

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



September 16, 2017

## Democracy and Conflict Prevention

September 15 was celebrated throughout the world as International Day of Democracy. The day was basically designated by United Nations through the resolution A/62/7 in 2007 and at the same time UN General Assembly encouraged the governments of the world to 'strengthen national programs devoted to the promotion and consolidation of democracy'. The theme for the Day this year was 'Democracy and Conflict Prevention', which focuses on the critical need to strengthen democratic institutions to promote peace and stability. A more integrated approach to foster resilient societies calls for effective and inclusive democratic governance with respect for human rights and the rule of law.

Afghanistan is also struggling because of the ongoing insecurity and terrorism, which have influenced the lives of the people to a large extent - keeping them away from the benefits of a truly democratic system. Unfortunately, the leaders are not in the position to realize that they need to strengthen democracy in order to eradicate insecurity and terrorism, and they have been exerting their energies to make the opposite possible. For conflict prevention, it is important for the country to stick to the essentials of democracy and try to achieve them in the best possible manner.

One of the basic requirements of democracy is knowledge and education. Democracy requires not merely an absence of ignorance but also that the citizens are adequately educated. Proper education will produce a wise leadership and a vigilant public and 'Eternal vigilance is the price of democracy'. If knowledge remains scanty, fragmentary and confined to narrow circles and if the mass of humanity remains steeped in ignorance and error, there can be no prospects for the success of democracy. Education makes citizens vigilant and also gives them the boldness to criticize government measures which are ill-conceived or harmful. In fact, education produces wise leadership and an enlightened and alert public.

No two human beings can ever think alike, it is natural to come across dissenting opinions at every step, in every field. True democratic spirit lies in overcoming dissent through discussion and persuasion and not through coercion. In a democracy, views are not imposed, views are shaped and molded. Democracy inculcates among the people the habit of tolerance and compromise and teaches them to show due regard for the opinions and sentiments of others.

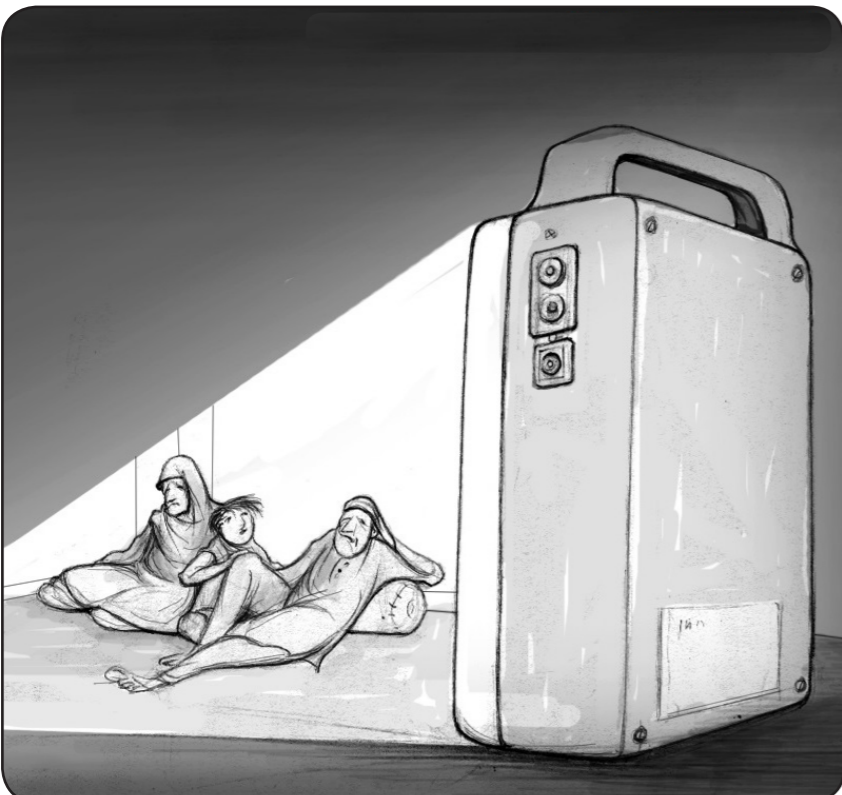
A free and fair press is another vital necessity for democracy to flourish. It ventilates public opinion and enables the government to frame policies in the interests of the masses.

The newspaper acts as a kind of liaison between the government and the people. It acquaints the people with the policy and principles of the government. At the same time, it reflects the public reaction to this policy and thus enables the government to modify it. Since it gives such extensive publicity to the movements of the ministers and other higher-ups, it exercises a very sobering influence on them. It does not let them forget that they are in office as the representatives of the people to whom they are finally answerable. It keeps a powerful check on the corruption and tyranny of the government.

For the health and efficiency of a democracy, an effective, vigilant and working opposition is indispensable. Strong opposition exercises a healthy restraint on the ruling party and prevents it from subjecting the people to arbitrary and despotic rule. No free large country has been without political parties. None has shown how a representative government could efficiently work in the absence of strong political parties. Effective opposition saves a country from turmoil; it safeguards it from coup d'état. If the party in power neglects public welfare, the voters can oust it and give power to the opposition.

However, the competing political parties must not forget that a sense of responsibility and a desire to give topmost priority to public interest against party interest would certainly boost the image of the democracy in the public eye. On the contrary, lack of discipline and constructive approach inevitably leads to instable confusion and reversal of economic progress.

It is now quite a few years since we embarked upon a democratic experiment. Today, when we make an appraisal of our democracy, we find it still lacking in certain important requisites. A large majority of our people are still illiterate. Glaring disparities between the rich and the poor not only persist but have become accentuated. There is no economic security; food is scarce, poverty appalling and unemployment rampant. Ethnicity and class exclusiveness still haunt our minds! Provincial and linguistic differences still create distrust and bitterness. The masses also lack civic probity. Corrupt and dishonest administration is eating into the very vitals of our democracy. Democracy can only flourish in our country when the true essence of democratic values and culture is understood, implemented and practiced devoid of discretion of any sort. Accordingly democratization of society would lead to a prosperous country and people.



## Will We Witness International Census about Fighting Terrorism?

By Ghulam Sakhi Ehsani

The swift evolution in regional and international policy of influential powers in recent months reflects their genuine intention and serious determination vis-à-vis terrorist groups. There has been mixed reaction following the declaration of US strategy about Afghanistan and its emphasis on long-term presence so as to win the 'war on terror' and also its first stress on this issue that Pakistan had been changed into safe haven for the Taliban's activities as they, along with Haqqani network, orchestrate their attacks against Afghanistan. The backlash was shown about a number of issues: (1) The US appreciation about the constructive role of India and stressing the extension of its economic and security role in Afghanistan. (2) Expressing dissatisfaction with Pakistan on the basis that despite receiving millions of dollars in terms of fighting terrorism, then it changed into safe haven for terrorists. (3) Pointing out that the US would not be indifferent about it and Pakistan had to show its sincerity in action.

As a main and strategic ally to Pakistan, China expressed her discontent over the US strategy concerning Afghanistan and South East Asia calling the US status about Pakistan unjust. According to China, Pakistan has been at the forefront of fighting terrorism and suffered great sacrifices. This country deserves to be appreciated. Russia also called the new strategy of the US unrealistic and futile.

Over all, these reactions will be considered as the emergence of new polarization at regional and international level and among the influential powers. With this polarization, China, Russia and Pakistan are on the one side and the US, India and its western allies will be on the other side.

This issue spread fear among analysts that Afghanistan might change into battleground once more. But the final statement of the BRICS Summit, which consists of Russia, China, India, Brazil, and South Africa, has created a new hope about fighting terrorism and their clear understanding of shared peril of terrorism. This statement declares that the centers of terrorist activities which have posed threat to the regional and global security are in Pakistan.

This is promising in terms of fighting terrorism and terrorist groups. What adds more significance to the final statement of BRICS summit is its clear mention of the Taliban, al-Qaeda, the self-styled Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), East Turkestan Islamic Party (ETIP), Is-

lamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), Lashkar-e-Taiba, Haqqani network, Jaish-e-Mohammad, Tahreek-e-Taliban Pakistan, and Hizb ut-Tahrir, which are considered the main threat and disruptive of regional security. Now the support of China - which is one of Pakistan's main and strategic allies - for this statement, will be taken as a next significant outcome for Afghanistan, which frequently said that terrorist attacks are orchestrated in Pakistan and if this country does not abandon its dual game vis-à-vis terrorism or divide it into the good and bad, the process of fighting terrorism will not come to fruition.

There is no doubt that in the wake of events occurring recently in battlefield and the defeat of terrorists in Syria and Iraq, there will be great changes. The defeat of terrorist groups in Syria and Iraq cause them to retreat and splinter. On the other hand, the ISIS was able to recruit from Middle East, Afghanistan and even China so as to extend the realm of its influence. It is clear for China that the ongoing extension of such groups will pose serious security and economic threat to all regional countries, especially China, Russia, and India.

So, based on a realistic and economy-oriented perspective, as economic activities are prioritized by China, there is a need that Chinese officials will consider their security-economic interests regardless of political competition and deem the issue of terrorism serious, along with other members of BRICS and western countries.

Fighting terrorism will be prolific if the strong regional and international powers urge Pakistan to abandon its dual policy about terrorism, since dividing terrorism into the good and bad will hamper the formation of international census about fighting terrorism.

One of the reasons behind the failure of defeating terrorism is Pakistan's frequent refusal to the issue that it has been the sanctuary of terrorist groups or they have been organizing their attacks from across the border. So, terrorists should not be divided into the good and bad. All in all, the final summit of BRICS will result in the following outcomes:

- (1) An important outcome for Kabul and the reality of Afghanistan's claim that the main sanctuaries and centers of terrorist groups are located across the border.
- (2) Sidelining Pakistan at international level.
- (3) Strengthening hope for the formation of international census in fighting terrorism.

Ghulam Sakhi Ehsani is the permanent writer of the Daily Outlook Afghanistan. He can be reached at the outlookafghanistan@gmail.com

## Al-Qaeda on the Rise in Syria

By Manish Rai

Exclusive for the Daily Outlook

While the United States and NATO remains focused on defeating Islamic State in Syria and Iraq, Al-Qaeda in Syria is accumulating strength and territory at an alarming pace and may eventually pose the most daunting counterterrorism challenge that the US and west has ever faced. Al-Qaeda has reportedly benefited from the U.S.-led coalition's single-minded focus against ISIS and exploited the opposition against Syrian President Bashar al-Assad to grow stronger.

While ISIS is under daily coalition bombardment, Al-Qaeda has been thriving, continuing to re-align itself with local forces, and re-emerging as the world's enduring terror group. Al-Qaeda has created its most powerful stronghold ever in north-west Syria.

It has taken full control of Idlib province and of a vital Syrian-Turkish border crossing since July this year. "Idlib Province is the largest Al-Qaeda safe haven since 9/11" says Brett McGurk, the senior US envoy to the international coalition fighting ISIS. The Al-Qaeda linked movement, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), which used to be called Jabhat al-Nusra, has long been the most powerful rebel group in western Syria. But after the capture of east Aleppo by the Syrian army last December, it moved to eliminate its rivals in Idlib, including its powerful former Turkish-backed ally Ahrar al-Sham. Now HTS has a stronghold over the province and it's unchallenged.

HTS is estimated to have 30,000 experienced fighters whose numbers is growing as it integrates brigades from other defeated rebel groups and recruit its young men from the camps for Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) who have sought refuge in Idlib from Syrian government forces. Al-Qaeda is growing in strength in and around Idlib province just as ISIS is suffering defeat after defeat in eastern Syria and Iraq. It is very much possible that if Islamic State is destroyed or rendered a marginal force, Sunni Arab jihadist refusing to surrender to President Assad's army and intelligence service will have no alternative but to join Al-Qaeda linked HTS.

Since it entered the Syrian conflict, Al-Qaeda has established its local affiliate as one of the most dominant rebel groups in the country and has quietly amassed its largest guerrilla army in history. Right now, Al-Qaeda has established itself as the tip of the spear in the resistance against the Assad regime and as a result of this many Sunnis Arabs who do not share Al-Qaeda's jihadist ideology are also flocking to Al-Qaeda because it is the only credible option for fighting

Assad. Al-Qaeda's goal has always been to take charge of the Syrian uprising and slowly transform it into a global jihad against Iran, Russia and the United States. In achieving this partial success Al-Qaeda that been helped by US led coalition which focused almost exclusively on the Al-Qaeda staunch rival Islamic State.

Counterterrorism officials and experts are now suggesting that the group's Syrian wing may be the largest and strongest Al-Qaeda branch in the world. Qaeda is transitioning from a small terrorist outfit with struggling affiliates to a potent transnational network of branches that has gained in numbers and fighting strength and now spans the Middle East, Africa, and Asia.

Al-Qaeda as an organization has spent the last five years growing durable, deep roots in Syrian opposition and revolutionary society through outreach to tribal leaders, power brokers and sometimes the broader community, rather than outright fear and coercion. While Islamic State, on the other hand, has shallow roots. IS never focused on acquiring popular support it just controls the population.

Al-Qaeda reduced its public profile, downplayed its successes rather than publicizing them, and embedded further within local populations. In this way, Al-Qaeda presented itself to the local communities as a more palatable alternative to its bloodthirsty rival.

It's unfortunate that the US is not giving proper attention to the seriousness of the threat Al-Qaeda poses. With a base in Syria they can threaten American interests in the entire Levant region, Europe, and US allies in Jordan and Israel. Strong base in the heart of Middle East will not only allow Al-Qaeda with an opportunity to de-stabilise the region. But it will also provide a springboard for Al-Qaeda to launch strikes into Europe and West.

As Al-Qaeda leader Zawahiri has made it clear on several occasions that although the group may have prioritised local campaigns for the moment but it still remains committed to attacks on the west in the long term.

Al-Qaeda is almost certainly using its Syrian base for refining and improving its external attack capabilities to be prepared to deploy them at a future date against Western interests. Therefore, international community must seek urgently to counter-attack Al-Qaeda Syrian affiliate HTS, which grows stronger by the day, without waiting for the complete destruction of the Islamic State. Even the large-scale land intervention in Idlib like IS de-facto capital Raqqa should be considered.

Manish Rai is a columnist for Middle-East and Af-Pak region and Editor of geo-political news agency Viewsaround can be reached at manishraiwa@gmail.com



Chairman / Editor-in-Chief: Moh. Reza Huwaida

Vice-Chairman: Kazim Ali Gulzari

Email: outlookafghanistan@gmail.com

Phone: 0093 (799) 005019/777-005019

www.outlookafghanistan.net



The views and opinions expressed in the articles are those of the authors and do not reflect the views or opinions of the Daily Outlook Afghanistan.