

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



May 01, 2018

Is the Situation for Journalists Improving?

The world for journalists seems to be getting more difficult; however, there appears to be some improvement for Afghanistan. As per the Reporters Without Borders' (RSF) latest index on Press Freedom, the hatred against the journalists is on the rise; nevertheless, Afghanistan has been placed at 118 out of 180 countries. This placement shows an improvement of two points as compared to last year, but it does not provide a satisfactory state of affairs. Afghanistan needs to improve much as far as the rights and security of journalists are concerned.

According to the RSF, the past year was a particularly deadly year for journalists in Afghanistan as at least 15 journalists and media workers were killed, many in targeted attacks. It also revealed that by sowing terror in some regions, the Taliban and Daesh militants have created information black holes. In some provinces, the Taliban even forced the media to pay arbitrary taxes that were tantamount to ransoms. On the other hand, the report discloses that some governors and local officials are not willing to accept the principle of media independence, and the police and military have been implicated in several cases of violence against journalists.

The situation for Afghan journalists does not seem to be getting much better. The rising insecurity and the lack of attention to the plight of the journalists has led to some very difficult circumstances that the journalists have to go through so as to perform their duties. Even the foreign journalists are facing serious difficulties in fulfilling their responsibilities. Kabul police, on several occasions have warned the foreign nationals and the journalists in particular to limit their travels in the city because of security risks and the risks of kidnapping. Some analysts believe that such warnings by the police, in fact, demoralize the spirits of the journalists in the country and would bar them from collecting information. Instead, the security authorities must ensure the security of the country as a whole and of the journalists, in particular.

Mostly, the societies that are well developed and have great respect for knowledge and information, make sure that the rights of the journalists are guarded properly and they are provided with such circumstances wherein they are able to perform their responsibilities with full dedication and devotion.

On the other hand, the societies that suffer from political instability and experience wars, and disturbances and do not recognize the worth of true knowledge and information tend to forget the vital responsibility of guarding the rights of the journalists. The journalists in such societies tend to suffer from different sorts of discriminations and, unfortunately, even lose their lives.

Mostly conflict zones are dangerous for the journalists. In order to provide true and timely information, the journalists have to move into or close to the places where wars and conflicts happen. They, therefore, put their lives at risk and try to fulfill their responsibilities. Different groups, organizations or countries in such zones have to be very careful about the rights of journalists and make sure they are not targeted. However, that does not seem to happen and many journalists lose their valuable lives every year. Moreover, because of the influence and approach of different extremist networks, the number of journalists losing their lives in the peaceful countries is also alarming.

Apart from the right to life, according to International law, journalists are entitled for certain other rights as well which all the governments and organizations around the world must respect. Journalists, according to the Declaration of Rights and Duties of the Journalists, must have free access to all information sources, and the right to freely inquire on all events conditioning public life. Therefore, secret of public or private affairs may be opposed only to journalists in exceptional cases and for clearly expressed motives. Therefore, any factor hindering the journalists from having access to all information sources must be considered illegal and should be eliminated.

Moreover, the journalists have the right to refuse subordination to anything contrary to the general policy of the information organ to which he collaborates such as it has been laid down by writing and incorporated in his contract of employment, as well as any subordination not clearly implicated by this general policy. And, the journalists cannot be compelled to perform a professional act or to express an opinion contrary to his convictions or his conscience.

Ill-fatedly, Afghanistan is also one of the countries that have not been giving enough heed to the rights of the journalists. The war and conflicts and the negligence of the relevant authorities have resulted in different sorts of discrimination against the journalists in the county. Afghan government and different other organizations and groups must make sure that they strive to protect the rights of the journalists as they are not a party to the conflict and do not serve anyone's purpose.

Overcoming Democratic Myopia

By Dambisa Moyo

Despite positive indicators, the global economy remains beset with risks. And because virtually every one of those risks arises from structural challenges, mitigating them will require long-term thinking by leaders. Unfortunately, there is not a lot of that on offer nowadays, particularly in the world's democracies.

The problem lies in the disconnect between political and economic cycles. A normal economic cycle lasts 5-7 years. But, according to the McKinsey Global Institute, the average tenure of a G20 political leader has fallen to a record-low 3.7 years (compared to six years in 1946). Focused on winning the next election, politicians often implement policies that will bring short-term rewards, even at the cost of long-term growth or stability. This trade-off is exemplified by widening fiscal deficits. In the United States, according to the Congressional Budget Office, the budget deficit is on course to triple over the next 30 years, from 2.9% of GDP in 2017 to 9.8% in 2047, owing to the effects of tax cuts and other budget-busting measures implemented to appeal to voters (or, equally important, to appease donors). This undercuts the government's ability to make forward-thinking investments in areas like education and infrastructure.

With politicians effectively rewarded for myopic thinking, the Western democracies find themselves struggling to secure stable long-term growth in a way that, say, authoritarian China is not. There are at least two ways to address this problem in a democratic context.

First, governments could be bound more firmly to their predecessors' policy decisions. That way, more forward-thinking legislation that has been debated and enacted will have time actually to take effect, without the risk that it will simply be repealed by a subsequent administration.

The European Union provides one example of how long-term binding commitments can work. The 1992 Maastricht Treaty committed European governments to cap public debt at 60% of GDP, and annual budget deficits at 3% of GDP. Since then, governments have gradually brought their countries into alignment with this standard.

But, as the EU's experience also shows, such "binding" obligations are not always treated as unassailable, particularly during times of economic stress. In the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis, it became clear that countries like Greece, Italy, Spain, and Portugal breached their Maastricht commitments.

Nonetheless, establishing commitments for governments that extend beyond electoral cycles can imbue legislative agendas with a longer-term perspective, as they reduce partisan policy turnover. Such an approach would have been useful for US President Barack Obama's signature legislation, the Affordable Care Act. Ensuring that the ACA would remain in place

for some minimum fixed term, rather than leaving it vulnerable to immediate repeal by Donald Trump's administration, might have enabled a more fundamental transformation of America's flawed health-care system, including through improvements to "Obamacare" itself.

Another way to encourage longer-term thinking among policymakers would be to extend their terms in office to, say, six years - roughly the length of economic cycles. Instead of spending their entire term campaigning for reelection, policymakers would have the time and political space to consider the nuances of complex structural challenges and formulate policies that boost the economy's potential growth.

In some countries, political leaders already serve longer terms. In Brazil, for example, federal senators are elected for an eight-year term. In Mexico and the Philippines, each presidential term lasts six years. In the US, by contrast, members of the House of Representatives face an election every two years, forcing even the president and senators - who serve four- and six-year terms, respectively - to operate, to some extent, on a two-year time horizon.

Of course, longer electoral terms are risky, as they could enable incompetent and otherwise problematic leaders to remain in power for longer. That is why the change would have to be pursued in tandem with another reform: changing the eligibility requirements for would-be policymakers, with an eye to securing leaders who have experience not just running for office, but also handling real-world challenges.

In a 2012 article, the University of Nottingham's Philip Cowley noted that, in late 2010, the leaders of the major British political parties had less experience than any others of the post-war era. Similarly, a 2012 study by the British House of Commons Library revealed that, from 1983 to 2010, the number of career politicians in Parliament had more than quadrupled, from 20 to 90.

The rise of career politicians has coincided with growing cynicism about the effectiveness of elected leaders. In fact, according to a 2016 World Economic Forum survey, citizens in democratic countries trust their leaders less than those elsewhere, while a 2015 Pew survey found that more than 80% of US citizens do not trust the federal government to do what is right consistently. Such suspicion probably contributed to the victory of the political neophyte Donald Trump over Hillary Clinton in the 2016 US presidential election.

In any case, today's economic risks will not go away, and they can be minimized only with the type of reforms that must form part of a long-term policy agenda. In terms of crafting such agendas, democracies seem to be at a disadvantage. But *Dambisa Moyo, an economist and author, sits on the board of directors of a number of global corporations.*

How Europe Can Save the Iran Nuclear Deal

By Mark Leonard

This week, a senior German official pointed out to me that, "The Iran nuclear deal is the last firewall preventing military tensions in the world's most combustible region from spilling over into thermonuclear war." That language is unusually apocalyptic, but it reflects a genuine fear that US President Donald Trump could soon dismantle a crucial line of defense that Germans and other Europeans are proud to have built.

European leaders have been on the back foot since January, when Trump gave them a deadline of May 12th to "fix the terrible flaws of the Iran nuclear deal," or he would re-impose sanctions on Iran. Trump's main objections to the deal are that it does not address Iran's misbehavior in the region or its ballistic missile program, nor does it prevent Iran from re-starting its nuclear program after 2025. And now that Trump has installed a hawkish new foreign-policy team - with John Bolton as national security adviser and Mike Pompeo as secretary of state - European diplomats fear the worst.

Over the past few months, the German, French, and British governments have been frantically assembling a package of measures - including potential sanctions on Iranian elites - to address Trump's concerns. And both French President Emmanuel Macron and German Chancellor Angela Merkel have now visited the White House to persuade Trump that it is better to build on the deal than blow it up.

In the short term, the Europeans are hoping that their proposed measures will allow Trump to declare victory while remaining in the deal. They have reminded Trump that a diplomatic solution to the North Korea nuclear crisis could very well depend on whether he unilaterally abandons America's commitments to Iran under the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

In the long term, though, European leaders' ability to save the deal will depend on the extent to which they can act in their own interests, rather than being a hostage to the caprices of the Trump administration.

It is fitting that the Iran issue has come to the fore around the 15th anniversary of the start of the Iraq War. For European diplomats, that disaster and the success of the JCPOA have come to represent two foreign-policy extremes. Iraq was post-Cold War Europe's darkest hour, with European countries lined up against one another to support or oppose the war, even though none had any real influence over US decisions.

The JCPOA, by contrast, is seen as modern Europe's shining success. Desperate to avoid another war in the Middle East, Europeans, starting in 2005, began to define their own interests in the region. With the two-pronged goal of preventing Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons and avoiding another war, they devised various carrots and sticks to shape Iranian and US actions.

To Iran, European diplomats offered a choice between two futures: one in which Iran would freeze its nuclear program

and end its international isolation; and one in which it would maintain its program and face ever-harsher sanctions, and possibly war. At the same time, the Europeans, having convinced Russia and China to back their strategy, approached the US with another stark choice: either join an international coalition to apply diplomatic pressure on Iran, or pursue dubiously effective military measures on your own.

Today, European leaders' overarching goals in the Middle East are to de-escalate the hegemonic struggle between Iran and Saudi Arabia, prevent nuclear proliferation, combat terrorism, and stanch the flow of refugees into Europe. But many of these goals are now being actively undermined by the Trump administration, which has made a show of siding with Israel and Saudi Arabia against Iran in regional conflicts from Yemen and Iraq to Lebanon and Syria.

Diplomats in some EU member states have started to worry that attempts to placate Trump could force them into self-defeating positions, thus reprising the relationship between British Prime Minister Tony Blair and US President George W. Bush in 2003. As one official confided to me, the introduction of new sanctions will make it even harder to keep Iran committed to the JCPOA, let alone engage with it on other regional issues.

Nevertheless, the European approach so far has been carefully calibrated both to win over Trump and preserve Iran's commitment to the deal. Needless to say, this requires a delicate balance. If the Europeans give Trump too much, they will be playing into the hands of US hardliners.

At the same time, they will be empowering the hardliners in Iran. In a recent interview, political scientist Nasser Hadian of Tehran University told me that moderate Iranian leaders such as President Hassan Rouhani and Foreign Minister Javad Zarif have already been left in a weak position, with hardliners now saying, "We told you so." In Hadian's view, the greatest danger is that Europe will try to appease Trump "at any cost," when it should be working "on a plan B to save the deal without the US."

Among other things, a plan B would offer Iran economic relief if the US were to re-impose sanctions, conditional on Iran's continued compliance with the JCPOA; and it would provide the basis for a larger strategy of engaging with Iran and other stakeholders to de-escalate regional conflicts. Of course, it would be better for everyone if Trump agrees not to abrogate the nuclear deal. But to persuade him of that, Europe must show that it is willing to go it alone.

To that end, Trump should be confronted with a clear choice: either preserve the JCPOA, in exchange for European support in addressing regional issues and Iran's missile program; or scrap the deal and risk the loss of European cooperation and the emergence of a nuclear-armed Iran. As my German interlocutor put it, "Trump must be told that he cannot have his cake and eat it."

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