

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



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Time to Get United

The death toll from Wednesday's deadly attack in Kabul has reached to 100 and 600 injured and there are many wounded who are in critical condition. Definitely, the attack was a cowardly attack by the insurgents in the holy month of Ramadan. Though Taliban, Daesh and other insurgents consider themselves Muslims, they have not been able to show that they respect the teachings of Islam, which teaches peace, harmony and well-being. By attacking the innocent people, the insurgents have always shown that they are enemies of the country and they want to bring back disorder and chaos.

After Wednesday's tragic attack it was important for the people of Afghanistan to further strengthen unity and peace among themselves, but that did not happen, as the situation in the capital Kabul got tense after protestors marched into the streets and chanted slogans against the security officials and the members of National Unity Government (NUG), particularly, against President Ghani and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Abdullah.

Unfortunately, the protest did not end peacefully and turned violent. In exchange of fire between the protestors and the security officials, 7 people were killed and some others were wounded. This resulted in further suffering. Ultimately, Afghanistan National Army was called that controlled the situation.

Agitation is the right of the people in democratic societies, but it is really vital that the agitations should be peaceful and they should have a particular objective. Peaceful agitations mostly do not involve any action of violence and do not harm anyone. They remain related to slogans, banners, placards, sit-ins or even hunger strikes. On the other hand, a non-peaceful agitation turns into violent acts. The stones are thrown, the public and private properties are damaged, the policemen are beaten and in some cases, there are gunshots. Such agitations mostly result in the injury to many of the participants and even their death.

Though all the protests have their impacts, the peaceful protests are considered to have positive impacts the most. In fact, the true spirit of agitation lies in such types of protests. The democratic system, at least in theory, supports such protests and considers them the outcome of the maturity and awareness of the public.

Therefore, it is necessary that the agitators who by organizing the agitations show their love for democracy must also make sure that their agitations do not turn violent as they may harm many others or their properties. In that manner their rights would be violated and the agitators themselves become the violator of justice.

It is really important that Afghans must learn the true spirit of democratic and peaceful protests. Such agitations will not only bring the desired result but would also set a valuable example for the coming generations to follow. They have to be shrewd enough to see how the political groups avail their own interests and try to make the protests violent. Yesterday's protests were not totally peaceful and therefore, it was not able to achieve its objective.

It further brought miseries to the people who were already suffering. The protestors were not united under single leadership and their demands were not coherent as well. Meanwhile, the response of the government was not very encouraging. It had to make sure to listen to the demands of the protestors and calm them down, but it was not able to do so.

On the other hand, it should also be noted that the government and security officials are responsible to guarantee peace and tranquility in the country. They need to realize that insecurity is on the rise in Afghanistan and the future seems uncertain as the lives, livelihood and security of the people are not fully guaranteed.

The authorities have not been able to control the situation and with each passing day the situation is getting worse. With the withdrawal of international security forces there were hopes that Afghan security forces would shoulder the security responsibilities throughout the country without much difficulty but that does not seem to be the situation. Afghan security forces are facing the toughest challenges of their lives as Taliban and Daesh are getting strength in different parts of the country simultaneously. They have made certain districts their strongholds and are able to threaten the security situation around the capital Kabul to a large extent.

The current security situation clearly depicts that it cannot further survive through lip service. Afghan government along with the security forces need to design a comprehensive strategy and at the same time they need to implement it effectively.

They, undoubtedly, require to seek ways for negotiation for the long term peace but to reach to the point where they can stand on a position of strength in the negotiations they have to use their strength wisely. The international community, in the meanwhile, must continue their support and should divert their support to the areas that are the most urgent and the most necessary. Otherwise, all their support will end up in smoke.



Why Russia should Rethink its Afghanistan Policy?

By Nassir Ahmad Taraki

Mohammad Hanif Atmar, Afghan National Security Advisor attended the eighth international high-level security meeting in the Russian region of Tver. The meeting was devoted to international information security and how to fight organized crime globally. The initiative was taken by Russia's Security Council and high-ranking security officials from more than 30 states took part in this meeting.

The Afghan National Security Advisor's agenda was to convince the Russian and Central Asian nations that defeating terrorist groups by individual capacity is difficult, therefore, a joint combat strategy should be developed to fight these groups across the Central Asia. Besides, he elaborated how terrorist networks try to create suspicions among countries in our region.

Afghan National Security Advisor has visited Russia several times during the last two and half years to bolster and cement state level relations with Moscow. Meanwhile, American generals such as Josef Votel and Curtis Scaparrotti separately, and some low-level Afghan security officials as well, accuse Russia helping Taliban militants in the country. But Moscow has always denied the accusations. Hence, Mr. Atmar encourages Russia to denounce relations with Taliban and run for a state level cooperation while he met his counterpart Nikolai Patrushev.

If allegations are proved right, it seems that Kremlin is on the threshold of committing a second mistake in its Afghanistan policy in last 38 years unless rethink it. First, during the cold war era while the erstwhile Soviet occupied Afghanistan in 1979. And now, by siding with the enemy of Afghan people; the Taliban. During the occupation of Afghanistan by the Soviet Union, it was faced with the Afghans' resistance and left the country according to Geneva Accords 1988 in frustration, thus putting an end to a nine-year-long occupation of the country. By backstopping Taliban, Kremlin is walking an old road leading to a second frustration and dejection. Public antipathy and hostility are up roaring against the Taliban and other terror networks. Siding with them directly enlist Moscow as the enemy of Afghanistan.

It is an aberration and fallacious believe that supporting a terrorist group in order to get rid of the other one. Morphologically both, Taliban and Islamic State are from the same fiber and have the same contexture. For the Afghan people, the Islamic State and Taliban are both terrorist groups which threaten the stability of their country, kill and torture them, destroy their country's infrastructures and challenge the sovereignty of their legitimate state. Besides, Afghan National Defense and Security Forces are sacrificing in an excruciating war against Taliban and the Islamic State including twenty other terrorist networks that have similar nature and mindset and function under the umbrella of extremism in the country. Instead, Russian should benefit from their re-

lations with Taliban and bring them on negotiation table with the Afghan government to end the protracted war in the country, as it is much better for the interests of both Kabul and Moscow.

Notwithstanding, Zamir Kabulov, head of the Russian foreign ministry's department responsible for Afghanistan and the Kremlin's special envoy in the country has punctually emphasized that Kremlin's contact with Taliban is for exchanging information with the group and see shared interest with them when it comes to fighting the so-called Islamic State. And at the same time, Taliban acknowledged the authentication of reports and maintained that Russia supports the group "politically and morally", but providing political and moral support, leave aside the military support as it is widely claimed inside Afghanistan, to a terrorist group is neither for the interest of Russia nor the region. Instead, as it is an African proverb which says only the owner can free his house from mice, so the Russian government should envisage a state to state cooperation to address the contemporary and mutual challenges whether it is Islamic State, drug or instability in Afghanistan.

The menace of terror and their destructive mindset will not be bond to a particular geography, suppose Afghanistan. It is epidemic and spreads beyond borders. As a Taliban militant, standing on the main intersection of Kunduz city in the Northeast of the country flatter the white flag of the group during the brief capture of the city in 2015 cried in front of a smartphone camera, "Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan will prevail and dominate all Central Asian countries and the whole world one day, if God's willing." Therefore, it requires joint efforts to contain terrorism.

Now, it is upon the officials in Kremlin to understand the long-term vision of Taliban. One with knowledge of the Taliban's ideology and background will not refuse to confess that the group has a plan beyond the boundaries of Afghanistan. The cornerstone of their rebellion is to establish a worldwide Emirate that is why they sheltered Osama bin Laden, his companions and Al-Qaida's training camps in Afghanistan during their rule in the country from 1994 to 2001. On the other hand, the mindset and civil code of the Taliban are the same as Daesh with a difference in the name. They both behead out-groups, deny fundamental rights of women and minorities and believe in a radical reform of the society.

Afghanistan understands that the presence of Russian-speaking fighters in the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq can expand as a potential destructive network in Central Asia which is considered as Russia's backyard. Thus, it is for both Kabul and Moscow to get to a common understanding to fight the menace in mutual terms.

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The Macron Method

By Mark Leonard

Emmanuel Macron's election to the French presidency provides the European Union with an opportunity to move past the internal conflicts that have hastened its disintegration. Rather than standing exclusively with the old elites or the new populists, Macron has promised to rally broad political support under the banner of European reform. But can he really breathe new life into an ailing project?

When Macron met with German Chancellor Angela Merkel, he offered a plan for ending the cold war between northern and southern Europe - which is to say the tension between advocates of austerity and those in favor of growth policies. And when he meets with Russian President Vladimir Putin this week, he could find a way to bridge the divide between the EU's eastern and western flanks, which want, respectively, to contain and engage Russia.

Likewise, Macron has tried to reconcile the idea of a welcoming Europe with advocacy of a fortress Europe. He wants to take in more refugees, while urging the EU to create a border force of 5,000 soldiers, and to accelerate repatriation of illegal migrants.

But while many EU leaders were relieved to see Macron elected, it is often because they hope he will give a new lease on life to the old project, rather than a radical break with the past. To bring true change, Macron will have to transcend the two contradictory but mutually reinforcing political models that have defined the last decade of EU governance: technocracy and populism.

Technocracy has been a central feature of European integration from the beginning. Jean Monnet, the French economist who is considered one of the modern EU's founders, was renowned for his ability to turn big political conflicts into smaller technical issues. This method was highly successful during the post-war period of European reconstruction, because it allowed diplomats and officials from different countries to bypass national disagreements or lingering resentments and address the continent's most pressing problems. But, over the years, EU policy discussions have departed from Monnet's model. They now tend to be disconnected from national politics altogether, driven as much by the logic of EU institutions as by member states' needs. Moreover, EU-level decisions have been pickled into rigid codes to which member states must adhere, even if their governments or electorates do not support them. Together, these trends have fed the widespread perception that there are no alternative forms of EU governance, and that Europe is being run by elites who have little concern for the interests of the people they are supposed to be serving. The populist explosion in recent years is a natural reaction to this disconnected form of technocracy. It is no accident that leaders such as Marine Le Pen in France, Geert Wilders in the Netherlands, Viktor Orbán in Hungary, and Nigel Farage in the United Kingdom have all posed as tribunes of the "people." Through referenda - their favorite political tool - they have been able to inflict damage to the EU constitutional treaty, the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement, refugee-repatriation deals, and, with the UK's Brexit vote, the composition of the EU itself.

As European technocrats have pushed for covert integration to resolve the euro and refugee crises, the populists have struck back

even harder. And every time populist-driven referenda against EU treaties force governments to retreat into technocracy, the populist narrative is reinforced.

The UK's Brexit negotiations have already become a battleground between technocrats and populists, with each side vying for an outcome that will support its narrative. When British Prime Minister Theresa May says that she wants to "make a success of Brexit," she sets off alarm bells in Brussels and other European capitals, because such an outcome could inspire populist anti-EU movements elsewhere.

To forestall that scenario, some members of the German government, fearing that they will be unable to accommodate Macron's other demands (particularly concerning eurozone reforms), are hoping to work with him to make Brexit unattractive. This also seems to be what EU Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker was getting at recently. "Brexit will show how much more attractive it is to be a member of our Union," he said. "Thanks to Europe, people enjoy the freedom to live, buy, love, and trade across borders."

It is understandable that European leaders would latch onto Brexit as the one thing EU member states can agree on. But, unfortunately, the Brexit debate tends to bring out EU elites' worst instincts, not least because it encourages them to fight for the status quo, rather than for reform and innovation.

If the EU continues to look inward, consumed by the questions posed by Brexit, the next five years will be as sterile and unproductive as the last. The big question now is whether Europe can accept the lifeline that Macron is offering, and look forward to a new project, rather than backward to old struggles.

To be sure, many observers have poked fun at Macron for refusing to commit himself to one side in any debate. And satirists have pointed out that he starts almost every sentence with "en meme temps" (at the same time). But for a long-gridlocked EU, Macron's proposed grand bargains could offer a valuable way forward - one that relies not on institutional changes, but on political trade-offs.

Macron's security policies try to square tough anti-terrorism measures with a more humanitarian approach to refugees. On economic policy, he has offered reform in exchange for investment. And, given his tough stance on Russia and support for action in Africa and the Mediterranean, he might even be able to rally the EU's southern and eastern members around a common foreign-policy cause. If Macron lives up to his promise, he will not stand for technocracy or populism, but for a genuine third way. That is an admittedly shopworn term. But Macron could imbue it with new meaning if he can combine, rather than accept, today's false choices. He will have to bridge the EU's geographic divides, and position himself as pro-European and patriotic, establishment and anti-establishment, open and protectionist, pro-growth and fiscally restrained. Can Macron's method allow EU leaders to break the vicious circle of technocracy and populism, and end the paralysis of the last decade? For the time being, the only certainty is that - to invoke another hackneyed phrase - there is no alternative. (Courtesy Project Syndicate)

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