

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



January 28, 2017

Severe Weather Getting Disastrous

It is not only terrorism that has influenced the people of Afghanistan; there are many other issues as well that have largely disturbed the people, and will keep on doing so unless there are measures carried out to control them. In some cases, the government has the capacity to show its role and effectiveness while in some others it needs to wait before it can acquire the capabilities. However, in the cases where it can play its role, it has been dormant and not shown any considerable responsibility. One of the same issues is a lackluster response to natural disasters. Though natural disasters are mostly unpredictable and cannot be stopped, different measures can be carried out to limit their influences and damages, if any.

Afghanistan has a severe cold weather and many parts of the country get covered by heavy snow every year. There are many remote districts that mostly get disconnected from the other parts of the country because of the snow. The central highlands and the northern parts of the country suffer the most in this regard. This year, as well, the snow has started disturbing the lives of the people in these areas in different ways. According to a statement by an Afghan official, Rehmatullah Hasher, snowfall and subzero temperatures in the Darzab district of northern Jawzjan province have left 27 children dead, and roads connecting villages to health centers has been blocked as more than 50 cm of snowfall has hampered the movement of villagers.

This is really tragic and shows what an extreme cold weather can do in Afghanistan. As Afghanistan is suffering from limited resources and unpreparedness people seem to suffer more than expected when they face any natural disaster. The current snowfall and avalanches in certain parts of the country have taken many lives that could be saved. As, there is no effective mechanism to respond to the emergencies in most of the remote areas of the country, the disasters have proved to be gigantic and the poor people have suffered misery and agony.

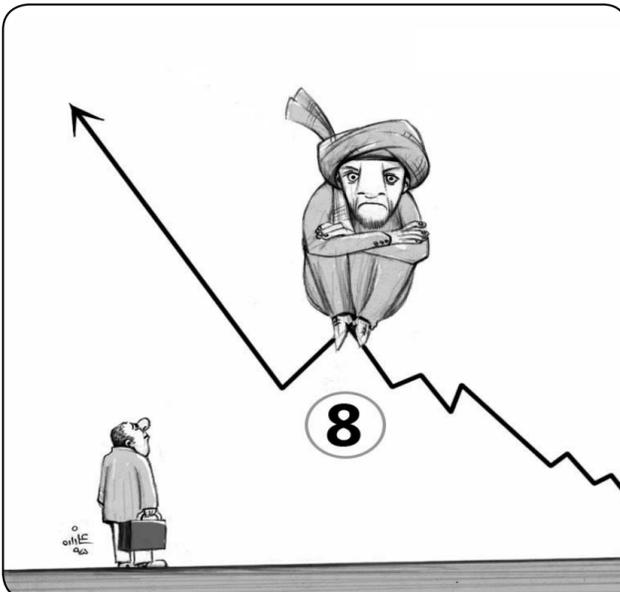
It is really tragic in Afghanistan that common Afghan people have not only been victimized by the wars and conflicts but natural disasters have also made their lives fragile. Whether it is flood, avalanches, famine or even earthquake, the severest of the shocks shake the existence of the poor and the destitute. They are the most effected, in two different ways. First, they do not possess a strong and reliable shelter and other facilities that can safeguard them against the natural disasters, which make them easy victims. Second, the facilities that should be there after the disaster to minimize the level of destruction, never reach them, as they are at the remotest of the areas.

Leave the disaster aside, even when there are severe weather conditions, which cannot be even termed as disasters; the loss of life and property incurred by the poor Afghans is really immense. Almost every year severe cold weather victimize many poor people as they do not have enough capacity to secure themselves.

As the people in the affected areas, because of their wretched and torn shelters and no fuel or wood to burn, are victimized, there is no support from the relevant officials to provide them the facilities to fight against the death. The result is misery. And when the severe cold weather turn into disasters in the form of avalanches in some parts of country, the incapacity of the government to help its people out of the disaster is exposed to a large extent. There are many lives that can be saved through proper and timely efforts.

Moreover, there are many other areas as well that are necessary to be given proper attention by the government so that such disasters and incidents should be properly handled. Among them making a very well-equipped and properly trained disaster management unit is the most important one. At the same time making the different parts of country accessible through proper roads is also an important one. Many places happen to be in the remotest of the areas, where the rescue teams and equipment take a very lengthy time to reach as there are no proper roads.

Though security has been the most dominant issue in Afghanistan, there are many other issues as well that kill more people than the lack of security. The proper attention of the government in that regard and its services can save many lives. It requires to institutionalize its efforts and put to practice National Disaster Management Plan. Department for Disaster Preparedness must be made fully functional and must be equipped and capacitated enough to carry out its responsibilities during and even before disasters. The developed countries of the world, through institutionalized efforts, have minimized the risks of disasters and have the capacity to react rapidly when such disasters take place and thus save the valuable lives of its people as much as possible. Therefore, the government of Afghanistan must also pay consideration and concentration in such areas and must make sure that poor people do not lose their lives worthlessly.



From the Diary of an Afghan Woman

By Hujjatullah Zia

I get goose-bumps whenever I think about my little daughter whose blood was spilt on the grounds of her race. Nothing and no one can ever fill the deep vacuum she left in my life. Whenever I see the girls of her age playing innocently in the world of their childhood, I remember the apple of my eye and can't resist my tears. Who dared take her from me and turn my life into hell? I loved my little daughter to death as any mothers do their children.

I couldn't believe my ears when I heard the news of her death and it is still hard to believe that my sweet daughter, who was the only gleam of hope in my life, is lying beneath the heap of earth.

Your heart would melt if you could see streams of blood oozing from her wounds like drops of tear rolling down my cheeks these days. No, I can't believe that the bloody statue was my sweetheart. I think she is alive and will come back one day.

But her segregation from my life is indescribably painful and I can't make my peace with her death which is highly unnerving and numbed my senses.

People try to soothe me and tell me that I am as pale as a ghost and have to forget her death since worrying cannot bring her back. But her memory eats me alive and does not leave me alone for a second.

Her empty seat around our tablecloth makes a lump in my throat while eating. I gaze at her seat with tearful eyes and seek a corner to vent my pent-up anguish by crying for an hour or two. I am overwhelmingly sick and tired of this life. I can't sleep a wink.

Being with her was like a dream and passed in the blink of an eye. The burst of her laughter still resounds in my ears. Her kohl-rimmed eyes and wavy hair haunt me every second.

I wished, one day, I could see my daughter in a white wedding gown with hennaed hands. To my unmitigated chagrin, I saw her in a white shroud with her hands hennaed with her blood.

Her thin body was put into coffin and carried to graveyard with sad song and tearful eyes. People sympathized with me, offered me condolences and tried to alleviate my pain with soothing words.

The mention of her murderers' name starts me fuming. If you just pass by a suicide bombing, the riddled bodies of innocent women and children and sliced and diced fleshes of human bodies will fill you with a strong sense of hatred. Tell you what; can you ever bear to see the

human bodies ripped to shreds? I just can't put my feelings and anguish into words. After her death, I feel like death warmed over and my swollen eyes and wrinkles on my face make me look years older. But the world without her is not worth a hill of beans. She was always there whenever I needed a shoulder to cry on.

Some tell me to hold my peace and her soul will not rest until I stop crying too much.

What would happen if my daughter was alive? Would her life create problem for her murderers? She was still child and knew nothing about race or creed. So, what was her fault? What is the fault of thousands of innocent women and children who lose their lives in terrorist attacks around the world, mainly in my country? Some say that the terrorist ideology cannot accept anyone's caste, color and creed and will target people indiscriminately. I just curse such mindsets and will never forgive the killer of my innocent daughter.

My religion emphasizes respecting the rights and liberty of all mankind regardless of their race and faith saying that killing an innocent person is tantamount to killing all humanity. I also believe that killing an innocent is forbidden in all religions and it is only self-styled ideologies that justify shedding the blood of individuals.

I always hear heart-wrenching stories of terrorists' victims from all around the world and the victims belong to different race and religion including Muslims, Christians, Jews, Hindus, etc.

Such stories add insult to my injury and fill me with stronger sense of revenge. As a mother who has lost her sweet daughter, I deeply feel the pains and sufferings of the victims' families and others won't be able to feel so. I just blow up with such news and curse the perpetrators. No wonder, it is really hard for a person to deal with the death of his/her near and dear ones.

Have you ever imagined that how hard it will be when you and your closest friend drift apart after years of sweet memories and heart-to-heart talks? Sorry, this comparison is like chalk and cheese.

I am too downhearted to articulate my feelings. Let's pray for the annihilation of terrorist networks that inflict casualties upon individuals.

Let's never forgive the murderers and the perpetrators of such crimes. My last message is that the world will have to stop the carnage in one way or another and protect the rights and liberty of nations.

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Germany in the Age of Trump

By Joschka Fischer

Donald Trump is now the 45th President of the United States, and in his inaugural address he made it clear to the assembled US establishment that his administration does not intend to pursue business as usual. His motto, "America first," signals the renunciation, and possible destruction, of the US-led world order that Democratic and Republican presidents, starting with Franklin D. Roosevelt, have built up and maintained - albeit with varying degrees of success - for more than seven decades. If America abandons its role as the leading economic and military power and moves toward nationalism and isolationism, it will precipitate an international reordering, while also changing the country itself.

Rather than being a hegemon, the US will become one great power among many.

Since the end of World War II, the US has been the engine of global free trade, so a move toward protectionism, or an attempt to either reverse globalization or harness it for narrow national interests, would have immense economic and political consequences worldwide. The full implications of such a shift are largely unpredictable; but we all know - or should know - what happened the last time the world's leading powers turned inward, in the 1930s.

The alliances, multilateral institutions, security guarantees, international agreements, and shared values underlying the current global order might soon be called into question, or rejected altogether. If that happens, the old Pax Americana will have been needlessly destroyed by America itself. And with no obvious alternative framework to replace it, all indicators point to turbulence and chaos in the near future.

America's two former enemies, Germany and Japan, will be among the biggest losers if the US abdicates its global role under Trump. Both countries experienced total defeat in 1945, and ever since they have rejected all forms of the Machtstaat, or "power state." With their security guaranteed by the US, they transformed themselves into trading countries, and have remained active participants in the US-led international system.

If Trump takes away the US security umbrella, these two major economic powers will have a serious security problem on their hands. While Japan's peripheral geopolitical position might, theoretically, allow it to re-nationalize its own defense capacities, pursuing that option could significantly increase the likelihood of a military confrontation in East Asia. This is an alarming prospect, given that multiple countries in the region have nuclear weapons.

Germany, meanwhile, lies in the heart of Europe, and is surrounded by its previous wartime enemies.

It is the continent's largest country in economic and demographic terms, but it owes much of its strength to the American security guarantee and multilateral, transatlantic, and European institutional frameworks based on

shared values and free trade. The existing international order has rendered the Machtstaat and its accompanying sphere of influence unnecessary.

Unlike Japan, Germany cannot re-nationalize its security policy even in theory, because such a step would undermine the principle of collective defense in Europe and tear apart the continent. Let us forget, the global and regional post-war order's purpose was to integrate the former enemy powers so that they posed no danger to one another. Owing to its geopolitical weight, Germany's perspective is now synonymous with that of the European Union. And the EU's outlook is not that of a hegemon; rather, it is concerned with the rule of law, integration, and peaceful reconciliation of member states' interests.

Germany's location alone makes nationalism a bad idea; and besides, its most fundamental political and economic interests depend on a strong, successful EU - especially in the age of Trump.

Germany is in the same boat as all other Europeans with respect to security. Just as there can be no French security without Germany, there can be no German security without Poland. That is why Germany and all other European countries must now do all they can to boost their contributions to collective security within the EU and NATO.

Germany's strength is based on its financial and economic might, and it will now have to leverage that strength on the EU's and NATO's behalf. Unfortunately, it can no longer count on the so-called "peace dividend" that it enjoyed in the past (and even during the euro crisis).

Thrift is undoubtedly a virtue; but other considerations should take priority when one's house is on fire and about to collapse.

Apart from security, Germany's second fundamental interest is global free trade. Intra-European trade will remain supremely important, because that is how Germany makes a living; but trade with the US will be vital, too. It will not bode well for Germany if China and the US - its two most important non-EU export markets - enter into a trade war. Protectionism anywhere can have global repercussions. And yet, along with all the dangers Trump's presidency poses for Europeans, it offers opportunities as well. Trump's protectionist rhetoric alone has already led to a rapprochement between China and Europe. More important, the new US administration has furnished Europeans with a chance finally to close ranks, grow up, and reinforce their geopolitical power and position.

But if Europeans finally do come together, they should avoid anti-Americanism. Trump is America's president, but he is not America. North Atlantic countries will still have a common history and shared values - even under Trump, and even though much else will change in the coming years. (Courtesy Project Syndicate)

Joschka Fischer, Germany's foreign minister and vice chancellor from 1998 to 2005, was a leader of the German Green Party for almost 20 years.



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