

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

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A Message of Hope: US Seeks Comprehensive Peace, Not Troop Withdrawal

Zalmay Khalilzad was selected as the US Special Envoy for Afghanistan to put an end to its longstanding campaign against the Taliban. At the beginning of the talks most of Afghan citizens, especially the minority groups thought that the US may leave them alone as they were left alone in 1990s. Thus, many observers had no clear picture of the talks and what will happen once a deal is made between the US and Taliban. Afghan government, civil society organizations, most of the neighboring countries and regional powers called the US to be very cautious of the talks and avoid a hasty withdrawal from the country. All these concerns had a legitimate base; it could lead to a new civil war in the country and could change Afghanistan to the safe haven of the terrorist groups.

At the same time, Taliban have deliberately tried to exaggerate in terms of the talks and give wrong information to the people for their own favor to further confuse them. They used the same strategy at the verge of new round of the talks with the US Special Envoy and said that the timetable of the troop withdrawal has been finalized.

How to foil Taliban's propaganda

It seems that Taliban want to use the peace talk opportunity to expand their legitimacy in Afghanistan and at the regional and international level. At the same time, they continue their harsh interpretations from Islam and oppressing in terms of the talks to disappoint the people from the Afghan government and international community and to weaken the morale of the Afghan defense and security the people in the areas under their control. As the formal negotiation process is about to enter almost its second year between the Taliban and the United States but so far there has been no substantial breakthrough other than the assurance given by the Taliban that Afghanistan's territory will not be allowed to be used against the U.S. They have categorically denied giving any legitimacy to the Afghan government despite U.S' constant insistence. It seems to be deadlock about the post-withdrawal political environment of Afghanistan. Therefore, the United States of America shall strongly maintained that the purpose of ongoing negotiations with the Taliban is to find a sustainable way for peace to prevail in the country and not entirely withdraw the U.S troops and must abide by it. Fortunately, the US envoy has stated recently that the US seeks a comprehensive peace agreement, NOT a withdrawal agreement. As a result, this new development lays a foundation for the next round of the US talks with the Taliban.

Afghan peace talk has entered to a new crucial phase; during this phase may the US finalize the external aspects of the peace deal and then will focus on commencing Intra-Afghan talks and a comprehensive peace deal. What matters here is the identification of a mechanism that Afghanistan will not be taken once more by the Taliban to be changed to the safe haven of the terrorist groups. The stance of the US that clearly says that the US is looking for a comprehensive peace in Afghanistan, not withdrawing its troop from the country, is very good news for the Afghans in general and for the minority groups in specific.



The Losses of Property and Valuable Human Life as the Main Consequences of Wars

By: Asim

Wars have always played a dominant role in human societies, if not positive all the times. There are many people in the world who consider that wars are necessary, though wars bring a lot of miseries with them. They even go to the extreme by calling them as a precondition to peace. But, on the other hand, there are many people who believe that wars are destructive and they destroy human civilization and annihilate human race. Therefore, human beings must not pursue wars; rather they have to run after the opportunities that can lead them towards peace and tranquility. However, such thinking is considered very much ideal; the desire that wars should not happen is a dream, while the fact that wars happen is very much a reality. Therefore, it is necessary to understand wars, their objectives, reasons and their effects, so as to have a proper understanding of politics and human societies.

Wars are basically launched to coerce wills. The Prussian military general and theoretician Carl Von Clausewitz defined war as follows: "War is thus an act of force to compel our enemy to do our will." Thus, wars are basically launched when wills are not attained or they are not agreed upon by the opposing party. Most of the times, wars are followed by failed political or diplomatic endeavors. Finding no compromise or agreement, the parties jump in the war and try to solve the issues through force.

War is not a new concept in human societies; rather they have been parts of different phases of history. But in the modern world of ours it has become more lethal. Earlier human societies were not very complex and even their interactions were not very much often. Today human societies are very much complex and they have very frequent interactions; further, unlike past, today the resources are getting scarce with each passing day while the number of people living on earth are increasing. Moreover, with the development in science and technology, there has been advancement in the field of modern weaponry, making wars more possible and more lethal. There are possibilities that the modern wars can well end in nuclear wars which if not controlled properly can really lead to the extinction of human race.

The reasons and motivations for wars are different. It should be noted that the motivation for war may be different for those ordering the war than for those undertaking the war. The people ordering the war form leadership, while the people undertaking the war form the military and even the people. It is quite possible that the leadership may be pursuing the war with the motivation of exerting its dominance over the enemy, while the soldiers forming the military may be fighting the war just because they are more motivated towards the money they are getting for the war. Nonetheless, it is necessary for a state to have the will of its leadership, its military and its people behind a war otherwise it may result into a failure (that is what happening in the war against terrorism). The motivations may differ, but there should be motivation. War uses force and force requires energy, which is provided by leadership, military and people, once that energy ends, the war cannot coerce its

objectives.

The reasons of the war may differ on different occasions. According to Jewish Talmud, described in the BeReshit Rabbah, there are three universal reasons for wars; 1). Economic, 2). Ideological/religious and 3). Power/pride/love (personal). The reasons described by him are really one of the basic reasons but not the only reasons. Today with the development of the states and the growing importance of politics in them, political reason is one of the most dominant reasons. And it should be mentioned as well that it is not necessary that a particular war should have only a single reason. There can be different reasons for a single war and because of a single reason there can be various wars. John G. Stoessinger, in his Why Nations Go to War says that the parties who go for the war claim that morality justifies their fight. He further mentions that the rationale for beginning a war depends on an overly optimistic assessment of the outcome of hostilities (casualties and costs), and on misperceptions of the enemy's intentions. In short, there are different theories describing different reasons for war. These theories include psychological theories, economic theory, demographic theory and many others. They talk about the different reasons of war but none can be considered as a universal theory.

As there is no constant and universal reason for war, in the same way the strategic and tactical aspects of war keep on changing with the changing nature of human societies. According to Carl Von Clausewitz, "Every age had its own kind of war, its own limiting conditions, and its own peculiar preconceptions." The single factor that has always been constant is war's employment of organized violence and the resultant destruction of property and lives. The conducts of wars have changed with the changing societies as well. In the words of Ralph Peters, "The nature of warfare never changes, only its superficial manifestations. Joshua and David, Hector and Achilles would recognize the combats that our soldiers and marines have waged in Somalia and Iraq. The uniforms evolve, bronze gives way to titanium, arrows may be replaced by laser-guided bombs, but the heart of the matter is still killing your enemies until any survivors surrender and do your will."

The effect of the wars is the most tragic aspect of war and it can be measured by the amount of losses incurred by the involved parties. The losses of the war can be in the form of property and valuable human life. The result of the war can be measured by the outcomes of the war. The difference between the conditions before the war and after the war basically constitutes the outcomes. Sometimes the outcomes are in the favor of a particular party in the war, but on most of the occasions the outcomes are in the favor of none of the parties.

The ongoing war against terrorism in Afghanistan may become one of the same types of war that ends in the favor of none of the parties in the war. Ten years after the war, as the war is being concluded, none of the parties, US authorities and people, Afghan authorities and people, Pakistani authorities and people and Taliban, seems to be contended with the result of the war and each one finds its objectives not achieved. If not pursued properly from now onwards, this war is going to result in nothing more than a share tragedy.

Teflon Populism

By: Sławomir Sierakowski

Populist rule is invariably associated with corruption, nepotism, and incompetence. Why, then, do populists appear immune to scandal? Revelations that would have shocked electorates just a few years ago leave nary a mark on populist leaders and government ministers. And, sometimes, what doesn't kill them even seems to make them stronger.

Examples are legion. When Der Spiegel reported that the far-right Alternative für Deutschland had misappropriated funds, the party's supporters could not have cared less. When the same publication unearthed a video of Austria's now-former vice chancellor, Heinz-Christian Strache, negotiating a quid pro quo with a Russian interlocutor, his far-right Freedom Party lost only a couple of percentage points in the polls, and probably only temporarily. Likewise, the parties of Czech Prime Minister Andrej Babiš and Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán continue to dominate their countries' politics, despite repeated corruption scandals.

But the most scandal-proof populist of all is Poland's de facto ruler, Jarosław Kaczyński. Independent Polish media outlets have revealed new affairs involving Kaczyński and his Law and Justice (PiS) party practically on a weekly basis – all of them damning.

For example, Kaczyński was recently caught on tape arranging for the payment of a bribe to the partner of an Austrian businessman involved in the construction of a skyscraper project tellingly named K-Towers. And just before the European Parliament election in May, Poland was shaken by a documentary exposing pedophilia by Catholic priests, along with a massive coverup by the Church hierarchy, which has close ties to the PiS. Nonetheless, the PiS government has refused to form a lay commission to investigate the matter.

Also in May, Polish journalists discovered that Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki purchased land from the Church that has increased in value a hundredfold as a result of a planned road project, but which he has avoided disclosing by using a transmutation agreement with his wife. Citing a former colleague of Morawiecki, journalists also found that he is due to receive a multi-million zloty payment from Santander, the bank where he worked before becoming prime minister, upon the completion of his term.

Any one of these revelations would have ended the career of a politician in any previous Polish government. But since PiS came to power in 2015, not a single government minister has resigned as a result of a scandal. On the contrary, scandals seem to have shored up the party's base. Although polls show that 84% of Poles support establishing a lay commission to investigate pedophilia in the Church, a significant share of the electorate still supports PiS. Most Poles believe that scandals are real, but that didn't stop PiS from securing a substantial victory in the European Parliament, with 45.5% of the vote. If anything, the party has gained even more leeway to engage in malign and corrupt behavior.

The PiS government is immune to scandal for two reasons. The first is the strong economy, which has allowed it to pursue successive social programs aimed at marginalized voters. For example, just before the European Parliament election, the government disbursed an extra month's worth of retirement benefits and issued payments to rural residents. Both groups voted overwhelmingly for PiS.

The second factor is propaganda. Because PiS constantly levies spurious, defamatory charges against the opposition and groups such as doctors, judges, and striking teachers, real scandals no longer seem all that shocking or compromising. This debasement of public discourse is no accident. Kaczyński has made a conscious effort to create a media environment in which anything goes. That is why he frequently accuses European Council President Donald Tusk of conspiring with the Russians to orchestrate the plane crash that killed his brother in 2010. It is also why he traffics in conspiracy theories about German Chancellor Angela Merkel being installed by the Stasi (communist East Germany's notorious secret police), and about refugees carrying infectious diseases.

For a politician like Kaczyński, a public sphere with no standards of truth or rules of decorum is ideal. The media and opposition can expose whatever they want; it won't change anything. While investigative journalists compile fact after fact, receipt after receipt, and publish rigorous year-long investigations, PiS is busy poisoning public discourse through the state-run media outlets it oversees.

Owing to its unscrupulous use of targeted cash transfers and propaganda, the PiS is not only immune to scandals; it benefits from them. Where everyone else sees the disclosure of ugly facts, PiS supporters see a frontal assault on their own interests. Revelations of malfeasance by the ruling party merely strengthen many working-class Poles' resolve to defend a government that has benefited them through social transfers.

The situation might be different if PiS politicians faced the risk of criminal investigation or prosecution. But the prosecutor's office has been fully co-opted, and will not seriously investigate the ruling party. You can hear a recording of Kaczyński bribing a businessman, but you can't interrogate him (the same also seems to apply to US presidents suspected of obstructing justice). And if you are an investigative reporter who uncovers facts that are inconvenient for the government, you can expect to come under pressure to reveal your sources.

And so, Poland – and Europe – is left with a government that is utterly impervious to scandal, incompetence, and charges of nepotism. The PiS administration is beyond reproach, not because it is a moral authority, but precisely because it is so shamelessly immoral. It may be pillaging the country, but it is sharing enough of the spoils not to have to look over its shoulder.

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