

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



November 04, 2017

## “Afghanistan – 2<sup>nd</sup> Worst Country for Journalists”

Media and journalists in Afghanistan have been performing a very important role. They are the ones who can provide timely information to the people of the country and at the same time shape public opinion against extremism and terrorism and make the people ready for a democratic system that can ensure peace, prosperity and development. However, they face serious problems while performing their duties. These problems are not only related to insecurity but also to discriminatory and non-democratic behavior towards them.

According to a recent statement by Afghan Journalist Safety Committee (AJSC), Afghanistan is the second worst country in the world for journalists after Syria, which is the most dangerous country. AJSC has also recorded that 10 journalists have been killed so far this year and 100 others have been exposed to violence. Sediqullah Tawhidi, the chairman of AJSC, said in his statement that around 1,000 journalists have been killed throughout the world this year and Afghanistan, unfortunately, has the second highest total. This is a matter of great concern, especially in a country that needs to protect its journalists and media to a great extent.

Thus the fact remains evident that the situation for Afghan journalists does not seem to be getting any better. The rising insecurity and the lack of attention to the plight of the journalists has led to some very difficult circumstances that the journalists have to go through so as to perform their duties. Even the foreign journalists are facing serious difficulties in fulfilling their responsibilities. Kabul police, on various occasions, have warned the national and international journalists to limit their travels in the city because of security risks and the risks of kidnapping that seems to be on the rise. Afghan media organizations feel that the attitude of the law enforcement agencies, in fact, demoralizes the spirits of the journalists in the country and would bar them from collecting information. Instead, the security authorities must ensure the security of the country as a whole and of the journalists, in particular.

Mostly, the societies that are well developed and have great respect for knowledge and information, make sure that the rights of the journalists are guarded properly and they are provided with such circumstances wherein they are able to perform their responsibilities with full dedication and devotion.

On the other hand, the societies that suffer from political instability and experience wars, and disturbances and do not recognize the worth of true knowledge and information tend to forget the vital responsibility of guarding the rights of the journalists. The journalists in such societies tend to suffer from different sorts of discriminations and, unfortunately, even lose their lives.

Mostly conflict zones are dangerous for the journalists. In order to provide true and timely information, the journalists have to move into or close to the places where wars and conflicts happen. They, therefore, put their lives at risk and try to fulfill their responsibilities. Different groups, organizations or countries in such zones have to be very careful about the rights of journalists and make sure they are not targeted. However, that does not seem to happen and many journalists lose their valuable lives every year. Moreover, because of the influence and approach of different extremist networks, the number of journalists losing their lives in the peaceful countries is also alarming.

Apart from the right to life, according to International law, journalists are entitled for certain other rights as well which all the governments and organizations around the world must respect. Journalists, according to the Declaration of Rights and Duties of the Journalists, must have free access to all information sources, and the right to freely inquire on all events conditioning public life. Therefore, secret of public or private affairs may be opposed only to journalists in exceptional cases and for clearly expressed motives. Therefore, any factor hindering the journalists from having access to all information sources must be considered illegal and should be eliminated.

Moreover, the journalists have the right to refuse subordination to anything contrary to the general policy of the information organ to which he collaborates such as it has been laid down by writing and incorporated in his contract of employment, as well as any subordination not clearly implicated by this general policy. And, the journalists cannot be compelled to perform a professional act or to express an opinion contrary to his convictions or his conscience.

Ill-fatedly, Afghanistan is also one of the countries that have not been giving enough heed to the rights of the journalists. The war and conflicts and the negligence of the relevant authorities have resulted in different sorts of discrimination against the journalists in the country. Afghan government and different other organizations and groups must make sure that they strive to protect the rights of the journalists as they can be one of the hopes of the country for restoration of peace and tranquility.



## Escalation in Hate Crime

By Hujjatullah Zia

Hate crime has increased to a great extent in democratic countries, mainly the UK, and Muslim men and women are targeted on the grounds of their beliefs and Islamic covering. Women's headscarf, face veil, or robe are not tolerated by those who allege that Muslims lack tolerance. This act, which will curtail Muslims' freedom and spread fear and hatred, is against democratic principles and human rights discourse.

According to a recent report, anti-Muslim attacks in the UK rose 47 percent in 2016 compared with the previous year. The attacks were largely levelled at Muslim women – 56 percent of victims of 642 incidents were female. Sixty-six percent of perpetrators were male, and 69 percent were white men. Victims came from a variety of ethnic backgrounds.

Following a spate of terrorist attacks in European countries, hate crime escalated in many parts of the world as a result of Islamophobia which was spread by religious fundamentalists. Muslim men and women were frequently insulted in public places and even harsh rhetoric was said against them by officials. They stereotyped all Muslims in the wake of some practices by radical groups.

It should be noted that Muslims bear the brunt of radical ideology and Islamic countries are beset by the issue of terrorism. Currently, Muslims in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Burma, Iraq, Syria, etc. suffer in the worst possible way on the grounds of their beliefs as a result of radicalism practiced by fundamental groups – which shed the blood of Muslims and non-Muslims indiscriminately. But they represent their radical ideology rather than Islamic beliefs.

To view the global history, religious wars inflicted heavy casualties upon nations in Europe. For example, the European wars of religion were a series of religious wars waged in Central, Western and Northern Europe from 1524 to 1648, following the onset of the Protestant Reformation in Europe. Similarly, the Thirty Years' War, which was fought between 1618 and 1648, and Crusades led to countless fatalities. But it will not be right to pigeonhole a certain religion or followers for being involved in such deadly attacks. This further suggests that there are radicals in any religion and radicalism will lead to war and destruction.

The same is the case with those who misconstrue Islamic Sharia and justify their acts of terror on the basis of their own ideology. In short, the practices of religious fundamentalists are not only against Islamic tenets but also against

the mainstream of Muslims. In his popular speech titled “A New Beginning”, the US former President Barack Obama said in Cairo, Egypt, “None of us should tolerate these extremists. They have killed in many countries...more than any other, they have killed Muslims.

Their actions are irreconcilable with the rights of human beings, the progress of nations, and with Islam. The Holy Koran teaches that whoever kills an innocent, it is as if he has killed all mankind; and whoever saves a person, it is as if he has saved all mankind. The enduring faith of over a billion people is so much bigger than the narrow hatred of a few. Islam is not part of the problem in combating violent extremism – it is an important part of promoting peace.”

Although terrorism is colored by religion and terrorists operate under the cloak of faith and beliefs, it has been changed into political issue and mercenaries are believed to form the larger number of militants. Terrorists fight proxy war rather than ideological one. They value neither religion nor code of ethics.

Violating one's rights or dignity on the grounds of their race, color, gender, etc. is against human rights and moral values. We live in the global village and have to feel the pain and suffering of an individual regardless of their background. For example, if a man or woman of color fall victim to violence in Las Vegas, if a Muslim's right is violated in Rohingya, and if a child's blood is shed in Palestine, it is a stain on public conscience. We have to respect the rights and dignity of one another irrespective of backgrounds. But if we do not tolerate one's beliefs or color or simply the way of their dressing, we are also called radicals. That is to say, radical does not necessarily mean to kill one but to insult one on the basis of their racial or religious grounds is also radicalism.

In the current sensitive time, human societies need to strengthen unity and accept the way one thinks, says, writes, and dresses. Justifying our own acts of violence is tantamount to radicalism.

We are not supposed to add to violence. To live a peaceful life, we need practice tolerance and treat one another with the spirit of brotherhood. If religious fundamentalist be able to sow the seeds of discord in human societies, their dream for a dystopia will come true. Hence, targeting people based on actions of some fundamentalists who happened to be Muslims is unacceptable and against democratic principles and moral values.

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## Big Tech Meets Big Government

By Mohamed A. El-Erian

Impressive quarterly results from the biggest technology companies show that they are nowhere near saturating their consumer markets, exhausting their innovation cycles, or reaching growth maturation. Dig a little deeper, and those reports also illustrate the sector's substantial and growing systemic importance. Yet, for the tech sector, there is a distinct downside to this development.

With increased systemic importance often comes greater scrutiny. And, indeed, today's prosperous and innovative tech giants now face the prospect of redoubled efforts to regulate and tax their activities. The longer it takes for these companies to recognize their systemic importance, the greater the likelihood of a more powerful backlash by governments and the public, hurting the companies and undermining their ability to continue producing innovations that genuinely boost consumers' wellbeing.

When the tech sector began its evolution toward systemic importance, it comprised a collection of hungry start-ups possessing breakthrough technologies. Beyond disrupting existing economic sectors and activities, these technologies ended up producing new demand for the altogether new goods and services that they enabled.

Tech companies' track record – time and again proving their capacity for exceptional growth – enables them to attract massive investment. They are thus able not only to strengthen their market position in their core activities, but also to develop innovative capabilities in new areas, by taking over smaller competitors, whether actual or prospective. And some are even able to self-disrupt repeatedly – and thus consistently to remain at the technological frontier. Fueling Big Tech's remarkable growth further, many of these companies' services are ostensibly free, facilitating quick adoption by consumers. It helps that these services often can be provided as seamlessly abroad as they are within their country of origin, to the point that the very concept of “abroad” has become rather elastic.

Over time, the major tech companies' rapid accumulation of market power has led to the rise of oligopolies in some sectors, and monopoly players in a few. Their social, economic, and even political influence has soared in some cases. Facebook and Twitter, for example, played a pivotal role in galvanizing protesters during the Arab Spring uprisings of 2011.

This raises serious risks: as beneficial as Big Tech's innovations are, they can also serve as important channels for state or non-state actors to bring about their own disruptions. In the run-up to last year's presidential election in the United States, some social media platforms inadvertently enabled the spread of disinformation. More menacing, extremists like the Islamic State have relied on social media for recruitment and propaganda purposes.

It should come as no surprise that Big Tech firms tend to move much faster than governments and regulators. As

such, what began as a laissez-faire attitude of benign neglect – largely a result of ignorance and inattention – is evolving into something more forceful. As tech firms reach systemic importance, attitudes toward them change markedly.

This shift has become increasingly apparent in recent years, as major tech firms have faced intensifying scrutiny of their competitive practices, tax behavior, data uses, and privacy policies. Broader questions about their contributions to labor displacement and effects on wage growth have also arisen, even as societies increasingly recognize that technological disruption implies the need for education reform and improvements in skills acquisition and retraining.

Yet the tech sector itself still seems to underestimate its growing systemic importance. As a result, firms can lag in recognizing the need to update their operations, resources, and mindsets to reflect their shift from small disruptor to powerful incumbent. That means building more comprehensive and integrated business models, informed by experienced talent with expertise in a broader array of areas, in order to move beyond these companies' laser focus on innovation.

The longer this process takes, the greater the risk that tech firms will lose control of the narrative. Beyond fueling a rise in outside monitoring, regulation, and supervision, there is the risk of a consumer backlash – or even the further exploitation of innovations by malicious actors.

In an ideal world, major tech companies would recognize and adjust to their changing role in step with external actors, including governments and consumers, thereby striking the right balance between innovation, consumer benefits and protection, and national security. But this is not an ideal world. And, so far, internal and external forces have been out of sync, in terms of perceptions, capabilities, and actions. Add to that conscious and unconscious biases and considerable temptation for political manipulation, and the risks become only more profound.

Big Tech can and should play a larger role in helping the entire economy to evolve in an orderly and mutually beneficial manner. This will require, first and foremost, that they internalize their own systemic importance, and adjust their perspectives and behaviors accordingly. But it will also demand far better communication, with firms' objectives and operations becoming much more transparent. And, finally, it will call for a commitment to enhanced monitoring both of themselves and of their peers, together with more effective collective action, as appropriate.

If the tech sector fails to make such changes, government oversight and regulation will inevitably intensify. And it is far from certain that the net result will be positive for society, much less for business. (Courtesy Project Syndicate)

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