

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



March 27, 2016

We Require Religiosity and Spirituality

With the advancement of human societies and the arrival of so-called modernization, human beings have opted for lives that are too much mechanical. The advent of technology has made human being too much dependent on them and they have started thinking that machines are more important than human beings themselves. This has, in fact, created a distance among human beings and influenced their social relations to a large extent. Human societies, thus, have lost brotherhood and spirituality and they are sauntering in the pursuit of materialism. They have, in the process, neglected religion as well or have destroyed it with their egoistic intentions, which they call politics.

There are so many clashes in human societies nowadays, and most of them have their roots in the pursuit of materialist and egoistic intentions. As human beings have discovered that they are not the center of the universe and they have rejected religious teachings, they have lost their directions and believe that they do not have any sacred responsibility in their lives. Since they believe that their lives are the outcome of a natural incident or accident, they do not give much value to the ethics and social responsibilities and are running in a maze with no end, each individual following his own path.

Most of degradation can be found in human beings' ethical values. The concepts of right and wrong are now based on individual prosperity and material wellbeing, not on the common good or on the welfare of the all the human beings alike. The relations have turned into business transactions and love, affection and brotherhood are now considered as weaknesses. They are only useful when they are used to utilize others or benefit from them. Spiritual and religious teachings on the other hand are ridiculed and thought to be obsolete; in fact, most of the modern criticism has been on religions. They are thought to be promulgating hatred and disorder but as a matter of fact they are based on true message of love and brotherhood.

Unfortunately, religions are even thought to be promulgating conflicts and wars but it is not based on true observation. It is not religions but their political interpretations that make them spread hatred and give birth to conflicts. It is difficult to understand how the ones who oppose religion can fill the heinous figure of politics with the colors of innocence and incorruptibility? How can they find violence in the guiltless and demonstrative teachings of religion? How can they talk of peace through a system, which has its footings on the principles of hatred, egocentricity and greed? They fail to understand that in the contemporary world of ours politics is nothing except greed and intense quest for power and popularity. Every politician or political group strives to dominate others in order to gain strength and superiority. Politics in its nature is corrupt. It can never guarantee peace because it has to welcome war. Every political group rises with the downfall of others. On the other hand, religion, in its true form, starts with love and ends in peace. It demands virtue from man and makes him capable of doing so. The very essence of religion is affection. It has to hate war, because its rudimentary teachings are based on welfare of entire humanity.

A person enters the kingdom of religion when he washes away his ego, selfishness, and hatred through the ablation of his spirit. Religion performs virtue; otherwise, it does nothing. Religion is determined to strengthen tranquility.

The present form of religion that we find around us is the political demonstration of religion. It is religion in the frame of politics. It is one of the manifestations of political hypocrisy. It is religion caught in the webs of politics, suffocating and striving to make its last breaths possible and history has witnessed that whenever and wherever politicians have raised the slogans of religion in their ideologies they have always wanted to dodge the people through sanctity and honor of the religious beliefs. This is not religion. This is politics, changing forms and means to discriminate innocent masses.

Frank Herbert, commenting on the same issue, had mentioned, "When religion and politics travel in the same cart, the riders believe nothing can stand in their way. Their movements become headlong - faster and faster and faster. They put aside all thoughts of obstacles and forget the precipice does not show itself to the man in a blind rush until it's too late."

If we want to experience religion we have to apply it without any political intentions. Religion itself is a self-perpetuating system. Pure religion is destined to guarantee peace and it will because it starts with love and ends in peace. Anna Sewall puts it beautifully, "There is no religion without love, and people may talk as much as they like about their religion, but if it does not teach them to be good and kind to man and beast, it is all a shame."



The Fragile Political Environment

By Abdul Ahad Bahrami

After the collapse of the Taliban regime in 2001, there are still signs of simmering inter-ethnic tensions boiling in Afghanistan that threaten the very fabric of the current establishment. The Taliban conflict may be the most daunting challenge in the way of the state-building process in Afghanistan, but the fact remains that there are many other challenges to the process which may be dormant but are potentially destabilizing in the long run. The developments of the recent counter demonstrations in the northern Mazar-e-Sharif city indicated the fragileness of the political environment and the potential threat it poses to the sustainability of the state-building process. The incidents showed how the long-existing inter-ethnic tensions could spark rivalries and violence among political players.

Recently the outgoing chairman of the UN mission in Afghanistan and UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for the country Nicholas Haysom mentioned fragile political environment as a key challenge ahead of Afghanistan in 2016, insisting that failure to tackle the challenges including lack of political cohesion would be catastrophic for Afghanistan. The remarks by the UN official proved to be the right warning at a right time. With the recent developments in the north, it is time for the Afghan political community to start worrying about the situation and how the divisive political environment could be managed so that further unfavorable events in the future could be prevented.

One of the key objectives of the international coalition's involvement was to help Afghans in the post-Taliban state-building processes. Key law enforcement, executive and lawmaking institutions were established and developed. However, too much focus has been put on the establishment of different entities. The trends of political development and institutionalizing democracy have had many shortcomings over past fifteen years. Former president Hamid Karzai's approach in retaining the grasp of power was to use a policy of patronage aimed at building a network of allies in the political community and across the country. This approach failed him to promote democracy and meritocracy in the administration rather left him reliant on support of the former jihadi and ethnic leaders.

The 2014 presidential elections was a major blow to the legitimacy and credibility of the government, the sustainability of the state-building process and the stability of the political environment in the country. The elections left the Afghan political community deeply polarized while on the other hand potentially harmed the legitimacy and credibility of the political processes and of the state itself. Afghanistan will not be able to afford the harms the 2014 presidential elections did

to the country's political development. The recent tensions between the two key stakeholders of the national unity government are indicative of how the presidential elections have poisoned the political environment in Afghanistan.

The Afghan government has missed great chances in the past to start leading the nation into the right direction on state-building and development of democracy in the country. However now, the government still does have the main responsibility to seek long-term solutions to enhance authority and legitimacy of the state and establish mechanisms in which all political actors can play democratically and peacefully. The Afghan government and the international community supporting Afghanistan should start initiatives aimed at strengthening authority of the central government and, in the meantime, promoting national consensus to back the trend of political development in the country.

There are with no doubt, many factors that led to the recent tensions in the north and many political actors, could be involved in deterioration of situation in Mazar-e-Sharif. The immediate causes of the tensions are only on the surface. The government is also to blame for creating an environment of rivalry between politicians and, in the meantime, government officials in the national unity government through marginalizing them from the decision-making processes and pushing them to resort to their local power bases. All the political figures need to exercise restraints and allow the government, the law enforcement agencies and the political mediators to come between and end the crisis.

The government should act from a position of strength while keeping a stance of neutrality over the issues. The national unity government needs to realize that development of political and inter-ethnic tensions will add up to its failures in promoting political cohesion and national harmony in the country. The government must take long-term approach aimed at eliminating the factors of development of such inter-ethnic tensions centered on strongmen and politicians affiliated to one of the ethnic groups. The government should eliminate the factors of such provocations by bringing changes in the local administrations. It needs to seek an approach that brings stability and central government monopoly over local administrations while ensuring sufficient participation of all ethnic groups in national governance and politics. For this, it is crucial to seek broad political consensus. That consensus can be attained by ensuring sufficient participation of all ethnic groups in the national politics and governance. The Afghan government needs to realize the urgency of need to start depolarization of the country's politics and removing attractiveness of the local power hubs to jihadi and ethnic figures.

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ISIL - A Global Threat

By Hujjatullah Zia

With the emergence of the self-proclaimed Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), Afghan nation fell at the mercy of immense violence and militancy. The individuals' rights and dignity were violated to a great extent on the grounds of their caste, creed, color, etc. and sectarianism broke out in restive parts of the country. As the graph of civilian casualties raised, a sense of fear and frustration spread among the public.

Since the Taliban elements splintered with the revelation of Mullah Omar's death and appointment of Mullah Akhtar Mansour as a leader, a number of Taliban fighters pledged allegiance to the ISIL group - this strengthened the ISIL outfit to gain firm foothold in the country. Some officials also believe that most fighters calling themselves ISIL are disaffected Taliban members. The ISIL loyalists had held some remote districts in the country's east for almost a year.

John Campbell, the former US and NATO commander in Afghanistan, said earlier this month that there were between 1,000 and 3,000 ISIL fighters in the country. Indeed, some Afghan people suffered painfully and/or lost members of their families in ISIL-dominated areas and some Afghan soldiers were killed in the worst possible way.

As a result, the fighters decapitated them in cold blood and left notes saying the bodies had to be left on display for some time, and anybody who moved them would get the same punishment. "If they found an Afghan army soldier, they would behead him and then put the head on the stomach," a villager is quoted as saying. It is further said that many schools were closed down and students were warned not to attend classes.

However, President Muhammad Ashraf Ghani said, in early March, that Afghanistan would be a "graveyard" for the ISIL fighters as he announced that Afghan forces had dislodged fighters loyal to the group from regions of Nangarhar province bordering Pakistan. The government claimed victory over ISIL-linked fighters in the country's east.

The spokesman for US forces in Afghanistan said earlier that ISIL sought to establish a base in Nangarhar province on the southern border with Pakistan but the Afghan forces carried out successful operation against the militant group in the southern city of Jalalabad, Nangarhar. He said that they had been pushed back largely to the southern parts of Nangarhar province. "That area is very, very rugged, it's very mountainous, it's on the border with Pakistan, and that's where most of the Daesh in Nangarhar currently is."

The deadly attacks which are being carried out across the region by terrorist groups must be an eye-opener for Afghan government. For instance, the Tuesday's attacks on the Brussels airport and subway system, which killed 31 people and

wounded 270, the Nov. 13 attacks that left 130 dead in Paris and the attacks on Bacha Khan University in Pakistan by Tahreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), that took the life of at least 21 people and the Friday's attack in Baghdad which killed 30 people - including the town's mayor - and wounded 65 others, will have to be great lesson for the government. Similarly, the Taliban's last year spring offensive, that inflicted heavy casualties on Afghan soldiers and civilians, must not be repeated in the New Year.

Luckily, Afghanistan has adopted the right strategy towards ISIL fighters. This soil will be "graveyard" for them and the US-backed Afghan soldiers carried out effective military operations against them. Since ISIL fighters intend to impose their warped minds on people on the barrel of gun and spill the blood of innocent individuals on the grounds of their race, color, sex and beliefs, no strategy will be helpful other than military deal.

Despite the government's strict counterinsurgency mechanism, the US officials believe that Afghanistan will encounter great challenges in the New Year. UN Nicholas Haysom, the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Afghanistan said that the Afghan government will face tough time politically and divided political elite in Kabul, "which it needs to manage, particularly in the interest of developing a greater level of political coherence among the political class and the political elite in Kabul, especially if it's going to generate a sense of confidence in the future and build the morale of the people and the security forces".

The world must consider the fact that terrorist networks, mainly the ISIL outfits, are serious threats against the entire humanity and therefore, orchestrate heavy attacks in different parts of the world - be it east or west. In other words, if a global counterterrorism strategy does not be launched, western countries will fall in the same boat as the Middle East or at least witness heavy terrorist attacks - the same as Brussels and Paris - every once in a while.

There is fear that the Taliban will resume their spring offensive and ISIL group may usher in greater operations. However, it is the government to tackle the security crisis and intensify the forces to keep battling against mounting insurgency.

It is hoped that the heads of the National Unity Government (NUG) will make compromise on each and every issue to earn the public trust and boost the morale of the soldiers. Political conflicts in state's machinery must be buried. Moreover, the international community will have to support Afghanistan in counterinsurgency and the world, mainly the neighboring countries, have to join forces to root out terrorism and eradicate their hubs.

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