

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



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Bringing Different Cultures Closer!

Globalization, frequent movement of the people across the continents and modern and efficient ways of communications and transportation have brought human beings together, but they have not been able to bring them closer. The different cultures and communities that live together not always result into a multicultural society with rich traditions and tolerance for one another. Often, it has been observed that different people have come in confrontation with one another and they have given rise to disorder and disturbances.

This can be found in today's European society. Though many of them have achieved a considerable stability and development, and some of them claim to be multicultural societies with different people living together in peace and tranquility, there are evident problems of alienation within certain communities. Currently, the immigrants, mostly Muslims, are thought to be suffering from the same. Few among them have even created serious problems for some of the countries, as they have not been able to own those cultures and have strived to show their hatred through violent means.

Some of the current attacks in European countries, particularly in Paris and now in Belgium, show how some of the extremist Muslims, who claim to belong to Islamic State (IS), behave in the societies that they had opted to live in because of feeling of insecurity in their own countries.

This has also raised serious questions for the flow of refugees in European countries and their acceptability. Few thinkers believe that the refugees may pose serious threats to European countries and may push them towards instability and insecurity. However, this issue has been pulled to its extreme by involving the question of the flow of the refugees. There are only few terrorists who penetrate along with the refugees. This has to do with the concerned governments and authorities; they have to be ready for such attacks as today the whole world is facing the issue of terrorism, not some of the European countries alone.

This issue can also be discussed within the broader perspective of multiculturalism and globalization. The concept of multiculturalism has not been able to implement itself thoroughly in the world. The multiculturalism has not been able to form a global ethics or a global code of conduct. It has been lost somewhere in cultural relativism. The cultures or the negatives in the cultures are accepted with the claims of cultural relativism. If the same inclination towards cultural relativism is maintained it would be very difficult for today's world to form common values, laws or systems, which are very necessary to avoid clashes among the cultures and civilizations. Unfortunately, our today's world is moving right towards the same kind of clashes.

On the other hand this is going to strengthen the phenomenon of ethnocentrism. As the concept of ethnocentrism says that it is judging another culture solely by the values and standards of one's own culture, the ethnocentric individual will judge other groups relative to his or her own particular ethnic group or culture, especially with concern to language, behavior, customs, and religion. These ethnic distinctions and subdivisions serve to define each ethnicity's unique cultural identity. Ethnocentrism may be overt or subtle, and while it is considered a natural proclivity of human psychology, it has developed a generally negative connotation. Anthropological studies reveal that people born into a particular culture that grow up absorbing the values and behaviors of the culture will develop a worldview that considers their culture to be the norm. If people then experience other cultures that have different values and normal behaviors, they will find that the thought patterns appropriate to their birth culture and the meanings their birth culture attaches to behaviors are not appropriate for the new cultures. However, since people are accustomed to their birth culture, it can be difficult for them to see the behaviors of people from a different culture from the viewpoint of that culture rather than from their own.

It is really fine that the different cultures in the world sustain their identity and even be proud of their historical and cultural backgrounds but they are never entitled to subjugate and devalue others cultures and values. Nonetheless, when there is the discussion of a multicultural society, there are some necessary safeguards against ethnocentrism and cultural relativism. In a multicultural society, there is a requirement of common values that do not harass human beings and violate their rights, even if the same is suggested in a particular culture.

The developed countries of the world today experience a process of multiculturalism, wherein they are facing the problems generated by extreme ethnocentrism and cultural relativism.

However, none should substitute multiculturalism as it is the evolution human beings have made in their social lives. Definitely, it is time consuming and yet there is a long way to go to achieve it. For the time being states marked with multiculturalism have to introduce hard and fast rules and vigilant checks against any sort of attempt to strengthen violation of it. However, the developed nations of the world must never strive to go against it, not because the deprived nations benefit from it but because it is favorable for all the human beings. Further, this will prove them more evolved.



Russia Gained a Lot in Syria

By Manish Rai

Exclusive for the Daily Outlook

With the formal end to five and half month of the Russian brief military intervention in Syria. Many analysts are busy drawing Russian Profit and Loss account in Syria. Since beginning Russia maintains the stand that its operation will last for limited time and there is no intentions of extensive military presence. Moscow was determined to avoid a protracted military operation that might compel it to deploy ground troops. Memories of the Soviet Union's bloody war in Afghanistan are still strong. Russia did not want Syria to be a second Afghanistan. From the start, the Kremlin had a minimal set of aim in Syrian arena. Minimal objective was to stabilise the Assad regime which was losing badly at the time. The Russians, and President Assad's Iranian allies too, risked losing their strategic investment in Damascus. So both stepped up their involvement. The Kremlin may have calculated that, with the cessation of hostilities and a peace process in place, now was the moment to reduce its military contingent and cut the risk of getting sucked into a longer conflict. When we do the analyses of Russian gains in Syria it clearly shows that Russia gained a lot. Let's have a look of immediate gains of Russia from direct military intervention in Syria.

Eased international isolation

After the initial deployment and the announcement of the partial withdrawal by Russia both caught the West entirely by surprise. The Assad regime, which had been on the defensive and even facing potential fragmentation, has been stabilized and revived. Moscow's claim to a say in Syria's future cannot now meaningfully be challenged. In this all process Western attempts to isolate Russia have been all but abandoned. Russia is now a dominant stakeholder among those who will chart the future of Syria. Washington has switched from precluding compromise and discouraging militants to lay down their arms before Assad steps down, to conceding that Assad will maintain some presence. Moscow has demonstrated, to both the region and the West, the value of accommodating Russia as an ally, and the costs it can inflict if its security interests are ignored.

New Allies

Because of intervention in Syria Russia made some new allies in the Middle East especially-Iran and Israel. Iran and Russia, have reinforced their military and nuclear cooperation. Russia has authorized the delivery of S-300 anti-aircraft batteries to Iran, despite the strong opposition of the Western powers. Putin is in constant communication with Israel, assuring Netanyahu that the security of Israel is a priority. Israeli President Rivlin was visiting Moscow discussing the Russian agenda

and Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu was invited to Moscow to continue the conversation in a few days. Russia also get new friend in the region that's "Kurds". Putin has been expanding ties to Kurdish groups in Turkey, Iraq, and Syria. Democratic Union Party (PYD) opened its first foreign office in Moscow a major step forward in the group's campaign for international legitimacy. Russia has been a consistent advocate on behalf of the Kurds at the Geneva peace talks. Kremlin also realised the importance of the Kurds to the politics just south of Russia's borders.

Expansion of Military Presence

Russia from long maintains a naval base in Syrian port of Tartus and now they have increased their presence significantly on this port. But now they also added a new air base of Khmeimim to its list of bases in Middle East. Putin is keeping total control of the Russian port in Tartus, its naval headquarters in the Mediterranean and the Middle East. From Tartus, Russia can listen in on and control all their assets and their forces as they roam throughout the region. They can listen to almost everything that happens with everyone else throughout the entire Middle East. Tartus is a huge strategic asset for Russia. Creating the port was one of Putin's major goals from the very beginning of his Syrian operation. Putin will also be keeping the newly Russian-built air force bases in Latakia and Khmeimim. Each of these bases houses dozens of fighter jets. When you add those jets to the 30 to 40 jets on the Russian aircraft carrier which is off the coast of Tartus, the number of Russian fighter jets around Syria reaches about 70 to 75.

Promotion of Russian Weaponry

With conducting successful air campaign in Syria. Russians have demonstrated the capability of its weaponry a splendid advert to any buyers of Russian arms. Russia showcase the best weapons the country has in its arsenal and this Syrian campaign did a good marketing for Russian defence products. There has been widespread confusion among analysts about Russian motives in Syria, confusion that has led to flawed expectations. Russia never sought a 'winner-takes-all' victory. Rather, its entry into the conflict reflected its view that the West was a key obstacle in the way of a political settlement in Syria, hence its aim to weaken all armed groups and coerce a compromise. Russia still has a number of long-term objectives to pursue in Syria. These include the formation of a coalition government free from extremist organizations, such as Al Qaeda and ISIS, ensuring Syria's territorial integrity, and ensuring Russia's leading role in the country's future. Moscow should work to put pressure on the opposition and Assad to negotiate the transition to a coalition government, which could then take on ISIS and Nusra.

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Will Talks with Hizb-e Islami Help Peace Process?

By Abdul Ahad Bahrami

With peace talks between Taliban and the Afghan government in a stalemate, the Afghan government welcomed Hekmatyar-led Hizb-e Islami's move to enter the talks backed by the four-nation coordination group of Afghanistan, Pakistan, China and the United States. According to media reports, members of the militant group had their first meeting with Afghan High Peace Council officials last Thursday. Government officials have expressed hope that resumption of talks with Hizb-e Islami militant group would pave the way for other groups to take part in the peace negotiations. Hizb-e Islami's green signal to join the peace initiative comes at a time when the Taliban have refused to participate in the talks which were planned to take place in Islamabad.

The move by Hizb-e Islami to join talks with the Afghan government does not seem to be a big prize for progress of the four-way peace initiative that is overshadowed by Taliban refusal to take part in its first meeting. The group has also negotiated with the government in the past. However, those talks did not led to a substantial breakthrough on demands of the Hizb-e Islami group. The announcement by the militant group that it was ready to start talking with the government just came as a side development that is deemed to be somewhat helpful for Afghan government's peace efforts. However, it is not expected to affect the recent stance taken by main Taliban group in refusing to participate in the talks.

Hizb-e Islamic Hekmatyar once was one of the leading insurgent groups in Afghanistan organizing major attacks against the Afghan government and the US-led NATO coalition in the country. However, its power in the stage of jihad in Afghanistan has substantially diminished with other militant groups dominating the insurgency in the country. Some still label Hizb-e Islami as the second largest insurgent group after the Taliban, and suggest that readiness of the group to negotiate with the Afghan government is a major breakthrough. This is while the group's militant activities have become very limited than many years before when it was operating as a powerful ally of the Taliban. Hizb-e Islamic is now believed to have limited capabilities in taking part in the ongoing insurgency led by the Taliban.

There have been many factors behind the Hizb-e Islami's gradual decline in the anti-government insurgency. Perhaps the most important one is the gradual erosion of the group's senior leadership over the last decade. The group has undergone splits with some offshoots operating as legal political parties and many senior members assuming higher positions in the government. With many splinter branches of the group operating as legal political parties, Hekmatyar's own militant group has become weakened and seems to continue declining. Another factor is emergence of other militant groups who have greater insurgency activities against the government and NATO forces. Emergence or domi-

nance of groups such as the Islamic State and Haqqani network has left little room for the Hizb-e Islami to have strong influence in the on going insurgency.

On the other hand, Hizb-e Islamic has sought a much more different approach and ideology in the fight against NATO and the Afghan government. The main objective for Hekmatyar's hizb-e Islami militant group seem to have been attaining a share of political power rather than fighting a merely ideological jihad against the Afghan government and foreign forces stationed in the country. This is what differentiates between Hizb-e Islami and the Taliban along with many other militant groups and is important for any peace talks in the future.

The key question is that will the talks with Hizb-e Islami help to reach Taliban and end the conflict in the country. Or, will seek parallel talks with militant groups such as Hizb-e Islami help to decrease violence? There have long been two different but sometimes conflicting ideas on ways of seeking talks with the militant groups with the aim to weaken the militants and eventually end the conflict. One is the approach to make peace with the Taliban as a whole to end war and violence and put an end to the bloody fifteen years of insurgency. This has been so far the main approach as the Taliban is viewed to be spearheading the main bulk of the insurgency.

Another strategy recommended for long time has been to seek parallel talks with insurgent groups and the pro-peace members of the Taliban with the aim to weaken the insurgency by splitting the Taliban. However, Taliban have proved to be led by powerful and highly centralized leadership. Afghan government's attempts to contact with so-called moderate Taliban leaders have simply not worked. The Taliban leaders who have been in contact with the Afghan government over peace issues have been quickly removed or killed. Given the facts on the ground, the Afghan government has no option but to focus on talk with the Taliban as a unified insurgent group who have influence over many of other militant groups as well.

Therefore, the talks with Hizb-e Islamic are difficult to reach a substantial outcome. While the government needs to negotiate with the Taliban, Hizb-e Islamic has no or little influence over Taliban and its ideology and approach are far different from the Taliban. The government may not be prepared to consider important political concessions for a group who do not have much weight in the insurgency and whose denounce of violence would not substantially decrease violence or end the conflict. Even if there are progresses in talks between the government and Hizb-e Islami party, the government will have to wait for the Taliban to come to the table of peace negotiations. However, successes in talks with Hizb-e Islami will set a pattern for negotiations with the Taliban and other militant groups.

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