

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



May 12, 2019

Ramadan – A Month for Revival of Humanity and Ethical Code

Ramadan is the month of peace and compassion. One's self-purification in Ramadan should be reflected in their individual and collective life. Simply abstaining from food and drink during the hours of daylight without exercising a moral life is of no significance.

One must not reduce Ramadan to abstaining from food and drink. Ramadan has great philosophy and humane messages for mankind rather than sheer suffering from thirst and hunger in this hot climate. One of the reasons behind remaining hungry and thirsty from dawn to dusk is to feel the extreme pain and suffering of the poor who put up with for years or for the whole life. Therefore, the rich have to help the poor financially. So, keeping fast is not an individual act, but it intends to boost the morale of compassion and humanity in a community. For instance, it will be immoral of one to live in skyscrapers and eat enormous food while their neighbors have no roof over their heads and suffer from starvation. Therefore, one has to nurture their humane feelings and emphatic and sympathetic emotions.

In Ramadan, all individuals are encouraged to repent for their past sins and pledge to live a moral life. Ramadan is called holy to inspire people to pay heed to spiritual life, exercise virtue, and shun vice.

The message of Ramadan for warring parties is to, at least, humanize the war if not quit it. They have to avoid spilling the blood of non-combatants, mainly women and children, the wounded in action and captives or hostages. In other words, humanitarian law, which stems originally from religious guidelines and ethical code, must be abided by. People's natural rights and dignity, "bestowed by their Creator", must be protected under any circumstances. The Islamic radicals, who claim to practice upon a certain ideology, must decrease their militancy and suicide attacks so as to prevent from mounting number of casualties.

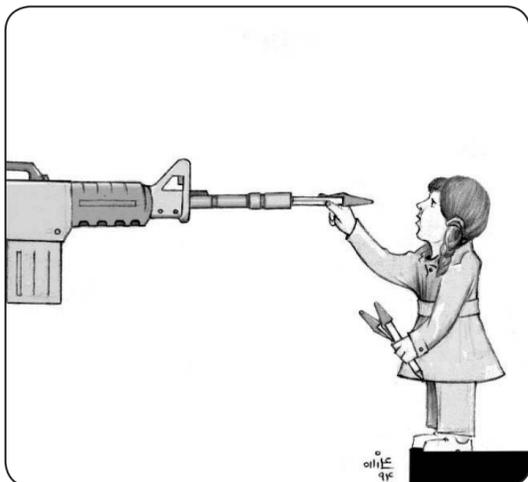
The act of fasting is said to redirect the heart away from worldly activities, its purpose being to cleanse the soul by freeing it from harmful impurities. Ramadan also teaches Muslims how to better practice self-discipline, self-control, sacrifice, and empathy for those who are less fortunate; thus, encouraging actions of generosity and compulsory charity. John Foster Dulles has aptly said, "Economic and military power can be developed under the spur of laws and appropriations. But moral power does not derive from any act of Congress. It depends on the relations of a people to their God. It is the churches to which we must look to develop the resources for the great moral offensive that is required to make human rights secure, and to win a just and lasting peace". Indeed, it is mosque, church, and temples for individuals, in which to polish their souls and uphold their moral activities. There is no military power or legal force in countries behind keeping fast, it is simply to enhance humanity and ethical code in the community through feeding souls by worship and fasting.

One's practices should be also reflected in their individual life. Imagine praying with tearful eyes and a soulful heart in the privacy of midnight or at the crack of dawn. That is, what will be your feelings when a lump in your throat makes your tears run down your cheeks and a deep sadness is in your heart while there is thirst in your soul? A spiritual dialogue with your God at the altar of worship enables you to realize the sanctity of the Creator, which is emphasized in Ramadan.

Muslims should mold their souls according to religious tenets and moral standards and satisfy their spiritual needs through prayer and fasting. In short, it is the month of breaking the chains of slavery and purifying soul from satanic characteristics.

Not only individuals but human societies should revive moral standards in this month and keep them forever. They have to fight against both inward and outward evils for their entire life. The outrageous acts of horror and terror should be ceased and people's dignity and fundamental rights must be respected not only during Ramadan but forever.

In Ramadan, holding out against passions, enduring hunger and thirst, and resisting carnal desire will awaken and arouse the dormant and secret inner force, provide an exercise in self-control and enable man not to succumb easily to the base desires like the outburst of lust, anger, and selfishness. So, to develop this resisting power gradually, one must have an occasion to fight against their desires and personal pleasures – Ramadan provides such an opportunity.



ISIS is a Big Hurdle for Afghan Peace

By: Manish Rai

Islamic State Afghanistan claimed responsibility for an attack on the communication ministry building centrally located in the capital Kabul last month. The Islamic State's local arm has repeatedly targeted both official and civilian facilities, as well as religious gatherings, in the Afghan capital. The Afghan affiliate of IS, commonly known as Islamic State Khorasan (ISK), has been active in the war-torn country since 2015, fighting the Taliban as well as Afghan security forces. But recently they have carried out some bold attacks to make their presence felt. IS Khorasan has received significant support from the Islamic State's core leadership in Iraq and Syria since its founding in year 2015. But now as the Islamic State has lost its core territory, it is might turned to Afghanistan as a base for its global caliphate. Even a recent United Nations publication commented that "ISIS core continues to facilitate the relocation of some of its key operatives to Afghanistan". The United States military estimates there are about 2,000 Islamic State fighters in Afghanistan but despite their small number still they pose a grave threat. That's why United States drop one of the largest bombs in its inventory, the MOAB, on a cave complex used by the ISIS terrorists in eastern Afghanistan in April, 2017.

Islamic State is pushing hard to expand into a country that has hosted both Taliban and Al-Qaeda strongholds for decades. In order to establish a foothold in Afghanistan, ISK is challenging both the Taliban and Al-Qaeda. Rather than attempting to co-opt these groups, as it did with groups like Ansar Beit al-Maqdis in Egypt and Boko Haram in Nigeria, Islamic State leaders instead tried to discredit the local dominant groups in Afghanistan. This is leading to frequent deadly clashes with Taliban in which both the sides have lost hundreds of fighters. It's very much clear that Islamic State won't enter into any accommodation with the largest insurgent group that is Taliban. Islamic State Khorasan is trying to portray Taliban as Afghan-centric force which wants to restore its government in Afghanistan rather than fighting for Islam. The Afghan Taliban should be seen as a political rather than an Islamic force. Definitely at this point in time the Islamic State is not as powerful as the Taliban nor it can take control of significant swaths of Afghanistan as it once did in Iraq and Syria. But that's also true that ISIS has the potential to wreak plenty of havoc in the country. This is due to the fact that It has attained enough operational strength, organizational structure and skills to carry out

large-scale attacks.

The Afghan battlefield is widely known to be one of most militant-saturated battlegrounds in the world. The notable presence of an Islamic State affiliate has further complicated a multifaceted militant landscape. Everyone who keeps eye on the security dynamics in Afghanistan knows that the forces in the country are actually trained to fight insurgents. Insurgents, mostly, employ hit-and-run tactics, including insider attacks on security forces. On the other hand, terrorist organizations like Islamic State don't operate like this. They launch massive-scale attacks, and diversify their target areas to ditch the security apparatus. The mismatch between ISK tactics and the Afghan security forces counter insurgency training give ample breathing space to the group. For sure IS has shaken the existing jihadist landscape of the country making it more complex, violent, and polarised. Moreover, the growing competition between IS and Taliban has negatively affected country's security and stability. Also, the IS model has provided the new generation of jihadists with a viable alternative option.

Islamic State Khorasan presence could even complicate any peace deal with the Taliban, which has pledged to prevent any terrorist group using Afghan soil as a haven to plot foreign attacks against west. Afghanistan is struggling to reach political settlements with its insurgent groups from decades. For it a strengthened IS-Khorasan could deepen the sectarian rifts which ISK has established in the country by attacking minorities and this would make it harder to bring about the social cohesion necessary for any kind of political settlement in future. The Islamic State seemingly emerged as a new dangerous threat in Afghanistan, one that could grow to overshadow the Taliban. Hence United States and its allies should ensure that the Islamic State is prevented from carving its own space in the war-torn country. Because if IS-Khorasan cannot be effectively countered, then the political landscape of an already complex society stands to become even more complicated and ugly. Not only strong IS in Afghanistan is a threat to the region but to the whole international community. We know ISIS is hostile to any accommodation with the west and its allies in many ways its deadlier than Taliban and Al-Qaeda. As its sole focus on global jihad motivates them to launch attacks on West as soon, they get a fertile ground for themselves.

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What are the Main Factors of War in Afghanistan?

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The sixth round of peace talks between the U.S. and Taliban representatives in Doha ended late on Thursday but the prospect of peace is still ambiguous and violence has intensified in many parts of the country in recent days. There is no doubt about the fact that majority of Afghans want peace, but there is no consensus on which mechanism can lead to peace. One of the most important and complicating reasons of war in Afghanistan is its multivariate feature. The main variables in Afghan conflict are opium trade, inter-religious identity, ethnic nationalism, proxy war and the expansionist policies of the neighboring countries; each of these factors is highly effective in Afghanistan's conflict and peace. This article aims to analyze each of these variables separately.

The first variable in the Afghan conflict are opium trade; since 80s of the twentieth century, Afghanistan has been one of the most prominent drug producers (opium) in the world. Opium has actively entered in the political economy of the country and even the region, which is most beneficial to gang groups, terrorists, corrupt government officials and, last but not least, to the farmers of the country. Today, drug trafficking is one of the most important commercial goods in the world; despite being illegal it has a huge profit. Over the past years, millions of dollars have been spent on counter-drugs, but the result was not favorable.

The Afghanistan's opium is exported to Europe, North America and Russia through neighboring countries, and those who are in the final chain of this trade are gaining its major part of profits. After the opium collected by the farmers, it is passed into local traffickers and then with the help of corrupt government officials, including the police and other security agencies, transferred to the borders and neighboring countries with millions of dollars exchanged. The Corrupt officials as well as insurgents and terrorists equally benefit from this trade, and so those who have access to the opium trade in Afghanistan will never be willing to work for peace and rule of law, because establishing the rule of law will cut off their black revenues.

The second variable in the Afghanistan conflict is confrontation of Inter-Religious Identity and Ethnic Nationalism. Forty years ago, when the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan, the political Islam, especially religious extremists were used as an effective instrument in the cold war. The religious fundamentalism intensified the inter-religious-civilizations gaps and the most important of which could be consist of al-Qaeda, the Taliban and ISIS, which seriously endangered international security. Extreme Interpretation of religion, especially political Islam, provokes the jurisprudence differences that had occurred in the 4th to the 6th Islamic centuries in the Muslim world. As the culture of tolerance and pluralism has not been institutionalized in Afghan society, the differences in view lead to divisions and insistences on a single religious interpretation.

During the years of war and violence in Afghanistan, some countries tried to expand their influence, and one of the tools they possessed was religion which spent millions of dollars on building new religious seminaries with expanding the activities of past seminaries these way the religious gaps have been aggravated in Afghanistan. During the US-Soviet war in Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia created thousands of religious schools in tribal areas of Pakistan and the border of Afghanistan that later graduates of these schools joined the al-Qaeda, Taliban and ISIL groups.

The engagement of government in daily conflict has also reduced the chances to supervise the religious training centers, especially the territories which are outside the control of the Afghan government. They continue their training activities with very backward and deviating materials and this way they pave the way for the continuation of the cycle of violence and wars in Afghanistan. In terms of political values, the demand for republic or Islamic Emirate is rooted in the religious view of the kind of political system in the country. Those who are in the favor of democratic system, argue that democracy has produced good results in many parts of the world but the inflexible interpretation from religion lead to religious tyranny which has already been experienced in Afghanistan and other countries. The Emirate system favorers in Afghanistan are those who do not believe in democracy, human rights, freedom are merely reliant on violence, and they believe in the theory of overcoming which is rooted in some historic religious interpretations.

Those who think about inter-civilization clashes, they are also in favor of Emirate system, but in a different form. In recent years, especially since the advent of the Taliban's terrorist group in Afghanistan, the ethnic nationalism has also added to the challenges and in many instances, ethnic identity has become more prominent in religious affiliation. Those who profit from the friction within the civilization will not be willing to give up violence. The next factor is proxy war and the expansionist policy of neighboring countries; because of its geopolitical location Afghanistan has always been used as passageway or buffer state. During the Cold War, the Soviet invasion in Afghanistan caused that America seriously support Afghan insurgents and Arab jihadis in Afghanistan. Today, the battles in Afghanistan have provided the ground for the expansionist engagement of its neighbors and some world powers.

Now, in the most optimistic way, Afghanistan's neighbors are striving to establish a political system that is obedient and not hostile to them. For the neighbors of Afghanistan, it is not important which kind of political system should come, the emirates or the republic, but they are trying to bring people to power to pursue their policies in Afghanistan.

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