

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



November 15, 2017

Taking Advantage of Improving Optimism

Among prevailing insecurity and ambiguities about the future, survey shows that Afghan people are more optimistic about the future this year as compared to the previous year. As per the Asia Foundation's 13th annual public opinion survey of the Afghan people, optimism has risen marginally from 29.3 to 32.8 percent. The survey reveals that the reasons for hope among Afghans are due to the rebuilding of the country (51 percent) and improved security (50.6 percent).

Report also finds out that "this year's general increase in reported optimism applies to all ethnic groups, with the exception of Uzbeks. Pashtuns are the most optimistic about the direction of the country (40.6 percent), compared to Tajiks (29.3 percent), and Hazaras (26.2 percent). The proportion of Uzbeks who say the country is moving in the right direction has fallen since last year, from 29.0 percent to 25.8 percent". Though optimism has improved, the reasons remain unknown. Moreover, there are still some considerable concerns about security, economic stability and governance. The report shows that concerns relating to security or crime top the list at 69.5 percent, followed by economic concerns at 39.9 percent, and governance issues at 36.9 percent.

It remains evident that there are many fronts where Afghan government needs to deliver more so that people get rid of difficulties and problem and become more and more confident about the performance of the government. As far as the security of the country is concerned, a lot of work needs to be done. Since Taliban and Daesh insurgents have posed myriads of security challenges in different parts of the country, it has become difficult to keep the country secure. Insofar as the capacities of Afghan forces to guarantee secure life for Afghan people, there are grey patches. Unless there are speedy development in the capacity building, training and professionalism of Afghan forces, the eyebrows will remain tense and the prevailing conditions may thrive.

Furthermore, the political reconciliation with Taliban that is expected to find out some political solution to the issues in the country in order to lead to peace is also suffering from lack of clarity and commitment. There are reports that suggest that talks have restarted between Afghan authorities and Taliban leadership; however, such reports have made headlines on various occasions but that have never resulted in fruitful outcomes. On the other hand, Taliban leadership has not shown readiness for the peace process. In addition, the factions existing within Taliban also differ in their views regarding any peace deal and this makes the process difficult by introducing the intricacy as to whether which faction should be considered as the true representative to Taliban, and what should be done with the other factions who opt to go against any sort of peace process.

Then there is the issue of corruption. In fact, most of the support and assistance that have been provided to Afghanistan for its development and betterment have been gulped by corruption. Many of the other issues that Afghanistan face are directly linked with this issue; as a matter of fact, they are the outcome of this serious problem. Corruption has incapacitated Afghan institutions, denied development in different sectors and disheartens those who have the potential and the skills to bring about positive changes. The incapacity of the Afghan government to provide good governance is another matter of great concern. Good governance relates to the conduct of the public institutions regarding the public affairs in such a way so as to guarantee wellbeing, prosperity and definitely human rights. But instead our public institutions have been dominated by incapacity and dormancy. These institutions have been further adding to the troubles of the common people instead of solving their problems. They have been vehemently dominated by the individuals in authority. The institutionalization process has been very weak and institutions serve the authoritative people on the top of bureaucratic hierarchy.

The real purpose of a democratic system is to reach to the common people of the society and provide them facilities on their doorsteps. Further, the so-called democratic system in our country has not been able to represent the people of Afghanistan as a whole. The diverse Afghan society has not been able to be compensated in the system that has been trying to keep the central government stronger. The political system, wherein more authority should be given to the provinces, can provide better representation to all the ethnic groups in the country and can favor the general will but such a setup has not been appreciated the way it should have been. Even the key institutions like legislature, judiciary and executive have not risen to the task. They, instead of serving the country, seem to be fanning the flames of controversies. The government that should be the leading force towards a democratic setup, itself seems to be running after authority, not democratic principles. In order to address the socio-political and security concerns appropriately and develop better legitimacy and acceptance of the government, there has to be immense efforts made on the part of government and other authoritative institutions in the country. Moreover, to further improve the optimism of the people about the future of the country as a whole, the services must be directed to the issues that are faced by common Afghan people.



Kabul University and Academic Freedom

By Hamid Bamik

Academic freedom is both a "core value and governing principle" of higher education institutions. Its proponents are in this belief that academic places are designed to pave the way for scholars, professors, students, and academic authorities to discuss the most challenging and tough cultural, economic and political issues, and such academic settings must be free from political interventions and extortions. In a broader concept, academic freedom is defined as the freedom of teaching and carrying out scholarly investigations or researches on social, political, cultural and religious matters at universities and colleges without having any kind of panic and fright of being retaliated later by the concerned authorities.

Given the above clarifications regarding academic freedom, how much Kabul University faculty are benefited from academic freedom? How the concept of academic freedom is interpreted and translated in the context of Afghanistan's higher education? What is the chronicle of academic freedom in history of higher education in Afghanistan? To what extent the academic culture of Kabul University is conducive for the discourse of academic freedom? And we can add many more questions in the above list. I know that the above-mentioned questions each can be discussed in a distinct paper per se. In this paper, I will have a critical overview on the idea of academic freedom at Kabul University.

The concept of academic freedom is interpreted in a different fashion in the academic culture of Kabul University, and the real essence of academic freedom does not exist at Kabul University. Generally, administrators, authorities, faculty and, students think that academic freedom means (a) not disrespecting others' ideas, (b) not imposing one's ideas on others, (c) not hurting somebody's religious feelings or mocking them, (d) not discrimination between students in the class, (e) while discussing or talking about an issue, the professors should judge the conclusions impartially not stereotypically. In fact, all the above-mentioned points must be observed even in the absence of academic freedom because those things are pertaining to the mutual understanding of students and instructors, and they are the basic principles of academia. Usually, a wise and professional instructor / student will never say or do something that may regret later. Thus, analysts and observers believe the notion of academic freedom is deeper and more serious than the above issues.

The real construct of academic freedom is manifested when instructors are free (a) to say the truth even if it may hurt the external political circles sentiments or may jeopardize their benefits, (b) to discuss political, financial, cultural, and social issues for the purpose of expanding and enhancing the knowledge and understanding of students without censorship by the administration, and fear of revenge and prosecutions by concerned authorities, (c) to express their opinion impartially and unbiasedly about the matters regardless of how much the matters are contentious or uncontentious, and finally (d) have unconditional academic freedom so that they can carry out their career perfectly and without being afraid of its consequences.

In the above list of components of academic freedom, one point is central, and it underlies the entire composition of academic freedom - that is to talk and write, in other words, to do your duty without being afraid of retaliated. To illustrate this issue further, let me present a highlighted example when I was a student at Kabul University. In 2010, when I was a freshman at Kabul University, College of Education, I was the witness of threatening of instructors by students in my own class. One of my classmates was failed in a subject. Since he belonged to a warlord family, not only he himself warned the instructor but also his father had told our instructor that if such "mistake" occurs again in the future, then you will not be any more at Kabul University. There are myriad such instances at Kabul University, and each of you

may have directly or indirectly experienced such cases if you have done your undergraduate at Kabul University. Our instructor could not do anything against my classmate's exactions and warnings because he neither knew that he had academic freedom no he was prepared for that risk to jeopardize his duty for revenging the student.

The question is here that why my instructor did not react against my classmate's threats. In my mind, the answer of this question lies in the predominance of four serious problems at Kabul University which block the entire discourse of academic freedom. First, these problems take hold at Kabul University because (a) the judicial system is weak, and in some cases corrupt, (b) there is a weak rule of law in Afghanistan, and (c) there are not a lot of active and influential pro-academic freedom and university and college instructors' organizations to defend from the academics in such circumstances. Therefore, the instructors know that in case they act against the drift status quo, they may lose either duty or even their lives.

Second, the intrusion of political cliques among students, faculty, and authorities at Kabul University has disguised the concept of academic freedom. When the instructor in my class could not act against my classmate's threats, because he did not pertain to such political circle while the student did because he had the external support. While at that time, there were many instructors who were supporting and germinating a particular ideology, political movement, religious notions, and acting in the class as they desired, and were not caring about anybody because they had both the support of internal circles and external political groups. When we have such a nepotistic and partisan situation at Kabul University, academic freedom is a prosaic and disposal idea that only can have meaning and importance for writers and its adherents.

Third, lack of academic discourses regarding controversial and challenging social, historical, and political themes at Kabul University weakens the growth of academic freedom. Academic places are famous and well-known for analyzing, conversing, disagreeing, opposing, and solving the hardest political, social, cultural, economic... matters of the society. Unfortunately, at Kabul University both instructors and students do not the rights and to some extent the guts to talk about the hardest issues because the authorities think that holding such discussion in the class may hurt the public mindset about the university. While discussing academically and impartially about the argumentative matters does not hurt the general peace and public tranquility; conversely, it will enrich the social tolerance and acceptance among the people. Moreover, it will strengthen and institutionalize the pillars of academic freedom. While by concealing the truth, we can only keep calm the status quo but cannot cultivate a stable and dynamic social harmony and unity in the society. Again unluckily, the reason of such silent and reticent situation at Kabul University, lies in the absence of academic freedom. The more academic places are vibrant and can challenge the students and faculty, the more they flourish and grow up.

Fourth, in the ideal option and situation, should my instructor have been cognizant that he had the academic freedom, he may have reacted against the student because academic freedom empowers the instructors to claim for their jurisdiction for carrying out their obligations. All and all, in my view, as long as we have the intrusion of political circles among the authorities, students, and faculty at Kabul University, lack of awareness regarding the importance of academic freedom among the faculty, lack of constructive academic debates among the faculty and students about the hard, bitter and challenging issues either past or present, we may not experience the flavor of real ethos of academic freedom at Kabul University.

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Al-Qaeda - A Threat to the Region

By Hujjatullah Zia

With the defeat of the self-styled Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), Al-Qaeda is most likely to emerge stronger than before and fill the vacuum left by ISIL group. Al-Qaeda sought to capitalize on Arab Spring and muddy the water in Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Libya, etc. If Al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden was not killed, he would play as destructive role as ISIL.

It has been unraveled by a journal that how Osama viewed the world around him and reveals his deep interest in the 2011 Arab Spring revolutions unfolding in the months before he was killed in a United States raid. The journal states what bin Laden shared with his family about how to exploit the uprisings, what to make of the rapid changes unfolding in the Arab world and when Al-Qaeda should speak out. "This chaos and the absence of leadership in the revolutions is the best environment to spread Al-Qaeda's thoughts and ideas," bin Laden is quoted as telling his family.

Bin Laden's wife, referred to as Umm Hamza, assures him that a tape he released seven years earlier calling out the rulers of the region as unfit could be one of the major forces behind the Arab Spring protests roiling the region.

The conversations took place between February and April 2011 when uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt had ousted longtime autocratic rulers, touching off protests in Libya, Yemen, Bahrain and Syria. The Middle East was on the cusp of unstoppable change, chaos and turmoil.

On Libya, bin Laden says he believes the uprising "has opened the door for jihadists," as he says, "This is why Gadhafi and his son say that the extremists will come from the sea, which will be an area of operation for Al-Qaeda. This will be the Somalia of the Mediterranean." Still, bin Laden appears reluctant to issue a statement in support of extremists in Libya for fear that if Gadhafi is ousted, the US will try to expand its footprint there.

Bin Laden, who held Saudi citizenship until the early 1990s, imagines that Saudi Arabia would soon feel the "tsunami" of change sweeping the region. He talks about wanting to deliver a message to Saudi youth and Saudi rulers: "The flood is coming and it will lead to a change so there is no need for violence." A journal made all these issues public by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and apparently handwritten by one of Osama bin Laden's daughters.

On the other hand, Osama bin Laden's favorite son Hamza bin Laden urges Muslims in an audio message released recently "to take revenge on the Americans, the murderers of the Shaykh [Osama bin Laden],

specifically on those who participated in this heinous crime." He tells young Muslim men to prepare for a new wave of armed uprisings across the Arab world.

Al-Qaeda has released several audio messages from Hamza, and to mark a recent anniversary of 9/11, Al-Qaeda superimposed a childhood photo of him over a photo of the World Trade Center. Dubbed the 'Crown Prince of Terror', he has purportedly called for terrorist attacks on London, Washington and Paris in an audio message released by Al-Qaeda. He issued another audio message in July 2016, calling for "revenge against the United States".

It is believed that by bringing out bin Laden's son Al-Qaeda is both trying to evoke the family name of bin Laden which still carries much weight for jihadists and at the same time challenging the al-Baghdadi leadership. Hamza bin Laden seeks to organize his father's proponents and exploit their sentiments to continue war and militancy. His video will boost the morale of militant fighters and encourage them to spill the blood of people without hesitation. Perhaps, he intends to fill the vacuum left by Al-Qaeda's strong opponent ISIL group. His father's death seems very rational justification to recruit radical elements and send them to war. However, Hamza has forgotten that his father's death was a revenge for the 9/11 terrorist attacks, which killed three thousand innocent people. Indeed, calling for revenge is very insane of him as his father killed hundreds of people and supported the cruel regime of the Taliban in Afghanistan.

If bin Laden was not killed, he would compete ISIL's leader in shedding the blood of people. Since Al-Qaeda was established earlier, it would surpass ISIL in destabilizing the region. Osama was a great mastermind in terrorist activities with having a bunch of experienced politicians around him. So, after al-Baghdadi, now it will be Al-Qaeda's incumbent leader Ayman al-Zawahiri to destabilize the region. Since Zawahiri lacks the charisma and fame of Osama, he will use Osama's name and fame through his son Hamza Osama. For the same reason, he could not compete with ISIL, either.

The threat of Al-Qaeda must not be downplayed. Hamza's repeated calls for war bespeaks of the fact that Al-Qaeda is preparing a strong attacks against any nation and it will also destabilize Afghanistan. In short, Afghan army and U.S. soldiers in the country will not be immune to its threat. Hence, the Taliban's intensified attacks on the one hand, and Al-Qaeda's offensives on the other hand, will deteriorate the security situation in Afghanistan.

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