

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



September 21, 2019

Women Prone to Taliban's Ideology

Afghan women have aired their concern about return of the Islamic Emirate on several occasions and fear that its return will jeopardize their fundamental rights and freedoms. The Taliban still exercise their radical ideology towards women in their dominated areas and restrict their liberties.

There are many reasons behind women's concern: First, Afghan women have been sidelined in the peace talks and were barely provided the platform to have their say. Although some women participated in informal talks with the Taliban in Moscow this year, they either could not represent all women in Afghanistan or their words fell on deaf ears. In the peace agreement between the Taliban and US representatives, drafted after nine rounds of talks, women's concerns were not addressed.

Second, women made great strides under the post-Taliban nascent democratic administration and were entitled equally with men. Their active participation in social, political, and economic spheres is beyond doubt. For instance, Afghan women have no restriction to run for presidential elections or serve in police ranks. They hold high political positions and proved their qualifications and talents in significant posts. Now with the return of the Islamic Emirate, women fear that all their past achievements will be at stake.

It is believed that some political figures, who practice parochial mindset towards women's rights and liberties, are likely to support the Taliban's stance regarding women. As a result, the leader of Hazb-e-Islami Gulbuddin Hekmatyar views women's rights through the prism of Taliban-like Islamic Sharia. In his recent interview with BBC, he said that the "Law of Elimination of Violence against Women", which was endorsed by former Afghan President Hamid Karzai, was against Islamic tenets and Afghans' cultural values. According to him, that law had been copied or translated from those of western, which are against Islamic tenets. He also talked against women's shelters, built to protect women from domestic violence, adding that those shelters were "the most insecure" place for women and would disrupt family relations. Hekmatyar was also against co-educational system in Afghanistan, which has not been resisted by Afghans so far. Further, he denied that Afghanistan had been the worst place for women adding that the level of violence against women had been exaggerated. Meanwhile, he preferred family issues to be resolved by tribal councils rather than by country's courts.

Hekmatyar, who runs for president, joined the Afghan government through a peace deal and would approach women through Islamic Sharia rather than a democratic law if he wins the elections, which seems impossible.

With this in mind, the Taliban are also likely to treat women radically if they gain power, which is the main cause for concern.

Third, women are highly vulnerable to radical ideology and political upheaval. In the course of history, Afghan women were persecuted to a great extent and their rights and freedoms were curtailed for ideological reasons. They were discriminated on a large scale and bore the brunt of violence during the Taliban regime (1996 - 2001). That is, gender discrimination was widespread during both Mujahidin and Taliban regimes.

If peace talks are resumed, women's concerns should be put on the table and their rights and freedoms have to be protected at all costs. The fundamental rights of women, stated in the constitution, should not be compromised. In other words, safeguarding the rights and dignity of women and abiding by the constitution should be set as preconditions for talks. It is believed that Afghan people will not accept a peace deal that would put their rights at stake or undo the past achievements since they made great sacrifices for achieving all those democratic principles.

Women should also be provided seats around the negotiating table to have their say and urge the Taliban not to enter Afghanistan with their past ideology, which was extremely aggressive and radical.

The Taliban should understand that Afghans, mainly women, are not ready to accept their radical ideology. In the upcoming presidential elections, Afghans will flock to ballot boxes to show that they support democracy and are proud to have participation in political issues.

Besides the Taliban, both the Afghan government and its international allies should advocate women's rights and freedoms at the peace table. If peace deal is signed between the Taliban and their interlocutors, the Taliban should no more be able to impose their warped mind on Afghan people or seek to interpret women's rights through their own radical ideology. Since the Taliban have claimed that their ideology had been moderated, they should abide by Afghan constitution and respect the rights of each individual across the country.

Taliban Persist Attacking on Civilians and National Infrastructures in Afghanistan

By: Mohammad Zahir Akbari

It is nearly two decades that Taliban have been persistently killing civilians and non-civilians violating national and internal laws and values. They have also destroyed public infrastructure such as schools, mosques, market, masques, roads, and so on. In the eve of election and during peace process they have intensified their attacks aiming to cancel the election and gain more privilege in the peace process. The latest example of Taliban attack was on President Ghani's campaign rally in the central province of Parwan which ended with at least 26 innocent people killed and 42 wounded as spokesperson for the Ministry of Interior confirmed. The Taliban has immediately claimed responsibility for the attack, claiming they were targeting security forces at the campaign rally.

In the same day, Taliban carried out another suicide attacks in Kabul city close to one of the Ministry of Defense's buildings in Police District 9 (PD9). According to Ministry of Interior statement, at least 22 civilians were killed and 38 others were wounded in the blast, including women and children. Thus, they carried out attacks in other provinces across the country warning people that its fighters will intensify war against the Afghan government and foreign forces to dissuade people from voting in the September 28 vote. They also destroyed several power lines which provide services to around 11 provinces in the country.

Few weeks ago, the peace talks between the United States and the Taliban also collapsed due to the same reason when they killed a US soldier and 11 more wounded in Kabul city. Orally, they declare readiness for peace process, national interests and loyalty to Islamic values but in practice they have never been honest to what they chanted in their slogans. They might consider violence as its strength point while it shows their weakness, dark mentality and its incompatibility to modern values with spreading hatred among the people. The history of Afghanistan will never forget what Taliban imposed in last two decades on the already deprived people.

Taliban think that they are fighting for freedom of the country but their actions pave the ground for more interference of foreign people in the country. In fact, the Taliban action is not justifiable to any system or criteria in the world. This means, they receive order from foreigners to kill their people and destroy their country or else they understand that there are no foreigners at schools, election campaign, inside the mosques and other public area. They are also aware that the beneficiaries of power line in provinces are genuine Afghan people yet they deprive people from the services.

Although the government and international community have jointly decided to hold the elections, the Taliban are trying to prevent people from participation in the election by launching

suicide attacks, hostages and killing innocent people. According to political experts, Taliban want to cancel or interrupt the election because they do not want a legitimate and strong government in Afghanistan. In case of intra-Afghan talks, they want a weak and unregulated government that could easily meet its demands in the negotiation process and impose its extremist demand on a weak government. In fact, Taliban want to compel government and the international community to return to the faulty and incomplete peace process. Nevertheless, there are some internal elements that directly or indirectly support the terrorist groups.

Those who insist that the Taliban have changed and that the Taliban of today are not the Taliban of yesterday - they well are dressed, stand in front of the television, do not escape from photographers, journalist and respect modern values - how can justify the Taliban's crimes. Based on their acts and crimes, the Taliban have not shown any good attitudes and changes to show that they really want peace and development in the country. In the past, Taliban did not value human life, they did not recognize women's rights and did not accept elections yet they are with the same dark thoughts and inhumane behavior as very easily endanger the lives of innocent people. Almost every day, they kill innocent people including passengers, man, women and children.

The attacks and behavior of Taliban indicate that they are not satisfied with less than Emirate in Afghanistan. Unfortunately, some of the weak and conservative stances against brutality deeds of Taliban have made the group hopeful about the black rule of the Emirate. If the political leaders and elites stood against atrocities of the Taliban in solidarity with the people of Afghanistan, today the Taliban would not have dared to threaten the lives of the Afghans so shamelessly. According to people, Emirate is the reminder of bitter days of darkness that had turned Afghanistan into a burning and deadly hell. Now, people want to experience peace, security and prosperity in the shadow of democracy and never go back.

Based on the past and current position of Taliban, their action and position have not changed yet. So, first, it is the responsibility of Afghan government to protect the supreme interests of the country against terrorists and their supporters. Second, we should encourage Afghan allies and friends to break silence against Taliban brutality.

We must not allow the country to be repeatedly invaded by terrorist groups and other foreign elements. The political circles and political leaders must not try to victimize national interests against their own personal and family interests.

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Ukraine Gets Its Chance

By: Carl Bildt

Suddenly, opinion polls find that Ukrainians are more optimistic about their future than are citizens of most other countries around the world. That will come as a surprise to many, given Ukraine's manifold challenges. And yet it is justified by the country's current political trajectory.

For the first two decades after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Ukraine was one of the most poorly governed of the successor states. Whereas Russia initially underwent liberal economic reforms and has long benefited from high oil and gas prices, and the Baltic states were admitted to the European Union in 2004, Ukraine was left in the dust. Neighboring Poland's per capita GDP is now almost five times higher than Ukraine's, even though the two started post-communist life on roughly the same economic footing.

Although Ukraine's 2004 Orange Revolution revealed a popular yearning for change, it soon ended in internal disputes and disappointment. By the time the country's long-held desire for closer alignment with the EU began to materialize politically, a newly ambitious Russia had reemerged to challenge Ukraine's shift to the West. Making matters worse, Ukraine's financial situation was a disaster. Endemic corruption and the absence of serious reforms had essentially disqualified it from receiving help from the International Monetary Fund or Western governments, leaving then-President Viktor Yanukovich heavily dependent on the Kremlin (probably much more so than he would have wished).

In late 2013, Yanukovich acceded to Russian demands that he scuttle Ukraine's EU Association Agreement (with its promise of a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area). Ukrainians exploded in anger, and the Yanukovich regime responded with violence, killing some 100 people in the streets of Kyiv. But, failing to stop the protests, Yanukovich eventually fled to Russia, which intervened militarily.

By the spring of 2014, Ukraine was in limbo. Russia had occupied and annexed Crimea, backed and recognized two break-away regions in the eastern Donbas region, and was conducting a thinly disguised operation to carve off Ukraine's southern regions for incorporation into a "New Russia" (Novorossyia). With its very survival in question, the country was also quite literally broke.

But Ukraine staged a remarkable recovery. In May 2014, Petro Poroshenko won the presidency in an electoral landslide that was unprecedented in the country's short democratic history.

Ukraine started to fight back, and Russian President Vladimir Putin was forced to deploy regular Russian Army forces into Ukraine's eastern provinces of Donetsk and Luhansk. A ceasefire and political process outlined in the Minsk Protocol that September served as a face-saver for Putin and his misbegotten Ukraine project, though the conflict remains unresolved. According to United Nations estimates, the fighting has claimed some 13,000 lives and forced millions of people to flee.

The latest chapter in Ukraine's saga started early this year, when Volodymyr Zelensky, a popular comedian with no political experience, clinched a surprise victory in the presidential election. And in parliamentary elections a few months later, his new political party won an absolute majority. When it comes to pursuing difficult reforms, Zelensky and his team are better positioned than any other government in Ukraine's post-Soviet history.

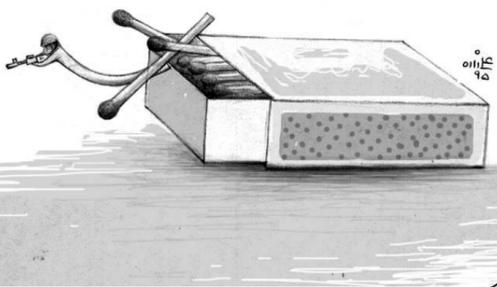
Zelensky's election reflects a deep-seated yearning for radical change. His campaign focused on corruption, economic malaise, and the ongoing conflict in the east, and it is these issues that will loom large during his presidency. Although Ukraine has adopted more far-reaching reforms than any other European country in recent years, voters want more, and they have come to believe that Zelensky and his young team are the ones who can deliver it.

Zelensky has outlined a (still-vague) program of radical policies aimed at expanding the size of the Ukrainian economy by 40% in the coming years. As he and his advisers have made clear, this will require a substantial increase in foreign investment, which will not be forthcoming until the judiciary is seen as clean and efficient. A vigorous crackdown on corruption is a key prerequisite for economic growth.

One particularly promising economic proposal would expand private ownership of land, in order to encourage competition and innovation in the agriculture sector. As home to one-third of the planet's super-fertile "black earth," Ukraine has already surpassed Russia as the world's top grain exporter, and is the EU's third-largest food supplier after the United States and Brazil. It could accomplish much more with growth-enhancing reforms in place.

Zelensky and his team are benefiting from strong tailwinds for now. But Ukraine's future will depend on how well they use their political honeymoon to implement difficult reforms. Headwinds will inevitably arrive. But the initial signs are encouraging. Ukrainians are not wrong to be optimistic.

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