

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



March 09, 2016

## On International Women's Day

8th March is celebrated as International Women's Day throughout the world to highlight gender disparities and discrimination and violence against women and urge measures to eradicate them. This year the day was once again celebrated throughout the world, and the theme of the Day was "Pledge for Parity," which demanded that everyone men and women - can pledge to take a concrete step to help achieve gender parity more quickly - whether to help women and girls achieve their ambitions, call for gender-balanced leadership, respect and value difference, develop more inclusive and flexible cultures or root out workplace bias. It also urged that everyone be a leader within his own spheres of influence and commit to take pragmatic action to accelerate gender parity.

The Day was also celebrated in Afghanistan by different organizations and civil society. Afghanistan National Institute of Music (ANIM) launched a "women's anthem" on the eve of the Day. The purpose of the anthem is to heighten the spirit of women in Afghanistan.

On the same day, the Office of the Attorney General of Afghanistan (AGO) said that it had finalized the cases of at least thirteen suspects involved in the murder of Farkhunda, who was brutally killed in Kabul by an angry mob; and her family and some of the civil society activists demanded justice for her.

The spokesperson to AGO, BasirAzizi said, "Three of the defendants were convicted to 20 years imprisonment, one person to ten years jail and thirteen others to 16 years jail."

Though some may believe that justice may have been served, still there are huge gaps to be filled; more work needs to be done regarding the protection of women. The real achievement would be the measurable reduction in the actions that discriminate women or encourage any sort of violence against them. However, that seems to be a Herculean task.

AGO has mentioned that special tribunals have been set for addressing violence against women and so far they have completed 9,572 cases in the provinces. Amongst the cases processed so far there are 828 cases of murder, 2,453 cases of sexual abuse, 75 cases of kidnapping of women, 253 cases of forced marriages, 1,912 cases related to beating and 18 other cases.

This seems encouraging; however, it is still insufficient. These figures only highlight the cases that have been brought to the law; there are many other cases that go unnoticed. Either the victims hesitate to bring their cases to the court because of the mistrust or mostly because of fear. Therefore, there are many cases in different parts of the country that never come out of the confinement of the houses and the discrimination against women has turned into a complex phenomenon.

The fact remains that Afghan society still lacks the modernity and development it needs in order to reach to a respectable position regarding the rights and position of women. The support and assistance of the international community has only been able to provide clean and beautiful attire not a praiseworthy soul to Afghan society. The Afghan social structure has been vehemently dominated by religious extremism and tribal nepotism. Though these factors have affected almost everyone, women have been intensely influenced as they belong to the weaker strata of the society. Most of the self-designed religious doctrines and tribal norms are against the women and discriminate their basic rights. Unfortunately, these norms and doctrines have even gone to the extent of violence and have tortured women physically - mostly in the public.

Afghan society is a patriarchal society wherein all the major institutions are controlled by male members of the society. Though the history of male dominance within Afghan society is not a new phenomenon, its extreme traces can be found within Taliban era. Taliban introduced the worst kind of violence against the women and brought the position of women to its lowest. There were many cases during their reign when women were prosecuted publicly - they were shot in public, beaten brutally and even stoned to death. They were not allowed to come out of their houses; in compelling situations they were allowed to come out only when they had a male escort with them. In short, Taliban displayed the worst kind of discrimination of women through their extremist religious ideology and obsolete tribal values. The same kind of discrimination against women is still found in Afghanistan though there have been claims of improvements. One of the basic reasons of the survival of such an attitude is the way the females are perceived within Afghan society. The women are considered no more than other personal possession by the male members of the society. They can buy or sell them, use them as convenient and can discard them at their will. No one is there to object.

It is necessary that Afghan government should take serious notice of the discrimination and violence against women. From now on, it must pledge for parity, in all the walks of life. Women should be given equal opportunities to get education, pursue the profession of their choice and should have access to other social rights. In fact, all the members of the society must pledge for the same.



## Europe's Stillborn Security Strategy

By Ana Palacio

If a strategy is announced and nobody is around to listen, does it make a sound? The European Union will find out the answer this June, when Federica Mogherini, its High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, presents a long overdue foreign and security strategy for Europe - just when all eyes will be on the United Kingdom's referendum on EU membership. The EU is adrift and desperately in need of a catalyst to renew its sense of purpose and dynamism. The global strategy could serve that purpose, but not if it is issued at a time when attention is squarely focused on another challenge, especially one that could bring about fundamental change for the EU.

Given this, the strategy's launch should be put on hold until after the referendum.

In the United States, the president is legally required to issue a national security strategy annually. Though the requirement is adhered to only loosely - President Barack Obama has released just two strategies in the last seven years - the intent is clear: to establish a set of concrete national security priorities informed by the administration in office and the country's changing circumstances. In Europe, the approach is broader. When the first - and only - strategy was launched in 2003, it was meant as a long-term guide, to endure through multiple European Commissions. But it has lasted for too long, and is now well out of date - a reality that is apparent from its opening line: "Europe has never been so prosperous, so secure, nor so free."

Last June, the European Council recognized the need for an updated strategy, and called on Mogherini to prepare a new foreign and security policy, to be submitted within a year. To maximize their chances of success, Mogherini and the European External Action Service have kept the expert-led development process discreet, intentionally avoiding broad public debate.

Meanwhile, numerous difficult challenges - most notably, the ongoing refugee crisis - have buffeted Europe. This has not only sustained the lack of public awareness of the foreign and security strategy development process, but has also altered the environment in which the strategy is to be introduced.

A process that was intended to enable Europe to respond better to external changes now must be rethought to reflect the recognition that it is the EU which is now set to undergo a fundamental transformation.

Such change will occur regardless of whether British vot-

ers choose to exit the EU. If the UK leaves - taking its diplomatic, military, economic, and cultural prowess with it - the hit to the EU, in terms of its capacity to influence its external environment, is obvious. If the UK stays, it will require the formalization of a looser conception of the EU - one that will raise core questions about the future of European integration.

Seen in this light, the UK's upcoming referendum is more momentous even than the failed referenda on an EU constitution in 2005. Releasing a new foreign and security strategy at the same moment will not just doom the plan to irrelevance; it will reinforce the perception that the EU institutions are out of touch with the real world, exacerbating the Union's already-acute existential crisis.

Prolonging the plan's development process would have the opposite effect, by helping to spur a broad - and attentive - discussion on what the new Europe, with or without the UK, should look like.

Beyond producing a relevant and useful foreign and security strategy, such a discussion can give the EU a new narrative, thereby invigorating public support for the European project.

To understand the need for such a narrative, one need look no further than the debate in the UK over its EU membership, which is focused almost exclusively on practical considerations and cost/benefit analyses. Principles, solidarity, and vision are nowhere to be found.

Timing is everything in politics. Last June, Europe's leaders made the right call. If the strategy had been ready for release at that time, it might have served as a pole around which a discussion on Europe's purpose in the world could have coalesced. But events, both internal and external, have overtaken the process. It is time to adjust.

Releasing a new strategy that does not reflect Europe's new reality would amount to an enormous missed opportunity - a tragedy, in fact, given how desperately the EU needs direction.

The European Council and Commission should bear this in mind as the June 2016 deadline to submit the strategy approaches. Sometimes patience truly is the companion of wisdom. (Courtesy Project Syndicate)

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## Radical Ideology!

By Hujjatullah Zia

Do you not know that faith is the leading principle in all matters? For what husbandman can reap, unless he first trust his seed to the earth? Or who can cross the sea, unless he first entrust himself to the boat and the pilot? And what sick person can be healed, unless first he trusts himself to the care of the physician? And what art or knowledge can anyone learn, unless he first apply and entrust himself to the teacher? If, then, the husbandman trusts the earth, and the sailor the boat, and the sick the physician, will you not place confidence in God, even when you hold so many pledges at His hand?" Theophilus of Antioch.

A world view is how one perceives and interprets the world in its entirety. It includes a collection of beliefs about things such as life and the world itself. An individual or a group of people can hold these beliefs. Many people associate world-view with religion as well. Carol Hill says: "By 'worldview' I mean the basic way of interpreting things and events that pervades a culture so thoroughly that it becomes a culture's concept of reality - what is good, what is important, what is sacred, what is real. Worldview is more than culture, even though the distinction between the two can sometimes be subtle. It extends to perceptions of time and space, of happiness and well-beings. The beliefs, values, and behaviors of a culture stem directly from its worldview."

Moreover, ideology is a body of ideas that reflects the beliefs and interests of a nation, political system, etc. and underlies political action. Ideology originates from a worldview. It is the infrastructure and ideology is the superstructure of a school of thought.

The practices of religious extremists are reflected through their radical stereotypes and deep-seated ideology which originate in their fundamental interpretation of the world. They interpret religious beliefs with a strictness which is void of reason or logic. These religious radicals believe in extreme rather than moderate views. Moderate fideism is only non-rational while extreme fideism is irrational or anti-rational which is a blind faith and stands against reason. Blind faith is highly perilous for any society. For example, the religious radicals whose worldview is empty of reason are deeply ethno-centrist. I remember when I with some friends of mine went to a luxury house, in an insecure district of Ghazni province; I saw cuts on the walls made with sharp objects which surprised me greatly. I asked the reason. The owner of the house answered that the cuts were made by Taliban's Kalashnikovs. He detailed that they left their guestroom's door; a separate room made for serving guests which is traditional among the Afghan people, open at night otherwise if Taliban faced closed door they would break in. He added, the Taliban forced them to serve them

dinner. He complained that all his neighboring homes suffered from Taliban's disturbance. They entered their homes and asked them to serve the Mujahideen. Mujahid (Holy Warrior) is a sacred word used for those who fight to support Islam. So, this is a clear manifestation of their ethnocentrism.

The strictly ideological behavior of religious extremists is formed by their fundamental worldview and blind faith. They are brainwashed that way. A documentary perhaps filmed in 1980 when about two and a half million Afghan people were killed and seven million were displaced. The documentary was about Afghan people who emigrated to Zahidan, a city in Iran. They lived in camps and their children did not have access to school. They attended mosques for learning Holy Qur'an. Finally, a school was opened for them by the international fund. The students who attended schools belonged to highly conservative families that hardly ever dared present themselves with their faces open. Even, they were not willing to say their names. Samira Uzbek who was hardly convinced by insistence of filmmaker to tell her name was not persuaded to reveal her face. She was persisting that it was a sin which would led to the torture of God on the Day of Judgment. Finally, Samira's school teacher left her between two choices whether to reveal her face or get out of the school; she chose the second choice and went out. A friend of her who revealed only her two eyes followed her outside for convincing to reveal her face. She implored and asked her just to reveal her eyes and then repent to God who will forgive her, she refused to do so. However her friend implored and said that she herself will repent to God for revealing her face, Samira denied continuously. Therefore, their worldview is so strict and closed.

Talibanism also has roots in religious extreme and a misinterpretation of the world. Mostly, the profane has changed into the sacred for them. For instance, their strict political ideology regarding women such as burning their schools and barring them from participating in political, cultural and educational fields is based on their radical worldview. They have been brainwashed and trained for many years which can make their frames of mind unchangeable. Moreover, their ideological opinions and extreme fideism regarding Jihad has deep root in their religious understandings which prepare them for altruistic suicide. Therefore, it will be very naïve of one to think that they kill themselves for worldly materials. However, all their actions and practices have deep roots in religious ideology.

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