

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

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Taliban's Attitude towards Women's Rights Stated in Moscow Meeting

The rights of the Afghan women are that their sons should not be killed, their husbands should not be killed, their houses should not be destroyed, they should not be forced out of their homes. These rights should be given to the women and the rights of children also should be given to them," Amir Khan Muttaqi, a member of the Taliban, is cited as saying in the last Moscow meeting held between the Taliban and Afghan political figures.

Muttaqi's statement suggests that either the Taliban lack very basic knowledge of individual's rights and freedoms or they are still seeking to tailor the rights and freedoms of women to their parochial mindset and radical interpretation of religious tenets.

One's fundamental rights - rights to life, liberty, and property - are "inherent", "universal" and "inalienable". Fundamental rights are one's natural rights, which are acquired inherently, that is, given by the Creator or nature not by the government. To put it in a simple way, people are born free and with a set of certain rights as it is stated in Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood". For example, people are also born with dignity, which is bestowed by the Creator not by the government, and violating one's dignity or humiliating one is not allowed at any case. Apart from international law, Islam does not allow one to humiliate or disgrace even a dead body let alone a living person. According to English philosopher John Locke, the most important natural rights are "life, liberty, and property". The natural rights mentioned in the United States Declaration of Independence are "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness". The government has to protect people's natural or fundamental rights through a social contract. Thus, natural rights are different from civil rights, which must be given and guaranteed by the power of the state.

With this in mind, the fundamental rights of children and husbands have nothing to do with their mothers and wives. Children's rights to life or those of men solely belong to themselves and have to be protected. They do not have the authority to transfer their aforementioned fundamental rights to others. Defining the rights of women through those of their spouses or children suggest that women are still not considered an independent person or personality in the Taliban's school of thought. They are still treated as an inferior creature and their identity is defined through that of their spouses or children. Such definitions of women's rights are an insult to Afghan women.

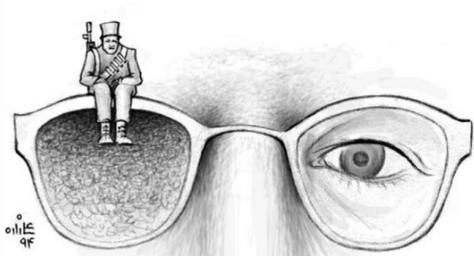
It is likely that the Taliban are not inclined to consider equal rights and freedoms for men and women, which would be a violation of Afghan Constitution. Muttaqi could mention the active and equal participation of Afghan women in social, political, and economic activities and their rights to education. He said that women "should not be forced out of their homes", but he made no mention of not being forced to stay in, as the Taliban did so during their regime.

The Taliban are supposed not to misconstrue religious texts or legal issues anymore and stop foisting their own narrow mindset on Afghan men and women. They have to be outspoken whether or not they support the rights, freedoms, and dignity of all citizens equally regardless of their race, color, and gender, as stated in the constitution. If the Taliban are seeking peace, they have to draft all issues clearly in the peace agreement, let Afghans know the content, and stay committed to the agreement.

Afghan women are highly concerned over their rights and freedoms with the ongoing discussions about the return of the "Islamic Emirate". Viewing the Taliban's misogynistic views during their regime, which led to the violation of women's rights, and women's marginalization in the ongoing peace talks are great cause for concern.

Although the Taliban have claimed they moderated their attitude towards women, it is yet to be proved. The Taliban militants still restrict the rights and freedoms of women in areas under their control. Women's rights to education are widely trampled upon as the Taliban continue burning down girls' schools.

If a high-ranking Taliban leader such as Muttaqi has really that definition of women's rights, he and his other companions seriously lack knowledge about individuals' rights and freedoms. It clearly indicates the highly restricted worldview of the Taliban. It is believed that they also have the same knowledge or little more of Islamic tenets, which is a pity.



Why Fukuyama is Breathtakingly Honest

By: M. Rezaie

The world, today, is going through a historic era whose repercussions will stay with mankind for generations to come. The decades ahead will define the future of humanity and how the lives of billions of people worldwide will be scripted for generations to come. The challenges ahead of humanity, at this juncture, are enormous and formidable and so are the capacity and creativity of human beings to overcome them. The challenges that confront the humanity today are manifold and multi-faceted. On various fronts, what is driving ahead the lives of nations, people and communities is a complex mix of hope and despair - of achievements and failures. Today and more than twenty years after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the fall of Communism as a viable school of thought and plan of political organization, the world on the crossroads one again. Many had predicted that liberal democracy of the type that has been practiced in the West for decades now will be the eventual fate of many of the less developed countries in the Global South too. Francis Fukuyama, the noted American political scientist, in his 1992 book, "The End of History and the Last Man", clearly exalted by the collapse of Communism, had bragged about the fate that he so surely believed would now spread across the world. In his view and expressed throughout his book, he had upheld that liberal democracy of the type practiced in the West now is the inevitable fate of the humanity at large. Many among the more realistic critics of this claim, who had their eyes and ears attuned to the ground realities unfolding on the global stage, at the time had nothing but contempt and a wide grin for this claim that seemed to be taller than the reality. What is interesting is that none other than Francis Fukuyama himself recently has come out with a detailed article in the Foreign Policy magazine declaring far and wide that what he predicted as an inevitable fate of the humanity is proving to have been just another passing era that last is fast losing its sheen. The article by Fukuyama in the Foreign Policy magazine is a must to read for everyone that is even remotely interested in current and global affairs.

Fukuyama has correctly diagnosed a number of problems with how the liberal democracies are functioning today and why and based on what reasons these issues and problems are working to slowly erode the foundations on which the edifice of liberal democracy today rests. He singles out the decline of middle class in the West as by far the largest reason that is contributing to the erosion of liberal democracy as it is known and the ascendance of economics over politics in these societies. From a historical perspective, Fukuyama delves into the history of the evolution of liberal democracies in the West. He upholds the thriving and flourishing of a large and strong middle class in the West in the 19th and 20th centuries as the foundation upon which a strong tradition of liberal democracy was nurtured and institutionalized in

the West. As long as there is a vibrant and strong middle class in the West, liberal democracy thrives and prospers. It has been so until around the turn of the last century and more recently with the advent of a financial and economic crisis in the West, the erosion and decline of the middle class in these societies has taken a sharp turn towards worsening. Fukuyama has correctly diagnosed the range of issues and forces that today are responsible for the decline of the middle class in the West and, in consequence, the erosion and decline of liberal democracy. Globalization and the "financialization" - as Fukuyama himself uses this term - of entire economies in the West are pointed out by him to be the two largest forces that are responsible for the erosion of the Western middle class. Globalization, as explained by Fukuyama and also evident in the economic trends worldwide, has thrown wide open the gates towards a global market for hundreds of millions of inexpensive workforce from the erstwhile third world countries. Today, a manual worker in the U.S. should compete not only with his counterparts from other developed countries but also with a growing army of skilled workforce from the developing world. Globalization is also driving many American and European companies to move plants, operations, jobs and livelihoods elsewhere to other countries in Asia and Latin America where inputs can be found much cheaper. Millions of well-paid jobs have already been offshored out of the U.S. towards Asia and Latin America over the past one decade. The Western world, particularly the U.S., is fast turning into real "post-industrial" economies and societies where wealth and political power is becoming more concentrated and the future generation will not be necessarily better off than the previous generation of the Post-World War II period. Fukuyama delves into this issue in greater detail and paints a clear picture of how globalization is resulting into a hollowing out of European and particularly American economies. Financialization of economies in the West has been an ongoing trend for the past two decades. The first decade of the 21st century saw an unprecedented growth in the share and importance of banks and financial institutions in the West. Fukuyama is honest enough to also point out this runaway financialization as a major culprit for the present economic stagnation and the decline of the middle class in the West. As I have repeatedly dealt with this issue in my previous articles, the ascendancy of 'finance capital' over the real economies is harming western economies and societies on an unprecedented scale. What is going on in the West is a gradual rollback of real democracy and an outright dictatorship by the banks and financial corporations with politicians.

The economic malaise in the West and the decline of the middle class there is resulting into the decline of the strong tradition of liberal democracy in the West. Liberal democracy is indeed proving not to be the final fate of these societies. Fukuyama is breathtakingly honest.

Forgotten Voices: The Critical Role of the Afghan Diaspora in the Pursuit of Peace in Afghanistan

By: Gabriel Piccillo & Mark Thomas Patterson

On April 23rd, 2019, the Charge d'Affaires of the U.S. Embassy in Kabul, Karen Decker, hosted more than 120 Afghan youth leaders at the "Youth and Peace" Roundtable conference convened by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). Attendees came from various backgrounds including academia, civil society, private sector, government, and international organizations. The one-day event was an opportunity for Afghans to openly discuss their opinions about the Afghan peace process in addition to their hopes and priorities for the future of their country. It provided participants with the opportunity to discuss ways their voices could be empowered in the dialogue surrounding the Afghan peace process. Efforts to strengthen the voices of those who often go unheard are critical to the pursuit of long term and sustainable peace throughout Afghanistan.

During the event, U.S. Ambassador John Bass encouraged the involvement of all Afghans in the dialogue surrounding the Afghan peace process. He indicated "Everyone can be part of the national conversation that informs the dialogue on peace, so you can have confidence that the people talking about your rights, your hopes, and your future, know what is important to you." The open forum showed Afghans around the world that senior officials involved in efforts to stabilize their country value their thoughts, their voices have not been forgotten, and they can play a valuable role in shaping the future of their country. These kinds of efforts are useful models for engaging Afghans across the globe who have seen their country ravaged by conflict and instability for decades.

For decades, scholars and policy makers analyzing the Afghan peace process have criticized its limited inclusion of the Afghan government and diaspora communities around the globe. Intra-Afghan reconciliation depends on sustained dialogue between all parties involved in the conflict. Engaging the Afghan diaspora is a critical step towards making this aspiration a reality. Understanding the grievances and challenges faced by members of the Afghan diaspora, recognizing what they believe can be done to increase the prospects for progress, and ensuring they are given a platform from which they can voice their opinions about the future of their country are important steps the international community should take throughout the months and years to come.

Many of those who have fled the war in Afghanistan have gone on to pursue meaningful careers in business, academia, the private sector, and government around the world. Providing these members of the Afghan diaspora with a platform from which they can contribute to the conversation surrounding the challenges facing their country is critical. What has become known as "brain drain" has caused substantial challenges throughout Afghanistan and other regions faced with instability and low levels of economic development. The brain drain phenomenon suggests that those most capable of nurturing progress in their home countries are also those who have the means to pursue safer and more prosperous lives abroad. As a result of their expatriation, they play more limited roles in the pursuit of progress in their home countries. Many of those who could make the most valuable contributions to socioeconomic and political progress in Afghanistan are now scattered across countries with higher levels of socioeconomic development. Countries such as the United States, think tanks across the globe, nonprofits, and civil society, should cooperate closely with efforts to provide members of Afghan diasporas the means through which they can contribute to their country's path to peace.

Though their decision to leave Afghanistan is understandable, the mass exodus of highly skilled labor from the country has affected the Afghan-peace process, socio economic development, and efforts to create conditions conducive to foreign direct investment detrimentally. Encouraging members of the Afghan diaspora living abroad to contribute to the dialogue surrounding the challenges facing their home country could prove enormously productive. Many of those most capable of contributing to the pursuit of peace and reconciliation have left the country to pursue education and heightened career prospects abroad. Members of the large, well informed, resilient, and well-educated Afghan diaspora living

in countries such as Canada, the United States, Germany, and the United Kingdom should play a substantial role in fostering the conditions necessary for the pursuit of Afghan peace.

Members of the Afghan diaspora around the world are endowed with an intimate understanding of the socioeconomic, political, and tribal roots of the conflict in Afghanistan. They possess first-hand knowledge of the difficulties faced by ordinary Afghans and their desire for peace is often independent of political interests. Many of these people have the wellbeing, prosperity, peace, and stability of Afghanistan at heart. They can contribute to a more clear understanding of the roots of the conflict and the development of realistic policies aimed at addressing them. Providing opportunities for the diaspora to contribute to the formulation and implementation of policies conducive to peace is of utmost importance.

The constructive nature of diaspora engagement is exemplified by Liberia, a West African country who experienced two devastating civil wars in recent history, which caused a substantial portion of the Liberian population to flee the country. Many settled in the West, with a substantial portion of them eventually resettling in the United States. The Liberian diaspora living in the United States became essential in achieving economic development, nurturing reconstruction, and peacebuilding in the country. As of today, Liberian Americans continue to provide essential foreign aid to their home country. Furthermore, Liberian professionals who lived the United States are returning to the country and providing valuable expertise in fields such as telecommunications, economic development, tribal reconciliation, and finance.

The assistance provided by the diaspora also extends to the political and security realms. For example, by funding democratic opposition, the Liberian diaspora was able to encourage political dialogue and decrease levels of widespread political violence. Furthermore, Diaspora members pressured relatives living in the country to support justice reform and end the practice of trial by ordeal, which often resulted in death and bloodshed. Additionally, diaspora communities across the United States, particularly in the state of Minnesota, brought together diverse actors fueling the conflict who otherwise would not have been at the same table. They acted as track two diplomatic mediators.

Though much progress has been made throughout the past few months in encouraging intra-Afghan dialogue in a spirit of compromise, negotiations, and reconciliation, much work remains to be done. The people most passionate about the pursuit of peace are those who have suffered from its absence the most. It is an unfortunate reality that these people's voices often go unheard. It is important that they are given the opportunity to discuss their thoughts and concerns, interact with policymakers and other stakeholders, and present a unified message about what they feel the future of their country should look like.

It is both their right and the international community's responsibility to ensure that members of the Afghan diaspora are provided with platforms from which they can voice their hopes, expectations, and desires for the future of Afghanistan. Members of the Afghan diaspora and their families are those whose futures will be most affected by the decisions made by policymakers. It is therefore their right to make constructive contributions to the development of policies aimed at peacebuilding. Members of the Afghan diaspora possess critical knowledge and understanding of the conflict that has sown death and destruction throughout their country for decades. Including their knowledge and opinions in the shaping of the future of their own country is a vital step towards achieving long lasting and sustainable peace in the country.

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