

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



November 13, 2017

No Room for Talks

Despite the global campaign against terrorist networks, terrorism still remains a serious threat to the world and shed the blood of innocent individuals. Within the past decades, terrorist fighters continued war against all nations without enunciating the main reasons behind their attacks. With the emergence of scores of terrorist outfits with multiple frames of mind, the world encountered greater challenges and death toll increased on a large scale.

Terrorist networks are believed to be constituted of two kinds of fighters: First the ideologues who claim to fight for their beliefs and seek "altruistic suicide" rather than "egoistic suicide". The ideologues cherish religious ideology and fight to death. Ideology is similar to destructive storm and will surge up strongly that will lead to great destruction and kill combatants and non-combatants alike. However, the ideology of religious fundamentalists differs from one group to another. For example, the Taliban are less radical than the self-styled Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). The Taliban hardly target sacred places or kill people on the grounds of their race or religion - they did so to some extent. Nonetheless, the ISIL foment sectarian violence and show no mercy to anyone. They also kill people in the worst possible way. Moreover, the Taliban sought to establish an "Islamic Emirate" in Afghanistan but the ISIL group emerged with loftier ambition and claimed to establish caliphate on the surface of earth. In fact, there is a red line for radical group. In the beginning of their regime, the Taliban were not involved in sectarian violence and they did not discriminate between their members and others. In case of crossing the red line, their own members were also punished severely. But their war was colored with sect during the final years of their regime.

Second, there are mercenary fighters who will observe no boundaries. Scores of individuals who did not have the opportunity to live a life of luxury, eat sumptuous meal, or dance with girls, join militants. They are mostly thugs and will cross all red lines. Mercenaries will be engaged in moral turpitude, merciless killings, etc. For example the ISIL group practiced harshly, raped women, had sexual intercourse with a number of girls under the mask of religion, and killed men, women, and children for their racial and religious backgrounds. They neither valued religious tenets nor moral codes. So, nothing was sacred for them.

Both ideologues and mercenaries play highly destructive role in a community. The reasons are clear: Ideologues will shed blood out of radical mindset. Their ideology is wrong and radical. They show no tolerance for the religious practices of other sects or religious groups. Their ideology will leave them with small restriction. On the other hand, mercenaries know no faith or code of ethics. They fight to alleviate their financial constraints or satiate their carnal desires. The death of mercenaries is no more than "egoistic suicide" since they fight selfishly and value nothing or no one. It is believed that both the aforementioned fighters pursue death - be it egoistic or altruistic - and, unlike political opponents, they will not negotiate with governments. Despite this fact, Afghan government seeks to bring the Taliban to negotiating table. The High Peace Council (HPC), which was established in 2010, was tasked to persuade the Taliban to hold talks but there is no achievement since the establishment of this council. After all, the Taliban have intensified their attacks and inflicted heavy casualties upon Afghan soldiers and civilians. The US soldiers also sustained heavy casualties since the attack launched by Bush administration in response to 9/11 attacks carried out by al-Qaeda and left three thousand people dead. Only Hezb-e-Islami Afghanistan (HIA) led by Gulbudin Hekmatyar joined Afghan government. According to Hekmatyar, the HPC had no role in this issue. After all, it should be noted that HIA, unlike terrorist networks, was a political party with no certain ideology. They fought against the government for being political opponent. Subsequently, the party negotiated and reached an agreement with the government. Will terrorist networks reach an agreement with the government?

One of the main reasons behind the Taliban's refusal to hold talks is that they fought bloody battles in the past and killed thousands of people under ideological cloak. Now if they stop war and join government, they will not be able to justify their past and it will lead to many splinter groups. They do not give Afghan government the green light and their intensified attacks reflect their lukewarm response to peace talks.

One of the preconditions of the Taliban on peace talks was the withdrawal of foreign forces. However, with the withdrawal of foreign forces - as the US military role reduced to consultative role and the bulk of US soldiers withdrew from Afghanistan in 2014 - the Taliban intensified their attacks and occupied Kunduz two times. It bespeaks of the fact the Taliban are not committed on their words and must not be trusted. They have proved it. Their next precondition, which was releasing their prisoners, were also fulfilled during Hamid Karzai's administration and a number of the Taliban's dangerous prisoners were released, but they joined the battles against government. They also killed the former head of HPC Professor Burhanuddin Rabbani in 2011. Hence, there is no room left for talks, is there?



'Man is Born Free, and Everywhere He is in Chains'

By Hujjatullah Zia

In modern world, freedom has been recognized as a natural and fundamental right of mankind. All have been born free and are supposed to exercise their rights freely. Freedom is strongly cherished in today's discourse and it is the spirit of democracy. Democratic systems have to protect the liberty and freedom of people and support their rights. However, Jean-Jacques Rousseau aptly said, "Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains. One man thinks himself the master of others, but remains more of a slave than they are."

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) states in its preamble that "the advent of a world in which human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear and want has been proclaimed as the highest aspiration of the common people".

The UDHR also recognizes freedom as the natural rights of mankind as its first article says, "All human beings are born free...." Freedom and liberalism are the cornerstone of democracy. Based on liberal school of thought, all people are entitled to exercise their rights, beliefs, and religion freely and no formal religion is recognized by liberalism. That is to say, pluralism is one of the elements of liberalism which recognizes many religions. People should be able to exercise their beliefs and religious rituals freely, express their thoughts freely, etc. and no one is supposed to curtail their freedoms unless it is limited on the provision of law to ensure the freedoms of others.

It is believed that if freedom, which is the inherent right of all human beings, is respected, the bulk of global challenges will be resolved. In other words, if one's freedoms are not curtailed on the grounds of their race, color, and creed and people show tolerance toward the religious beliefs and practices of others, militancy will decline tremendously.

Currently, radicalism and lack of tolerance pose the greatest threat to the world and people's right to life and liberty are violated flagrantly. If one's freedoms of beliefs, expressions, thoughts, movement and residence, etc. are valued, streams of blood would not be shed, as it is being shed today, and people would live a peaceful life. Hence, radicalism and lack of tolerance are one of the main reasons behind curtailing people's freedoms.

It should be noted that freedom is not only right but also a method or instrument for expressing thoughts and beliefs and representing culture. Freedom paves the ground for the public to play their social, cultural, and political role without obstacles. Without freedom, one will not only fail to express their thoughts or exercise their religious rituals,

but also to promote their culture or perform their social or cultural activities.

Despite the fact that freedom is debated hotly, it still remains elusive and freedoms of large number of people have been violated in some ways or the others around the globe. It is true that man is everywhere "in chains" although he is born free. Currently, violating freedom makes global headline. To view the current militancy, people's right to freedom is trampled upon in the worst possible way. People are not able to express their thoughts freely or play their social or cultural role in the society, mainly in war-torn countries.

Religious fundamentalists are one of the strongest violators of people's freedom. They do not observe the International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and curtail their freedoms on a large scale. After all, many radical militants, including the self-styled Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), violate people's right to liberty on the basis of their racial and religious backgrounds.

Freedom of thoughts and expressions are also repressed in many parts of the world, mainly by states. People are not allowed to express what they think. Media and press are censored and in some countries there are only government-owned media - which will broadcast what states want. This will be a strong blow to freedom of speech. Quelling those who express their thoughts is rampant in despotic regimes - which are afraid of the public thought. In Afghanistan, people also suffer from violation of their freedoms.

On the one hand, militant fighters infringe upon people's right to freedom, and on the other hand, traditional culture and cultural restriction limit their freedoms to a great extent. Women are highly prone to violation of freedoms. Some girls are bereft of freedom of marriage and are subdued to parents' will in this respect.

In all honesty, freedom of speech is valued in Afghanistan and there are many free and non-governmental media and press. Moreover, social media are a suitable vehicle for expressing thoughts and ideas. Afghan officials have the tolerance to be criticized openly. In brief, to compare Afghanistan with many neighboring countries, freedom of speech is highly valued in Afghanistan.

To value freedom, people have to be tolerant enough and respect people as they are. Pluralistic ideas will extend the realm of one's tolerance; whereas radical mindset will spread hatred that will necessarily result in violation of freedom. Infringing on freedom will dismantle people's unity and they will not be able to live a peaceful life.

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Sounding the Alarm on Biodiversity Loss

By Robert Watson

With the United Nations' climate change conference underway in Bonn, Germany, rising global temperatures are once again at the top of the world's agenda. But why care about the increase in temperature, if not because of its impact on life on Earth, including human life?

That is an important question to consider, in view of the relative lack of attention devoted to a closely related and equally important threat to human survival: the startling pace of global biodiversity loss.

The availability of food, water, and energy - fundamental building blocks of every country's security - depends on healthy, robust, and diverse ecosystems, and on the life that inhabits them. But, as a result of human activities, planetary biodiversity is now declining faster than at any point in history. Many policymakers, however, have yet to recognize that biodiversity loss is just as serious a threat as rising sea levels and increasingly frequent extreme weather events.

This lack of sufficient attention comes despite international commitments to protect biodiversity. In October 2010, global leaders met in Aichi, Japan, where they produced the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020, which included 20 ambitious targets - such as halving global habitat loss and ending overfishing - that signatories agreed to meet by 2020. Safeguarding biodiversity is also specifically included in the UN's Sustainable Development Goals. Yet progress toward these global biodiversity goals is likely to fall dangerously short of what is needed to ensure an acceptable future for all.

Policymakers have largely agreed on the importance of holding the increase in global temperature to less than 2°C above pre-industrial levels - the goal of the Paris climate agreement. But too few leaders have shown any sense of urgency about stemming biodiversity losses. The sustainable future we want depends on ending this indifference.

Toward that end, the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), which I chair, will release a series of landmark reports next March on the implications of biodiversity decline. Prepared over three years by more than 550 experts from some 100 countries, these expert assessments will cover four world regions: the Americas, Asia and the Pacific, Africa, and Europe and Central Asia. A fifth report will address the state of land degradation and res-

toration at regional and global levels.

The reports will highlight trends and plausible futures, outlining the best policy options available to slow the degradation of ecosystems, from coral reefs to rainforests. Taken together, the IPBES assessments will represent the global scientific community's consensus view on the state of biodiversity and ecosystem services.

Moreover, the reports will highlight the close links between biodiversity loss and climate change, which should be addressed simultaneously.

The world will not be able to meet the goals of the Paris agreement - or many of the SDGs, for that matter - unless it takes into account the state of biodiversity and ecosystem services.

Today, most governments separate their environmental authorities from those focusing on energy, agriculture, and planning. This makes it difficult to address climate change or biodiversity losses in a holistic way. New types of innovative governance structures are needed to bridge these policy silos.

After the release of IPBES regional reports next year, a global assessment building on them will be published in 2019. This will be the first global overview of biodiversity and ecosystem services since the authoritative Millennium Ecosystem Assessment of 2005. It will examine the health of terrestrial, freshwater, and marine ecosystems, and the impact of factors including acidification, rising sea surface temperatures, trade, invasive species, overfishing, pollution, and land use changes.

The success of efforts to reverse unsustainable uses of the world's natural assets will require policymakers to reconsider the value of biodiversity for their people, environments, and economies. But the first step is ensuring that we have the best peer-reviewed knowledge available to make sound decisions; the forthcoming IPBES assessments will move us in that direction.

If the full consequences of climate change are to be addressed in our lifetime, we must recognize that human activity is doing more than just adding a few degrees of temperature to the annual forecast. By early next year, we will have the data on biodiversity and ecosystem services to prove it, and the policy options to change course. (Courtesy Project Syndicate)

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