

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

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**Acting as a Responsible Citizen for the Common Good**

Our country is going through most fragile and crucial phase of its history. The incidents that have taken place and the ones that are taking place clearly indicate that we are going through a transition phase that might lead us to stability or even chaos – if we do not act wisely. It is very imperative at this juncture that we must not fall the victim of emotions and carelessness and strive to act prudently. The leaders, who have influence over the minds and thinking of the common people, must try to advice the people not to lose their sanity and they need to strive to understand the demands and the challenges of time.

People, at this crucial juncture require thinking above their personal benefits; the groups and the institutions require functioning more than their own profits and most importantly the privileged class of the society must take decision above their self-centered incentives. It is really important to speak the words that make sense instead of uttering the words that are popular and spoken for the sake of earning fame. The objective conditions want us to be more realistic and if we are not able to act in that particular manner are doomed to failure. The history has taught us so many lessons that by now all of us must have learnt enough lessons and must have acquired sufficient prudence. The world has never given any nations so many opportunities to learn from their past mistakes. But seem not to avail any opportunity and at the moment we are going astray.

The traditions and values in our society are really weird and out of understanding. A limited number of people have decided to devour the entire wealth of the nation. Another group is busy only in the false display of wealth and status. Certain old men have shouldered the responsibility of proving the wrongs of the ruling elite right through holy scriptures; while another honorable group is striving tirelessly to earn fame in every possible manner.

They have, in reality, lost their connection with the actual problems of the time. The most unfortunate fact is that the intellectuals have forgotten their responsibilities. Though they claim their rights from the society but they seem to have forgotten that the society which they ignore cannot be expected to understand their rights, as well. Has earning fame ever been a top priority issue for the sane people of the society? Our society has adopted the non-issues and wasting time on them. As a matter of fact, we are far behind our actual social, civil and philosophical problems. Our people are behaving like the immature boys and it seems to be written on our foreheads that we do not have any serious issues at the moment and for the times to come God will keep us away from all the problems.

What have the slogans based on extremists sentiments and hatred and division have given us so far? If we still possess the capacity to ponder, we must make use of it and reach to conclusion that our history is one of the most challenging histories in the world and the most tragic fact is that this history has been written with our own blood.

As a matter of fact, we do not seem to have any idea about the gravity of the situation. If we had any idea our reaction would have been very much different from what we are doing now. Though we are human, we have forgotten the habits of thinking and understanding. The fact is that our people have not been provided the required sanity and boldness to ponder upon the challenges of time and challenge the prevailing values and understandings. We are habitual of saying only those words that seem appropriate to everyone as we are afraid to make others angry. We, from the very beginnings of our lives, are taught to compromise and adjust. Even if there is a place for one person to sit in a car, we can adjust two persons there. We strive to fit ourselves in the mould of traditions and practices even though they may be obsolete and insane.

We have only a single ideal to pursue and that is our 'past'. Unfortunately, the past has not always been glorious and our people seem to follow the same portion of the past that was inglorious. It is difficult to understand why our people do not live their own lives instead of living the lives of their forefathers. If they really want to make difference to themselves and to the world they need to start living their own lives – their present not past.

If we lack a serious consideration to our present and to the life, we would never be able to have a sincere relation with knowledge and even with our beliefs. Though we seem to have inhabited the cities, we have deserted our conscience and our spirits. We seem like alien in our own world. We need to wake up; we need to understand that we are pursuing the wrong directions and the wrong destinations. We must realize that we are not using our humanly attributes in their full capacities and we are not fulfilling the responsibility of being true human beings.

**The Role of Press in Democratic System**

Writer: Moh Erfani

Translator: Moh Zahir Akbari

The press as a civil society entity is considered as the fourth pillar of democracy in political system and can play an important role in creating appropriate environment for cultural and political development. Generally, the press freedom is one of the important indicators of political development. If the press acts independently and free, it can find its true place in society; the press not only act as a powerful tool in construction of good culture but also act as the most effective means of guiding society towards national interests of the country. The freedom of the pen and the press is a part of the freedom of expression. Freedom of the press means that "people have the right to publish their thoughts and opinions through written or verbal media, without asking permission from authorities.

The main feature of active and dynamic press in a democratic and republic system consist of presenting realistic and critical analysis about current issues, raising public awareness and broadcasting public opinion to the government while acting as steering driver through exerting public pressure on government. But the government is not considered accountable unless people are aware of its activities. This awareness is not possible except through mass media, including independent and private press. Freedom of expression and press are the essence of the republic and democratic government system; the freedom of speech and press means that every citizen has the right to comment and reflect his opinion like others. To this end, individuals have the right to search and access all kinds of information and ideas through media. Here, when we are speaking about freedom of speech, it includes freedom of government oppositions. Therefore, the art of government is not to dissuade its opponents from political scene, but the art of government is to instigate its opponents in contributing with political system through their opinions within the framework of the law.

In fact, the freedom of the press is part of freedom that has been given to the mankind for the growth of human excellence. This freedom is the requirements of social and political life, and is a means of imparting thoughts, exchanging information and transferring the heritage of humanity. It is also a good place for dialogue and cultural exchange between different civilizations and cultures. The social enlightenment and the growth of public opinion can only be done in the shadow of the press, and so the pens must be free so that they can publish the facts. Therefore, the political regime cannot claim of being republic and a democratic unless ensure the freedom of the press.

Generally, the press is very effective in the development of public opinion. The press has been termed as the "fourth pillar of democracy, due the crucial role it plays in a democratic system. The press is a source from which people find the realities. The role of press is to influence the public opinion by reflecting news, discussing about the events and talking about policies of different political

groups. However, some news systems are trying to keep people in a closed world with a very low level of thoughts and information. The purpose of such news systems is to fool the people. They want to immerse people with an unrealistic, artificial and absurd environment so as not to be aware of real issues of the society. But if the media are truly independent and free from preference of self-interests, they can have humanitarian and philanthropic activities and also able to neutralize the effects of deviating news system.

The press is a great force in the new democratic government. "In the last century, the emergence of the press has greatly contributed to the development of democracy," Divorzha said. The press enables the governments to maintain constant contact with the public and receive criticisms and suggestions for better governance. Freedom of the press not only covers the public complaints but also tries to reflect the deep feelings and opinions of the people as they see.

Given the important role of the press in shaping public opinion, it needs to be monitored. The mass media should not be monopolized by few people for the sake of their self-interests. It is generally agreed that the free and neutral press is necessary for the success of democratic government. As without accessing to accurate information and news, accurate judgment about public and political decisions is not possible, and so press considered the best means of publishing correct information. The freedom of press is the real feature of democratic system. The emphasis on the freedom of the press and publications also articulated in Article Fourth of the national Constitution. Accordingly, Every Afghan has the right to express his opinion by speech, writing, image or other means without prior permission of the government.

Overall, the dominance of government institutions on the press or monopoly of the press by very few people is on contrary to general spirit of democracy. Wherever, the news broadcast in a uniform way it indicates that democracy is threatened. Whenever, news reports are distributed from certain addresses, everyone is impressed monotonously. Because all people obtain the same information, their minds are made into a same template. Thus, the community is deprived of the diverse and competitive contexts, which is the desperate need of every democratic and creative system. In such cases, the possibility of censorship, the removal of important information, will become usual. Likewise, the possibility of exaggerating one part of news and belittling the other part would become also possible. When people get inaccurate information, it is natural not to have a real understanding of the events.

Meanwhile, freedom of the press does not mean that everyone can publish whatever he/she wants; rather it means, they are safe from pressure of the ruling class and able to reflect the reality to people as it is.

Mohammad Zahir Akbari is the permanent writer of the Daily Outlook Afghanistan. He can be reached at mohammadzahirakbari@gmail.com

**Agonizing over Afghanistan**

By: Richard N. Haass

After more than 17 years, the time has come to accept two important truths about the war in Afghanistan. The first is that there will be no military victory by the government and its American and NATO partners. Afghan forces, while better than they were, are not good enough and are unlikely ever to be capable of defeating the Taliban. This is not simply because government troops lack the unity and often the professionalism to prevail, but also because the Taliban are highly motivated and enjoy considerable backing at home and from Pakistan, which provides it critical support and sanctuary. The second truth is that peace negotiations are unlikely to work. Talks have taken place on and off over the years, but diplomacy is never far removed from facts and trends on the ground. Both work against a negotiated settlement.

The situation on the ground is something of a slowly deteriorating stalemate. The government controls territory where an estimated two-thirds of the population lives. But the Taliban and even more radical groups, including those associated with al-Qaeda and the Islamic State, control or contest nearly half the territory and have repeatedly demonstrated an ability to attack military and civilian targets alike anywhere and everywhere inside the country, including the capital, Kabul.

What really weakens diplomatic prospects, though, is that the Taliban see little need to compromise. It is only a matter of time, they seem to believe, before the United States grows weary of stationing troops in a far-off country and spending on the order of \$45 billion a year on a war that cannot be won.

They may well be right. The White House's recent announcement that roughly half of the current 14,000 US troops will soon be leaving reinforces the Taliban's view that the future is trending their way. Coming on the heels of President Donald Trump's decision to pull all US troops out of Syria, it is unsurprising that the Taliban and other insurgents would conclude that it is a question of when, not if, the remaining 7,000 US troops (and another 8,000 NATO soldiers) will be withdrawn.

A complete troop withdrawal is a real possibility, given Trump's longstanding skepticism of the value of the US effort. His frustration is understandable. More than 2,000 US soldiers have lost their lives in Afghanistan, and another 20,000 have sustained injuries. The war begun in the wake of the 9/11 attacks has cost

well over \$1 trillion. It is hard to see how 14,000 or 7,000 American troops could accomplish what more than 100,000 could not. So why not just withdraw all of the troops? One reason is that the government might collapse, in which case Afghanistan could again become a place where terrorists train recruits and plan attacks against US interests around the world and against America itself. Of course, even if that were to happen, Afghanistan would be little different from other places where terrorists are able to operate unmolested.

Another reason not to leave in a manner unrelated to conditions on the ground is that, coming after Syria, such an exit would cast further doubt on America's willingness to sustain a leading role in the world. This is not to say that the US should remain involved in Afghanistan simply because it has been involved. But perceptions matter, and simply walking away would lead many allies – not just in the region, but also in Asia and Europe – to wonder if they might be the next American partner to be abandoned.

America's policy in Afghanistan should be one that avoids the risks of a rapid, unconditional exit but also minimizes the costs of staying. To accomplish the latter would require trimming strategic ambitions. Although the US and its European partners cannot expect to win the war or broker a lasting peace, it should be possible to keep the government alive and carry on the fight against terrorists. Doing so would probably require keeping a few thousand troops deployed, continuing to provide intelligence, arms, and training to Afghan forces, and, in special situations, a readiness and ability to intervene narrowly but directly.

It would also help if the US both reoriented and stepped up its diplomatic engagement. Current efforts are focused on brokering an internal settlement with the Taliban. A more fruitful approach might be to convene Afghanistan's six immediate neighbors (which include both China and Iran as well as Pakistan) and other actors, including Russia, India, and the EU, that have a stake in the country's future. None has an interest in seeing Afghanistan become a haven for terrorism and drug production.

This is not a strategy for winning, but rather one for not losing. It may not be ambitious enough for some, but, in Afghanistan, even seemingly modest goals have a way of becoming aspirational.

Richard N. Haass is president of the Council on Foreign Relations and author of *A World in Disarray*.

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

Vice Chairman / Exec. Editor: Moh. Sakhi Rezaie

Email: outlookafghanistan@gmail.com

Phone: 0093 (799) 005019/777-005019

www.outlookafghanistan.net

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