

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



July 07, 2019

Painting a Gloomy Picture of Peace Talks

The war on terror was launched in Afghanistan after the 9/11 terrorist attack on World Trade Center complex in New York City. US forces took a military action as a backlash against the Taliban and their Al-Qaeda allies. The operation was very serious that the Taliban could hardly find sanctuaries inside the country. The Tora Bora, which was allegedly used as Taliban's sanctuary, was under heavy bombardments. Ultimately, the Taliban were overthrown by the American-led invasion of Afghanistan.

It was only the start of the story. The Taliban reactionaries resurfaced with radically religious beliefs to launch jihad against the foreign troops in Afghanistan. They regrouped as an insurgency movement to the American-backed Karzai administration and the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). Militancy broke out seriously leading to human casualties - including Afghan civilians - and the country was moved towards higher instability.

The hope of Afghan people, who were imaging Afghanistan as utopian country after the fall of Taliban's regime, crumbled. They were largely falling victim to terrorist acts.

To establish a democratic government, the first presidential election was conducted in 2004. Large number of people participated and the ballot boxes were filled to bring democracy in the country. But was democracy established?

Indeed, ballots could not dominate bullet. The nascent democracy was being threatened by Taliban and Al-Qaeda armed militants. Terror persisted continuously and the graph of casualty tolls mounted day by day.

Afghan government decided to hold negotiation with the Taliban militants as a strategic mechanism to end terrorism. President Karzai has long called on the Taliban to join the peace process. In late 2008 he even offered to provide security for the Taliban supreme leader, Mullah Omar, if he agreed to peace talks - this was not incentive enough.

The High Peace Council was established in 2010 and tasked with contacting the Taliban and convincing them to join the peace process. The members of High Peace Council (HPC) were making efforts days and nights in pursuit of bringing the Taliban to the negotiating table. However, all efforts and energies met failure repeatedly. In spite of the government's efforts focused on reintegrating Taliban fighters, they did not have a reconciliation strategy.

Finally, the head of Afghan High Peace Council, Professor Burhanuddin Rabbani, was assassinated at his home in Kabul on 20 September 2011, by two men posing as Taliban representatives. The suicide bomber claimed to be a Taliban commander and said he wanted to "discuss peace" with Professor Rabbani. Four other members of HPC were also killed in the blast. The Quetta Shura was blamed for the incident by Afghan officials.

This incident enraged Afghan officials, especially Afghan then President Hamid Karzai and drew severe condemnations. But their anger did not last long.

On June 18, 2013, Taliban opened an office as the first move towards peace deal after 12-years of fighting, but it enraged Afghan President by styling itself as an unofficial embassy for a government-in-exile. Karzai raised his concerns about the peace process not being Afghan-led. He suspended plans for Afghan officials to meet the Taliban in Qatar. His concerns were so great that the then US Secretary of State John Kerry had to promise that the Taliban flag and their sign reading "The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan" would be removed. But the flag remained, albeit on a shorter flagpole.

The then US President Barack Obama signaled for peace talks with the Taliban.

This issue stirred up tension between Kabul and Washington. The Afghan government reacted to the move saying it contradicted the security guarantees the US had given it.

However, Trump administration began talks with the Taliban leadership to end 18 years of conflict through negotiations.

With the latest round of peace talks held between the Taliban and the US representatives in Qatar's capital, the Taliban have signaled positively for intra-Afghan dialogue. However, the positive outcome of the upcoming dialogue is still doubted by Afghan people.

The fact is that the Taliban's intensified attacks against Afghan combatants and non-combatants have left little room for optimism. Ordinary people believe that if the Taliban were genuine in the talks, they would mitigate their insurgency, especially targeting civilians.

Despite the ongoing peace talks, terrorism still remains a serious threat for Afghanistan. Afghan people are losing their lives as ever in roadside bombings and suicide attacks carried out by Taliban militants. The Taliban have constantly turned down the public and state's demands for declaring ceasefire. Hence, Afghans still paint a gloomy picture of peace talks.

Afghanistan: the Example of Adoptability between Modernism and Traditionalism

By: Mohammad Zahir Akbari

There are two types of approaches between Modernism and Traditionalism among the developing Islamic countries: adoptability and paradox. Given the inclusion of Islamic principle in the legal system of the country, especially in national constitution of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, it has chosen the first approach. According to conservative thinkers, it has caused some theoretical and practical challenges in legal practices. They believe that the combination approach is not possible, but due to the national and international requirements have been accepted. Therefore, the challenges are proportional to the level of political and economic dependency of the countries. The more dependent the deeper is the challenge.

In clearer term, According to article 3 of the national constitution, Afghanistan has highly preserved its Islamic identity, and on the other hand, it is highly tended to the international norms and values. For example, Afghanistan has adapted dozens of international conventions in past 18 years without any reservation rights legally justified by the article 7 of the national law. As a result, it has confused many practitioners in realistic arenas. The decision makers and lawyers seem to be in a crossing road whether to choose the Islamic discourse or the liberalism discourse. For example, in some cases, the employees of MoFA are confused; from one hand, they need to respect international requirements, and on the other hand, they have not to forget the national requirements in regard to implementation of the adopted international laws and values.

According to reformist thinkers, the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan is a good model of combination of modernism and traditionalism as it has enabled the system to have more capability in management of today's society. Thereof, among variety of interpretations from Islam, the Shia and Hanafi interpretations are more flexible into combination of traditionalism and modernism. Shia, In addition to using traditional sources such as Quran, Sunnah and Ijma, also believe in using from rational sources which has been well reflected in the academic works of moderate scholars such Farabi, Ibn Khaldoon and so on. Among the temporary scholars the faithwa and religious degree of Ayatullah Faiyaz are highly adaptable to the current international norms and values; this indicates that modernism and Islamism are more similar to two friends rather than two opponents or enemies due to the commonalities exist in regard to using of rational source.

In a deeper view, the origins of these challenges come from ignorance, social and political context, dogmatic thinking, complicated nature of religious sources and in some cases the unruly ego of human being. Regarding religious language, it means that religious language is, somewhat, symbolic not possible to understand unless having good relation with Allah and vast knowledge of religious topics. Concerning ignorance, some ignorant people are not seeking to find out the truth; they think that they are the owner of the truth. In the other word, there are two types of ignorant groups of people: one who are not aware and one who do not allow themselves to be

aware. For example, the extremist groups neither are aware and nor allow themselves to be aware, especially those who are trained in the closed contexts. From this point, confrontation starts between modernism and extremist groups of traditionalist. However, politics are blamed for having role in this issue but undoubtedly it is the effect, not cause; it might be similar to a piece of cotton which is easily flammable because of its nature.

According to moderate interpretation from Islam, any rule, regulation or modern phenomena which are not against Islam, they are considered Islamic. Therefore, a very high percentage of modern values and achievements such as democratic system and international laws including international declaration of human rights, Child Right Convention, Convention of Elimination on all forms of discrimination against women, the Convention on non-racial discrimination and so on can be considered Islamic as long as it is not against the main principles and its general spirits. Undeniably, there are some exceptional cases but no one should expect a hundred percent unity in thoughts and views. The today's civilization and advancement is not the production of dogmatism thinking but the blessing of unity in diversity.

Instead of confrontation among cultures and civilizations as Huntington had predicted, we had better launch a dialogue and friendship among cultures so as to learn from each and other. In fact, we do not need to change the opportunities to threats; we should confess all cultures and civilizations are the products of human being, and so it is respectable unless threaten the freedom of thoughts and human society. Based on this, both moderate traditionalist and modernists are under similar threats and need to seek common solution. In past 18 years, both national and international people, even those who sincerely took part in reconstruction of Afghanistan, have been victimized by the extremist groups. That is why, Afghan people stress on preservation of new democratic system and the current achievements. They are confident in not needing to re-experience the model of political systems, especially Talibanism with its tendencies towards extremism.

As aforesaid, the parts of the paradoxes come from ignorance dark context of education. Unfortunately, most often the extremists have been trained in dark, closed environment more similar to the middle aged seminaries. The content of their lessons are limited to jurisprudence and Hadith while both have been politicized within the long course of history. As a result, their graduates think that they have reached the ultimate truth, but do not know that do not know. Consequently, from one hand we need to eliminate the dark context and contents, on the other hand, we need to respect the rational-based knowledge and freedom of thoughts. However, as a short term solution, they should be compelled walking on the right way or decisively be stopped from farther expansion.

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The Democratic Nominee America Needs

By: Alexander Friedman and Jerry Grinstein

The contenders for the US Democratic Party's presidential nomination have held their first debates, and the main questions reverberating in political and media circles seem to be either who will be tough enough to take on President Donald Trump, or who has the headline-grabbing ideas.

But there is a better way to think about who the Democratic nominee should be. While the Democrats search for a liberal savior, they run the risk of making a fundamental mistake. The answer to the party's problems lies not in its own version of an extreme disruptor, but rather in empowering moderate local leaders throughout America, not just the coastal states.

The Democrats must pick a candidate who not only wins the White House, but, just as critically, also gives swing-state House and Senate candidates policies that are wide enough for them to run and win on, thereby enabling change in Senate leadership. The Democrats must nominate a candidate who understands that voters in many of the states that will actually decide the election are largely more fiscally conservative and less interested in the politics of division.

Forget the West Coast and the Northeast: these states will largely get behind whoever the Democrats nominate. But there is real concern among local leaders in states like Arizona, Florida, Wisconsin, Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Ohio - the places that will determine the election's outcome - that the country cannot afford the headline policy proposals for health care, education, and the environment that are becoming litmus tests for many Democratic candidates.

These fiscal concerns have merit. The United States is running an enormous deficit, exacerbated by the Trump administration's recent tax bill. Historically, the US has been able to carry more debt than other countries because it enjoys the unique privilege of printing the world's reserve currency. Thoughtful political leaders on both sides of the aisle have known for years that the US needed to address the deficit to avoid imperiling the dollar's exalted status at some point decades from now. But under Trump, with his unilateral and erratic trade wars, America's competitors and even its allies are now stepping up efforts to knock the dollar off its pedestal and develop an alternative reserve currency.

Moderate state leaders are highly attuned to fiscal soundness, because, unlike the federal government, they cannot print currency to finance debts. Such leaders will have a hard time supporting programs that imply rapid deficit growth, like the Green New Deal

or a single-payer health-care plan, or forgiveness of all student debt. It is unclear, at best, how the country would pay for such programs, and their constituents will largely find them threatening as a result.

The bold ideas now coming to the fore among some Democratic candidates may sound appealing, especially to a party searching for ways to galvanize young voters, and they surely contain elements that address important issues facing the US. But policy ideas are not campaign soundbites. Each must be weighed in terms of what it would cost, what would have to be sacrificed to pay for it, the net impact on the deficit, and critically, whether it empowers or alienates swing-state leaders.

Over the last two generations, the US presidency has become more powerful than ever, dominating the political system in a way never intended in the Constitution. Historically, presidents have nonetheless been constrained by a combination of respect for the rule of law, a default to truthful and ethical behavior, a willingness and ability to act strategically to strengthen the US in the long run, and, critically, the Senate's constitutional duty to act as an independent limiter to a president's power.

Today, all four of these constraints are gone. Trump has no interest in the constitution, honesty, or best positioning the US for the long term. And under Mitch McConnell's leadership, the Senate has abandoned the US founders' vision that it be, in James Madison's words, "a necessary fence" to protect "the people against their rulers" and from "the transient impressions into which they themselves might be led."

In these circumstances, the Democrats must turn to voters throughout the US to find their way to a functioning government that acts in accord with the Constitution. This starts with recognizing that winning in 2020 means taking back the White House with a candidate who helps the party regain control of the Senate as well. Only then can the US begin to repair the damage caused by the Trump administration, restore the checks and balances on which American government depends, and right the country's fiscal trajectory. What is at stake may be nothing less than the fate of the American experiment.

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