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

Understanding Social and Political Changes

Social and political changes are inevitable and the societies that are able to understand these changes and guide them towards or closer to the intended destinations are the most successful ones. It is not possible to keep on resisting changes and the ones who have opted to resist changes for long have not been able to do so without using force and violence. And, that has resulted in the backwardness of the society and the eruption of conflicts and wars. There are two important aspects of social and political changes: context and scope. The changes cannot be understood without their contexts; in fact, they cannot happen without them. Understanding the context would make the changes easily comprehensible and may even help the societies adjust themselves as per the context. The scope of the changes basically determine the extent of influence. Some changes are very minor and they are not easily detectable; however, there are certain changes that redefine the whole social and political structures and may lead the societies towards annihilation or a magnificent victory. In most of the cases, the small changes that keep on happening within the society ultimately result into big changes and even revolutions. Therefore, it is important that these changes should be pursued properly and their possible influences should be predicted beforehand so as to save the societies from facing surprises.

Another essential aspect of social and political changes is that they follow a certain process. Within this process, there is a period called transition period, which is an ongoing phenomenon between two states of affairs. Within transition period it is not yet decided where the changes are going to end ultimately. It is most chaotic, uncertain and ambiguous stage and, therefore, the societies that are passing through a transition period, experiencing changes with a wide scope, are difficult to manage or govern and require true, dedicated and wise efforts from all the members of society.

Social and political changes are always difficult to prognosticate. Human beings have been in constant struggle to comprehend their nature and have control over them. In this regard there are researches, studies and mechanisms in societies, with the objective of curbing them appropriately. One of the basic reasons of the formation of a political system was to introduce control within states. This control mechanism is guaranteed by the government in a political system along with other pillars of state.

A part from that, the political parties and institutions also play a major role in addressing these changes. Controlling here does not necessarily mean stopping the changes; rather it refers to guiding the changes towards the wellbeing of most of the people living in the state. If on certain occasions changes are blocked on many other occasions changes are promulgated by the government or political parties.

At the present scenario our country Afghanistan is going through a transition period. Transition period here does not mean the transition of the security responsibilities going on in the country; rather here transition is mentioned with much broader perspective. Afghanistan is moving, though to a very limited extent, from a tribal society to a democratic one. Though the real democratic signs are yet to be found in most parts of the country, there have been movement in that direction to a certain extent.

Unfortunately, this transition period is facing myriads of hurdles. The instable political and social setups have further made this period uncertain. The control mechanism itself seems to have lost the focus and devotion. It seems perplexed in the interwoven web of frequent social changes and has been contaminated with intense corruption. It lacks clear vision itself, so how it is possible for it to guide the social and political changes towards a definite goal.

The country at the moment is marked with swelling wave of terrorism. Even the securest of all the people are insecure, most of the international forces have withdrawn, the national forces are facing serious challenges to shoulder the security responsibility, the political system is marked with certain incapacities to deal with the diverse political requirements and all these changes have been magnified because of their occurrence during a transition. So, the economic future is clearly uncertain and the most tragic fact is that we are completely unprepared. This transition period has to be over one day, as happens with every transition period; but what could this period lead to is of immense importance. This period can either lead us to another chaotic state of affairs wherein we have to wait for a couple of more decades for the same transition or it can lead us to position from where we can move towards a successful democratic state.

Definitely, the second option is what most of Afghan people desire for, but that is achievable only after prudent, agile and above all sincere efforts on the part of the control mechanism.

Suffering under Democracy?

By Hujjatullah Zia

The gap between state and nation has widened and there is a sense of deep mistrust in the air. On the one hand, the exchange of harsh rhetoric among political figures and on the other hand, reports about combatant and non-combatant casualties aggravate the political challenges and put an adverse effect on the mind of the public. The insurgency has increased to a great extent and the newly emerging insurgent groups, mainly the Islamic State of Khorasan Province (ISKP), seek firm foothold in Afghanistan to fish in troubled waters and put pressure on the government through spilling the blood of men, women and children.

With the establishment of the National Unity Government (NUG), Afghan nation hoped to heave a sigh of relief under democracy and put an end to the dark pages of historical episodes and fratricide. People dreamed a utopian world, which was empty of terrorism and human casualties, and democracy seemed to be a perfect panacea for their incurable wounds. The approval of the Constitution – which underlined the equality of men and women before the law and held respect to the United Nation's Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) – and the discourse on natural and inalienable rights and dignity filled the individuals with a sense of hope. Constitutionally, the government is supposed to empower women, protect the rights and liberty of the nation, form a civil society void of violence and bloodshed, develop the economic resources, etc.

Democracy also puts strong emphasis on individuals' rights and freedoms and prohibits discriminations on the grounds of one's race, sex and beliefs. There is no room for inferiority or superiority in democratic view and people are to treat one another with the spirit of brotherhood, practice upon the "Golden Rule" and tolerate one another patiently. The hegemony of the democracy has dominated the world, however, the true spirit of democracy is not practiced and the rights and dignity of people are violated on a large scale.

It is an undeniable fact that the post-Taliban Afghanistan has made great progress compared to the Taliban's regime and Afghan women play key role in political, social and cultural arenas, but there are a lot to be done. Women still suffer from mental and physical tortures, deemed inferior and confined within traditional restrictions, mainly in the villages – where parochial mindsets hold strong sway. Afghan nation still sustains casualties and the guerilla fighters spill the blood of men, women and children without an iota of mercy. The conflict-related incidents have, reportedly, caused more than 8,000 civilian casualties in Afghanistan, including more than 2,500 deaths in the first nine months of 2016. Similarly, the ethnic minority groups fall victim to sectarian violence on the grounds of their caste, color or creed. Afghan soldiers bore the brunt of terrorism this year. Based on a recent report, Afghanistan's security forces battling the resurgent Taliban have suffered around 15,000 casualties, including 5,523 fatalities in the first eight months of 2016. Hence the nation's dream for peace and prosperity fell by the wayside and a vacuum for the spirit of democracy is widely felt among the public. With the Taliban's Omari Operation led by Mansour' successor Mullah Haibatullah Akhundzada, the graph of fatalities heightened and it is said that of "407 districts, 258 districts were under government control or influence, 33 districts were under insurgent control or influence, and 116 districts were 'contested." In addition, the Taliban have infiltrated the Afghan soldiers and there were, reportedly, 101 insider attacks from January 1, 2015 to August 19, 2016 in which Afghan National Defense and Security Force (ANDSF) personnel turned on fellow security forces, killing 257 and wounding 125 others.

Despite the escalated militancy and high graph of fatalities, there are many challenges in the government's apparatus. For instance, the harsh rhetoric among the high-ranking officials created a rift in the NUG and deteriorated the situation since the attention is redirected into self-interests rather than the political instability and planning an effective mechanism for counter-insurgency. It is believed that whenever the issue is muddied, the Taliban elements will try to exploit the situation in their own interests. Therefore, in the current sensitive condition, the officials and heads of NUG will have to strive for strengthening democracy and providing peace and prosperity for the nation.

It should be noted that disagreement among the officials will affect the nation negatively and channel their energy and attention to minor issues rather than terrorism which threatens the life of the citizens, including women and children. The officials are to boost the morale of the nation and soldiers through exercising unity and brotherhood. Furthermore, the nascent democracy is to be strengthened through reinforcing the soldiers. It is highly painful to feel the vacuum for brotherhood in the military. Many soldiers lose their lives after being surrounded by the insurgents for days and left without help despite their persistent urge for support. In such a case, the officials are responsible. Those who neglect their duty in critical time must stand trial. Strengthening democracy without the implementation of law is impossible. All, including the officials, are equal in the eye of law and no one is supposed to violate it with impunity. It is hoped that the officials will bury the hatchet, focus on protecting the rights and liberty of the nation and counter insurgency with more effective mechanism.

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Radical Realism About Climate Change

By Lili Fuhr

Mainstream politics, by definition, is ill equipped to imagine fundamental change. But last December in Paris, 196 governments agreed on the need to limit global warming to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels – an objective that holds the promise of delivering precisely such a transformation. Achieving it will require overcoming serious political challenges, reflected in the fact that some are advocating solutions that will end up doing more harm than good.

One strategy that has gained a lot of momentum focuses on the need to develop large-scale technological interventions to control the global thermostat. Proponents of geo-engineering technologies argue that conventional adaptation and mitigation measures are simply not reducing emissions fast enough to prevent dangerous warming. Technologies such as "carbon capture and storage" (CCS), they argue, are necessary to limit damage and human suffering. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change seems to agree. In its fifth assessment report, it builds its scenarios for meeting the Paris climate goals around the concept of "negative emissions" – that is, the ability to suck excess carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere.

But this approach ignores serious problems with the development and deployment of geo-engineering technologies. Consider CCS, which is the process of capturing waste CO2 from large sources like fossil-fuel power plants and depositing it in, say, an underground geological formation, thereby preventing it from entering the atmosphere. It sounds good. But what makes it economical is that it enables enhanced oil recovery. In other words, the only way to make CCS cost-effective is to use it to exacerbate the problem it is supposed to address.

The supposed savior technology – bioenergy with carbon capture and storage (BECCS) – is not much better. BECCS begins by producing large amounts of biomass from, say, fast-growing trees which naturally capture CO2; those plants are then converted into fuel via burning or refining, with the resulting carbon emissions being captured and sequestered.

But bioenergy is not carbon neutral, and the surge in European demand for biomass has led to rising food commodity prices and land grabs in developing countries. These realities helped persuade the scientists Kevin Anderson and Glen Peters recently to call carbon removal an "unjust and high-stakes gamble."

What about other geo-engineering proposals? Solar Radiation Management (SRM) aims to control the amount of sunlight that reaches the Earth, essentially mimicking the effect of a volcano eruption. This may be achieved by pumping sulphates into the stratosphere or through "marine cloud brightening," which would cause clouds to reflect more sunlight back into space.

But blasting sulphates into the stratosphere does not reduce CO2 concentrations; it merely delays the impact for as long as the spraying continues. Moreover, sulphate injections in the northern hemisphere could cause serious drought in the Africa's Sahel region, owing to dramatic reductions in precipitation, while some African countries would experience more precipitation. The effect on the Asian monsoon system could be even more pronounced. In short, SRM could severely damage the livelihoods of millions of people.

If geo-engineering can't save us, what can? In fact, there are a number of steps that can be taken right now. They would be messier and more politically challenging than geo-engineering. But they would work.

The first step would be a moratorium on new coal mines. If all currently planned coal-fired power plants are built and operated over their normal service life of 40 years, they alone would emit 240 billion tons of CO2 – more than the remaining carbon budget. If that investment were re-allocated to decentralized renewable-energy production, the benefits would be enormous.

Moreover, with only 10% of the global population responsible for almost 50% of global CO2 emissions, there is a strong case to be made for implementing strategies that target the biggest emitters. For example, it makes little sense that airlines – which actually serve just 7% of the global population – are exempt from paying fuel taxes, especially at a time when ticket prices are at an historic low.

Changes to land use are also needed. The 2009 International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development charts the way to a transformed agricultural system – with benefits that extend far beyond climate policy. We must apply this knowledge around the world.
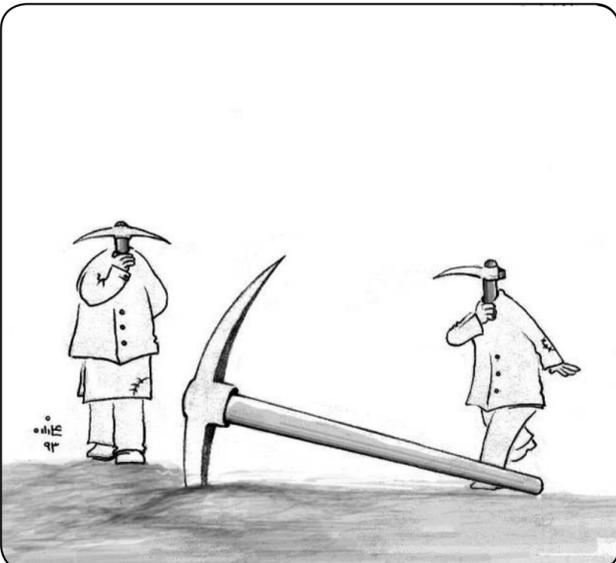
In Europe, the waste sector could make a significant contribution to a low-carbon economy. Recent research, commissioned by Zero Waste Europe, found that optimal implementation of the European Commission's "circular economy package" waste targets could save the European Union 190 million tons of CO2 per year. That is the equivalent of the annual emissions of the Netherlands!

Available measures in the transport sector include strengthening public transportation, encouraging the use of railways for freight traffic, building bike paths, and subsidizing delivery bicycles. In Germany, intelligent action on transport could reduce the sector's emissions by up to 95% by 2050. Another powerful measure would be to protect and restore natural ecosystems, which could result in the storage of 220-330 gigatons of CO2 worldwide .

None of these solutions is a silver bullet; but, together, they could change the world for the better. Geo-engineering solutions are not the only alternatives. They are a response to the inability of mainstream economics and politics to address the climate challenge. Instead of trying to devise ways to maintain business as usual – an impossible and destructive goal – we must prove our ability to imagine and achieve radical change.

If we fail, we should not be surprised if, just a few years from now, the planetary thermostat is under the control of a handful of states or military and scientific interests. As world leaders convene for the 22nd United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change to bring the Paris agreement into force, they should repudiate geo-engineering quick fixes – and demonstrate a commitment to real solutions. (Courtesy Project Syndicate)

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