

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



January 02, 2016

A Stride towards Democracy in New Year

Since the very inception of the universe time has been experiencing a continuous flow, and within this flow there are moments that are passing; there are hours that are going by and the flow remains constant. This flow has now completed another period of days of nights and another year has been added in the book of the history, and the nations of the world have acquired another treasure of experience and learning in their lives.

Within the limitless flow of the moments, the existence has been tired and its feet are hurting, but the life has kept the pace with time. We have entered a new year (2016) and we have the profit and loss statement of the year that has gone by in our hands. During the time that has passed we have less profit than loss; however, the new year that we have entered may give us great opportunity to make up for all the loss and for that we have great expectations. The greatest opportunity in this year would be that we would be given a chance of deciding our own destiny to a certain extent and this opportunity has been achieved after a lot of hard work and sacrifices. At the same time, this year would be a year wherein we would be tested to a large extent.

We should expect that there would be many things happening in this year and whether these happenings would be in our favor or would turn out to be against us depends on ourselves largely. Now, we ourselves have to be the accountable and the judge.

We are now on a road to a democratic country and we need to pursue the same track. The nourishment of democracy this year would require us to be really vigilant. We would require amending our conscience and our inner selves. The departure or distance from democracy would only spoil us to a further extend. Now that we have decided to welcome it with open arms we require changing ourselves.

The behavior of democracy is largely based on the art of speaking and the patience to listen adequately. Democracy supports the freedom of expression and allows everyone to say what he wants to say. In democracy we basically accept the sort of environment wherein we can be opposed openly. Those people who support democracy fundamentally want that the issues should be solved through dialogue and reasoning not through violence. They want that the opposite reasons should be listened to sufficiently and the claims should always be reconsidered.

Within democracy, first of all we need to develop the preparedness to accept that the truth may not be with us and it may be with others. Democracy is never suitable for those who believe that their views are absolute and final and they do not have the patience to listen others.

The absolute truth has never been known by the people. Yes, certain aspects of a complete truth have been known and people have to compromise with the same. These aspects are present within different circles. Within the circle of politics the aspect of truth lies within a system which considers the welfare of the people as its basic pillar. And, democracy strives to establish the sort of circumstances that are suitable to guarantee welfare of the people.

Though we have had considerable strides towards democracy, yet there are many behavioral issues that we need to deal with. We have dishonesty in our intentions and extremism in our actions. The difference in opinion and thoughts are dealt through intolerance and even violence. Our statements have taken the shape of threats. Some people have even started the attitude of calling others with different opinions as non-Muslims and infidels. The true spirit of democracy can only be found in the theories and promises; therefore, the people do not see the true practice of it and are ambiguous about it. This is really unfortunate that at this instance of hope and great expectations we are suffering from these problems; yet, we do not have to be disheartened.

If we really like democracy and democratic values, we would require making its prerequisites possible. We would need to feel our responsibility in order to lead our country towards true democracy; otherwise, the dream of democracy may shatter and we will not be able to recreate it. Though the roles of government and the people play a very important role in it, most of the responsibilities go to those leaders and religious scholars who have great influence in forming the opinion and the attitude of the people. They need to understand that instead of sowing the seeds of hatred and intolerance in the minds and hearts of the people, they can spread love and tolerance and they can really participate in forming an environment that is suitable for democracy. As Barack Obama had said in one of his press conferences, "The strongest democracies flourish from frequent and lively debate, but they endure when people of every background and belief find a way to set aside smaller differences in service of a greater purpose."



Afghanistan's Fledgling Air Force

By Abdul Ahad Bahrami

In order to bolster the campaign against the insurgency in Afghanistan, strengthening Afghanistan's air force is a key priority for the Afghan government and International allies. However, despite hundreds of millions of dollars being spent, the efforts for building an effective air force in the country has been lagging behind the stated objectives. This is while the role of well-functional air force, supporting Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) in its anti-insurgency operations, is deemed as crucial for winning the war. According to US special inspector for construction of Afghanistan (SIGAR), the United States has spent more than \$2.3 billion in the past five years for development of the Afghan Air Force (AAF). According to a SIGAR report, the United States has spent more than \$1.8 billion for the development of the Afghan Air Force for the years 2012 to 2015 and more than 935 million dollars on provision of equipment and aircrafts for the force.

This is while there is still a long path ahead for the Afghan Air Forces (AAF) to become a fully functional air force, and provide the crucial capability of aerial firepower to ANSF. AAF has started playing a role in boosting the ANSF in the ongoing fight against the insurgent groups across the country. In 2015, when ANSF shouldered the burden of the war against the Taliban alone as the US-led NATO alliance ended its combat mission in Afghanistan, Afghanistan's fledgling air force played a more significant role in the fight against the insurgent groups. Though it is far from being capable of fully providing the required support for the ground forces, its operations have been viewed as helpful for the government forces in the battle.

The government of Afghanistan has long been complaining from the US for not equipping the AAF with the required weaponry and the helicopters. However, there has been progress, though slower than expected, in equipping the Afghan air force with weapons and aircrafts. According to the US military, AAF now has 11 MI-35 helicopters, 52 Mi-17 helicopters, 16 MD-530 helicopters, 26 C-208 and four C-130 aircrafts. Recently, as the Indian PM visited Afghanistan, the country delivered three gunship helicopters to the Afghan government. The assistance was seen as an important move in the country's security cooperation with Afghanistan and providing assistance to help the embattled Afghan army in the fight against the insurgents. President Ashraf Ghani has said that the US will deliver 20 more aircrafts to the Afghan Air Forces in weeks. However, AAF has particularly been suffering lack of skilled staff.

There have been long differences between the Afghan government and its international allies over building an effective force to support ANSF in the fight against the Taliban. Afghan leaders have long demanded combat aircrafts from

the international community to help its ground forces in the fight against the insurgent groups. For the Afghan government forces, having airpower is meant survival in the war of attrition against the insurgents. Helping Afghan army and police forces to have the upper hand in the war, Afghanistan and the US need to speed up the efforts equip ANSF with the required planes and training its personnel. Therefore, Afghan previous government pushed for warplanes from the US and NATO for the past over a decade of the conflict. Since the fall of the Taliban regime in 2001, last year (2015) was said to be the deadliest year for the Afghan government forces in the fighting against the Taliban and other militant groups.

Afghan officials believe lack of airpower was one of the key factors behind the high casualties of the Afghan security forces engaged in a far-reaching battle against the militants. There have been many cases of government forces being besieged by militants in remote areas across the country while the central and provincial military headquarters were unable of sending reinforcements. The same was with the battle in Sangin district of Helmand province. While security forces were surrounded by the Taliban, it took days for the government to send reinforcements to break the Taliban siege.

A high rate of attrition in the army is viewed as one of the biggest threats to strong Afghan military. And the high rate of ANSF casualties is one of the major factors behind soldiers deserting the army and police forces. It is believed that better provision of aerial support to the army units fighting the militants would drastically decrease the casualties of ANSF, which in turn lead into lower rate of desertion among the troops.

A highly capable air force in Afghanistan will be able to turn the tide of the battle in favor of the Afghan forces and help containing the insurgency.

Therefore, the Afghan government needs to make it a top priority to strengthen AAF, and convince the international community to do more in training its personnel and providing weaponry and aircrafts to the force. The national unity government needs to do more through diplomatic means to ease concerns of the neighboring countries over the future of Afghan military and air force capabilities, and improve security cooperation with the neighboring countries aimed at removing any existing distrusts. The national unity government has been more successful than the previous governments in persuading key international and regional partners to boost support for the Afghan army, particularly the country's fledgling air force. The government should enhance efforts to persuade the major world and regional supporters of Afghanistan to speed up the efforts for building a sufficiently strong Afghan air force.

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Executing Foreign Policy

By Richard N. Haass

The filmmaker Woody Allen is often quoted as saying that "Showing up is 80% of life." One can quibble with the percentage, but Allen's insight is important: You have to get in the game - be a player - to have any chance of obtaining your objectives.

The same is true of world affairs. If showing up is 80% of life, at least 80% of foreign policy is following up. Smart plans, good intentions, and strong negotiating skills are essential, but they are never enough - not even close. As with business, education, and much else in life, most of what makes foreign policy work - or not - is a matter of implementation and execution.

This observation will be tested more than once in 2016 and subsequent years. One prominent example is the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), the trade pact signed in October by 12 Pacific Rim countries in Asia and the Americas. If the accord enters into force, it will expand world trade, boost economic growth, and strengthen the United States' ties with regional allies who would otherwise be tempted to move closer to China.

The agreement's entry into force, though, is subject to ratification by most of the 12 signatories' legislatures. The outcome in the US and Japan, the world's largest and third largest economies, respectively, will be particularly consequential. Indeed, everyone is waiting to see what happens in the US.

But approval by the US Congress is far from certain, especially as the presidential candidates - all of the Democrats and the leading Republicans - have come out against it. The vote, if it takes place, will be close, and the stakes are high, as failure to ratify the TPP would raise fundamental questions about America's political effectiveness and ability to be a reliable partner to its allies.

A second test will come in Syria, arguably the biggest international failure of recent years. In December, the United Nations Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 2254, which establishes a political framework for a civil war that has raged for nearly five years, claiming as many as 300,000 lives and creating millions of refugees.

A framework, however, is nothing more than an outline. In this case, it was less than that, because the resolution was silent about Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's political fate and the timing of his departure. It also raised more questions than it answered about which Syrian opposition groups would participate in negotiations. Given the many divisions both within Syria and among its neighbors, getting from the

resolution to a cease-fire and political settlement is likely to take years - and even that assessment may prove to be overly optimistic.

Yet a third test for diplomats also stems from the climate agreement reached in Paris in December. The agreement comprises voluntary pledges by governments that amount to no more than promises to do their best. In many cases, there is a lack of specificity about what is to be done. And, because the agreement is not legally binding on its signatories, the only sanction it permits is to "name and shame" countries that fail to deliver.

A fourth test stems from the agreement signed over the summer by the Security Council's five permanent members, Germany, and Iran limiting Iran's nuclear program. There are sure to be numerous disagreements over whether the parties in general, and Iran in particular, are meeting their obligations. Perhaps most important, steps will need to be taken to reassure Iran's neighbors so that they are not tempted to proceed with their own nuclear programs. At some point, the implementation challenge will include additional measures to ensure that Iran does not develop nuclear weapons once the agreement's time limits on specified programs expire.

There are a few lessons to be learned from all of this. For starters, while international accords are rarely reached easily, no one should get carried away at the signing ceremony. The negotiators still must be able to deliver their governments' full backing, and this is never automatic, especially when it comes to democracies such as the US, where different branches of government are often controlled by different political parties. A second reality is that there is an unavoidable trade-off between negotiations and implementation. In many cases, agreement is possible only if critical details are left unresolved. But such "creative ambiguity" also ensures that the implementation phase will be more difficult, as tough choices that were postponed suddenly must be addressed.

Third, there will inevitably be moments when one or another party does not implement the pact in a manner judged to be adequate. Dealing with episodes of alleged non-compliance can prove to be every bit as demanding as the original negotiation. Which brings us back to where we began. All four of the major international accords reached in 2015 - the TPP, the Security Council's Syria resolution, the Paris climate agreement, and the Iran nuclear deal - required great effort to negotiate. Making them work in 2016 and beyond will prove even harder. As Woody Allen could tell you, it is akin to the difference between writing a screenplay and making a movie. (Courtesy Project Syndicate)

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