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

The Worth of Our Social Values

A society is recognized by its values and standards. Better societies have better standards in every facet of life; nonetheless, it is arguable what better standards really mean. The standards that are humane, based on the well-being and development of the society as a whole and that are as per challenges raised by the socio-political circumstances are mostly thought to be better than the ones that do not uphold them or negate them. On the other hand, relevance to the context does not always stand for perfect and positive standards. For instance, in contemporary modern world, modernity is one of the agreeable standards but it cannot be concluded to be positive.

Setting universal standards for the societies of the world is always a difficult task as cultures and social settings differ and even contradict. However, the main point is to comprehend that the standards that depict the actual position of human beings; their positive role and behavior – the one that is sensitive to the well-being of others, care and kindness for the fellow beings, true encouragement for science, arts, creativity and innovation are basically the ones that must be fortified and protected.

Today's human beings are led astray. They have become materialistic excessively and saunter aimlessly in their spiritual life. They are unable to realize the true purpose of their existence and are turned into beings that they are not by the conditioning of systems and circumstances. They are caught at a position where they are the cause of their own infamy and annihilation. They urge for love, affluence, pleasure and material comfort and they are prepared to pay any price for it. This urge has given rise to a man who flawlessly fits in today's materialistic societies but may not be successful in achieving the requirements of being a true human.

A cursory look at the standards in our society are necessary at this instance. Our society is well-known and easily recognized because of its egotism and bigheadedness. Inequitableness and discrimination are the commonly acceptable behavioral trends. If a person brings another person anguish for his own benefit or if a person betrays another person, it does not seem to be weird as it is normal exercise within our society. Since the socio-political settings and the objective conditions have paved the way for such types of actions and thinking, imagining something different would be ridiculous. As the rule of the race is to thrust others back so as to win the race in any way; therefore, victory kisses the feet of those who are follow this rule in its exact form.

Considering today's society, it can be claimed that a person who is not cunning and self-seeking is principally unwise. Alternatively, the crafty evils cannot be censured, too. As a matter of fact, in our society, when a person does an evil act, he is not all the time guilty for it.

On the other hand, the kindness and service to others are not responded in the way they should be. The people are so much accustomed to wrongdoing and cunning behavior that even if they receive sincerity and kindness, they are able to respond it properly. They may even think that they are being flattered and therefore their response is mostly a discouraging one.

In this society, if a killer is not a relative to the prey, it is really odd. Attachment, adoration, belief, uprightness and devoutness are the values that are only important to few of the people; else, these are only words which the people of our society use so as to conceal the crimes of their conscience and the evils of their intents. We are mainly bounded by lies and false exhibition and if we are able to defend our truth, it would be a great accomplishment.

Nevertheless, the company and ownership of truth is truly wearisome. It involves bearing seclusion and accepting the responsibility of being dissimilar. Yet, it is not something to be discouraged about. A human can be disenchanted from another human but should not be disenchanted from humanity, because human beings live for a definite period of time but humanity has always lived and will live persistently. The significant point is to deliberate why the kind of society, wherein a person has to lead another person by going over his cadaver, should not change.

Why should not we modify the system wherein human beings do not need the sustenance and collaboration of others for the improvement of society in its entirety, but need for their selfish benefits?

There is something utterly wrong with the society that does not have love and brotherhood as its standards but inspires the people to have negative rivalry so as to own as much material coziness as possible. The society we reside in is in desperate need of true humanity, true affection and true warmth.

Children of War and Nation-Rebuilding in Afghanistan

By Abdul Basir Azimi

Although there have been significant works done on nation building in Afghanistan, it's still a mystery. It should be confessed that the nation building has been a challenge for all the politicians, scholars and even five-star generals in the history. One of the reasons is that there is no agreed-upon conclusion regarding how, when and who would do the nation building. In the other words, are governments, the international community, elites or every single citizen of a nation responsible for nation building? Moreover, the philosophical perspective of nation-building makes it even more complicated: Whether a nation builds a state or the state builds the nation? Does not the state-building process break nations?

It has never been easy to answer these questions as people argue and say "it depends" instead of giving any specific answer. Moreover, there could be many internal and external factors influence and catalyze the process of the nation building. It is clear that situational approaches have resulted in trial and error in the nation-building process. For instance, international community sometimes supported people of a country to build a nation by their own imagination. Sometimes, while scholars were trying to convince politicians to prioritize economic and political reforms to pave the way for nation building, in a military view, generals could convince the international community to send troops to sabotage the dictatorial regimes and spread democracy. Many instruments of power like diplomacy, information, military or economic supports are being used to foster the nation-building process.

The Middle East is one of the regions where nation building has proved to be challenging. For instance, countries like Iran, Turkey, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria have applied different approaches to nation building based on trial and error and the lessons learned. The lessons learned are very useful assets and is much more considerable, but it takes a lot of time, effort, capital, high opportunity cost which is sometimes not even recoverable. Afghanistan is a unique example where international community consumed time, effort, and capital to build a nation since 2001 until now. But recently, the U.S. President Donald Trump's speech of U.S. engagement, and "The Path Forward" in Afghanistan and South Asia changed the entire plans. When he said "Ultimately, it is up to the people of Afghanistan to take ownership of their future, to govern their society, and to achieve an everlasting peace. We are a partner and a friend, but we will not dictate to the Afghan people how to live or how to govern their own complex society. We are not nation building again. We are killing terrorists."

Various reactions emerged to the President Trump's approach to the nation building process in Afghanistan. Some civil society activists, human rights and women rights activists were shocked. They thought if international community stops supporting the process of the nation building in Afghanistan, achievements of the international community in Afghanistan would be negatively affected. Despite billions of dollars have been spent in Afghanistan and also the nation building process in the last two decades, the war did not end and the nation building process is costing more and more. That's why President Trump had to change the strategy and thus he clearly said "We will no longer use American military might to construct democracies in faraway lands or try to rebuild other countries in our own image. Those days are now over. Instead, we will work with allies and partners to protect our shared interests." Now the question for Afghan citizens is "who will be responsible for the nation building"? Is it the responsibility of Afghan citizens, government, civil society, or international community? To answer this question, Afghanistan should be looked into more deeply.

Afghanistan is a multi-tribal society and nation building process has been internally and externally influenced and realigned but it never worked.

The ethnic groups were more divided when the Soviet Communist Army left Afghanistan in 1989, fighting over which group would control the country. The civil war erupted which not only destroy economic and political infrastructures but also destroyed the long standing attitude of tolerance and nation building process. Moreover, ethnocentric sentiments became the biggest threat to the cohesion of Afghanistan during the civil war and the role of ethnic leaders in a multi-tribal society became eminent during the civil war while they obviously attempted to save their people in the desire for revenge, military victory, and power control.

After 1989, alliances against Soviet army were broken and turned into the internecine civil war. Yesterday's allies become today's enemies, breaking Afghan nation into many factions. The different parties involved in the civil war had to find tools and techniques to motivate and inspire their infantry. Ethnicity, religion, cultural and historical values were supposed to be very powerful provokers. Unavoidably, they misused them to win battlefields regardless of how badly they could affect the nation. In addition, ethnic leaders highlighted the differences between Afghan people and feared them from each other. They forced people into a conflict to kill each other to get more power and lands. In the other words, the ethnic leaders killed their nation to build their own states.

Analysts and observers are of the view that Afghan nation was broken apart during the civil war and need to be rebuilt. Nation rebuilding process should be approached like healing family wounds and pains. On the one hand, addressing old wounds and mistakes in the family can be painful, but on the other hand, letting them go away can result in losing valuable family members. Sometimes we get hurt and sometimes we hurt others in our family, but we can not leave each other and have to rebuild our family again. Now the question is, how to rebuild the Afghan nation? How could we rehabilitate the lost glory that we enjoyed once? The only generation who is able to accomplish the mission of rebuilding this war-torn country is the children of the war, who born in the war, grown up with the violation, discrimination and felt everything by their own heart. President Trump recently addressed the nation-building process in Afghanistan as a national responsibility of every Afghan citizen. It's the time for the young Afghan to think about how to build their nation again. Indeed the civil war was totally wrong, and the responsible persons should be punished, but at this time more important is how to make peace with each other before to make peace with enemies otherwise the nation's dream will be killed.

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Planning Better Cities

By Christine Auclair and Mahmoud Al Burai

Cities, the American-Canadian author Jane Jacobs once observed, are engines for national prosperity and economic growth. But in their current form, modern cities are also catalysts of inequality and environmental degradation. Today, the share of city dwellers in poverty is growing; 33% live in slums; and 75% of global carbon dioxide emissions originate in metropolitan areas. Statistics like these should give us pause: Are cities really the best way to organize human life?

They can be, but only with significant adjustments to how they are planned, built, and managed. For city-led growth to empower a sustainable, prosperous future, governments and developers must reintroduce a user-centered approach to urbanization. Today, most cities fail to include key stakeholders in the planning process, leading to exclusionary development. Consider the ubiquitous housing project on the edge of town, a characteristic of many poorly planned cities. Built in the middle of nowhere, these multi-unit eyesores are often cut off from public transportation and other services, compounding residents' isolation from the urban core. But design flaws like these, which have both economic and social implications, are just the beginning. Even more worrying to urban planning professionals like us is that in many places, the entire planning process – the way we think about cities, how they are used, and by whom – is flawed.

Even the world's best-intentioned planning departments do not always put the public first. Part of this reflects uncertainty about who "owns" a city. Residents might call a city "theirs," but government leaders often act in ways that suggest otherwise. For example, a government seeking to attract investment might equate economic interests with residents' needs, and thus lower environmental standards or tax burdens for businesses. Such decisions might, however, lead to deurbanization, with people leaving cities as they become less livable.

The gap between economic viability and environmental responsibility can be especially wide. Consider the production of traditional, gasoline-powered cars. Although this type of industry might power some cities' growth today, the public's growing concern about CO_2 emissions from these vehicles is spurring changes in consumer demand. Businesses that can capitalize on such shifts will be better positioned for long-term growth. Unfortunately, for-profit entities typically fail to see future generations as tomorrow's customers. Their short-term vision not only hurts their bottom line; it also affects cities, by trading immediate gain for quality of life. So, what can be done to ensure that urban planning is conducted with the interests of cities' actual users – particularly their residents – in mind? Most cities lack a democratic planning process, and in many large metropolitan areas, inequality is sewn into the social fabric. So institutionalizing participatory planning must be the starting point. Programs that safeguard local democracy by encouraging transparency and accountability are critical. Residents who are equipped with the knowledge and means to express their views on issues affecting their communities make better neighbors. And planning discussions that take their views into account produce better design. Because leaders everywhere, under any type of political system, are judged by the livability of the places they oversee, an inclusive planning process should be every city's goal. With participatory planning as a starting point, governments and residents can move toward building cities that are more strategically linked to their surrounding regions and areas beyond. This type of growth is not only about transportation links, but also about coordinating policies and actions across sectors, including housing, social services, and banking. In this way, regional roles and responsibilities become more clearly defined, with finite resources allocated strategically, equitably, and according to a common agenda.

Too often, cities manage resources in bureaucratic silos, which can increase competition among precisely those who must work in concert if the urban areas they regulate are to invest wisely and implement policies effectively. Local autonomy can be achieved only through strong regional cooperation and coordination.

Urban sprawl is a good example of why a regional approach to planning is critical. Limiting sprawl requires a coordinated territorial strategy, so that cities can address common concerns, like the transportation of goods, clustering of housing and services, and management and placement of industrial corridors. Intermunicipal cooperation can also achieve economies of scale by discouraging unnecessary competition.

Many urban areas are being designed as "cities for the rich," rather than population centers for all. This is gradually encouraging social segregation and threatening the security and safety of residents. Planning buzzwords like "smart cities" and "sustainable urban development" mean little if the theories behind them benefit only a few. As Jacobs predicted, the "city" will remain the world's engine of economic growth and prosperity for many decades to come. But if that engine is to run most efficiently, the mechanism powering it – the urban planning process itself – will need a tune-up. (Courtesy Project Syndicate)

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