

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



November 29, 2016

Accountability

Having been provided with enormous amount since 2001, Afghan government's sincere efforts seemed infinitesimal if not none, for not having taken any sufficient proportional step to turn the fate of people. As an ordinary citizen, everybody has the right to information and claims equal rights to hold his elected representative accountable on these grounds. The blinding illiteracy has left people ignorant of their fundamental rights and eased public officials at making them fools. How many welfare tasks are undertaken, out of aforementioned sum? How many hospitals, educational institutes and vocational training centers are built across the length? Has the government tried to meet the agreed terms and conditions? The absence of proper control mechanism, check and balance and accountability made governmental institutes operate at will. To check such ill-conducts institutions of high moral and prestige should be created that could exercise strict accountability of public officials.

To be accountable is to be answerable for one's conduct in respect to obligation fulfilled or unfulfilled. Accountability is the obligation of an individual to keep his superior informed of his use of authority and accomplishment of assigned tasks. Accountability grows out of responsibility and goes hand in hand with it. A person who is responsible for results must recognize that he will be judged by the quality of his performance. Just as responsibility is a derivative of authority, accountability is a derivative of responsibility. It is the obligation to perform assigned tasks and the reporting of performance. Accountability refers to the obligation of an individual to report formally to his superior for the proper discharge of his responsibility.

It is the answerability of a subordinate to render an account of his activities to his superior. The person who accepts responsibility is accountable for the performance of the assigned duties. It makes responsibility meaningful and completes the process of delegation. Responsibility is stated in terms of work done, while accountability is stated in terms of performance. The delegated authority, the assumed responsibility is an imposed accountability. Authority flows downward while accountability for performance flows upward. Responsibility arises from authority while accountability is derived from responsibility. Authority means some autonomy while accountability is meant to regulate autonomy. Authority is the medium for creating responsibility while accountability is a means of fulfilling responsibility.

Political accountability is constraint placed on the behavior of public officials by organizations and constituencies with the power to apply sanctions on them. As political accountability increases, the costs to public officials of taking decisions that benefit their private interests at the expense of the broader public interest also increase, thus working as a deterrent to corrupt practices. Accountability rests largely on the effectiveness of the sanctions and the capacity of institutions to monitor the actions, decisions, and private interests of public officials. Political accountability limits the use and sanctions the abuse of political power. Public exposure is necessary but not sufficient to limit or sanction the abuse of power.

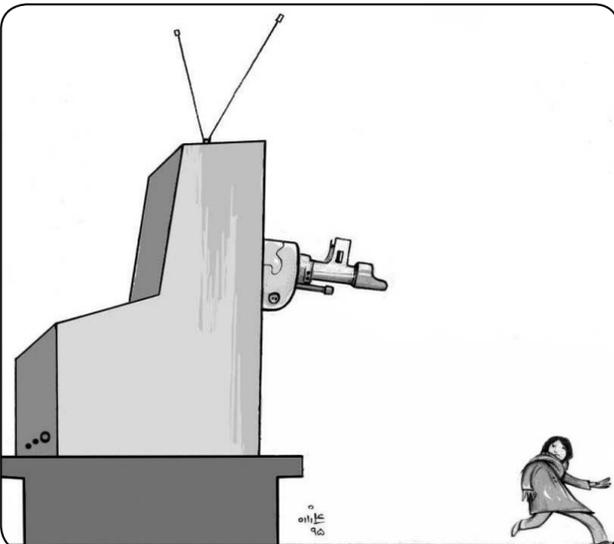
Actors and institutions that promote accountability attempt to bind the exercise of power to specific benchmark standards. It can be promoted through both state and non-state institutions, and pro-accountability outcomes often depend on mutually reinforcing interactions between the two. The liability assumed by those exercising authority to account for the manner in which they have fulfilled responsibilities entrusted to them, a liability ultimately to the Afghan people owed by Parliament, by the government and thus, every governmental department and agency.

Without it, power in the hands of the wrong individual or group could be abused to the extent where laws and policies could be formulated which would undermine the integrity of the Afghan population. Legitimate, political power must be properly controlled and regulated through accountable measures; otherwise social, political, and economic chaos could ensue. Unfortunately, Afghanistan does not possess such legal measures to limit the power of those who have it, at least on the surface.

Transparency via public scrutiny has proven to be one of the most powerful forms of monitoring public officials. A number of measures can foster such transparency: opening sessions of the parliament, government, and the courts to the public; registering lobbying activities; and publishing the voting records of parliamentarians, annual reports of government bodies, trial records, and the decisions of judges. There is a range of legal instruments as well as agency-specific rules, which can be effective in deterring corrupt behavior. Ethical codes, regulations on lobbying, disciplinary committees, prohibitions on and disclosure of conflict of interest, including the receipt of gifts and other benefits received from private resources, asset declaration laws, procurement laws and party financing laws are amongst the most prominent ones. Freedom of information laws, whereby citizens can demand the disclosure of information regarding government activities and a whistle-blower protection law in order to encourage the reporting of corruption cases can further reinforce the impact of increased transparency on accountability.

To be fully effective, however, such laws need oversight and implementation bodies. Afghanistan rudimentarily needs these law formulated and enacted with soul and spirit. Working in conformation with each other the governmental institutions can keep the conduct of public officials in checks to know either they are functioning in accordance to rule of business prescribed by constitution or detracted.

Being negligent to the dire need of a mechanism of answerability the government might not earn prosperity for the country in the long term.



We are as strong as we are literate

By Mohammad Zahir Akbari

Literacy is the ability to read, view, write, design, speak and listen in a way that allows communicating effectively. The importance of literacy lies not just in the ability to read and write, but rather in a person's capacity to apply these skills to effectively connect, interpret and discern the intricacies of the world in which they live. According to UNESCO reports, over 84 percent of the world's adults are now literate while Afghanistan is in the midst of the lowest literacy rate in the world. While Literacy has been recognized as essential traits to developing a strong sense of well-being and citizenship; the citizens who have developed strong reading skills can easily overcome challenges and have a healthier self-image. They can become lifelong learners and sought-after employees. As aforementioned, Afghanistan has one of the lowest literacy rates in the world, estimated about 31% of the adult population (over 15 years of age); female literacy levels are on average 17%, with high variation, indicating a strong geographical and gender divide. The highest female literacy rate, for instance is 34.7%, found in the capital, Kabul, while rate as low as 1.6% is found in two southern provinces of the country. Male literacy rates average about 45%, again with high variation. The highest male literacy rates are in Kabul, at 68%, while the lowest is found in Helmand, at 41%.

This high variation between male and female literacy rate, is due to combination of factors, such as traditional norm of women not attending school and spending time managing the household, security problems in travelling to classes, and sometimes family not allowing women to attend classes. The disparity in urban and rural areas in adult education rate is due to several factors as well, including security problems, centralized system of education like: lack of schools universities in remote areas, long walking distance to schools, and low demand for literacy in particular for women literacy due to traditional barriers. It should be clear that there is no real Islamic barriers regarding education but this is responsibility of religious scholars to fight against superstitious social customs. According to saying of Prophet Mohammad (PBUH), seeking knowledge is compulsory for all Muslims including men and women; also the Holy Quran says about knowledge: "Never night and day is same." Night means a person who does not have an education, because night is dark and if we wake in the dark we will fall. But in daylight we will see and avoid mistakes. A person who does not have education is like a person who cannot see. Education is like glasses. If we do not have education, how can we know what is right and what is wrong? How can we know about our culture and religion? If we do not have education, we must rely on people from other countries to help us. In fact, Countries are like a family, and if we do not have education we are like a five-year old child. We need someone to help us. Maybe they will – but only

for one day, two days, three days. Not forever.

The power of literacy can be stated at two levels: National and Individual. At the national level, a literate population is required to build a nation with strong social, economic and political foundations. Literacy is an important starting point that brings awareness in people to work towards a better living. It helps them to break free of shackles of ignorance, avoid getting manipulated, and being left out of the mainstream. At an individual level, the increased confidence of every newly literate person to achieve the impossible bears heartwarming testimony to the power of literacy. Researchers found that children who received more attention and nurturing at home tended to have higher IQs. Children who were spoken to more achieved higher IQ results at age three and performed better in school at ages nine and ten. And while the amount of talking parents did with their children made a difference, one researcher found that language delivered by television, audio book, Internet, or Smartphone did not produce the same results as personal interaction, no matter how educational the content. When we invest in learning and literacy, we invest in human dignity, development and peace.

Literacy is the key for acquiring knowledge, interpersonal skills, expertise and the ability to live together in community – all skills that are the foundations of modern society. Especially in our day, the internet enables endless educational possibilities, with constantly evolving information streams. By promoting literacy, we can help millions of people improve their work with new blessing of advanced technologies and write their own chapter of opportunity in their lives and our common future. Also strong literacy skills are a key tool used when children discern and interpret information, enabling them to utilize the internet to its full potential and making sure that the inevitable 'digital footprint' that children will leave, is one that is safe, appropriate, and reflective of their true self.

Finally, we are as strong as we are literate as weak as illiterate. Education must be one of the top priorities in terms of allocating national budget and international assistance. Governments should not be under pressure to show tangible and quick results for money spent. Reforming curriculums, revising textbooks and changing teacher certification systems just are not as romantic as a ribbon-cutting ceremony for a new brick schoolhouse.

A quality basic education system that serves girls and boys equitably represents Afghanistan's best chance of steering its way out of the storm that has raged there for more than three decades. Schools that have the tools they need to nurture critical thinking, exposure to big ideas and the creativity to generate new big ideas will yield young minds capable of transforming the future of their country.

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Sustaining the Trump Rally

By Mohamed A. El-Erian

Donald Trump's victory in the United States' presidential election surprised most of the world. But the president-elect is not finished defying expectations. Contrary to the predictions of many experts, stock markets have rallied strongly since his victory, with the three major US indices reaching record highs while the dollar has soared. Explaining these unexpected responses could provide a glimpse of what the next few months have in store for markets.

Before the election, most analysts predicted that a Trump win would trigger a large stock-market selloff and a rush into low-risk government bonds. And, indeed, when the results began rolling in, that is what happened, beginning with Trump's dramatic victory in Florida and gaining traction as his lead in the Electoral College grew. By the time that lead appeared insurmountable, the Dow Jones index of US stocks had fallen by 800 points, and the broader S&P 500 was "limit down." Moreover, the dollar began to slide, and a flight to quality in US Treasury markets caused bond yields to plummet.

But market pessimism did not last long. Soon after the president-elect delivered his acceptance speech in New York, at nearly 3 a.m. Eastern Standard Time, stocks began to rally – and have ever since, helping to boost risk assets around the world. With capital pouring into the US, the dollar strengthened to levels not seen for some 13 years.

In addition, many investors have abandoned the safety of government bonds, triggering a spike in interest rates even more pronounced than during the 2013 "taper tantrum" that followed former US Federal Reserve Chair Ben Bernanke's statement that the Fed intended to wind down its liquidity support. Markets are now all but certain that the Fed will pursue an interest-rate hike next month.

The most likely explanation for the turnaround lies in Trump's post-election remarks, which have focused largely on his economic agenda's pro-growth features, such as deregulation, corporate-tax reform, and infrastructure spending. Since the election, Trump has mostly avoided talking about his trade-protectionist campaign pledges, such as imposing punishing tariffs on China and Mexico, dismantling the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), and rescinding America's bilateral trade agreement with South Korea. Though he has reiterated his pledge to withdraw from the Trans-Pacific Partnership, that deal had not yet been ratified, anyway. And he has also chosen not to repeat his criticisms of the Fed and its leadership.

This shift in focus has convinced markets that Trump may well decide not to follow through on the more growth-damaging measures he suggested during his campaign. Trump has become far more conciliatory as well, telling the New York Times that he did not want to "hurt the Clintons" by appointing a special prosecutor to investigate his former opponent. Similarly, after years of criticizing President Barack Obama, Trump has spoken positively – even glowingly – about him.

Similar tendencies can be seen in Trump's approaches to his Re-

publican campaign opponents, including House Speaker Paul Ryan and one of Trump's most outspoken Republican detractors, former Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney. Given that Republicans won a majority in both houses of Congress and gained further ground at the state level, Trump's détente with the party establishment bodes well for the enactment of his pro-growth policies.

Of course, to make faster and more inclusive growth a reality, thereby validating exuberant markets, more will be needed – namely, careful design, broad political buy-in, and sustained implementation. Moreover, the team that will oversee that process has yet to be selected; like other appointees, its members could well face long vetting processes and, in some cases, confirmation challenges in the Senate.

Once the team is in place, its members will need to figure out how to make Trump's plans work for an economy that has – by necessity, not choice – been excessively reliant on unconventional monetary policies. The plan must recognize that, during this protracted period of monetary expansion, both financial markets and resource-allocation have been distorted, worsening wealth inequality. The good news is that the incoming administration can draw on measures that were formulated during Obama's tenure, but which gained little traction because of the highly polarized and dysfunctional congressional politics that characterized most of Obama's eight years in office. Such measures address imperatives such as infrastructure investment, tax reform, and job creation. But, of course, the US does not exist in a vacuum. External challenges must also be overcome – or, at least, contained – if the president-elect is to fulfill markets' expectations. Developments in Europe, which faces a series of potentially destabilizing political events in the next few months, will be particularly consequential.

Italy is about to hold a constitutional referendum that could result in the fall of Prime Minister Matteo Renzi's government. The United Kingdom has to produce a plan to guide a credible and orderly Brexit process. In France, the far-right National Front's Marine Le Pen will attempt to turn the upcoming presidential election into another anti-establishment upset. And, in Germany, Chancellor Angela Merkel will try to position herself to win another term next fall, in an environment that has been tripping up traditional politicians. Notwithstanding the risk of instability in Europe, Trump is in a position not just to help boost growth in the US, but also to make it more inclusive. By pursuing a Congress-supported pivot toward a more comprehensive economic-policy stance, his administration's policy surge could also spur the private sector to begin using its large amounts of cash not for short-term financial engineering, but for growth-enhancing investments in plant, equipment, and people. If the economic frustration that drove so many Americans to vote for Trump is to be dissipated during his presidency, and if the market gains are to be validated and augmented, this prospect must become a reality. (Courtesy Project Syndicate)

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