the country, and to all parts of society, Afghans will be able to fight conservatism.

In addition to that, the women now have direct and active involvement in the campaign, giving them a voice and the energy to make their voice heard. As a result of the efforts, the conservative Afghan society is opening up for embracing new status and rights for the women. The situation has much improved as the collective move towards the goal of a violence-free society for women impacts the society. While there were almost a-zero percent of girls in school during the Taliban era, there are now millions of girls going to schools and universities, which virtually would change their life as well as the attitude of the society and that of families. This is a clear sign of what is going on in Afghan still-conservative society. The fact that millions of girls are going to universities is indicating that the country is changing, though not at a fast pace, but is moving in the right direction. However, there should be concrete measure both from the Afghan government and the international community to sustain these achievements and ensure that the women's rights would be protected and preserved.



Insecurity: National and Regional Concerns

By Muhammad Zahir Akbari

The growing insecurity in Afghanistan has caused widely national and regional concerns. The recent killing of coal miners in Baghlan has sparked a massive outcry in the country with the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC), Parliament Members (MPs), the Ulema, Civil Society Activists and government condemning the incident. AIHRC, civil society activists and the Ulema council on Saturday condemned the killings reportedly committed by Daesh fighters and said it is a war crime.

"Killing of civilians because of their racial and ethnic differences is a war crime," said Mohammad Taqi Wahidi, the AIHRC media officer in the province. "Sometimes they kill people chanting Allah is great and misuse religion and this is shameful. Religion is strongly against killing and it does not condone it," said Mohsin Danish, a member of Balkh Ulema Council. MPs also denounced the killing of the coalminers and said if the situation continues, the country will face a crisis. Haji Mohammad Mohaqiq, the CEO's second deputy, said that Daesh had increased its activities in the country. He had been talking about the 13 coalmine victims in Baghlan in what is believed to have been a Daesh attack.

Mohaqiq linked the killing to Takfiri groups and said out of 100 terrorist groups in the world, 20 of them are active in Afghanistan. "They are part of Takfiri groups that are active in Syria, Iraq and some other countries. They have been active in Afghanistan for about one year," he said.

The group first started activities in Nangarhar province and then recruited fighters from Logar and Nuristan provinces. But recently the group carried out activities in Faryab, Jawzjan, Sar-e-Pul, Uruzgan and Baghlan provinces. According to Ministry of Defense (MoD), Daesh is active in Nangarhar, Kunar, Nuristan and Zabul provinces. In addition, "A number of armed individuals use the name of terrorist groups to carry out some criminal activities. They first change their flag and then their fighting tactics and carry out such activities that they did in Baghlan," said Mohammad Radmanesh, deputy spokesman of MoD.

A number of MPs said terrorists want to create discord among the people using religion and tribal issues and urged government to investigate the issue. Several times, they applied their evil strategies through a series of deadly attacks on mosques but luckily failed to reach their sinister goals. With attacking on the mosques and killing dozens of innocents, they also proved that neither they are committed to Islamic teaching and nor to national or international values.

Over the past months, Afghanistan has witnessed a surge in terror activities by Daesh. The initial information shows Daesh is behind the sectarian attacks. Their main goal is to

create divisions between Shias and Sunnis. It is also quoted by Mohammad Hussain one of the coalmine survivors that the reason of assault was because of their beliefs. "We were trying to escape in our vehicle when they shot us.

They killed one person and then stopped us and told us you belong to another religion, you are non-believers and your death is allowed and then they started shooting us and others fell in the river and I got wounded in my back," he said". In October 2016, at least 14 Shia Muslims lost their lives in a powerful blast at a mosque in the northern city of Mazar-e-Sharif. The attack was carried out hours after gunmen targeted worshippers at a shrine in the capital, Kabul, and killed 18 people. The rise of Daesh in Afghanistan has triggered local and regional concerns.

Mainly, Daesh is active in Syria and Iraq, has reportedly managed to take recruits from Taliban defectors in Afghanistan. In August, Daesh claimed responsibility for a bombing during a demonstration in Kabul, where at least 90 people were killed and hundreds injured. They have been expanding for one last year and are always looking for new geographical areas. It is said that they are present in at least 11 of Afghanistan's 34 provinces.

There are serious grounds to expect that the situation in Afghanistan will rapidly deteriorate including the disunity of the government authorities, the government legitimacy crisis, and increasing ethnic tensions.

The triangle talks in Moscow also cannot be underestimated due to several analyses. First, Moscow fears that this zone of instability could spread northwards into the Central Asian countries that border Russia. Second, over the past 15 years Russia has changed from a transit route into a market for Afghan heroin, which distress up to 25,000 Russian lives every year. And the third concern is the development of Daesh (ISIS) infrastructure in Afghanistan that can be used to export terrorist activity to the North Caucasus and the Volga region. Over all, the People are really tired and concerned suffering from long-lasting crises. It is really a big shame when we hear that a group of Afghan old women have taken up arms to fight the double threat of Taliban and Daesh Group.

It is said that they moved to take the revenge of their victimized brothers, sisters, children and husband while it is the responsibility of government to protect people and pursue terrifying actors. It obvious, that remote northern parts of Afghanistan has seen the center of militant activities and regrouping while the loosely writ of the state in these parts, giving a almost free hand to the Taliban and Daesh who in turn are fighting each other for control of these areas.

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Europe's New "Indispensable Nations"

By Joschka Fischer

After the shock of the United Kingdom's Brexit referendum and Donald Trump's election as President of the United States in 2016, this will be a decisive year for Europe. Upcoming parliamentary elections in France, Germany, the Netherlands, and possibly Italy will decide whether the European Union will hold together, or whether it will disintegrate under the neo-nationalist wave sweeping the West.

Meanwhile, the Brexit negotiations will begin in earnest, providing a glimpse of the future of the EU-UK relationship. And Trump's inauguration on January 20 may someday be remembered as a watershed moment for Europe.

Judging by Trump's past statements about Europe and its relationship with the US, the EU should be preparing for some profound shocks. The incoming US president, an exponent of the new nationalism, does not believe in European integration. Here he has an ally in Russian President Vladimir Putin, who has long tried to destabilize the EU by supporting nationalist forces and movements in its member states. If the Trump administration supports or turns a blind eye to those efforts, the EU - sandwiched between Russian trolls and Breitbart News - will have to brace itself for challenging times indeed.

The consequences for the EU will be even more serious if, in addition to setting the US relationship with Russia on a new foundation, Trump continues to call into question America's security guarantee for Europe. Such a move would be at the expense of NATO, which has institutionalized the US security umbrella for more than six decades. Europeans would suddenly find themselves standing alone against a Russia that has increasingly employed military means to challenge borders, such as in Ukraine, and to reassert its influence - or even hegemony - over Eastern Europe.

We will soon know what comes next for NATO, but much harm has already been done. Security guarantees are not just a matter of military hardware. The guarantor also must project a credible message that it is willing to defend its allies whenever necessary. Thus, such arrangements depend largely on psychology, and on a country's trustworthiness vis-à-vis friends and foes alike.

When that credibility is damaged, there is a growing risk of provocation - and, with it, the threat of escalation into larger crises, or even armed conflict.

Given this risk, the EU should now shore up what it has left with respect to NATO and focus on salvaging its own institutional, economic, and legal integration. But it should also look to its member states to provide a second security option. The EU itself is based on soft power: it was not designed to guar-

antee European security, and it is not positioned in its current form to confront a hard-power challenge. This means that it will fall to its two largest and economically strongest countries, France and Germany, to bolster Europe's defense. Other countries such as Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Spain, and Poland will also have a role to play, but France and Germany are indispensable. Of course, living in continental Europe means having Russia as a neighbor, and neighborly relations, generally speaking, should be based on peace, cooperation, and mutual respect (especially when one's neighbor is a nuclear power). But Europeans cannot harbor any illusions about Russia's intent. The Kremlin approaches foreign policy as a zero-sum game, which means that it will always prioritize military strength and geopolitical power over cooperative security arrangements.

Russia does not view weakness or the lack of a threat from its neighbors as a basis for peace, but rather as an invitation to extend its own sphere of influence. So, power asymmetry in Eastern Europe will lead only to instability. If Europe wants a stable, enduring peace, it first must ensure that it is taken seriously, which is clearly not the case today. Europe can credibly strengthen its security only if France and Germany work together toward the same goal, which they will have an opportunity to do after their elections this year.

EU diplomats used to murmur off the record that Germany and France would never see eye to eye on military and financial issues, owing to their different histories and cultures. But if security conditions take a turn for the worse, that may no longer be the case. Indeed, reaching a compromise on both sides of the Rhine should not be so difficult: France undoubtedly has the experience to lead on defense; and the same goes for Germany on financial matters.

If pursuing this European security option prompts the US to renew its own security guarantee, so much the better. Meanwhile, the EU should also forge a post-Brexit cooperative strategic arrangement with the UK, whose geopolitical position and security interests will remain unchanged.

The old EU developed into an economic power because it was protected beneath the US security umbrella. But without this guarantee, it can address its current geopolitical realities only by developing its own capacity to project political and military power. Six decades after the Treaty of Rome established the European Economic Community, history and current developments are pushing France and Germany to shape Europe's future once again. (Courtesy Project Syndicate)

Joschka Fischer, Germany's foreign minister and vice chancellor from 1998 to 2005, was a leader of the German Green Party for almost 20 years.



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