

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



July 09, 2017

## Time to End the Blame Game

There is an ancient Chinese story: "A man lost an axe. Suspecting one of his neighbors of stealing it, he began to observe the latter's behavior. Everything the neighbor did seemed to the other man to resemble the action of an axe stealer. Later, however, the man found his axe, and from then on his neighbor's action no longer resembled those of an axe stealer." The moral of the story is that people must cast away biased views and negative mindset towards one another.

Spreading hatred and mistrust will sow the seed of animosity among neighboring countries. For instance, Afghanistan and Pakistan exchanged harsh rhetoric and continued the blame game over terrorist issues for years. The Afghan-Pak officials and media engaged in sparking off hatred and stereotypes and filled the air with a strong sense of distrust. The two countries accused each other of harboring terrorist networks and supporting militant fighters.

Their relation hit rock bottom with the escalation of terrorist attacks both in Afghanistan and Pakistan. The February 14 attack on Lal Shahbaz Qalandar in Sehwan and the deadly attack on May 31 in the heart of Kabul - both the incidents killed and wounded hundreds of people, including women and children - fueled the mutual tension as the blame game continued endlessly. Although the relation between Kabul and Islamabad is likely to thaw, there is still a sense of mistrust.

The Republic of China seeks to bridge the gap between the two countries as Wang Yi, Chinese foreign minister, had a trip to Afghanistan and Pakistan to discuss resuming peace talks.

Moreover, a high-level delegation of US senators traveled to Kabul and Islamabad recently and visited the South Waziristan tribal region along with Pakistani army chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa and met the leaders of the National Unity Government (NUG) to discuss security situation and urge the two neighboring countries to target the leadership councils of the Taliban, mainly the Haqqani network.

The two recent struggles are likely to bridge the rift between Afghan-Pak officials. The time is ripe for the two countries, which are in the same boat, to bury the hatchet and join forces for combating terrorism. There is no doubt that Afghanistan and Pakistan bore the brunt of militancy and suffered severely as a result of terrorism and extremism. Afghan-Pak nations left bloody days behind and sustained heavy casualties. It is self-explanatory that terrorist networks seek to spill the blood of combatants and non-combatants wherever possible. In other words, the nature of terrorists is to kill individuals and destroy infrastructures regardless of the border and geography. Therefore, terrorism has been changed into a global threat.

Insurgency and terrorist attacks will not be reduced in light of blame game and harsh rhetoric. That is to say, the relentless blame game heightened the tension between Afghan-Pak officials and triggered a sense of public sensitivity rather than stopping the bleeding wound.

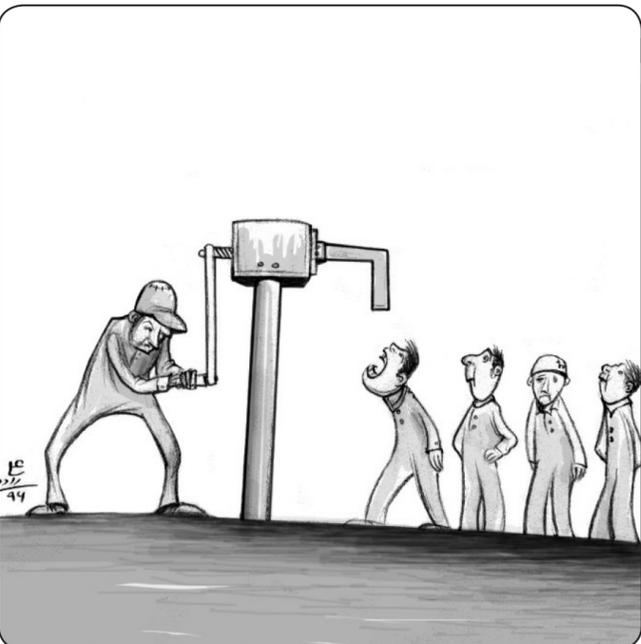
Afghan-Pak officials will not have to view each other like "the axe stealer" and stop blaming each other right now. It is widely accepted that an insecure Afghanistan or Pakistan will be a threat to the entire region. The two countries must seek common grounds for having shared interests and destiny. It is time to cultivate a strong bond of friendship so as to root out terrorism.

The media in both countries are to play their role positively and avoid fueling mutual tension. This is the moral responsibility of journalists to figure out and unfold the facts. I have constantly experienced the kind attitude of Pakistanis towards Afghans. For example, when I had missed my flight in China, it was my Pakistani journalist friend Zamir Assadi who did me a great favor through helping me to book a ticket and sharing his room for days.

So, we need to change our views and do not treat one another on the basis of our personal presumptions.

It is believed that if we change our views towards each other, the challenges will be alleviated to a great extent and there will be no need for third party to mediate between the two neighboring countries. The rift between Afghanistan and Pakistan is more likely to be exploited by terrorist networks and insurgency will continue unabated.

To combat terrorism successfully and mitigate the escalated insurgency, bridging the gap is the first and foremost step to be taken. The media and officials play a crucial role in this regard and must fulfill their responsibilities. Otherwise, the two nations will suffer insurgency and terrorist attacks as ever before. Realizing the destructive role of the blame game, it is hoped that the two countries will shake hands with each other and join forces to combat terrorism effectively.



## Putin and Trump's Tainted Love

By Nina Khrushcheva

US President Donald Trump must be giddy: this week, on the sidelines of the G20 summit in Hamburg, Germany, he will finally meet his Russian counterpart and strongman-hero Vladimir Putin.

It is rare for someone who has reached the exalted office of President of the United States to retain the capacity for, much less interest in, hero worship. But it is also rare - if not unprecedented - for someone in that position to owe so much to a single foreign leader. For Trump, Putin's likely intrusions in the 2016 presidential election may well have contributed to his victory, even as they have also done considerable damage to his presidency. Trump expressed his admiration for Putin well before the election, and, it seems, fantasized about meeting him - a dream so potent, apparently, that it drove Trump to claim that he actually had, at the 2013 Miss Universe pageant in Moscow. (Before the pageant, Trump took to Twitter to ask his followers whether they thought Putin would attend, and, if so, whether he would be Trump's "new best friend.")

That story was debunked, but Trump wasn't ready to give up on his dream. In 2015, he seemed to indicate that he and Putin had shared the "green room" on the US news program 60 Minutes, for which they were both interviewed, though he quickly backtracked on those claims, as their interviews had actually taken place on different continents, which was easily verifiable. Trump then claimed to have spoken to Putin by phone - a story he later revised to say that he had spoken with members of Putin's inner circle.

In any case, Trump's fantasy will now become reality. But, at a time when a special counsel is investigating whether Trump's campaign colluded with Russia's election meddling, lifting any of the sanctions, even the most trivial ones, that Barack Obama introduced to punish Russia for its interference in the campaign might not be the most sensible idea.

Yet there are whispers that Trump may do just that. And, given his tenuous relationship with sensibleness, such a scenario is not farfetched.

Were Trump to take that tack, Putin would of course have reason to celebrate. But, short of such an outcome, one must ask whether, from Putin's perspective, Russia's apparent efforts to help Trump get elected have paid off. Trump is certainly sowing chaos across the West.

Russia's generals, we can assume, rejoice each time Trump refuses to endorse NATO's Article 5 - the alliance's bedrock collective defense clause - and instead poisons the alliance by railing against its leaders for their inadequate defense spending.

Trump's disagreements with German Chancellor Angela

Merkel - who declared after the G7 summit in May that the US can no longer be considered the "reliable partner" it once was - have also fueled deep uncertainty. Left to lead efforts to resolve the ongoing crisis in Ukraine, Germany no doubt is feeling somewhat exposed - and Russia is feeling somewhat heartened.

But Trump's evident belief in the chaos theory of government is, overall, probably not good for Russia, especially at a time when its economy, after three years of sanctions and low oil prices, is gasping for air. Putin is failing to uphold his end of a tacit bargain with the Russian middle classes - "you keep quiet, and I keep improving your lifestyle" - and the resulting disquiet is increasingly on display on the streets of Russia's cities. Another source of uncertainty is the last thing that Putin wants or that Russia's economy needs.

Of course, it is unlikely that growing dissent will dissuade Putin from standing for re-election next spring. In fact, he probably feels that he has little choice but to remain president for the rest of his life, for the sake of his own safety.

But without that all-important bargain - which provided Putin with a kind of legitimacy more durable in Russia than any vote could ever be - it will become increasingly difficult to keep the various factions of the Russian elite in line. Instead, those factions' ever-suspicious members may well begin to question the long-term viability of the system that Putin has constructed.

No one knows what will happen as those questions attract more attention. In 1998, a year before Putin first became president, few outside Russia - or within the country, for that matter - had ever heard of him. It was the implosion of Boris Yeltsin's legitimacy in his last year in office that put the thin-skinned ex-KGB colonel on Russia's political map.

At the root of the affinity between Trump and Putin is the sense that both are essentially strongmen. But that affinity - and their relationship, whatever it may be - could be what weakens them. Just as Putin's interventions in the US presidential election have undermined Trump's presidency, reflected in record-low approval ratings, Trump's chaotic behavior has damaged Putin's position, already undermined by his own economic mismanagement. Putin must now look over his shoulder even more often - for challenges from the street and, perhaps, for challenges from within.

At the upcoming G20 summit, Trump should savor his long-awaited handshake with Putin. Before long, both Trump and his autocratic hero could be regretting that they ever sought each other out.

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## An Urgent Need for Protecting Human Rights

By Hujjatullah Zia

The global wars, which outraged human conscience, inflicted heavy casualties upon nations around the world and led to indescribable pain and sufferings. Streams of men, women and children's blood were shed and millions of people lost their lives or were amputated in the worst possible way. In addition, the violence and carnage unfolded men's megalomania and evil.

Subsequently, the world realized the fact that violence will lead to horrible consequence rather than resulting in peace and prosperity and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) was endorsed to alleviate the pain and anguish of human societies and cultivate the spirit of brotherhood. Based on UDHR, men are born free with natural and inalienable rights and dignity and have to be respected irrespective of their color, caste and creed.

The bulk of violence originated from parochial mindsets, religious intolerance, radical ideologies and racial superiorities. In other words, one was humiliated for his/her racial and sexual background and deemed inferior for nurturing a certain type of belief.

It is an unmistakable fact that viewing the individuals form the lens of race or religion will lead to challenges in a society. Therefore, the UDHR declared that all men are supposed to exercise equal rights and dignity on the basis of being human and no one is supposed to trample upon the inalienable rights and liberty of the people.

Historical violence and bloodshed, which wrecked deadly havoc on human societies, originated from violation of human rights, aggression and tyranny. In other words, when men found their rights and dignity at risk, they had "recourse, as a last resort, to rebellion against tyranny and oppression".

They felt compelled to raise their voice against the despotic regimes and cruel rulers at the cost of their life. They had to revitalize the spirit of humanity and moral norms in human societies through donating blood - it is far more honorable than having one's bleed shed in vain under dictatorial regimes.

However, violation of human rights is widespread and people suffered from violence and bloodshed in the worst possible way, especially with the increase of warring factions. For instance, the self-styled Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) kill men, women and children in cold blood. The dignity and fundamental rights of mankind

are meaningless for the ISIL group since it nurtures radical ideology.

The day-to-day macabre stories of the terrorist victims add insult to the historical injuries of our people. Our old wounds are being infected by the poisonous ideologies of the newly emerging militants. To our unmitigated chagrin, we have never been put in the process of therapy for our bleeding hearts root in three decades of war and carnage.

Men still live in a deplorable state. Violating international instruments and moral taboos are really imprudent of us. Malice and cruelty continue unabated. We harm one another, perpetrate honor-killing acts, blacken our neighbors' reputation and shed our brethren's blood with no iota of mercy. We succumb to the worldly temptations, yield to carnal desires and satiate our voracious appetite for not only pecuniary issues but for hurting our fellows without feeling a sense of guilt.

It is a matter of great surprise to see that in the transient moment of life, men curtail others' freedom and sacrifice their rights and life for their own enjoyments. In short, one wishes to relegate his fellows to dystopian world so as to live in their own utopia.

It should be noted that, "A human being is part of the whole called by us universe, a part limited in time and space. We experience ourselves, our thoughts and feelings as something separate from the rest. A kind of optical delusion of consciousness.

This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from the prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty. The true value of a human being is determined by the measure and the sense in which they have obtained liberation from the self. We shall require a substantially new manner of thinking if humanity is to survive."

To protect the rights and dignity of mankind around the globe, the international community needs to implement the UDHR and United Nations Charter. More importantly, the violators of human rights - be it a group or a country - must be prosecuted seriously. If there is no sanction behind implementing the international instruments, what will be the use of approving them?

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