

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


Daily Outlook
 AFGHANISTAN
 The Leading Independent Newspaper

October 12, 2019

Social and Political Challenges Hamper Democracy

Democracy has been challenged in the country as the rights and liberty of individuals are violated egregiously. In post-Taliban Afghanistan, the nation took active part in political decision-makings through electing their representatives. Within the last decade and so, the presidential and provincial elections and peaceful transfer of power has been prominent milestone in the country's history. Democratic discourse, human rights and empowerment of women have been hotly debated and Afghans dreamed of utopia, where militants had no room. Democracy in Afghanistan has not passed a normal process but ebbed and flowed within different regimes. Amanullah Khan is believed to sow the seeds of democracy in the country during his regime (1919-1929). But his exaggerated movement, which disregarded Afghan traditional customs and cultural values, triggered a strong reaction from the public, mainly from the religious figures, leading to the downfall of his regime. The germ of this thought paved the ground for democratic practices.

Subsequently, democracy was considered to secularize the cultural values and was publicly resisted. Radical elements, mainly in tribal belts, and dictatorial regimes hampered democratic practices in one way or another. Afghans suffered severely and their rights to life, liberty and estate were violated on a large scale. King Muhammad Nadir Shah was a highly despotic individual and spilt streams of blood flagrantly - which was a slap on the face of democracy.

By and large, the last decade of Zahir Shah's kingdom, was called the "decade of democracy" or "decade of constitution". In the solar year of 1343, the constitution of Afghanistan was approved by Loya Jirga (National Grand Assembly) and a free parliamentary election was conducted. This constitution, which restricted the King's power, was considered the best one comparing to the past constitutions. Similarly, this constitution did not discriminate one on the basis of their race, color or sex and women were allowed to be the candidates for parliament. This was also a high step towards democracy. To cut it short, democracy was repressed during the Taliban's regime as people were killed in wholesale for their accidental backgrounds and ideological differences. Women bore the brunt of the regime's aggression and cruel practices. Taliban's fundamental ideology was in strong conflict with democracy. Afghans underwent indescribable sufferings and their freedoms were curtailed.

With the downfall of the Taliban's regime, Afghanistan moved towards democracy following the Bonn Conference held on December 2001. The constitution of Afghanistan was approved in a Loya Jirga conducted in Kabul in 2004. In the preamble of this constitution, protection of human rights and dignity, observation of Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and United Nation's Charter have been underlined and the government has been committed to form a civil society, where people could exercise their fundamental rights freely. Moreover, any kinds of discrimination on the grounds of one's race, sex and color are forbidden as Article 22 states, "Any kind of discrimination and distinction between citizens of Afghanistan shall be forbidden. The citizens of Afghanistan, man and woman, have equal rights and duties before the law." Additionally, freedom is considered the inherent right of mankind and Article 24 maintains, "...Liberty and human dignity are inviolable. The state shall respect and protect liberty as well as human dignity." In short, this is a unique constitution in the history of Afghanistan and will alleviate social and political challenges if enforced properly.

Despite this fact, the nation's pain and sufferings have not come to an end. Afghans still bleed as a result of terrorism and unmitigated insurgency. In other words, the Taliban, along with other militant groups, trample upon the rights and liberty of Afghan men and women. There are two main obstacles before peace and stability: First warring factions, mainly the Taliban, undermine democracy via targeting both combatants and non-combatants. Similarly, the emergence of self-styled Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) deteriorated the security situation. The affiliates to ISIL stoke sectarianism and spread fear and anxiety in the air. In a nutshell, the high graph of civilian casualties put democracy under question.

Secondly, the government was unable not only in enforcing the law but also preventing corruption. After all, the constitution was widely violated even by a number of officials, including MPs. In another item, parliament is considered the "beating heart of democracy", and this heart beats no more in the country. The National Unity Government (NUG) failed to protect the rights and liberty of the nation, which was stated in the constitution.

Similarly, political tensions among the high-ranking officials also narrowed the room for democracy. They focused their attention on self-interests rather than paying heed to more pivotal issues. The militant fighters are believed to have taken advantage of the political turmoil and widened their realm of terrorist activities.

Democratization has been largely hampered by social and political challenges and there is much to be done to strengthen the nascent democracy and protect the rights and freedoms of the citizens. With the escalated militancy, Afghans' dream for a civil society did not come true. So, the vacuum for democracy will not be filled only with written law if not implemented.

The Instrumental View of Islamabad on Afghan Peace Process

By: Saalim Naji

Translated by: Mohammad Zahir Akbari

After the cancellation of peace talks between the US and Taliban, the Taliban were almost marginalized in the world and so traveled to capitals of regional countries to compel the United States to resume the negotiations. They repeatedly warned impose heavy expenses on the US due to peace talk's abortion. In homophony with Taliban position, the Pakistani prime minister has also recently said that the Taliban want peace while reality in the field is something different. The Taliban's violence has not only diminished in recent weeks but also increased both in its scope and objectives. Last week, the Taliban targeted a classroom in Ghazni University killing and wounding dozens of innocent students. In the past, they argued that civilian casualties are increased because of their proximity to military vehicles, but attacks on university students and other civilians are in paradox to their words and peace resumption. The nearly ten months Qatar peace talks clearly showed that Taliban are not serious in a fair peace talks demanding a kind of surrender to impose their own intentions on the Afghan people.

Given absolutist approach of Taliban, the question that arises is why Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan is trying to portray the Taliban as peaceful and good-natured beings. The main issue is that Pakistan thinks India is its strongest enemy in the region with a growing economy and a powerful army and since the separation of the two countries in 1947 there has been hostility and incompatibility between the two neighbors. In pursuit of its goals, Pakistan has always sought to use radical religious groups in the region, especially in Kashmir and in Afghanistan to hit India and limit its regional influence. The India's recent action in Kashmir considered an anti-Pakistani approach while Pakistan could not do anything to count as a dramatic and retaliatory move. Therefore, the Afghan peace talks and the Taliban war in Afghanistan is the last Islamabad card to use in the region.

In the beginning of the third millennium, when the US invaded Afghanistan, Islamabad pursued dual policies to obtain the US financial aid, and on the other hand, they tried to protect Taliban from permanent removal as Islamabad needed it in completion against New Delhi and Kabul officials. Now, as Americans are tired of the long war in Afghanistan and the Afghan people also want peace, Imran Khan Want to redefine its pivotal role in the peace process to benefit from the US financial assistance and impose a kind of new political system in Afghanistan to compete with New Delhi. In general, Islamabad can achieve its strategic benefits through Afghan peace process as following:

Firstly, if Islamabad get chances to steer the US peace program with the Taliban,

they will have the most golden opportunity to exploit it in its poor economic and foreign policy. Pakistan has always had a realistic approach in its foreign policy even against his closest friends, such as the United States. During the Cold War, the Pakistani policymakers fully used the advantage of its geopolitics while the US had to accept what they wanted at that time, and the Pakistanis knew well that the United States had no other option. Once again, Islamabad understands that the United States alone will not be able to conclude the Afghan peace program. They think that without Islamabad's support this process will be incomplete, and so they are trying to deal with the United States again like in the 1980s. The Pakistan's most important goal is that the United States should, as before, provide substantial financial support to Pakistan and, on the other hand, support from Pakistan's position against India. Given the fact that Pakistan alone cannot compete with India, sometimes they near its position to Beijing and sometimes to Washington to use their financial and political support in competition with New Delhi. When Imran Khan announces the demand of Taliban for peace, it means that only Pakistan can force the Taliban to accept a peace plan in Afghanistan.

Secondly, Taliban act as proxy fighters; when Pakistan steer the Afghan peace program, it means Islamabad will play a greater role in the proxy war between India and Pakistan in Afghanistan. Given the long-term goals of Pakistan towards Afghanistan, the Taliban are leading a proxy Islamabad war in Afghanistan and it does not want a strong central government in Afghanistan to unite Kabul with New Delhi against Islamabad. Islamabad could also use the Taliban as a tool to control the foreign policy of Afghan nationalists, especially about Durand line, and also push back the policies of New Delhi in Kashmir. As long as the Taliban continue their fight against the Afghan government, Afghanistan's territorial claim and its hostility to that country will automatically postpone the required opportunity to raise such issues. Given that the Taliban's educational and ideological source is in Pakistan, it could easily use the group against Indian interests in Afghanistan or even in the Kashmir terrorist conflict. Therefore, the Afghan political elites must refrain from any emotional stances in the region, especially in regard to Pakistan.

Given the current reality, any absolute hostility to Pakistan cannot benefit Afghanistan in the long run. In order to achieve sustainable peace, it is necessary to reduce all sources of tension in the region. The Afghan border dispute with Pakistan is the most important impetus to prevent Islamabad's hostile policy towards Afghanistan. The territorial claim of Afghan nationalists will not change the realities and will only aggravate hostility and instability in the region, especially within Afghanistan. Therefore, before putting an end to this issue, it will be unrealistic expectation to establish a friendly cooperation from Pakistan.

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At 70, is China still a challenge for America?

By: Rajkumar Singh

The present day People's Republic of China (PRC) was born on October 1, 1949, after a long mass struggle/movement which paved the way for development of Marxist-Leninist ideology in the region and beyond. It witnessed the end of Chinese civil war and establishment of a Communist rule. In the affairs of China India kept herself non-partisan and Nehru, in his note to the then Ambassador of China suggested 'The situation is difficult because of the civil war that is going on. While maintaining close and friendly relations with Chiang Kai-shek's Government, should not allow himself to become a partisan in the civil conflict. However, turning China red and the dramatic events were hardly a favourable sign for India because they had not only skewed the Asian balance of power in favour of the apparently monolithic Communist world, but had, with the Chinese occupation of Tibet, brought a dynamic and an unfriendly Communist state to the very doors of India. The situation became more delicate as a formal alliance with the West was excluded in view of the forthright decision of the government to make non-alignment its article of faith. An alliance with the Communist world was equally impossible due to the profound ideological and political gap that separated those who were in power in India from those who were the decision-makers in Communist countries. In response to the need there arose a broad consensus among the Indian decision-makers to deploy different efforts to face the new situation.

Background of Chinese power

To meet the new threat India adopted a two-pronged policy -on the one hand it decided to bring about a modest improvement in country's defences and advocated a way of befriending the Chinese, on the other. In pursuance of its first strategy new treaties were negotiated with the Himalayan states of Bhutan (1949), Sikkim (1950) and Nepal (1951). Discreet steps were taken to improve communications throughout the mountainous tribal areas, to increase the number of check-posts in the middle sector, and to extend the rudiments of effective administration in the North-East Frontier Agency right up to the McMahon line. Most of these steps were primarily diplomatic, administrative and police and aimed to bring about an improvement in India's defence system. The above defence-related steps proved unable in satisfying the minds of Indian people at large and there appeared a general consensus among the decision-makers that political rapprochement with the Communist world was really the only rational substitute for any military confrontation. It was in this background that a diplomatic offensive was launched to seek some normalisation with the Communist countries. China, being geographically and spiritually nearer to India became the first objective of Indian diplomacy. Nehru cherished hopes of making friendship with China. His faith in a resurgent Asia, free from the domination of Europe and America was strong. He demanded the admission of Peking into the United Nations, insisted on the return of Formosa to the People's Republic, and declined to accept the invitation of the United States to go to San Francisco to sign the Japanese Peace treaty only because the China had refused to accept the American draft treaty. Very soon the single minded policy began to pay off and it became increasingly evident that Peking was slowly abandoning its belligerent line. But India's refusal to sign the Japanese peace treaty was welcomed by the Chinese press editorially which expressed the view that such an action proved 'that the age was past when imperialist governments can do whatever they please.' Peking also appreciated India's determination to adopt an independent line on many controversial issues concerning China in international affairs.

Challenged ideologically in Asia

Modern people's Republic of China emerged as a result of the civil war between Ideologist as well as the nationalist forces of the country. In the period of internal clash to rule over China the nationalist forces were supported by the United States of America, a group which stood opposite to the Communist party. Several fact-finding missions and experts were sent to China by the US, who, despite admitted corrupt practices in the Chinese National Government of Kuomintang pleaded in favour of supporting them politically, morally and financially. They suggested, 'it is highly preferable that the United States have a free, though immoral Government in China than to have a hostile Government- no matter how pure and moral- dominated by Communist influences.' The Nationalists gained a good deal of military successes practically till the end of the first half of 1948, but by spring 1949 the Communists strengthened their rural mass base and were in full control of North China. Mao Tse-tung, the su-

preme leader of the Communist party of China appeared confident, of establishing the people's Republic. He declared after the Communists convened the people's political Consultative Conference in September 1949, 'our nation will never again be an insulted nation. We have stood up.' On 1. October 1949, 'People's Government started its affairs and Chiang Kai-shek took his Government to the island of Formosa (Taiwan) to survive as the so-called legitimate government of China under the American patronage and protection. To the surprise of none the new regime of China was aimed to spread Maoist radicalism in the non-communist countries and it necessitated apposition to the West and the US in particular. As the new dispensation owed some differences on several issues with the USSR, it required co-existence with numerous middle powers on the basis of expediency. Chinese aid was given principally to Peking - oriented parties which were expected to remain faithful to Maoist principles of strategy and accept Peking's guidance. According to the steps already decided the advanced capitalist states, especially the US, were alleged to express their class character by pursuing aggressive policies against China and the Asian Communist movements. Peking was happy to counter US and its interventionist activities and by increasing China's own armed strength to make it a more significant deterrent. On the other with a view to cultivate intimate relations with the neutral countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America Peking signed treaties of mutual non-aggression or friendship with Burma, Nepal, Afghanistan, Guinea, Cambodia, Indonesia etc. and settled outstanding differences with them through diplomatic channels. As a supplement China also strengthened its cultural relations with a large number of foreign countries and used economic weapon to further its interests.

Role of Sino-Soviet co-operation

Basically Chinese leaders believed in Marxist-Leninist ideology and stood for proletarian internationalism. For the attainment of this objective they thought it desirable to establish intimate relations with other Communist powers, especially the Soviet Union. In this period China tried to maintain her revolutionary fervour in internal and external affairs and propounded the new doctrines of 'the inevitability of war' and 'permanent revolution'. The importance of the Sino-Soviet cooperation was acknowledged by different Chinese leaders who asserted that the unity of the two could play an extremely important role in the unity of peoples of the world. Thus, when the Chinese Communist leaders began to build up a Socialist system in early years, they were evidently agreed that the Soviet Union should be accepted as a model.

Death of Stalin in 1953 witnessed some ideological dilution in Soviet policy which included "revisionism" and "peaceful Co-existence". Chinese viewed these concepts as basic change in Soviet policy. They considered it grave and fundamental danger and total hostility towards the USSR was viewed as the only correct response. As a result in sphere of ideology Peking decided to work as effectively as possible against the Soviet diplomacy in the developing areas which allegedly seek to advance Moscow's great power aims at the expense of the national Communist movements. Chinese associated the struggle against revisionism as their duty in order to establish friendship and cooperation with other Socialist states that evidenced the intensity of Chinese hostility towards the USSR.

"Peaceful Co-existence" as Chinese consider, is a line of diplomacy that facilitates expedient compromises and settlements with the imperialists and their allies. The diplomacy itself carries formal commitment to certain principles which concern the regime's dealings with other governments and there is no justification of another peaceful co-existence if the theme of diplomacy is taken into account. Thus in the post-1953 period Chinese leaders were evidently unwilling to recognise that Stalin's ideological authority had passed to the USSR's unstable collective leadership. They disapproved Khrushchev's liberalisation in the USSR and his new foreign policy which stressed co-existence with the West and the promotion of Communism in the Third World by peaceful methods. In spite of public respect for Moscow's leadership China's government accelerated extraordinary new programme of Socialist economic development, apparently in the hope of demonstrating that the regime had a superior dynamism with a view to give great inspiration to Communist movements in Asia and elsewhere.

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