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

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Year 2016 – More Deadly for Afghan Forces

Growing insecurity in Afghanistan is influencing the prospects of peace and tranquility in the country to a large extent. People belonging to different walks of life are being influenced by it. Afghan civilians have had to undergo decades of sufferings and now the ongoing security situation does not have good news for them. On the other hand Afghan security forces, who are on the forefront of fight with Taliban and other insurgents have to face great challenges. Many of them have already lost their lives in the fight and many others are vulnerable because of the situation. The most important point at this stance is that their sacrifices must not go in vain and they should be able to see the dawn of peace and tranquility.

In its recent quarterly report, the U.S government's Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) has said that 6,785 Afghan security force members were killed between January 1 and November 12 last year, with another 11,777 wounded. Going on previous reports, this is an increase of about 35 percent against the same period in 2015, when some 5,000 security forces were killed. The SIGAR report stated that the "majority of Afghanistan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) casualties continue to be the result of direct-fire attacks, with IED explosions and mine strikes accounting for much lower levels of casualties."

Moreover, SIGAR's analysis of the most recent data provided by U.S Forces in Afghanistan (USFOR-A) suggests that the security situation in the country has not improved this quarter. The numbers of Afghan security forces are decreasing, while both casualties and the number of districts under insurgent control or influence are increasing.

USFOR-A found that about 57.2 percent of the country's 407 districts are under Afghan government control or influence as of November 15, 2016 – a 6.2 percent decrease from the 63.4 percent reported the previous quarter ending late August, and a nearly 15 percent decrease since November 2015. Of the 407 districts of Afghanistan's 34 provinces, 233 districts were under government control (83 districts) or influence (150), 41 districts (in 15 provinces) were under insurgent control (9) or influence (32), and 133 districts were "contested."

The report described that contested districts as having "negligible meaningful impact from insurgents," contending that neither the insurgency nor the Afghan government maintains significant control over these areas. The data clearly shows that insecurity is going to be a major challenge for Afghan government and security forces this year as well. 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. 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.

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. Coupled with 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. Afghan government must therefore get serious in tackling the issue of the insecurity and strive to protect valuable human resource. ANDSF are vital for the peace and tranquility of the country. Though their profession requires them to be on the forefront of the war, proper strategic planning and policy making by the government officials can support them in achieving peace without having to lose many valuable lives. Moreover, proper strategies can assist the government in building its legitimacy and gaining support among the people, who otherwise seem to have lost their hopes about a tranquil and prosperous future. If the people are sure that the present government can strive honestly to provide them security and peace they will definitely join hands together along with the security forces to fight terrorists and terrorism successfully.

Tendency Towards Crime

By Hujjatullah Zia

When you see a broken chair, a sandal next to it, and drops of blood on the ground, you will think that a crime has been committed. Crime is part of life in a society and every one fears to be the victim. There is no one who has not seen a criminal scene or affected by it. People are kidnapped, killed or mugged, goods are smuggled, and items are stolen every day. The security staffs, who take preventive measures, around the city bespeak of probable crimes. Now the question is that can a society punish all criminals equally?

Throughout the history, the criminals were believed to be dominated by evil spirit and tortured painfully. Being suspected of a crime, they were treated violently without being proved guilty through legal process. There was no balance between crime and punishment. Perhaps, one was killed for committing a minor crime, but another was released despite committing a major crime. The main reason behind punishment, which is reforming the criminals, were turned blind eye and there was a sense of revenge.

On the other hand, some believed in "fatalism" and argued that they were fated to commit a crime. The Ancient Greeks were of the idea that a mysterious power controlled mankind and the wicked was subdued by "the Evil Spirit" and others were subject to "the Holy Spirit". The criminals sought to justify themselves by this argument.

Denouncing the severe punishments, philosophers said that the criminals must not be tortured violently. According to them, social structure plays a crucial role in paving the ground for crimes. For instance, the graph of crime will be higher in the slums. The poor will show greater tendency towards crime so as to alleviate their economic pressures. Gradually, attention was paid to the personality of the criminals. Based on Plato's opinion, mankind shows natural tendency towards the good and struggles to play a positive role in the society.

When a person commits crime, the society should not punish him/her cruelly but try to mend their behaviors. Plato said that the state must reform and cure the criminals in particular institutions without violence and torture.

In 1879, a French scientist Topinard coined the term "criminology" which is formed of two Latin words "Crimen" means crime and "logic" means the scientific study. Crime is an act against the collective conscience in a society which triggers public reaction. Criminology, which has been included in the universities' curricula, suggests that the state will have to focus on reforming the criminals and consider the human dignity of mankind. In other words, torturing the criminals will fill them with a sense of vengeance and put an adverse effect on them.

There are two significant schools of thought namely positivism and classism. Positivists believe that men's nature is flexible and subject to social and environmental elements. The judiciary is an institution for curing the body and mind of criminals regardless of civil law. In another item, issuing a decree is indefinite and merely for mending the behaviors of criminals and criminals should be reformed for preventing the crime.

Based on classism, man is wise and self-ruling creature but shows inclination to pleasure. Therefore, man is morally responsible regarding his acts. It supports the idea of "social contract" saying that nation has submitted some of its authority to the state to have its rights and liberty protected in return. That is to say, man should be subject to law and will be punished in case of jeopardizing public interests.

To view deeply, there are many factors which force people into crime. For instance, the children who are born and bred in morally unsafe environment, where there are many criminals, they will acquire moral turpitude as a social value. They will hand down the same value to the next generation. It is said that a girl from a traditional family went to New Jersey and was tricked by a man.

To save the honor of the family based on traditional society, her father killed the man. In a nutshell, environment and social and cultural structures will affect one's personality to a great extent.

Now the state will have to approve a law to satisfy the need of a society and prevent from crime and corruption. A law must consider crime and punishment in a balanced manner and no act will be considered crime unless being already mentioned in the law.

After all, human rights and dignity are to be paid great attention and punishment must have reformative purpose.

In addition, no one is supposed to be beyond law and committing crime with impunity will pave the path for further crimes. The judicial power needs to work honestly and implement the law which is approved by legislative power. Hence, to decrease the crime rate, a country must endorse an immaculate law and enforce it strictly.

It goes without saying that people are free and there is no force behind committing crime. Believing in fatalism or committing a crime under one pretext or another, will not justify criminals. The nation and state must nurture mutual assistance to ensure the implementation of law and prevent from potential crime. The state is also to create a safe environment and promote a sound social structure for citizens so that they can promote their positive characteristic.

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Fighting for Life at 60

By Philippe Legrain

European Union heads of state just gathered to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the signing of the Treaty of Rome at a time when nativist nationalists are threatening to destroy Europe's open liberal societies. As the recent Dutch election showed, such forces can be defeated. But the capacity to do so will be tested in three more important elections – in France, Germany, and Italy – by next spring, and those who want the EU to survive will need to fight hard, and on many fronts.

The first step is to recognize how grave the populist threat really is. Liberal internationalists cannot afford to be complacent. Most thought it inconceivable that the British would vote to leave the EU, and yet they did. Donald Trump's presidential candidacy in the United States was largely dismissed, until he won.

Yet most Europeans continue to underestimate Russian President Vladimir Putin's cyber and propaganda war against the West – a war that aims to help bring to power far-right populists bent on the EU's destruction. Although Dutch voters flocked to the polls to deny victory to the extreme xenophobe Geert Wilders, the risk of another populist upset remains real.

It could take only one such upset to fatally wound the EU – particularly if that victory brings Marine Le Pen of the far-right National Front to power in France in May. Even if Le Pen fails to win the presidency, the formation of an anti-euro government in Italy after its next election could fracture the currency union.

The situation is all the more delicate, because Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia are already led by quasi-authoritarian nationalist governments that are boring holes in the EU from within. Add to that the destabilizing effects of Brexit and a US president who is openly hostile toward the EU (and supportive of Brexit and Le Pen), and the stakes of the upcoming elections become starkly apparent.

Even out of power, populists can do serious damage. Wilders finished a distant second in the Dutch election, but he nonetheless managed to push the winner, Prime Minister Mark Rutte, to adopt a more intolerant stance toward immigrants. The prospect of a broad coalition government that excludes Wilders could enhance his influence, by making him the main opposition.

So those who want a reformed and thriving EU must do more to counter the populist threat, by dispelling the false perceptions that are fueling it, and providing positive and viable solutions to the real problems that are driving European voters to rebel against the establishment. To be sure, racism motivates some. But that does not explain why, for example, the National Front has surged from 10% in opinion polls a decade ago to nearly 30% now. There must be other forces at work.

A major one is economic. Most Europeans – like many Americans who voted for Trump – have endured years of stagnant or falling living standards, and fear an even worse future for themselves and their children.

These voters are understandably angry that politicians and EU technocrats so badly mismanaged the crisis in the eurozone, unjustly bailing out banks while imposing austerity on everyone else. Many Europeans have lost trust in an EU establishment that seems incompetent, self-serving, and out of touch – a perception reinforced by EU leaders' chaotic response to the refugee crisis, which populists have been quick to exploit by linking the newcomers to terrorism.

So the minority of Europeans who never liked the EU have seen their ranks swell with angry and fearful citizens, who feel that the system is rigged against them. Only 36% of Europeans now trust the EU, while just 31% trust national governments.

Some of these disenchanted citizens, particularly in Greece and Spain, have turned to left-wing parties. But many others have embraced far-right populists, who pledge to fight for "the people" (their supporters) against the "liberal establishment" (their opponents), whom they accuse of selling out the national interest to the EU, immigrants, and foreigners in general.

In this context, simply condemning the populists will not be enough. Pandering to them – say, by echoing their Euroskeptic or anti-immigrant rhetoric – is not a solution, either, because it merely reinforces atavistic views. In the Netherlands, support for the Labour Party, which chose an anti-immigrant leader, collapsed in the recent election.

A strictly technocratic fix would also fail. Yes, Europe needs a shift in economic policies to boost growth and wages now. But deeper questions about identity, political legitimacy, and trust in institutions cannot be addressed by tinkering with the Stability and Growth Pact.

What Europe desperately needs are positive political alternatives. That means fresh faces who are viewed as working for society as a whole, not special-interest lobbies. It means proposing radical reforms to create a more dynamic, fairer, and more secure society. And it means, more broadly, setting out a positive vision of shared identity based on openness, tolerance, and diversity that can bring together people of all backgrounds.

The biggest winners of the Dutch election were pro-EU, pro-immigrant parties, particularly the anti-austerity Green Left party, whose leader is just 30 years old, and the social liberal D66 party. In France, the 39-year-old Emmanuel Macron, who is campaigning on a positive, pro-EU message that aims to bridge the right-left divide, has edged ahead of Le Pen.

If Macron wins – a distinct possibility – he will need to deliver change, as will his counterparts elsewhere in Europe. Otherwise, the populists will be back – and probably stronger than ever. (Courtesy Project Syndicate)

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