

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



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Moderate Approach Should be Valued

Human beings, in their quest to understand the world and different phenomena in it, have gained knowledge and developed ideologies. These ideologies have, without any doubt, assisted them in understanding the challenging questions to a certain extent and similarly provided them an understanding of the happenings, incidents and changes. Nonetheless, these ideologies, on certain occasions, have also divided human beings. Some consider the difference in ideologies among different nations and groups of people as necessary, as they see it as the factor which would ultimately define the identity of the social and political groups and the development of different cultures and traditions. Others even claim this to be inevitable and the arguments they have are quite convincing as they consider the human natures to be different and even contradicting.

However, the point of consideration is, "Where have the distinction and differentiation in ideologies led human beings?" Has it brought them to more bliss and contentment or more conflicts and wars?

It is important to note that it is determined by social and political circumstances that the ideologies formed in different societies by different groups should be different. The problem is not at all to be different; even every individual human being is different from others. The difference in ideologies, in fact, may give rise to a variety of social groups with variety of social and cultural practices. Nevertheless, the problem arises when the ideologies turn extreme; when only one's or a group's own ideology becomes true and all the other ideologies become false; and when it becomes the responsibility of the follower of one ideology to change ideas of the followers of other ideologies, forcefully. At that point, such a follower becomes an extremist.

Extremism even convinces people to adopt hostility in the defense of their ideology or the defeat of the others. The circumstances show that it has persuaded its holders to take the responsibility of correcting others for they are absurd and must be led to the right direction.

It is important to note that extremism cannot be related to a single ideology, as is mostly depicted in modern times. Currently it has become a fad to link extremism with Islam and Muslims. However, it would be better to note that extremism itself is not an ideology; rather it is the frame of reference through which any religion or ideology is perceived that generates extremism.

If Muslims are extremists, there are certain Hindus, Sikhs and Christians as well, who are extremist. In addition it is not very strange to experience extremist atheists in today's society. Even atheists, who do not believe in any religion, can turn belligerent and even fierce in defense of their ideology. Then there are many believers in modern political ideologies who are extremists. Hence, it can be safely said that extremism is not the content of an ideology rather it is the conception of the content and its impacts over human psychology and behavior and eventually his responses.

It can be easily observed in today's world that how extremism has turned people violent and even terrorist. The example of our own country Afghanistan can be discussed here without any hesitation.

The terrorists who have been fighting in Afghanistan are mostly the extremists who believe their religious beliefs to be final and the best, while believe others' as meaningless and worth destruction. Therefore, what they have been doing is evident from the series of their tyrannies wherein they kill innocent people through indiscriminate bombings and shootings. Now realize the concept of suicide attack. A suicide attacker is basically a person who believes extremely in a particular ideology and in the falseness of others so much that he becomes ready to blow up himself in order to kill others. This is what extremism can teach people; therefore, it is necessary that human beings must stop being extremists and adopt moderation before it is too late.

Moderate approach, in fact, is the best approach to adopt in pursuance of an ideology. Moderation teaches tolerance and cooperation. People with moderate ideology tend to accept others with all their differences and respect them as well. It does not mean to forget one's own identity and mix up with others in order to lose oneself. It basically means valuing the heterogeneity and honoring the basic law of nature that people and groups of people are different and they have different perceptions, beliefs and practices. The modern world is a world that has shrunk because of the advancement of science and technology.

People are now closer to each other - as the distances have shrunk because of different means of communication and transportation, different religions and cultures have come closer to one another. It is the time when they have fully come to know about their differences and in certain cases that knowledge has led to conflicts and wars.

Therefore, it is better for all the human beings to adopt a moderate approach and try to understand each other instead of abhorring without any reason. Moderation would definitely lead them to find out the similarities among one another instead of finding out the differences and politicizing them.

They would be able afterwards to make further developments on the same line and at the end can bind into a single chain of humanity.

Afghanistan: From Land Lock to Land Link

By Mohammad Zahir Akbari

The railway running 85 km from Atamyrat, Turkmenistan to the Ymamnazar border crossing point and 3 km towards Afghanistan's border facilities at Akina was officially opened by Turkmenistan's President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov and President Ashraf Ghani in a ceremony on November 28, 2016.

Berdymukhamedov said: "the project is written in golden letters in the history of our brotherly nations." He added that the terminal could hold up to 500 tons of commodities and could play a key role for oil traders. But if the link is completed, both Kyrgyzstan and China have expressed interest in connecting to the railway, which could have a powerful influence on a landlocked region that has little transport infrastructure. President Ashraf Ghani thanked Turkmenistan for its support in promoting stability in the country. He said Turkmenistan had given "the gift of trust in the future of Afghanistan". "In the past two years, the esteemed president of Turkmenistan decided to make investments of millions and billions of dollars in a stable Afghanistan," He added, the opening of the railway is an important step in strengthening relations between the two nations, and in promoting regional economic co-operation in Asian countries.

Initial discussions for the railway project began in 2008, and a framework agreement was signed when Afghanistan's former President Hamid Karzai had visited Ashgabat in May 2011. As located in heart of Asian Countries, Afghanistan has indigenous capabilities for railway construction, and Turkmenistan agreed to take on responsibility for surveying, designing and constructing the entire route, with the section within Afghanistan to be considered as a donation to the country. Construction was launched by the presidents of Turkmenistan, Afghanistan and Tajikistan with an elaborate ceremony in Atamyrat on June 05, 2013. The project weighed down with concerns about security in Afghanistan that prompted key backer the Asian Development Bank to suspend support for it last year. Neither Tajikistan nor Afghanistan has yet built their sections in the route. Tajikistan has said it will not begin work on its own section while Afghanistan remains embroiled in some of the worst fighting the country has seen since the US-led international intervention in 2001. Should the link be completed, another Central Asian nation, Kyrgyzstan, and the region's top trade partner China have both expressed interest in linking up to the railway in the future.

A great deal of potential has always existed in Afghanistan-Turkmenistan relations. Turkmenistan has the fourth largest gas reserves and has been actively on the lookout to build transportation routes to large markets and the route through Afghanistan has been the most feasible and economical. The rise of India as an economic giant and its increasing energy needs make Turkmenistan and Central Asia energy markets of choice for that country and also China. The Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India

pipeline (TAPI) has been one of the most important regional initiatives to be undertaken by these regional countries. The agreement to build the pipeline to transport Turkmen gas to Afghanistan and Pakistan and thereafter to India was signed in 2010. In addition, Afghanistan depends on Turkmenistan for meeting a large part of the country's electricity needs. At present, Afghanistan imports more than 320 million kilowatt hours of electricity every year from Turkmenistan.

The Afghan government has envisaged Afghanistan to change from dependent land-lock country to a land-link and bridging state by opening new transit routes. Earlier in September, the first ever cargo from China arrived on Afghan soil through the Hairston port. The railway line between Iran and Herat was also inaugurated in September this year. The railway line will be established from Iran to Ghoryan district and will further go towards Zindjan district and Herat Airport. Afghanistan also finalized the deal with Iran and India on the Chabahar Port. Turkmenistan and Afghanistan are also participants in an ambitious \$10 billion pipeline plan to send Turkmen gas to Pakistan and India.

The geographical uniqueness of Afghanistan is that it borders with six countries and also has river ports. Very few countries of the world have this kind of strategic opportunity. From this point of view, Afghanistan has tremendous potential to develop its economy. But economic development cannot be achieved without a sound transport infrastructure, in which regard Afghanistan was very deficient and dependent.

The country needs to develop new road and rail infrastructures and also strengthen the existing one. The border countries have business interests not only with Afghanistan but also among themselves. If the border countries want to establish ground connectivity between them, they are obliged to operate through Afghanistan. So development of transport infrastructure in Afghanistan is not only important for its own economy, but also for the neighboring countries as well. The CAREC has been formed of countries including Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, People's Republic of China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Mongolia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan to develop ground connectivity through six corridors for the entire region. The Project is a part of Transport Strategy and Action Plan agreed under the CAREC program. These transcontinental corridors are expected to transport 20-30 million tons of cargo in total each year.

In addition, Afghanistan has potential to develop its tourism sector but currently the internal situation does not favor in this regard. As much as the land link programs become operational, firstly internal and eventually external tourism will develop in the country. Tourism will not only boost the economy of the country, but will also help normalization of the internal situation.

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A New Trilateral Talk for Peace

By Hujjatullah Zia

With the Taliban's escalated militancy and high graph of combatant and non-combatant fatalities, the negotiation of peace between Afghanistan and the Taliban is still believed to break the stalemate. Mullah Haibatullah Akhundzada, the Taliban's radical leader, seems to carry more weight than his predecessor since his appointment was not followed by a serious conflict as Mansour's did. Mansour refused to hold talks calling it "enemy's propaganda" and spearheaded two deadly attacks namely "spring offensive" and "Omari Operation" in Afghanistan. During his leadership, Afghan civilians sustained heavy casualties and hopes for peace talks shattered among the public. All previous initiatives to seek a political solution to the Afghan conflict have made little or no progress in the past. Pakistan, which is seen as key to the future of Afghanistan, brokered the first-ever direct talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban in July 2015. But the process was scuttled after the confirmation of the death of Taliban Supreme leader Mullah Omar. In fact, Pakistan used coercion, 'diplomatic' pressure and persuasion by its proxies within the movement to achieve the limited goal of the Murree meeting.

These achievements were unlikely to last or contribute to the ultimate goal - a political settlement. An authentic change of mind in as fragile a process as peace-making has to come from within the Taliban movement itself, ideally through its own mechanisms of deliberations and policy-making. It is believed that if the Murree meeting had been a natural outgrowth of the Taliban's internal policy-making, the movement would have most likely made sure all the various branches had been briefed. The Taliban would have taken measures before going into formal talks with the government. The most important would have been a thorough internal discussion with officials on the ground and making sure the talks were not portrayed as dictated by an external force, especially Pakistan.

Six months later, another initiative was announced involving Pakistan, Afghanistan, the US and China established to make renewed efforts for direct talks between the Ghani administration and the Afghan Taliban. The group, which was formed in December last year, was all but dead after the killing of Afghan Taliban chief Mullah Akhtar Mansoor in a US drone strike in Balochistan near the Afghan border in July this year. His radical ideology and indiscriminate attacks against the National Unity Government (NUG) was the main reason behind his death. Calling him an obstacle before the talks, the US drone targeted him to facilitate the peace negotiation. His death, however, marred the relation among the Quadrilateral Coordination Group (QCG) as Pakistan called it violation of territorial integrity.

Now, Haibatullah is playing his role. He seeks to gain the charis-

ma of Mullah Muhammad Omar through refusing to represent in the media or be pictured. This role will give him two positive results: First, he will be held in greater respect among the Taliban's radical fighters and carry much weight for them. Secondly, he intends to be safer and avoid being fated to Mansour's destiny.

Sustaining heavy casualties despite the peace talks discourse; Afghan nation feels no hope for a fruitful talks anymore and deems it a political game. However, it is said that Russia will host first-ever trilateral talks involving Pakistan and China next month in an effort to crack the Afghan conundrum. It will be discussed, in the meeting, how to bring an end to the long running conflict in Afghanistan and prevent groups such as the self-styled Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) from gaining a foothold in the war-torn country. "The deteriorating security situation in Afghanistan has raised concerns about the spillover effect due to the presence of non-state actors and other elements there," Pakistan's Foreign Office spokesperson Nafees Zakaria is cited as saying. The 'other elements' is in fact a reference to certain regional and international powers which Pakistan, Russia and China fear might eventually use the Afghan situation to achieve their larger objectives in the region. That is why the broader context of the gathering in Moscow in the first week of December is the transformation in relationship taking place among the major international players.

In September, at the sidelines of UN General Assembly session in New York, Afghanistan, the United States and India held a first-ever trilateral meeting. The development raised eyebrows in Pakistan, which publicly questioned the motive of such an interaction. The four-nation's last round meeting regarding peace talks was hosted by Kabul in February, however, Russia called it "useless" and denied to take part. Representative of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs said, "We are not going to participate in these useless attempts and have already told the US about it. We do not see any practical sense in it." He added that Russia was ready to promote its own peace plan, whose main goal was primarily to create a roadmap for restarting peace negotiations between the Taliban and the Afghan National Government (NUG). His prediction came true and the peace talks did not give the desired fruit, but will the coming meeting, which is to be hosted by Russia, bring the Taliban to peace table?

It is true that the Pak-Russia relations are beginning to thaw as the two countries held their first-ever joint military drills in a landmark development showing gradual improvement in their ties marred by Cold War rivalry in the past, but since the US is a key supporter of Afghanistan and plays a highly significant role, its part must not be underestimated.

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