

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



November 24, 2015

## Vital Prerequisites to Democracy

Since the downfall of Taliban, we have been chanting the slogans of democracy and striving to form a democratic country but it is important to understand that there are certain conditions which are absolutely necessary for the successful functioning of a democratic government. One of the most important essentials is a constitution. Constitution implies a rule of law rather than of men. Every citizen is granted equal right to pursue happiness, liberty and individuality, enshrined in the constitution, must be applied with letter and spirit, seeing as it curbs despotic tendencies of the rulers and safeguards the rights of the people. It ensures that there is no arbitrariness in governing people and members belonging to different groups are given an equal treatment.

No two human beings can ever think alike, it is natural to come across dissenting opinions at every step, in every field. True democratic spirit lies in overcoming dissent through discussion and persuasion and not through coercion.

Democracy requires not merely an absence of ignorance but also that the citizens are adequately educated. Proper education will produce a wise leadership and a vigilant public and 'Eternal vigilance is the price of democracy'. If knowledge remains scanty, fragmentary and confined to narrow circles and if the mass of humanity remains steeped in ignorance and error, there can be no prospects for the success of democracy. Education makes citizens vigilant and also gives them the boldness to criticize government measures which are ill-conceived or harmful. In fact, education produces wise leadership and an enlightened and alert public.

A free and fair press is another vital necessity for democracy to flourish. It ventilates public opinion and enables the government to frame policies in the interests of the masses.

The Media acts as a kind of liaison between the government and the people. It acquaints the people with the policy and principles of the government. At the same time, it reflects the public reaction to this policy and thus enables the government to modify it. Since it gives such extensive publicity to the movements of the ministers and other higher-ups, it exercises a very sobering influence on them. It does not let them forget that they are in office as the representatives of the people to whom they are finally answerable. It keeps a powerful check on the corruption and tyranny of the government. It is perhaps this aspect of a newspaper's function that prompted Thomas Jefferson to remark, "Were it left to me to decide whether we should have a government without newspapers or newspapers without a government, I should not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter".

For the health and efficiency of a democracy, an effective, vigilant and working opposition is indispensable. Strong opposition exercises a healthy restraint on the ruling party and prevents it from subjecting the people to arbitrary and despotic rule. No free large country has been without political parties. None has shown how a representative government could efficiently work in the absence of strong political parties. Effective opposition saves a country from turmoil; it safeguards it from coup d'état. If the party in power neglects public welfare, the voters can oust it and give power to the opposition.

A conflict of ideas is anytime better than a clash of arms. Without opposition the state has no elasticity, no true self determination. A constant probe into the activities of the government by the opposition keeps the government vigilant and prevents it from being arbitrary.

Legislative excellence is promoted by a recognized opposition. Good legislation is possible only when the law is discussed thread-bare before it enters the law book. Effective opposition also makes possible active and intelligent participation of public in the affairs of the government. Party campaigns are educational campaigns.

Propaganda through press, public meetings and pamphlets imparts political education to the masses and awakens them to their responsibility, opposition keeps a nation's mind alive as the rise and fall of the sweeping tide freshen the water of long ocean inlets. Thus the public business suffers a great deal and the interest of the nation is neglected. Disagreements keep the public divided into hostile camps. The spirit of rivalry and animosity pollutes the social life in the country.

A sense of responsibility and a desire to give topmost priority to public interest against pen or party interest would certainly boost its image in the public eye. On the contrary, lack of discipline and constructive approach inevitably leads to instable confusion and reversal of economic progress.

It is now quite a few years since we embarked upon a democratic experiment. Today, when we make an appraisal of our democracy, we find it still lacking in certain important requisites. Majority of our people are still illiterate. Glaring disparities between the rich and the poor not only persist but have become accentuated. There is no economic security; food is scarce, poverty appalling and unemployment rampant. Ethnicity and class exclusiveness still haunts our minds! Provincial and linguistic differences still create distrust and bitterness. The masses also lack civic probity. Corrupt and dishonest administration is eating into the very vitals of our democracy.

Democracy can only flourish in our country, given that the true essence of democratic values and culture, is understood, implemented and practiced devoid of discretion of any sort. Accordingly democratization of society leads to prosperous Afghanistan.

## Militants Persist in Sectarianism

By Hujjatullah Zia

According to reports, masked gunmen stormed four buses on a highway in Zabul province abducting a dozen people from a minority group. "The gunmen stopped buses and kidnapped passengers. No one has claimed responsibility for it. However, our investigations are under way," the Zabul police chief Mirwais Noorzai is cited as saying. The kidnappers were said to speak local language.

It is believed that with the emergence of self-styled Islamic State of Iraq and Levant (ISIL) group, the sectarian violence have mounted to a great extent in Afghanistan. The Shia Muslims have frequently fell victim to the IS's fundamental ideology. This month, seven Hazara, from Jaghori district of Ghazni province, were found dead in Zabul after being abducted in neighboring Ghazni province in February. They, including two women and a child, were beheaded with razor wire.

The killings sparked demonstrations nationwide, including in the capital Kabul, where tens of thousands of people demanded from the government to improve security across the country. The demonstrators expressed anger over the indiscriminate killing of seven innocent civilians. They accused the government of negligence, not only in this latest incident but in a series of horrific events since February 23, when 30 men were taken hostage by a group of fighters.

Nicholas Haysom, head of UNAMA, said, "The deliberate murder of civilian hostages, including women and children, is particularly abhorrent."

Nadir Naim, an Afghan politician writes regarding the past abductees as, "This is not a homegrown incident; it was most likely carried out by non-Afghans. When the 19 Hazara hostages were finally released on May 11, I had the privilege of talking to some of them upon their return to Kabul. They told me that the people who held them captive were non-Afghans and could not speak any of our main languages, eg, Dari or Pashto. The hostages believed that they were of Uzbek origin."

Condemning the ISIL and its recent attack in Paris, a former religious adviser to Osama bin Laden, Abu Hafis al-Mauritani has said that that ISIL has "misunderstood" Islam, just as people in the West might "misunderstand Christianity". He is cited as saying, "Islam forbids the killing of innocent people, regardless of whether they are Muslims or non Muslims. Killing civilians and innocent people ... is unacceptable and has nothing to do with jihad." He also accused ISIL's recruitment methods, citing political and not religious grievances for the group's rise. Rejecting Baghdadi's claim to be the leader of all Muslims, Mauritani says that ISIL fails to meet the conditions and requirements of a caliphate and is a "fruit" of the US-led occupation of Iraq.

Mauritani left al-Qaeda in August 2001 after disagreeing with bin Laden's decision to target civilians.

Civilian casualty is a protracted challenge in Afghani-

stan which has a deep historical root. Similarly, during the Taliban's regime Afghan nation was targeted indiscriminately and in case of war, the humanitarian law was violated flagrantly - without a national or international court to bring the perpetrators to justice. However, with the downfall of the Taliban's regime, the ragtag militants were reorganized and embarked on terrorist attacks killing thousands of civilians and Afghan and foreign soldiers under a radical ideology. With the Taliban's spring offensive and ISIL's foothold in Afghanistan, the non-combatants are sacrificed more than ever before.

President Muhammad Ashraf Ghani has said that the Taliban and ISIL is a real threat for Afghanistan and for the region. "The Taliban is a real threat. This is not a national issue only for Afghans. Afghan and Pakistani Taliban have changed into a threat for South Asian countries," he is quoted as saying. Pointing to recent insurgent attacks in Mali, Beirut, Istanbul and Paris, Ghani said the world is encountered with another type of insurgency - that of ISIL. He asserted, "The biggest threat we are faced with is from terrorists that launched attacks in Paris and Istanbul. We are experiencing the biggest type of threat in Afghanistan which is the new terrorist group (ISIL)."

It is self-explanatory that a spate of terrorist attacks around the world shows that it has changed into a global threat. Factually, the terrorists are a vehicle for political monsters who pursue their own interests behind the smoke-screen. In other words, the real players plan the geo-political wars to fish in the troubled water. Stoking sectarian violence in Afghanistan is utterly systematic and preplanned.

There seem mainly two reasons behind fueling sectarian tensions in Afghanistan: to dismantle the people of different ethnicity and therefore muddy the water in the country and secondly, to defame the National Unity Government (NUG) and channel the public mistrusts to Ghani's administration. I believe that a real ideologue group will not target civilians, mainly women and children, without an iota of mercy and therefore, the perpetrators are no more than mercenary fighters who fight for financial interests.

Fueling sectarianism is a potential threat for Afghanistan and will provoke the public anger if the officials do not adopt effective measures to curb the issue. Besides economic and social challenges in NUG, insecurity is a major problem and civilian casualty has increased in the new administration. In addition, sectarian violence is a new phenomenon the militants have ushered in.

However, there is no clear strategy from the government to tackle this crisis. So, the government has to establish tight security on Afghan-Pak's porous border and reinforce the Afghan soldiers to counter terrorism with high morale.

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## We Are At War

By Dominique Moisi

Ever since the terrorist attacks in January on the satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo and a kosher supermarket, Parisians knew that barbarism lurked around the corner, and that it would strike again. But it is one thing to know something, to anticipate it, and another to be confronted with the grim reality. On Friday night, reality struck us with a vengeance. We are at war. It would be wrong - even dangerous - not to admit it. And to win will require clarity, unity, and firmness.

Clarity of analysis is what we now need the most. We barely know our enemy, except for the intensity of his hatred and the depth of his cruelty. To understand his strategy, we must recognize him for what he is: an intelligent - and, in his own way, rational - adversary. For too long, we have despised and underestimated him. It is urgent that we now change course. In the last few weeks, the Islamic State's strategy of terror has brought death to the streets of Ankara, Beirut, and Paris, and to the skies over Sinai. The identity of the victims leaves no doubt about the message. "Kurds, Russians, Lebanese Shia, French: You attack us, so we will kill you."

The timing of the attacks is as revealing as the targets' nationality. The more the Islamic State is defeated on the ground and loses control of territory in Syria and Iraq, the more it is tempted to externalize the war to deter further intervention. The synchronized attacks in Paris, for example, coincided with the Islamic State's loss of the Iraqi city of Sinjar.

Of course, the terrorist cell that struck Paris was not created in the wake of the Islamic State's recent battlefield losses. It was already in place, waiting to be activated (as others may be). That demonstrates the Islamic State's tactical flexibility, not to mention the availability of people willing to commit suicide. If the Islamic State chose this time, in Paris, to target people who are not satirists, policemen, or Jews, it is precisely because their "ordinariness" left them unprotected. This time, the attackers chose "quantity" over "quality" (if one may be pardoned for such a crude formulation). The goal was to kill as many people as possible.

This strategy is possible because the territory controlled by the Islamic State provides a sanctuary and training ground. The self-proclaimed caliphate's territories represent for the group what Taliban-controlled Afghanistan meant for Al Qa-

eda in the 1990s.

It is imperative to regain control of this territory. And destroying the Islamic State's "provinces" in Libya, Sinai, and elsewhere must become the number one priority of the international community.

Beyond analytical clarity, there is a need for unity, beginning in France, where citizens would reject their political class were its members to continue to behave divisively at such an obvious historic turning point.

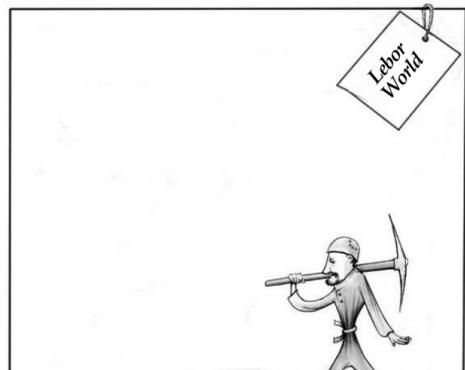
Unity must also be achieved within Europe. We are repeatedly told that Europe is in the midst of an identity crisis, in need of some new project. Well, now Europe has found one. To be European means to confront together the scourge of barbarism, to defend our values, our way of life, and our way of living together, despite our differences.

Unity is also required of the Western world as a whole. President Barack Obama's statement after the Paris attacks demonstrates that what unites Europe and the United States is much more significant than what divides us. We are in the same boat, faced with the same enemy. And this sense of unity must go beyond the European and Western world, because the Islamic State threatens countries such as Iran and Russia, not to mention Turkey, as much - if not more - than it does the West. Of course, we must be realists. Our alliance of circumstance with these countries will not overcome all problems between them and us. So, beyond clarity and unity, we need firmness, both in confronting the threat of ISIS and in defending our values, especially adherence to the rule of law.

The Islamic State expects from us a combination of cowardice and overreaction. Its ultimate ambition is to provoke a clash of civilizations between the West and the Muslim world. We must not fall prey to that strategy.

But clarity comes first. When Paris is attacked as it was last Friday, one must speak of war. No one wants to repeat the errors of the US under President George W. Bush; but to use those errors as an alibi to avoid confronting the world as it is would merely be an error of a different sort. Europe's response must be tough, but it must not deviate from the rule of law. We are, after all, engaged in a political battle with the Islamic State, one in which our love of life must prevail over their love of death. (Courtesy Project Syndicate)

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