Balancing Rights and Responsibilities

There are two ways of looking at the role and position of an individual within a society. One is through the lens of rights, while the other is through the lens of responsibilities. Mostly, the first one is the way, the people or the subjects want to see themselves. They perceive themselves as the ones with the rights and they consider that the governments have the responsibilities to fulfill those rights; therefore, most of their focus is whether the individuals are getting their rights and the governments are performing well to satiate those rights.
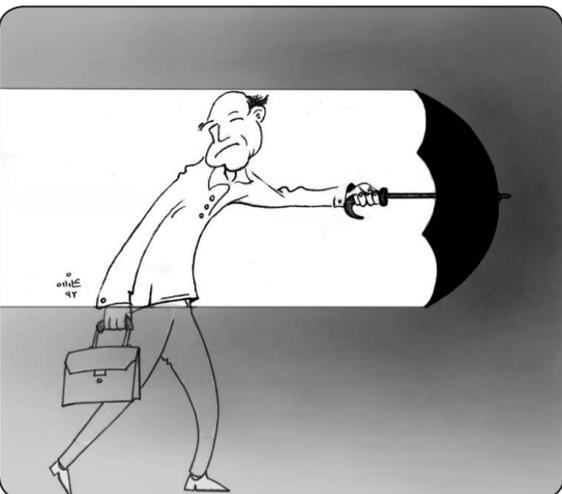
The other perspective is mostly adopted by the governments; they want to see the people to be responsible citizens and expect that they should perform all the responsibilities that the state expects them to perform. They consider the individuals worthy to be given their rights only after they fulfill their responsibilities. However, it is important to see that both these views are extreme in nature.

For the people, it is really important to have a balanced view. They don't have to see their position within the society only from the perspective of the rightful candidates for certain decided rights; rather, they have to realize that they have many important responsibilities as well which they have to perform. Because of the cooperative nature of the society, it is vital to understand that all the individuals are responsible for the development of the society equally. If there are certain shortcomings within the society, the people are responsible in certain ways as well.

It is really weird to find people blaming only the governments for all the disorder and problems in the society. Before blaming the governments for all the misdeeds, it is important to consider some of very important questions – Have we ever bothered to see around ourselves and know the problems deeply? Have we every tied to bring about developments in the society? Have we ever been quite responsible to play our roles? Have we ever thought to keep the social matters above all other concerns? Have we ever considered working for the society selflessly? Have we ever realized our duties towards the society beyond our rights? Have we ever recognized our own tendency and things we can do for betterment? And have we ever learnt to have a critical view over our actions as and ask ourselves about the mistakes that we commit without much consideration? Or we have only found the easiest way to put the entire burden over shoulders of the governments? It is important to note that all the governments that we hold responsible for having done nothing and for all harms to the society, are composed of the people who live in the same surroundings we have and they lead us because we have made them so. Without the will and cooperation of the people, leaders would never become leaders. It is also imperative to consider that when we ourselves escape our duties, why shouldn't the leaders do the same, as they are human beings as well? When we have never considered the evil to be eliminated from the roots and deconstruct the old useless system; how can we think to build anything new? How come we expect the leaders to be different from us when they are the products of the same corrupt society? We do not have the complete privilege to criticize them when we have never seen into our own collars. It is necessary to understand that the leaders may be able to give just a guideline to follow and ultimately it is the people themselves who have bring about changes.

As the human society is becoming more and more democratic the role of the people is getting more and more importance. The will of the people basically gets transformed into elections that choose the leaders to govern the country. Most of the institutions in democratic setup are people centered, not autocratic where the leaders alone take decisions; therefore, it is important in such setup that how the subjects are, and what sort of role they play. If the subjects are aware, active and cooperative, a democratic setup is bound to be successful.

Our society can never go forth if we rely only on some representatives to do it. Unless we, all the common members of the society, try to support them, we will not face success in life. Let us leave blaming the governments and leaders only, because they are not wrong alone; we are their partners of equal shares of evils and let us promise to use up our energy and strength all together for a common cause and purpose and a broader perspective of mass well-being. Let us substitute the old ideas with the new ones in order to go with the pace of developed and civilized world. Let us not only talk about our rights but speak up for our duties as well to have a better society. Let us all be active to play our role to fill the gap between leaders and the common people. Let us think beyond our personal interests to coup with the changing mood of the entire world.

Trump's Political Conundrum about Afghanistan

By: Hujjatullah Zia

In his Wednesday's remarks, US President Donald Trump said Pakistan and Russia should fight in Afghanistan not the US. He also gave a historically garbled account of Moscow's experience in the country and suggested that the US should not follow the former Soviet Union's footsteps by draining its resources here. Trump, who called his just-departed defense secretary James Mattis as "great military genius" in December 2017, disapproved of him in his remarks. "I am not happy with what he done in Afghanistan, and I shouldn't be happy," he said.

Trump's remarks seem to have incensed many Republicans and US generals who supported the US' military presence in Afghanistan.

Trump's endorsement of the former Soviet Union invasion has likely hurt the feelings of Afghans, mainly Mujahedeen, who paid heavy sacrifices in the fight against the Soviet Union. Moscow invasion of Afghanistan resulted in heavy destruction and casualties in the country and sowed the seeds of civil war. Despite Trump's statement, there was no issue of terrorism in 1970s or 1980s and Afghanistan posed no threat to the region or its neighboring countries. Terrorism and al-Qaeda emerged in Afghanistan in 1990s with the Taliban's regime. Hence, the Soviet Union, which spilt the blood of millions of Afghans, including women and children, and wreaked havoc on country's infrastructure, economy and culture, violated international and humanitarian law. Soviet Union committed war crime in Afghanistan with impunity. Endorsing the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan is equal to supporting the violation of human rights and humanitarian law and underestimating a decade of jihad carried out by Afghan people.

On the other hand, Afghans will not allow Pakistan to fight in Afghanistan's soil. Pakistan, along with Saudi Arabia and UAE, officially recognized the Taliban's regime. Mistrust between Kabul and Islamabad persists following years of blame game.

Meanwhile, a sense of sensitivity against Russia still lingers in Afghanistan. That is, a number of Afghans tend to view Russia from the 1980s perspective. Russia's military inference in Afghanistan is not acceptable to Afghan nation or state. The horrible consequences of Soviet Union invasion of Afghanistan is still felt in the country. The war imposed by the Soviet forces completely dismantled the country.

The irony is that last year Trump said that "Pakistan often gives safe haven to agents of chaos, violence and terror" while declaring his strategy about Afghanistan and South Asia, this year, however, he says Pakistan should fight in Afghanistan to combat terrorism.

Referring to last year's bloody attack in Barcelona, Trump repeatedly warned against the horrible "consequences of a hasty withdrawal", but this year he seems inclined to reduce the number of troops in Afghanistan. This U-turn in Trump's strategy within a year is astonishing for observers of Washington.

It is self-explanatory that terrorism is a global threat. Therefore, all world powers, including Russia and Pakistan, have to combat terrorism to stabilize the globe and put an end to violence and bloodshed. Afghanistan, however, is the main casualty of terrorism. If Afghanistan's neighboring countries fear the spillover, they have to seek a political solution to the ongoing crisis in the country. Kabul government has consistently urged Pakistan to combat terrorism in its own soil and support Afghanistan through bringing the Taliban to the negotiating table with Kabul representatives. Kabul will also welcome Russia's role in peace talks since both Russia and Islamabad believe that military deal will not lead to peace in the country.

It should be noted that the US war on terror is not similar to that of the Soviet-Afghan War. The Soviet Union sough to shore up its pro-communist puppet government and expand its influence through the use of force. All Afghans, with few exceptions, were against the invasion and the US sided Afghans in that historical fight.

All in all, the unmitigated insurgency has frustrated Afghan people. It is believed that if regional powers combat terrorism with genuine intention and eradicate their financial resources and safe havens, terrorist networks will be dismantled. To eliminate terrorism, the US and its allies should pressure regional powers to counter insurgency indiscriminately and target their safe havens wherever they are.

Likewise, the US withdrawal in the current critical situation is not recommended. Trump should review his statements he made last year, "The vacuum we created by leaving too soon gave safe haven for ISIS to spread, to grow, recruit and launch attacks. We cannot repeat in Afghanistan the mistake our leaders made in Iraq".

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A Year to Act

By: Ian Goldin and Robert Muggah

Let us hope that 2019 is the year when the historical tide turns. In 2018, divisions within and between countries continued to deepen. And while geopolitical tensions and political tribalism have transformed international relations and national politics, new technologies are upending long-held assumptions about security, politics, and economics. Complicating matters further is the growing interdependence of our societies. We are all increasingly subject to forces beyond the control of any one country, city, or individual, not least when it comes to climate change.

What a difference three decades makes. Back in 1989, the collapse of the Soviet bloc seemed to augur a triumph for liberal democratic principles and values. The development of the World Wide Web that year promised a new age of human flourishing and global cooperation. As recently as the 2000s, flashy catchphrases like "the death of distance" and "the world is flat" abounded.

Yet far from flattening the world, globalization has made it more mountainous and uneven. More than ever, one's postal code determines one's perspective, lifespan, and fate. Instead of replacing national ideals with shared values, globalization has led to rapacious competition, the decline of welfare states, and the corrosion of international institutions. And though there technically are more democracies today than in 1989, many are becoming more illiberal.

Not surprisingly, public support for globalization has waned. The attacks of September 11, 2001, and the $5.6 trillion "war on terror" certainly didn't help. Nor did the 2008 financial crisis, which exposed the failure of experts and institutions to manage interdependence and technological change. A growing divide between elites and all those who have been "left behind" has poisoned politics for a generation.

Still, the disillusionment with globalization is mostly confined to North American and Western European countries. After all, the fortunes of the emerging powers in East and Southeast Asia have risen, and most people around the world are objectively better off in the aggregate than they were 30 years ago. Outside of the West, average incomes since the fall of the Berlin Wall have doubled – and tripled in China. Life expectancy in many developing countries has increased by a whopping 15 years, and three billion more people worldwide have learned to read and write.

But there is no guarantee that this "New Enlightenment," as Steven Pinker of Harvard University calls it, will continue delivering progress. The Enlightenment of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries came in the wake of the Renaissance, which was a period not only of scientific and artistic revolution, but also of rising intolerance, religious warfare, and persecution of scientists and intellectuals.

The reactionary violence during and after the Renaissance owed much to elites' failure to manage the rapid change and rising inequalities occasioned by the print revolution. Today's elites should take note. The spectacular fallout from the US-led invasion of Iraq and the 2008 financial crisis profoundly damaged public trust in authorities and experts. What unites right-and left-wing populism is the idea that the old guard has let the people down while ensconcing itself in a cocoon of privilege.

They have a point. Flawed policies to promote globalization have let us down and contributed to growing inequality. And now, artificial intelligence and automation are threatening to replace routine jobs and accentuate social divisions. Can political leaders and citizens muster the will to tackle common threats, or are we headed for further fragmentation? Much will depend on the steps taken in 2019. Now more than ever, we must grapple with the accelerating and interdependent drivers of change. To that end, policymakers must take steps to protect the most vulnerable. Social safety nets are being slashed precisely when people need them most. After the financial crisis depleted government resources and produced crippling debts, governments such as that of the US have made matters worse by cutting taxes. More broadly, we all need to roll up our sleeves and get a handle on globalization. That means abandoning the outdated twentieth-century paradigm that divides all politics into left and right, socialism and capitalism. The politics of 2019 is values-based, which is why traditional political parties are being outflanked by parties appealing to national sentiment and nostalgic fantasies. Today's political revolution has so far been defined by anger and frustration. But those sentiments can and should be harnessed to serve the goal of constructive change. To achieve an inclusive globalization, we must address rising inequality, embrace diversity, and rescue international cooperation from the specter of unilateralism.

The stakes could not be higher than they are in 2019. When extremism, algorithms, fake news, and foreign manipulation drive politics, democracy itself is threatened. Without more active engagement on the part of policymakers and political leaders, there can be little hope for the future. The accelerating pace of change, along with deepening international interdependence, makes it harder, not easier, to find common solutions.

It is tempting to try to stop the clock and retreat from hard choices. But the changes underway will affect us all, regardless of whether we participate in the conversation. The only way forward, then, is to improve our literacy and engage with complex ideas. To do otherwise and play the victim is to invite catastrophe. Only by shaping the future ourselves will we fear it less. Unless bold people act, the arc of history will not bend toward justice or improved outcomes. Three decades after the fall of the Berlin Wall, we are again at a crossroads, and a battle of ideas is raging. The new walls being built within and between societies pose a grave threat to our collective future. This is the year to start knocking them down.

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