

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



March 02, 2017

Guiding the Socio-political Changes

The course of history in different societies and states has been dominantly guided by social and political changes. These changes have been able to attract the attentions of social and political scientists to a large extent as they are responsible for the evolution of society and states. As the social changes are related to the evolutionary process, they are concluded to be positive as the term evolution is considered positive; and are expected to take the society towards betterment, but that is not always the case. The changes can be negative as well. Sometimes they are negative for the entire society, sometimes for majority of the people and on most of the other occasions for the minorities.

It is more comfortable to study changes in the societies that are comparatively more ordered societies. Such societies are marked with political and economic stability and cultural integrity. The paradigmatic approaches can be very helpful in such societies, wherein the course of the changes can be easily traced as they are not marked with frequent fluctuations. Nevertheless, the societies that are marked with instable socio-political and socio-economic setups are difficult to be comprehended and the changes are not traceable even after much struggle.

Another important aspect of the social and political changes is their scope of influence. Some of these changes are not very intense, therefore, they cannot cast much effect on the surroundings, but others may be greater in magnitude with far reaching consequences. The scope of these changes have to be seen in relation with time and space, a particular change at a particular intersection of time and space may prove to be very much meager, while at yet another, it can be of immense impression and importance.

Further, there are periods in the evolution of societies, wherein the changes become frequent and vital. Such periods may be the periods of social and political disorder or the transition periods. Similar to the transition period in elements, which marks the change of one state to another; the societies also move from one phase to another. Like, the Feudalism in Europe changed to Capitalism. And while moving from Feudalism to Capitalism, Europe had to go through a transition period which was marked with frequent and fluctuating changes. But, unlike in elements, the transitional changes in societies take much longer period of time.

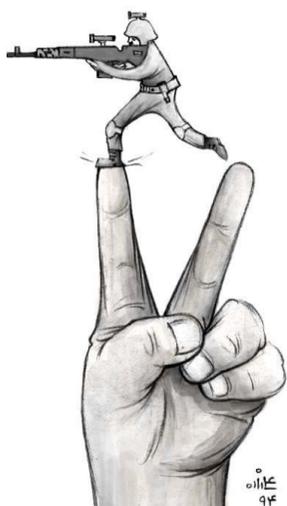
The social and political changes have always bothered human beings. They have been in constant struggle to comprehend their nature and have control over them. In this regard there are researches, studies and mechanisms in societies, with the objective of curbing them appropriately. One of the basic reasons of the formation of a political system was to introduce control within states. This control mechanism is guaranteed by the government in a political system along with other pillars of state. A part from that, the political parties and institutions also play a major role in addressing these changes. Controlling here does not necessarily mean stopping the changes; rather it refers to guiding the changes towards the wellbeing of most of the people living in the state. If on certain occasions changes are blocked on many other occasions changes are promulgated by the government or political parties.

At the present scenario our country Afghanistan is going through a transition period. Transition period does not mean the transition of the security responsibilities alone; rather it relates to a much broader perspective. Afghanistan is moving, though to a very limited extent, from a tribal society to a so-called democratic one. Though the real democratic signs are yet to be found in most parts of the country, there have been movement in that direction to a certain extent.

Unfortunately, this transition period is facing myriads of hurdles. The instable political and social setups have further made this period uncertain. The control mechanism itself seems to have lost the focus and devotion. It seems perplexed in the interwoven web of frequent social changes and has been contaminated with intense corruption. It lacks clear vision itself, so how it is possible for it to guide the social and political changes towards a definite goal. The country at the moment is marked with swelling wave of terrorism. Even the secured of all the people are insecure, the international forces have withdrawn, the national forces are not completely ready to shoulder the security responsibility, the political system is marked with certain incapacities to deal with the diverse political requirements and all these changes have been magnified because of their occurrence during a transition. So, the economic future is clearly uncertain and the most tragic fact is that we are completely unprepared.

This transition period has to be over one day, as happens with every transition period; but what could this period lead to is of immense importance. This period can either lead us to another chaotic state of affairs wherein we have to wait for a couple of more decades for the same transition or it can lead us to position from where we can move towards a successful democratic state.

Definitely, the second option is what most of Afghan people desire for, but that is achievable only after prudent, agile and above all sincere efforts on the part of the control mechanism.



No Panacea for Bleeding Wounds?

By Hujjatullah Zia

The flagrant violation of human rights and dignity is a stain on the collective conscience. Streams of blood have been shed and unmitigated war and violence led to large casualties around the globe. Scores of men, women and children were killed on the grounds of their caste, color and creed. The individuals' freedoms were curtailed to a great extent. Radical ideologies and lack of religious tolerance played highly destructive role in recent years.

Warring factions sought to impose their warped mind on people with the barrel of gun. Their parochial mindset and hard-line ideology engendered terrorism and escalated militancy in the region. Worst of all, the declaration of caliphate under Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, on June 2014, deteriorated the regional instability and left ethnic minority groups at the mercy of greater peril.

Militant fighters, mainly the self-proclaimed Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) group, pay no heed to humanitarian law and target combatants and non-combatants alike without an iota of mercy. Their atrocity and cruel practices are highly outrageous.

No wonder, terrorism, which blackmails the entire world, is a serious challenge around the human societies. Despite being combated strongly, terrorist networks have mushroomed and their venom is spew forth nationwide. For instance, the bloody war in Syria and escalated violence in Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan, which inflicted indescribable fatalities upon individuals, reveal the fact that militancy continues unabated. To put it succinctly, the pain and suffering of human societies never come to an end and there is a vacuum for the true spirit of democracy.

Democratic discourse and national and international conferences about human rights and dignity in general and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in particular could not alleviate the tragedy and anguish of mankind.

The UDHR has figured out the root causes of human sufferings as it states, "disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts" and suggests the panacea for the bleeding wound of human societies as, "recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world".

Men are born free with a set of natural and inviolable rights and dignity. Humiliating men's natural rights has resulted in deadly wars. Ethnocentrism and racial superiority have put the rights and liberty of ethnic minority groups, including women and children, at stake. Lack of religious tolerance triggered violence and bloodshed around the globe. Currently, terrorist networks excommunicate people and target them on the aforementioned grounds.

"Without a commitment to fundamental human rights, to

the dignity and worth of the human person and to the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small, our world will become chaos, misery and warfare," the UN's human rights chief Zeid al Hussein is cited as saying. "Of all the great post-war achievements, it is this assertion of the universality of rights in human rights law that may be the most noteworthy."

Afghanistan is believed to bear the brunt of terrorism and soldiers and civilians' fatalities increased to a great extent in recent years. Warring factions, especially the Taliban and ISIL fighters, spill the blood of nation. Instability and political turbulence never stop. Life has turned extremely cheap as a result of the insurgency which roots in radical ideology. In a nutshell, there are three main reasons behind the flagrant violation of human rights:

lack of religious tolerance, ethnocentrism and radical ideology practiced by the militants. To mitigate the challenges and seek to protect the rights and liberty of mankind around the globe, it is believed that religious approach to the issue will be counterproductive.

So, a secular view such as respecting one's rights for the sheer cause of being human, regardless of their racial and religious backgrounds, will alleviate the problem. With such an attitude, one will tolerate others the way they are.

The UDHR also suggests a secular solution for the protection of men's rights. Secondly, terrorism is the most challenging issue and a major obstacle before the free exercise of one's rights. Afghan government has constantly called warring parties to come to negotiating table and stop violence and bloodshed. However, this strategy backfired and the Taliban outfits intensified their attacks.

They played a foul game, mainly with killing the former head of Afghan High Peace Council (HPC) Professor Burhanuddin Rabbani. This political game was proved abortive and the Taliban kept on targeting Afghan nation.

So, one will conclude that since warring parties underestimate negotiation, it will not come to fruition. The world will have to demolish the hubs of terrorism and terrorist groups, including those seminaries which have changed into hotbed of radical mindsets.

That is to say, militant fighters must be shot on the head and all factors that pave the ground for radicalism are to be combated. It seems that the deep-seated ideology of militant groups will not be ended unless those ideologues are killed. On the other hand, human societies must nurture the spirit of brotherhood and strengthen the bases of democracy.

Establishing democratic administrations and giving participatory role to the public will decrease war and violence and enable individuals to exercise their rights freely.

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Laughing in the Dark

By Nina L. Khrushcheva

As a former Soviet citizen, I can tell you: it's never a good sign for a political system when artists start speaking out against it. And when their statements visibly strike a nerve, chances are that the system is sick.

In a democracy, art can simply be ignored. Of course, one can appreciate culture, but that is a matter of choice, not necessity. Indifference is a luxury afforded to those whose freedoms are well protected. When those freedoms are threatened, however, art becomes a critical line of defense. The United States is learning that lesson today.

In just over a month, President Donald Trump has changed the rules of US politics – and not for the better. If the facts contradict his administration's line – or, worse, suggest that he isn't popular – he denounces the journalists who report them as purveyors of "fake news" and an "enemy" of the American people. The judiciary and the intelligence community have not escaped Trump's feverish attacks.

Any opposition to his orders, such as court rulings against his partial ban on Muslims entering the country, or exposés of potential wrongdoing, such as his former national security adviser's secret conversations with the Russian ambassador, is met with quick condemnation.

With America's pillars of democracy under assault, artists are stepping in. Even before Trump was inaugurated, the writers' union PEN America held a #LouderTogether protest, on the steps of the New York Public Library, to "send a message" to an administration "that has laid bare its hostility toward the press and other free expression norms."

When then-Vice President-elect Mike Pence attended the Broadway show Hamilton, the actors appealed to him to uphold American values and work on behalf of all Americans (drawing a Twitter rebuke from Trump). Just down the street, the show Party People, which examines the legacy of the Black Panthers and the Young Lords Party, delivered a more confrontational message, as part of a modified script that addressed Trump's victory.

When Trump signed his order to ban anyone from seven Muslim-majority countries from entering the US, the Museum of Modern Art hung works by artists from those countries. In the plaques beside the paintings, MoMA referred to Trump's order explicitly, and asserted that it had hung the paintings to "affirm the ideals of welcome and freedom" that are vital to the US. MoMA has also scheduled four screenings of films by directors subject to the travel ban. In April, almost 100 independent US and Canadian movie theaters will offer free screenings of George Orwell's 1984 as a response to the Trump administration's embrace of "alternative facts."

Hollywood actors have taken advantage of this year's award season to make their own political statements. Meryl Streep drew Trump's ire with her speech at the Golden Globe Awards, in which she condemned Trump for mocking a disabled reporter and highlighted the importance of defending press freedom. David Harbour, accepting a Screen Actors

Guild award, declared that great acting "is a call to arms from our fellow craftsmen and women to go deeper, and through our art to battle against fear, self-centeredness, and exclusivity of our predominantly narcissistic culture."

In the fashion world, some major designers have pledged never to dress First Lady Melania Trump. At the recent New York Fashion Week, designers from Mara Hoffman to Prabal Gurung used the runway to make political statements, and some of fashion's biggest names participated in a W Magazine video, stating defiantly, "I am an immigrant."

Trump's supporters may prefer to dismiss such statements, telling actors and artists to "stick to their day jobs." But the truth is that what such figures say has an impact – and not just on Trump, a longtime Hollywood hanger-on. There is a reason why Russia's autocratic leaders have always tried to keep artists on a short leash.

When artists bow to power, the state gains a new level of authority and even legitimacy. That's why Joseph Stalin needed the celebrated anti-Kremlin poet Osip Mandelstam to write him an ode. Mandelstam succumbed to the pressure, but he was not broken. He continued to insult the Kremlin, most famously, with his poem, "We live not feeling the ground under our feet." While he ended up perishing in a gulag, his protest poems, and those by other brave poets, contributed to the regime's demise. Alexander Solzhenitsyn's 1970s anti-communist masterpiece The Gulag Archipelago ultimately did as much as the sclerotic economy to expose the communist charade.

Putin must have been delighted when Solzhenitsyn, a Nobel laureate who seemed to become increasingly nationalistic with age, expressed support for him. Recognizing the power of the arts, Putin established himself early on as a fan of Russian culture. He has also courted foreigners, including French movie icons Brigitte Bardot and Gérard Depardieu and even the Hollywood has-been Steven Seagal.

At the same time, Putin has been quick to eliminate those whose message he does not like. The 1990s satirical television show Puppets was canceled almost immediately after Putin entered the Kremlin, after likening the president to Little Zaches, the ugly, evil, and self-important dwarf from E.T.A. Hoffmann's grotesque fairy tale.

A novice autocrat whose attempts to silence his critics have been clumsy, at best, Trump may attempt to emulate his Russian role model. But he has not amassed sufficient power to quash every cultural work and institution that criticizes him. If he had, he probably would have already canceled the comedy show Saturday Night Live, which he condemns regularly. It is often the arts, serious or satirical, that expose the tragic absurdity of repressive leadership. And the worse Trump behaves, the more demand there will be for artists who oppose him. Saturday Night Live's ratings are at a six-year high. (Courtesy Project Syndicate)

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