

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



March 29, 2018

Withdrawal of Foreign Troops: Not Path to Peace, Sustaining Conflict

Abbas Araqchi, the political deputy of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Iran said today, Wednesday 28 March, 2018, that withdrawal of the foreign troops from Afghanistan is the "beginning of peace" in the country. Military approaches to solve the Afghan conflict has failed in the past and will fail in the future as well, he said.

The question which raises here is that, is the foreign troops withdrawal from Afghanistan the preconditions to peace in the country?

The answer to the question is, at least, increasingly obvious: if the U.S and other allies leave Afghanistan before the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces are fully prepared to lead the fight against the Taliban, and deny safe haven to ISIS and other terrorist groups, these terrorist groups are nearly certain to reign a high degree of safe haven in Afghanistan, as what happened in Iraq. Thus, the U.S and other international allies should remain and increase their troops in Afghanistan, until up the time security and stability is ensured in the country.

At the current situation, Afghan security forces do not have the logistics, air support, intelligence, and transportation capabilities and capacities they require to sustain their fight against the Taliban, ISIS, defend their borders, or deny safe haven to ISIS, Al Qaeda and other terrorist groups in the country. ISIS, Al Qaeda, the Taliban and their many affiliates and allies in the region have not been defeated and if the U.S and other international allies leave the country, these terrorist groups are likely to grow stronger in the power vacuum left in the wake of a U.S and other allies' withdrawal.

It is clear that if Afghanistan slides back into chaos or the ISIS, Al Qaeda, the Taliban and other affiliates operate unchecked in the country, the price the world shall pay is unaffordable and catastrophic. As Obama, the previous U.S president, has said, "We have a shared responsibility to act-not because we seek to project power for its own sake, but because our own peace and security depends on it". It is a clear cut fact that the security of the region and beyond the region depends on the security of Afghanistan. Further, here's why the international community forces should stay until the job is done.

The First is Afghan security forces, "logistics and sustainment capabilities remain underdeveloped. Although the Afghan security forces now lead the operations, they continue to rely on international military forces for air support, intelligence, surveillance and, and reconnaissance, among other needs. Clearly, the Afghan forces need international assistance, including training and advising, for an unpredictable time in the future.

The Second is, landlocked Afghanistan is at risk of unwelcome external influences, its sovereignty and traditions vulnerable. During the course of its history, the competition among external powers has affected negatively Afghanistan and changed it to the land of proxy wars. To ensure the success in Afghanistan, the U.S and its allies shall ensure strategic coordination and management of the whole endeavor; the U.S allies shall fully employ hard power, and also the Afghan government shall ensure no one abuse the international aid to line their own pockets. If the U.S and allies give Afghanistan enough troops, money and enough faith, the success in this prolong war, and winning the battle is not impossible.

The last but not least, as the civil conflict in 90s have proved, withdrawal of the U.S and other international allies not only will not put an end to the conflict, but will change it to the safe haven of the terrorist groups and will only open the ground for the interference of the bad neighbors in the country. And, if that happens it is not only the Afghans who will suffer dearly, but also the international community will pay higher costs than what they will pay by keeping their troops in Afghanistan. As a result, it is in the interest of Afghanistan, the region and the international community to join hands and help the country to realize its strategic potentials as the circle of regional and international economic partnership and open a new chapter in the regional and international economic partnership methods: contributing to the development of economic integration on a global scale.

Peaceful Life – A Dream that Will Come True

By Hujjatullah Zia

To form a civil and democratic society where all individuals are able to live a violence-free and peaceful life, Afghans need to exercise tolerance and strengthen the spirit of brotherhood. If discrimination on the basis of one's race and color prevails in the country, no one can have a sigh of relief.

The issue of peace will be resolved if Afghanistan pursues unity. That is to say, Afghan officials need to win the trust and support of people. Currently, there seems a tall wall of mistrust between state and nation which roots in distrust in the government's machinery. The gap between political factions or figures and harsh rhetoric has triggered a sense of public suspicion in the country. For example, the recent controversy over the appointment of provincial governor of Balkh province between the former governor Atta Muhammad Noor and presidential palace filled the social media with political satire. The officials' well-intentioned narrative could not allay the public suspicion. Secondly, paying more credit to the leader of Hezb-e-Islami Afghanistan (HIA) Gulbuddin Hekmatyar – who has a dark background – than the former political associates of the palace is also not acceptable for the public. Sidelining high-ranking officials from the government's structure will widen the gap and aggravate the public mistrust. Thus, officials need to eliminate the wall of mistrust between state and nation through embracing one another with open arms.

The second issue which undermines unity is spreading propaganda about one ethnic group or another, especially in the social media. A number of individuals from many ethnic groups still view one from the lens of ethnicity and propagandize against one another in the social media. They underestimate the issue of being one nation regardless of our diversities, which is natural in all countries. In short, ethnic sensitivity is still practiced in the country. The endless controversy over the electronic ID card indicates this sensitivity very well. Scores of people view themselves from the glass of ethnicity rather than nationality, which will threaten national unity.

Negative perception on the basis of one's ethnicity will leave the room for tensions. After all, the militants are most likely to fish in the troubled waters. Since the militants are very adroit in propagandizing against a group or party, they will fill the vacuum left by lack of unity in our so-

cial and political life. It is self-explanatory that the militants loyal to the self-styled Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) pursue the policy of dismantling unity through stoking ethnic tension and sectarian violence. In other words, the militants target people on the grounds of their race and color to sow the seeds of discord among people. If Afghans do not stop painting everything with the brush of ethnicity, militancy will continue unabated.

The lack of spirit of brotherhood is easily noticeable in the country. We do not feel the pain and anguish of our fellow human and compatriots. For instance, in one corner of the country or city, a number of people mourn the death of their family members who were killed by the militants, but in the next corner, our radios and televisions air joyful music which will add insult to the injury of the victims' families. But we are supposed to heal the wounds of our people through sharing our feelings and heart-to-heart exchanges. When one is dying before our eyes, our only claim to fame is to take a photo of it and post it in the social media rather than helping them in the right moment. If we are not mindful of all these self-destructive practices, we will not have a peaceful life.

To seek a peaceful coexistence, we are in dire need of strengthening the spirit of brotherhood and accepting our diversities. We have to be tied together with the bond of single nationality regardless of our racial, religious, and political backgrounds. Humanity carries meaning when we share our delight and sorrow, our pain and comfort, and all our emotional tendencies. We are one nation and have to maintain our unity, support our common interests, and campaign against our common enemies, which do not necessarily mean militants, but poverty, corruption, etc.

To sum up, reaching a democratic and civil society is possible on the condition that there shall be no sense of distrust between our officials and no wall of suspicion between state and nation. Both officials and locals will have to pursue common goals and national interests. In fact, viewing one another from the narrow glass of ethnicity is highly destructive. We are stepping in the new era and need to forget the past hostilities which rooted in our narrow mindedness. We belong to the new era and should think in a more open way.

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Macron Takes Aim at European Politics

By Mark Leonard

Until the terrorist attack at a market in southern France on March 23, French President Emmanuel Macron had been planning to launch a new European-level political campaign. Though the official rollout has now been postponed, Macron's latest project remains central to his presidency and to his conception of power.

Macron's "La Grande Marche pour l'Europe" will mimic the program that toppled France's dominant political parties and transformed his La République En Marche! movement into a political force in 2017. Over the course of six weeks, he will dispatch ten ministers and 200 parliamentarians to survey the French people's views on Europe and European issues. The results will then be considered in developing a platform that can beat populist and Euroskeptical parties in the 2019 European Parliament election.

Macron has persuaded all other EU member states (with the exception of Hungary and the United Kingdom) to conduct similar public consultations, which he hopes will lay the groundwork for the EU-level reforms he proposed in major speeches in Athens and at the Sorbonne last year.

To understand the full scope of Macron's ambitions, we should consider the principles that underpin his worldview and guide his approach to politics. Few are better acquainted with Macron's thinking than French historian and philosopher François Dosse. Dosse not only taught Macron at Sciences Po in the late 1990s, but also introduced him to his intellectual mentor, French philosopher Paul Ricoeur, for whom Macron worked as a research assistant for two years.

Dosse recently published a book about Macron and Ricoeur titled *Le Philosophe et le Président*. A few weeks ago, I met with him in his Paris apartment to discuss his latest work, and he explained Macron's approach to European reform as a combination of two fundamental Ricoeurian concepts.

The first is "consensus dissensus." This may sound like a highfalutin version of "having one's cake and eating it." But, according to Dosse, it is really about drawing strength from the opposition between two conflicting viewpoints, unlike a Hegelian approach, which seeks synthesis between two poles. Macron's embrace of the Ricoeurian model is evident in his frequent use of the phrase "en même temps" ("at the same time") when describing parallel domestic-reform proposals.

Similarly, Macron's vision for Europe seems to reconcile the irreconcilable: his plan is both to preserve member states' sovereignty and deepen EU integration. Institutionally, this means supporting supranational bodies while also allowing for more flexibility in areas where national governments, rather than Brussels, are better positioned to solve problems.

On defense policy, Macron wants to work within existing EU treaties, and he supports proposals for a Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) agreement and a European Defense Fund. But he also hopes to move beyond the current EU and even NATO frameworks to establish a European Intervention

Initiative (EII), which would operate alongside British, US, and other allied expeditionary forces.

On migration, Macron wants both to secure Europe's external borders and ensure that the burden of taking in refugees is shared across the EU. In the short term, he is pushing for an agreement among member states on refugee quotas. But, in the long run, he supports greater harmonization of asylum systems, or even the creation of a central EU asylum agency.

Macron also hopes to reconcile opposite ideas with respect to the euro. While pushing for reforms within France that will reduce the risks of financial contagion, he is also calling for a common eurozone budget and finance ministry to make the monetary union more resilient to future shocks.

Beyond these areas, Macron wants to boost innovation in the digital sphere, by establishing a European version of the United States' Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA). At the same time, he wants to protect national sovereignty in the digital age through regulations and a common fiscal approach.

The second Ricoeurian concept underpinning Macron's worldview is the idea of a European "refoundation." Whereas the first wave of European integration was largely limited to economics, Macron now wants to focus on politics and culture, starting with the European Parliament election next year.

When Macron looks at the EU political stage, he sees stale cartel parties that are just as ripe for disruption as France's mainstream parties were in 2017. For example, he has mocked the center-right European People's Party (EPP), asking how any parliamentary group can call itself Christian Democratic when it includes the parties of former Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi and Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán.

Macron also recognizes that the decline of the center left in Europe – along with the impending post-Brexit exodus of UK Labour Party MPs – has left a large void that needs to be filled. To that end, he has considered creating a Europe-wide "En Marche!" movement that could nominate its own Spitzenkandidat to the European Commission presidency. In fact, there has already been some talk of positioning European Commissioner for Competition Margrethe Vestager for that role.

Initially, the Macronistes had planned to recruit defectors from other party groups, and then ally with the left-leaning Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe. But the creation of a European En Marche! could mean that they will try to edge out the ALDE, too. At any rate, German Chancellor Angela Merkel will insist on a conservative candidate for the Commission presidency, so Macron might try to use that as a bargaining chip for concessions on other issues.

Much remains to be seen, but it is already clear that Macron has brought a new kind of thinking to European politics. In his view, sovereignty in Europe can really be exercised only at the level of the EU. He is taking France from the Fifth Republic to a Sixth Republic that is no longer strictly franco-francaise, but truly European.

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