

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



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## De-Radicalization

Radicalization has posed a serious threat to the world. Fundamental parties violate people's basic rights and traumatize them through violence. Ideologues, who lack religious tolerance, are widely involved in violence and bloodshed. They claim to be in the right path and others in the wrong one. Fundamentalists act as if they are infallible creatures. Their blind faith pushes them to pigeonhole nations and act aggressively towards those who are not following their school of thought. Now the entire globe suffers as a result of radical mindset.

To consider the Islamic radicals, mainly the Taliban and self-proclaimed Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), they spread violence and hatred around the entire globe. They are the products of blind faith and radical ideology and show zero tolerance towards other sects, races and faiths seeking to impose their warped minds on people at the barrel of gun. Hence, their ideology free them from the red border of humanity and ethical code.

To mitigate violence and protect human rights, the world will have to find out the reasons behind fundamentalism and put an end to it. It is believed that blind faith and radical ideology, which lead to lack of religious tolerance, will pave the grounds for violence. For instance, the current fundamental groups in Islamic countries are engaged in violence due to the very fact. They seek to resist against progressive ideas, excommunicate individuals simply for not following their mentalities, and slaying the innocent people, including women and children, for belonging to a certain ethnic or religious group.

The ISIL's cruel practices against Yazidi women reflect this fact. Following the declaration of caliphate by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, both the so-called and genuine ideologues filled the entire world with a sense of fear and hatred as a result of their indescribably violent acts. ISIL group intends to put its self-styled ideology in the frame of religion and impose it on people. Perhaps, ISIL group is a political project rather than a religious radical and there might be many reasons behind its establishment. Its active role in Syria's conflict will prove this fact to some extent. But what I would like to say is that religion has been exploited throughout the history both in Asia and Europe mostly by policy-makers. It is likely that if religion is separated from political arena, people will be less vulnerable to self-styled ideologies, claimed to be the true spirit of religion.

Afghan has borne the brunt of radicalism within the past three decades. Kings ruled this country under religious aegis and alleged caliphate in this land. They called themselves, caliph, sultan, the divine shadow and many other bombastic terms to influence people. On the other hand, religious figures sought to either confirm or deny the kings based on so-called religious tenets. For example, when Amanullah Khan struggled for modernity and declared freedom for men and women, religious figures prompted people to show backlash. They generated religious emotions among the nation and persuaded them to resort to protest, which led to the collapse of Amanullah's regime.

To view the Taliban group, it gained foothold in Afghanistan and established a regime under the pretext of implementing religious sharia, but their regime was political and their practices were all against sharia law. For example, they discriminated people on the grounds of their ethnic and linguistic differences. In brief, political officials have constantly exploited the religious feelings and virtue of pious nations, including Afghanistan. Currently, radical groups are killing individuals as a result of fatwa issued by their radical ideologues or caliphs.

Nowadays, the world is blackmailed by hardliners and terrorist groups which are founded in the wake of radical worldviews. Combating terrorism is likely to come to a stalemate and military strategy failed to put an end to this challenge. To think of Afghanistan, the "war on terror" was proved abortive and NATO's military role was reduced to advisory role. Now the question is that how to de-radicalize the countries?

If you consider China, which is a multi-ethnic country with a large number of sects, extremism has no room in this country. There are two big reasons behind this fact: first, the state has curtailed the role of religious tenets in school text books. The students' religious feelings will not surge up at schools and universities. Indeed, sometimes a word of a religious sect will spark argument among students and will lead to violence. Second, the clergy make commissions and invite other scholars from many countries to campaign against extremism. Moreover, the Islamic clergy publish articles and give speech to de-radicalize the Islam's followers - according to a leader of Xinjiang Ethnic and Religious Affairs Commission. He added that religious leaders of all ethnic groups make their commissions to promote religious tolerance among the public and combat against fundamentalism. Don't you think that it is a good example for terrorism-stricken countries to fight extremism?

## Ethnocentrism - A Menace to National Solidarity

By Hujjatullah Zia

Ethnocentrism will lead to violence and dismantle a nation. A peaceful life is possible when a nation does not view the society from the lens of ethnicity. In tribal structures, ethnic feelings outweigh national bonds. When ethnocentric view holds sway in a society, the people will not live a quiet life. It is most likely that claiming ethnic and racial superiority has resulted in destructive wars and bloody unrests across the human societies throughout the history and it continues up to now.

The historical wars, including World Wars, rooted in either ethnic superiority or religious supremacy. For instance, one nation imposed war on another or trampled upon the rights of an ethnic minority group, for considering that nation/group less important. On the other hand, politicians and policy-makers - including religious figures - capitalized on the issue to rule for longer time.

Ethnocentrism has been a challenging issue in Afghanistan in the past and it is still practiced considerably. For instance, a number of kings murdered people for their ethnic and racial backgrounds. Strong social and political tension based on ethnic inclination inflicted painful sufferings upon our nation. Worst of all, history was not an eye-opener for our political figures or nation and this feeling seems to continue. Apparently, ethnocentrism is one of the reason behind fundamentalism. Deeming themselves ethnically superior, fundamentalists contempt the rights and dignity of ethnic groups and discriminate them violently. Similarly, ethnocentrism and tribalism hold strong sway in rural areas of our society, which is very hot regarding the cases of marriage. Our tribal structure still rules the hearts and minds of our people.

Martin Luther aptly said, "We have learned to fly the air like birds and swim the sea like fish, but we have not learned the simple art of living together as brothers." This is the problem of the modern world, mainly of Middle East. Human discourse in international instruments and UN's charter have not alleviated the public sufferings.

Although Afghanistan is called a democratic country, the thick layer of ethnicity overshadows democratic practices and lead to the flagrant violation of human rights and freedom. For example, ethnic minority groups were targeted by the self-proclaimed Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) fighters within the two past years. They beheaded women and children, attacked mourning proceedings, and gunned down men with the aim of stoking ethnic/sectarian violence in Afghanistan. So, this is a strong blow to democracy.

If one considers other countries, people exercise their rights without being discriminated on the grounds of their race, ethnicity, belief or gender. There are multi-ethnic countries, but there is no tendency towards ethnicity. In other words, people deem themselves one nation rather than multi-ethnic groups. The followers of all religions exercise their rights and beliefs with no obstacles. Likewise, women play a significant role in social, political and economic fields. There is no gender discrimination in individual and social life. In fact, a pluralistic view rules the country and people tolerate one another however they dress up, practice their beliefs, etc.

The reason behind the tolerance and spirit of national solidarity is most likely to be their non-radical educational system. That is to say, the government seeks to centralize on national values and unity rather than involving radically religious issues in text books. Students grow in academic atmosphere, where there is no sign of ethnic, religious or sexual discrimination. During my visit to China, I had a visit from "66 Secondary School" based in Urumqi Economic Development Zone, I was impressed by a word of a 12 year-old female student - from an ethnic minority group - who said that they were all one Chinese and one nation regardless of their ethnicity or sect. According to the school's principal, Chinese government had prohibited teaching religious tenets at schools.

The government's strong control over social issues is beyond doubt. Chinese government has strict rules in terms of media, including social media as Facebook, Twitter, Google, and Gmail are locked. Meanwhile, the text books are under control. This policy is adopted to protect the nation's rights. Indeed, according to the theory of "social contract", the state is given authority by the public to protect the nation's rights in return. When this policy ensures people's rights and freedoms at the cost of aforementioned social media, the citizens will have no objection in this regard. It is believed that when parochial mindsets regarding ethnicity, caste, color and religion rule a society, peace will remain elusive. A state's strict rule about social and political issues are significant if it protects nation's rights and it will not be enforced unless officials are committed. The state will have to revive national feelings and inject the spirit of brotherhood into citizens. There are two main ways to strengthen national feelings in Afghanistan: first, ethnic tendency needs to be rooted out from government's apparatus. Second, the government should develop a strategy to highlight tolerance, pluralistic view and national solidarity.

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## Can Macron Pull it Off?

By Dani Rodrik

Emmanuel Macron's victory over Marine Le Pen was much-needed good news for anyone who favors open, liberal democratic societies over their nativist, xenophobic counterparts. But the battle against right-wing populism is far from won.

Le Pen received more than a third of the second-round vote, even though only one party other than her own National Front - Nicolas Dupont-Aignan's small Debout la France - gave her any backing. And turnout was apparently sharply down from previous presidential elections, indicating a large number of disaffected voters. If Macron fails during the next five years, Le Pen will be back with a vengeance, and nativist populists will gain strength in Europe and elsewhere.

As a candidate, Macron was helped in this age of anti-establishment politics by the fact that he stood outside traditional political parties. As president, however, that same fact is a singular disadvantage.

His political movement, En Marche!, is only a year old. He will have to build from scratch a legislative majority following the National Assembly elections next month.

Macron's economic ideas resist easy characterization. During the presidential campaign, he was frequently accused of lacking specifics. To many on the left and the extreme right, he is a neoliberal, with little to distinguish himself from the mainstream policies of austerity that failed Europe and brought it to its current political impasse. The French economist Thomas Piketty, who supported the socialist candidate Benoît Hamon, described Macron as representing "yesterday's Europe." Many of Macron's economic plans do indeed have a neoliberal flavor. He has vowed to lower the corporate tax rate from 33.5% to 25%, cut 120,000 civil service jobs, keep the government deficit below the EU limit of 3% of GDP, and increase labor-market flexibility (a euphemism for making it easier for firms to fire workers).

But he has promised to maintain pension benefits, and his preferred social model appears to be Nordic-style flexicurity - a combination of high levels of economic security with market-based incentives.

None of these steps will do much - certainly not in the short run - to address the key challenge that will define Macron's presidency: creating jobs. As Martin Sandbu notes, employment was the French electorate's top concern and should be the new administration's top priority. Since the eurozone crisis, French unemployment has remained high, at 10% - and close to 25% for people under 25 years old. There is virtually no evidence that liberalizing labor markets will increase employment, unless the French economy receives a significant boost in aggregate demand as well.

This is where the other component of Macron's economic program comes into play. He has proposed a five-year, €50 billion (\$54.4 billion) stimulus plan, which would include investments in infrastructure and green technologies, along with expanded training for the unemployed. But, given that

this is barely more than 2% of France's annual GDP, the stimulus plan on its own may not do too much to lift overall employment.

Macron's more ambitious idea is to take a big leap toward a eurozone fiscal union, with a common treasury and a single finance minister. This would enable, in his view, permanent fiscal transfers from the stronger countries to countries that are disadvantaged by the eurozone's common monetary policy. The eurozone budget would be financed by contributions from member states' tax receipts. A separate eurozone parliament would provide political oversight and accountability. Such fiscal unification would make it possible for countries like France to increase infrastructure spending and boost job creation without busting fiscal ceilings.

A fiscal union backed up by deeper political integration makes eminent sense. At least it represents a coherent path out of the eurozone's present no man's land. But Macron's unabashedly Europeanist policies are not just a matter of politics or principle. They are also critical to the success of his economic program. Without either greater fiscal flexibility or transfers from the rest of the eurozone, France is unlikely to get out of its employment funk soon. The success of Macron's presidency thus depends to a large extent on European cooperation.

And that brings us to Germany. Angela Merkel's initial reaction to the election's outcome was not encouraging. She congratulated Macron, who "carries the hopes of millions of French people," but she also stated that she would not consider changes in eurozone fiscal rules. Even if Merkel (or a future government under Martin Schulz) were more willing, there is the problem of the German electorate. Having portrayed the eurozone crisis not as a problem of interdependence, but as a morality tale - thrifty, hard-working Germans pitted against profligate, duplicitous debtors - German politicians will not have an easy time bringing their voters along on any common fiscal project.

Anticipating the German reaction, Macron has countered it: "You cannot say I am for a strong Europe and globalization, but over my dead body for a transfer union." That, he believes, is a recipe for disintegration and reactionary politics: "Without transfers, you will not allow the periphery to converge and will create political divergence towards extremists." France may not be in the European periphery, but Macron's message to Germany is clear: Either you help me out and we build a true union - economic, fiscal, and eventually political - or we will be run over by the extremist onslaught. Macron is almost certainly right.

For the sake of France, Europe, and the rest of the world, we must hope that his victory is followed by a German change of heart. (Courtesy Project Syndicate)

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