

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



March 09, 2017

Brutal Kabul Attack

In a brutal attack in Kabul, three gunmen attacked Sardar Daud Khan Hospital Wednesday morning, after their co-fighter detonated explosives at the entrance gate. The attackers entered the hospital and targeted the patients (mostly wounded Afghan army soldiers) and the hospital staff members. They were armed with AK-47's, grenades and suicide vests and stood against the Crisis Response Unit (CRU) and Commando Forces for hours. As per the sources in the Ministry of Defense, 30 people were killed while more than 70 others were wounded as a result of the attack.

The attack was really inhuman and shows the true face of the insurgency that is haunting Afghanistan at the moment. It is important to note that the attack was claimed by Daesh that is turning out to be a major security challenge for Afghanistan after Taliban.

Insecurity is going to be a major challenge for Afghan government and security forces this year.

As spring season is going to start, Taliban and other insurgents are more likely to increase their activities. There are fears among the people in Afghanistan that their lives would once again be influenced badly by the wave of terrorism and insurgency.

After the downfall of Taliban, Afghan people had hoped that their lives would change and the circumstances would lead towards a better and peaceful future, but the last few years have pointed towards worsening security situation. The year 2016 proved to be the most deadly for Afghan civilians; particularly, for women and children. And, as Taliban and Daesh insurgents have spread over many provinces in the country now, there are no good expectations for the ongoing year as well, unless there is a major breakthrough in peace talks with Taliban and a policy shift in the government corridors regarding the issue of insecurity.

As far as the capability of Afghan forces to tackle the security situation in the country is concerned, there are some evident grey areas, which require immediate improvement and the international community should play a key role to ensure that training and capacity building sessions must start immediately so that Afghan forces are in a better position to face the security challenges this year.

There is no doubt in the fact that Afghan security forces have given some great sacrifices; however, the important thing is that their sacrifices should bear some fruit and Afghanistan should see the sun of peace and tranquility dawn quickly. But, that does not seem to be near as the rise in insecurity seems to be consistent and it has been taking the lives of numerous people.

The suicide bombs and the assaults by insurgents that try to target the security officials, in some way or the other, target the civilians as well. In certain cases, they even target the civilians directly. This has made the life miserable for the people in Afghanistan.

The response of the government in the face of the rising insecurity is really lethargic. It has been largely influenced by the differences that prevail within the ranks of National Unity Government (NUG) regarding the approach that has to be adopted against the situation. The members of NUG see the issue with different perspectives and are not ready to cooperate with each other in designing a comprehensive and unanimous policy to tackle the situation. This has led to misunderstandings and ambiguities in the war against terrorism on operational level as well.

Afghan government, therefore, has to get united and strive to control the situation properly. It needs to understand that as a result of decades of instability and socio-economic and political problems, the Afghan people have been suffering from myriads of problems. Apart from the issue of insecurity, there are some very concerning issues that exist in our society and threaten the lives of the common people of Afghanistan.

There are claims by the government officials that changes have been brought within Afghan society; however, it should be noted that if the effectiveness of the changes have to be felt or observed, they should be observed by the changes in the lives of the common people. If there is any change in the condition of living of the common people as the outcome of the change; the change should be guarded for and even backed and supported vehemently.

If not, either the claim must be discarded as wrong or the efforts should be improved to make the changes effective. And that is what Afghanistan needs to do - it has to improve its efforts to bring about necessary changes in the lives of the common people that have been jeopardized both by insecurity and lack of rudimentary requirements of life.

Afghan government must therefore get serious in tackling with the issue of the insecurity and at the same time strive to provide at least the rudimentary requirements of life to people as they can also play a tremendous role in fighting against the insurgents.

If the people are sure that the present government can strive honestly to provide them their necessities they will definitely join hands together along with the security forces to fight terrorists and terrorism successfully.



Women's Day - Meaningless for Afghan Women

By Hujjatullah Zia

The 8th of March was celebrated as International Women's Day across the world, but does it matter for Afghan women? The rights of women have been a controversial issue and Afghan women left several regimes behind, including the Taliban's regime. The political ups and downs throughout the history involved women's rights and liberty and the patriarchal system left them at the mercy of injustice. They suffered indescribable pains and anguish. Their rights have been violated and their freedoms were curtailed in one way or another.

Moreover, Afghan women have been the victim of traditional cultures. Their rights were restricted within the closed frame of traditions being practiced mainly in tribal belts. In other words, the parochial mindsets regarding women played highly negative role across the country through engendering hatred and misogyny. Women's role was tailored to men's desires. They were deemed inferior creature and had to be all ears to their spouses' orders. After all, stereotypes abounded in our literature and our culture concerning women and continue up to now.

The Taliban's regime treated women as a pariah and trampled upon their rights and liberty. It is believed that Afghan women bore the brunt of violence during that regime. Women were not allowed to attend schools or go to bazaar without chaperone. They were flagellated in public places in case of eloping with their favorite men. Their social and political role was denied.

With the establishment of democracy in the post-Taliban Afghanistan, Afghan women were entitled to engage in social, cultural and political activities, including being candidate for presidency and provincial council. Constitutionally, "the citizens of Afghanistan, man and woman, have equal rights and duties before the law." In the meantime, "liberty and human dignity are inviolable. The state shall respect and protect liberty as well as human dignity." The current Constitution of Afghanistan, which was approved in 2004, is the most unprecedented one of its kind in the country's history.

It is believed that there are three attitudes towards women in Afghanistan: (1) the radical and Talibanic attitude holds strong sway in tribal areas.

In remote and Taliban dominated areas, the public treat women with disdain and consider no human rights for them. They are still deemed an inferior creature and restricted within harsh cultural boundaries.

The air is filled with a misogynistic view and the tribal council decides whether or not one is criminal and deserves punishment. Women are tortured in desert court for crossing the cultural red line which is against the Constitution and religious tenets. Simultaneously, the residents of tribal regions feel pessimistically regarding the government and its law. As a result, taking a family issue to the court will be a great

disdain for them. They believe that entitling women to equal freedoms and rights with men will lead to moral turpitude and women, according to them, deserve no more than working within the four walls. (2) There are some moderate opinions regarding women's rights and liberty too, which agree with the country's Constitution. Based on this idea, women should be treated with respect and given equal rights and freedoms with men.

The government must empower women and pave the way for their social and political activities. This moderate attitude, which is also supported by women, is in accordance with religious tenets. (3) There are also secular ideas about women which consider boundless rights and liberty for them. The supporters of this idea, who are mostly the so-called intellectuals, suggest that women should be liberated from all religious values and cultural norms.

Such an approach will result in violation of women's human rights and dignity. To consider the religious and historical background of the country, this attitude is against the public beliefs and may trigger a harsh reaction, mainly from the residents of tribal belts and religious figures. This will further put our moral values and cultural standards at stake with the process of time.

In real life, however, Afghan women suffer domestic violence and social discriminations. Worst of all, the militant fighters, including the Taliban guerillas, spill the blood of women without a tinge of guilt and pay no heed to their natural rights and dignity. In another item, the unmitigated militancy poses a serious threat to women's life and liberty and discourages them from playing active role in political arena. It is feared that the emergence of the self-styled Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) group, which practices upon more radical ideology, will further imperil women's life and liberty.

The democratic discourses and national and international conferences failed to put an end to the sufferings of Afghan women. Their voice still falls on deaf ears and their rights are violated with impunity.

Afghan women are not only the victim of terrorism but also of social injustice and cultural restrictions which stem from radical mentalities and parochial mindsets.

To lessen the anguish of Afghan women, the religious figures and clergy will have to enlighten women's fundamental rights according to the true spirit of religious tenets so that they can root out wrong traditions deeply implanted in our culture. Meanwhile, the government must protect women's rights through enforcing the law and campaigning against the radical mindsets.

The violators of women's rights and liberty should be prosecuted on the basis of law. Prayerfully, Afghan women will breathe a sigh of relief and enjoy the fruition of true democracy in near future.

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When Obama is Always Listening

By Nina L. Khrushcheva

What unites "America first" President Donald Trump, Poland's political puppet master Jaroslaw Kaczyński, and Russian President Vladimir Putin? Trump and Kaczyński, chest-thumping nationalists, should revile Russia's revanchist leader for his expansionist policies in ex-Soviet countries like Georgia and Ukraine. Yet Trump warmly praises Putin, while Kaczyński increasingly emulates his autocratic methods. And all three seem predisposed not only to believe in outlandish conspiracies, but also to use those beliefs to shape policy and manipulate the public.

Putin sees clandestine plots to undermine Russian greatness everywhere, mostly initiated by the Western spymasters, the United States and the United Kingdom. The theories to which he subscribes often have no basis in reality, but one can at least understand why he might believe them: for a former KGB agent, himself a spymaster, a heightened degree of suspicion that things may not be as they appear is not exactly shocking. Trump's susceptibility to - even enthusiasm for - radical conspiracy theories is less easy to explain. Trump is far from a master of intrigue, unless the cutthroat world of New York real estate is even more Mafia-ridden than outsiders imagine.

It seems clear that Trump's chief strategist, Stephen Bannon, a life-long anti-liberal fabulist, reinforces his boss's lumpen worldview. But not even Bannon's influence can explain Trump's feverish tweets, sent early last Saturday morning, accusing former US president Barack Obama of having Trump Tower's "wires tapped" before the election.

Lacking any evidence for his allegation, Trump has called for an investigation, much like he demanded an investigation into widespread voter fraud (in favor of his opponent, Hillary Clinton) that never actually took place. So bizarre and implausible was this latest rant - extreme even for a cable news-addled, Twitter-addicted president - that one can only wonder (as many are) whether Trump is experiencing some sort of psychological disturbance. Kaczyński has his own paranoid theories. He believes that European Council President Donald Tusk, a former Polish prime minister, conspired with Putin to assassinate his twin brother, then-Polish President Lech Kaczyński. The plane crash near Smolensk in 2010 that claimed the lives of 92 Polish dignitaries, including Lech Kaczyński, has been thoroughly investigated - and none of the evidence supports Kaczyński's claims. And yet, on the basis of his morbid delusions, Kaczyński engaged in a stealth plot in Brussels to have Tusk replaced.

What the late historian Richard Hofstadter called the "paranoid style" has reached the commanding heights of political power in the US and Poland. The question is how these two democracies fell under the spell of leaders more reminiscent of Putin than of conventional Western leaders. Ordinary political analysis - and even psychology - may be incapable of providing an answer. The novelist Joan Didion may come closest to charting a path

through the politics of Trump and Kaczyński. In her essay "Notes Toward a Dreampolitik," Didion describes people who move about the world "forever felling trees in some interior wilderness." They are "secret frontiersmen who walk around right in the ganglia of the fantastic electronic pulsing" that characterizes modern life, and they "continue to receive information only through the most tenuous chains of rumor, hearsay, haphazard trickledown." They are "nominally literate," yet "they participate in the national anxieties only through a glass darkly."

It is scary enough that the US president refuses most of his daily briefings from the professionals at the State Department and in the military and intelligence services. The fact that he relies instead on Fox News, racist alt-right blogs, and the unhinged enragés of talk radio is truly, even existentially, terrifying. The leader of the free world has made his home on the manic fringes of US political discourse.

Under Kaczyński, Poland seems to be stuck in a similar Internet and talk-radio sinkhole. Indeed, a Roman Catholic Church radio station, Radio Maria, is among the most notorious of the "secret frontiersmen."

But, as Putin's leadership has demonstrated, the paranoid style is not just some personal weakness. In his book *Voodoo Histories: The Role of the Conspiracy Theory in Shaping Modern History*, the British journalist David Aaronovitch has described this political paranoia as a kind of voodoo of our social media age. The choice of words is telling. As the Voodoo doctor François "Papa Doc" Duvalier showed during his nearly 15-year dictatorship in Haiti, where no basis for political legitimacy exists, the ruler's paranoia must be relentless.

Papa Doc turned fear into the blackest form of political magic. Anyone in Haiti who questioned his rule could expect to be dispatched - often in a public and theatrically violent manner - by Papa Doc's dreaded Tonton Macoute. Foreign critics had their reputations trashed. Graham Greene, who witheringly dissected Papa Doc's rule in his novel *The Comedians*, was called a Benzedrine addict - and worse - by the regime's propagandists. Putin is no stranger to such tactics.

And now the West is experiencing something similar. US President George H.W. Bush once famously warned against "voodoo economics." Today, we face a form of voodoo politics: rule based on "alternative facts" and unfounded and untestable theories that cast their own kind of spell on citizens struggling to comprehend a globalized world and economy from which they feel alienated. Trump, Kaczyński, and Putin embrace this approach because it works.

Regardless of whether, and to what extent, they believe their own claims, they can be confident that for many of their supporters, the magic will never wear off, no matter how badly they fail or how baldly they lie. (Courtesy Project Syndicate)

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