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

Getting out of Social Problems

No society in the world is perfect and there are social problems and evils in all the societies. However, there are certain societies that have been able to control most of the evils, while some others have not been able to perform well and as a result they have been suffering because of myriads of issues that they face in their daily lives. These social problems are really negative and they are the factors that unsettle the social life to a great extent.

They have the capacity to introduce disturbances and troubles in the lives of the individuals inhabiting the society and the overall social norms, values, relations and activities. Some of the dominant social evils include poverty, crime, corruption, drug addiction, juvenile delinquency, robbery, theft, begging and many others.

Many of these evils are, in fact, closely inter-related and have the cause and effect influence over one another. Nonetheless, all of these evils have the capacity to challenge and even sabotage the civilized and better living conditions in human societies.

There cannot be one particular reason behind the social evils. There are different reasons that are responsible for hosting these evils and debilitating a society to perform well for its inhabitants.

One of the basic reasons is the absence or weak adherence to the basic principles of justice. Without adhering to the rules and regulations based on justice and fair-play, it would be very difficult to have a society free of social evils.

Our own society, Afghanistan, can be studied in this regard. The basic reason behind the social evils that haunt us is the absence of justice and a system of check and balance. Moreover, there is no strong mechanism that can ensure that the justice or the rules and regulations are enforced properly. There are certain people who have hijacked the whole system and they are the ones who take advantage of it. The system is only for their service and provide them benefits and luxuries, while millions of other people fail to survive. Justice is, in fact, their words and their desires, and does not serve a higher objective of bringing about harmony within the society.

On the other hand, corruption has made the situation even worse. In fact, corruption is one of the key problems in Afghanistan. Without solving the issue of corruption it would be extremely difficult to make achievements as far as solving the social issues are concerned. If the resources and the energies are wasted for the corrupt intentions and self-centered objectives, there would not be much to exert against the social evils. Rather, it would have a reverse impact – corruption would further deteriorate the situation and give rise to many other ones. For example, it is not possible to solve the prevailing poverty, if the authorities who are responsible for certain programs to minimize poverty get involved in corruption and misuse the resources that are allocated for those programs. The resources would never reach to the deserving people and the programs would fail completely.

This is what has been happening in Afghanistan. There have been various assistance programs and funds allocated for certain social problems by the international donor agencies and international community but most of that has been devoured by corruption and a little has reached to the poor people and the consequences are now in front of all of us.

Most of societies in the modern world enact their rules and regulations through a just and proper system of law and order. Strong law and order system strives to achieve justice and minimizes the social evils. Through effective law enforcing agencies, including police, courts and prisons, an active law and order system makes utmost effort that justice is served to the people. The ones who are culprit must be punished while the ones who are innocent must not suffer ill treatment. Afghanistan needs to have the same sort of system.

Another way of controlling or eradicating social evils can be through the values that are disseminated by the social institutions. The social institutions can inculcate within the individuals the awareness about the evils and the ways to avoid them. Among the social institutions, families and education systems can play an important role in this regard. Family, being the primary institution for an individual, can make an individual socially acceptable and guide his attitude in such a way that he becomes a positive member of society. Then there are educational institutions.

They can play a tremendous role in establishing the characters of the individuals and making them aware so that they are able to make better choices in the society that may not benefit their individual lives but the social life as well. The roles of cultural and social institutions are also of utmost importance in this regard.

They have high social value and influence and through the same they can bring about positive changes in the society by making the members of society abhor and avoid social evils and condemn them in every possible manner.

What if Talks Come to a Standstill?

By Hujjatullah Zia

Following the fall of the Taliban's regime, Afghanistan sought peace through negotiation and urged warring factions to stop violence and bloodshed. Peace was a top priority for Afghan government as the country moved to democratization. Pakistan deemed peace talks the only viable option for political stability and promised to nudge the Taliban to sit around the negotiating table. As a result, a face-to-face negotiation was hosted between Afghan officials and Taliban elements last year in July in Murree. However, the revelation of Mullah Omar's death and subsequent struggle for succession in the Taliban leadership threw the whole process into uncertainty.

Omar's successor Mullah Akhtar Mansour refused to hold talks and staged deadly attacks against Afghanistan by declaring spring offensive and Omari Operation, which dismantled the Afghan-Pak relations. Similarly, Mansour's death, who was killed in a US drone strike in May for being called an obstacle before peace talks, deteriorated the relations and put an end to the Quadrilateral Coordination Group (QCG) consisting of Afghanistan, Pakistan, China and the United States. So, the death of the two Taliban's leaders brought peace talks to the stalemate.

Now, it is the third leader, Mansour's successor Mullah Haibatullah Akhundzada, to play his role. Haibatullah follows his predecessor's footsteps and leaves no room for peace talks. Since he is a radical ideologue, perhaps the same as Omar, he seeks to practice upon his fundamental mentality and continue bloodshed in Afghanistan. It is believed that he views the issue through ideological lens and holding talks with the presence of the US soldiers in Afghanistan will be against his ideology. Therefore, the militancy and terrorist offensives have been escalated in Afghanistan and the civilians casualties increased to a great extent.

A number of warring parties are involved in insurgency and the Taliban form the bulk of the insurgent group. Afghan President Muhammad Ashraf Ghani said in NATO summit, in Warsaw, "The conflict is multi-dimensional, ranging from Al-Qaeda and Daesh to terrorist groups with Central Asian, Chinese, and Russian origins, to Pakistani groups classified as terrorists by Pakistan and Afghan Taliban groups."

Currently, the hope for peace talks has ebbed away and Afghan government resorted to military actions as backlash against the Taliban's heavy inroads. Similarly, Pakistan is also said to increase attacks on Taliban. Of late, US Secretary of State John Kerry has said that Pakistan made progress in the fight against extremism in recent months, but urged Islamabad to push harder against militants hiding within its borders. He said that the US had made it clear to Islamabad that it needs to act against groups such as the Taliban-linked Haqqani network and Lashkar-e-Taiba that are suspected of operating from Pakistan to launch attacks against its neighbors India and Afghanistan. Both Afghan and Pakistani nations have suffered from terror and insurgency and their rights and liberty have been violated by warring factions. The civilians, who have nothing to do with the war, fell prey to deadly attacks and the militant fighters never observed humanitarian law. In such a case, it will be naïve of the officials to push for peace talks or cherish a hope for a fruitful negotiation with ideologue or mercenary fighters who seek to impose their warped mind with the barrel of gun.

Undoubtedly, Afghan's bonhomie towards the Taliban has been counterproductive. For instance, when the Taliban's prisoners were released during Hamid Karzai's administration to facilitate talks, they rejoined the militants and spearheaded strong attacks. Moreover, they enlarged their preconditions rather than showing tendency towards the talks due to the generous acts of Afghan officials. It is believed that the talks will not bear a desired fruit for many reasons: First, Mullah Omar's death created a split between the Taliban and a number of fighters led by Mullah Dadullah Mansour pledged allegiance to the self-styled Islamic State (IS) group in Afghanistan. Although Dadullah was killed by Akhtar Mansour's men, his people have reportedly appointed a new leader to widen their militancy. Secondly, since Sirajjudin Haqqani, the head of Haqqani's network, has been appointed as deputy to Haibatullah, the Taliban are redirect towards more radical ideology and will not show tendency towards peace talks. Thirdly, the Taliban may give a green light for talks while coming under severe attacks but will not pursue it with good intention. Therefore, one-sided desire for talks was futile.

It is believed that escalated militancy, be it in Pakistan or Afghanistan, will pave the way for other warring parties, including the IS groups, and Mafia, who muddy the water to smuggle drugs, and perhaps widely involved in instability.

I believe that Pakistan and Afghanistan are in the same boat and will have to adopt a joint strategy to counter insurgency in a fruitful manner. The US Department of State said earlier that bordering regions between Afghanistan and Pakistan are still safe havens for many terrorist groups. As the Taliban cross the Afghan-Pak border and carry out terrorist attacks both in Afghanistan and Pakistan, both the nations suffer from militancy. Hence, their rights and liberty are to be safeguarded by their governments and it is possible through reinforcing military actions and having no mercy on fighters as they never have mercy on innocent civilians, including women and children.

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Reviving Arms Control in Europe

By Frank-Walter Steinmeier

European security, to the surprise of many, is under threat once again. So, once again, Europe's security must top our political agenda. Even before the Ukraine conflict began in 2014, there were growing signs of a brewing confrontation between rival blocs. This new confrontation, however, is not defined by antagonism between communism and capitalism, but by a dispute over social and political order – a dispute about freedom, democracy, the rule of law and human rights – as well as by a struggle for geopolitical spheres of influence. Russia's annexation of Crimea violated international law and called into question the very foundations of Europe's security architecture. Moreover, the nature of conflict, as Ukraine has demonstrated, has changed dramatically. So-called hybrid warfare and non-state actors are playing ever-greater roles.

New technologies – offensive cyber capabilities, armed drones, robots, and electronic, laser, and standoff weapons – carry new dangers. New combat scenarios – smaller units, higher fighting power, faster deployment – are not covered by today's existing arms-control regimes. The danger of a new arms race looms large.

Ever since the Harmel Report, which redefined NATO strategy back in 1967, the West has followed a two-track approach to its relations with Russia: deterrence and détente. NATO renewed its commitment to this dual strategy at its Warsaw Summit earlier this summer. We adopted the necessary measures to provide military reassurance, and at the same time reaffirmed our political responsibility for cooperative security in Europe.

This dual approach is subject to an inherent difficulty: deterrence is real and visible to everyone; but détente must also be real and visible if it is to play its part. Whenever this policy balance is lost, misperceptions arise, and little remains to counteract the risk of escalation.

To mitigate this risk, we should advance a concrete goal: the re-launch of arms control in Europe as a tried and tested means of risk-reduction, transparency, and confidence building between Russia and the West.

Arms-control agreements, history has demonstrated, are not the result of existing trust – they are a means to build trust where it has been lost. In 1962, the Cuban Missile Crisis brought the world to the brink of nuclear confrontation. Soon after the crisis – when the US-Soviet relationship was at an all-time low – both superpowers decided that it was time to work across the divide, through small and concrete steps. This principle was also at the heart of Willy Brandt's Neue Ostpolitik in the 1960s and 1970s.

Today, new and deep rifts have opened up between Russia and the West, and I fear we will not be able to close them in the near future, however hard we try. No one should underestimate the challenges we face in this regard, especially given manifold crises – in eastern Ukraine, Syria, Libya, and elsewhere – at a time when we are not immune from renewed escalation or further setbacks. Only one thing is certain: If we don't try, peace in Europe and beyond will be tenuous. So we should heed the lesson of détente: however deep the rifts, we must try to build bridges. Unfortunately, the existing arms-control and disarmament regimes are crumbling. Russia is no longer implementing the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe, which led to the removal of tens of thousands of tanks and heavy weapons from Europe in the years after 1990. Likewise, the transparency and confidence-building mechanisms enshrined in the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's 2011 Vienna Document have grown increasingly ineffective, and Russia opposes the steps needed to modernize them.

The OSCE's Treaty on Open Skies, too, is being limited in its application. And Russia's annexation of Crimea has rendered obsolete the Budapest Memorandum. The trust that was carefully accumulated through decades of hard work has been squandered.

Yet, at the same time, Russia has repeatedly called for a new debate on conventional arms control in Europe. In this sense, it is high time to take Russia at its word!

Re-launching conventional arms control should be based on a principle that was at the heart of Brandt's Ostpolitik: security in Europe must not be framed as a permanently adversarial process. Security is not a zero-sum game. Increased security for one side must not be perceived by the other side as reducing its own security. So, in my view, a re-launch of arms control must cover five areas. We need agreements that:
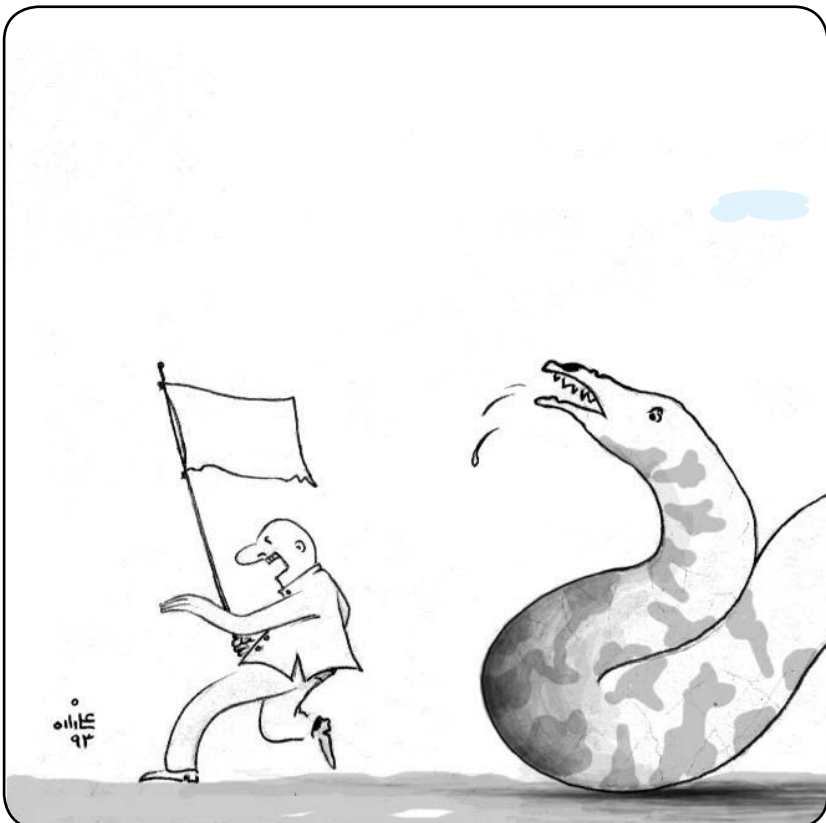
• define regional ceilings, minimum distances, and transparency measures (especially in militarily sensitive regions such as the Baltics);

• take into account new military capabilities and strategies (smaller, mobile units, rather than traditional, large armies, taking resources such as transport capabilities into consideration accordingly);

• integrate new weapons systems (for example, drones);

• permit effective, rapidly deployable, flexible, and independent verification in times of crisis (carried out by, say, the OSCE);

• can be applied where territorial status is disputed.

On these complex issues, we want to launch a structured dialogue with all those who share responsibility for European security. The OSCE, which Germany is chairing this year, is one important forum for such a dialogue.

It's not certain that such an undertaking can succeed at a time when world order is eroding and relations with Russia are strained. But it would be irresponsible not to try.

True, Russia has violated basic principles of peace – territorial integrity, free choice of alliances, and recognition of international law – that are non-negotiable for us in the West. But we must likewise be united in seeking to avoid an upward spiral of antagonism and confrontation. In the West, as in Russia, our world seems increasingly dangerous. Islamist terrorism, savage conflicts in the Middle East, failing states, and the refugee crisis imply risks for all Europe. Security capabilities on both sides are stretched to the limit. Nobody wins and everyone loses if we exhaust ourselves in a new arms race.

By re-launching arms control we can make a tangible offer of cooperation to all those who want to shoulder responsibility for Europe's security. It is time to try the impossible. (Courtesy Project Syndicate)
Frank-Walter Steinmeier is Germany's Foreign Minister.