

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



May 18, 2017

Security, Economic and Political Challenges

The security of a nation is a vital element to ensure its viability and survival as well as it is essential for securing an environment which will facilitate the process of national growth. Moreover, the concept of national security in itself deserves a continuing debate to determine its elements which include democracy, good governance, psycho-social and economic aspects besides the obvious imperative of defense.

Afghanistan, for a long time, has been facing serious problems of both, internal and external security. However, lately the internal security has assumed threatening postures. Given the significant geo-political space in which it operates and being somewhat handicapped because of the domestic peculiarities and serving as a buffer state between the world powers, Afghanistan's security quest is almost unending. Unfortunately, with the rise in challenges of insecurity, the country has had to face economic hardships and political instability as well. And, the interplay among the different issues within all these sectors have multiplied the sufferings that the people of Afghanistan have been facing.

A strong and viable democratic, political and economic system is essential to sustain any nation. In case of Afghanistan this element of national power has been quite weak. Emergence of frequent autocratic regimes further debilitated the important national institutions and retarded their growth. The situation was further aggravated due to unholy alliance among the feudal, religious leaders, politicians and business elite. At this stage in Afghanistan's life there is an urgent need to ponder and find ways and means for developing a genuine democratic process leading to political stability, good governance and economic development. Unfortunately, Afghanistan's political system remains inadequately institutionalized and highly personalized.

The country has alternated between long periods of clashes and wars and unstable governments controlled by small elite of landed and tribal and religious leaders. Our political system, in fact, is confronted by direct action, endemic violence and powerful primordial loyalties that have come to dominate all political and economic disputes. Democracy has not been able to institutionalized and kept on revolving around the individuals. The legislature and executive have not been able to complete their promises and duties of strengthening themselves and the overall democratic system.

Meanwhile, the elections have been dominated by fraud and corruption. Imperative electoral reforms that could support in strengthening the democratic system have not been taken into consideration and therefore the systems of elections for both the president and the parliament have not been able to offer much. Currently, the doubts about the parliamentary elections and the election reforms have further raised doubts about the system.

In addition, the ambiguity regarding the role of the President and Chief Executive has persisted and the evolution in their authorities and responsibilities that were to take place simultaneously has been forgotten. This has raised doubts and uncertainties about the nature of the political system that the country would have.

On the other hand we have forgotten that we are living in an age of economic competitiveness. In fact all elements of national power in present times are being directed towards achievement of economic objectives. The economic aspects are crucial especially for Afghanistan as a majority of our people are living below the poverty line and suffering various deprivations. Without improving the quality of the lives of our people we cannot emerge as a nation with honor and dignity.

Fortunately, we are endowed with sufficient bounties of nature to be self-sustained in the fields of basic necessities of life. The dire need is to harness our human and other natural resources and ensure that the benefits are equitably shared by all the people. The impediments to our economic growth need to be examined and overcome through innovative strategies. We need to understand that with spectacular progress in the field of science and technology, the whole world has shrunk into a global village. It is considered that economic development is the only secure foundation for domestic, regional and global peace and security. It is also true that origins of conflicts lie deep in socio-economic deprivations, disparities, denial of human rights and true participatory democracy. The prerequisites of a modern civil society are the establishment of the viable democratic institutions, participatory democracy up to the grass-root level leading to good governance.

Only then a stable and responsive social order can be established ensuring peace, stability and economic development. This, in turn would serve as a means to channel political energy and help in creating a conducive environment for healthy cross fertilization of cultural values between our multi-ethnic society. These changes can only be brought about by the collective will and support of the people at large. Hence it is imperative that our political leadership, economic guardians and our intellectuals embark upon a strategy of compassion and cooperation with all the communities living in Afghanistan so that the quality of the lives of our people could improve and a sense of dignity, purpose and commitment infused in the society.



Culture in China

By Hujjatullah Zia

Chinese state and nation pay especial heed to culture and history. Theaters and fashion shows seek to show culture and tradition to tourists from around the world. The priceless antiques and eye-catching art performances fill one with a strong sense of nostalgia for old days and absorb more tourists. China's rich culture is beyond doubt. The museums in China have many secrets and intact ancients in hearts to disclose them to tourists. If you visit this cultural land without considering the culture and history, this will be a big disregard, if not disloyalty.

Culture is believed to be a full-length mirror of a country which reflects the past and present facts (religion, religious rituals, customs, art, music, monuments, heroic tendencies, etc.). Monuments say unspoken stories of past generations to the present. It is self-explanatory that for building a strong society, a nation needs to maintain its past, including the culture and history, as an eye-opener. For instance, people were living in the state of nature initially and a strong tribal structure ruled human societies for centuries.

People practiced upon their parochial mindsets and ethnic tendencies. Streams of blood were shed and human rights and dignity were violated out of discrimination and ignorance. On the other hand, a number of nations and freedom-fighters fought bravely to protect their rights and lands.

The history is full of honor and dishonor. Now human societies need to review the past so as to measure the magnitude of their progress and learn lesson. Historical and cultural monuments and traditions reflect the past in the best possible way. China intends to protect its cultural heritage and invests a huge amount of money on it.

If you visit theaters and shows, the folk music and dancing will be really jaw-dropping. My Tuesday's visit from Dolan tribal tourist spot - which is located in Aksu City of China - gave me a great pleasure. Dolans, the ethnic minority group in China, performed incredible shows in their traditional dresses. The soulful performance of Dolans' folk music chorus, including women and old men, inspired hope and delight in viewers. After all, the delicious food and big smile on their lips reflected their generosity and hospitality.

Museums in China usually reflect the past nomadic life - which is very similar to the life of Afghan nomads.

The statues are dressed in the same dresses as Afghan female nomads. Moreover, one will find the same tents, same style

of baby wrapping and same sort of dishes, along with textiles and some precious stones, in Chinese museums. One will find many common cultural elements between China and Afghanistan. For instance, the sports shown to tourists on TV are Boz Kashi - which is common in northern part of Afghanistan - Afghan-style wrestling, rooster fighting, egg gambling (a group of people break eggs by hitting them to one another, as Afghans do on Eid Days), etc. In brief, the museums and theaters in China reflect its culture, history and folklore and Chinese government pay especial attention in this respect.

Silk Road, which played a significant role in the development of China's civilization, is a milestone in Chinese history. Therefore, camel and nomadic tribes in their local dresses are widely shown in plays and dramas in this country.

Moreover, Beijing hosted the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation from May 14 to 15 to promote economic and trade cooperation and investment and cultural exchanges. It is believed to be the highest-level international meeting - attended by high-ranking officials from about 30 countries - since the open and inclusive initiative was proposed by Chinese President Xi Jinping in 2013.

According to China Daily Newspaper, China's national capital Beijing has been working to establish long-term cooperation with regional governments. It has established sister-city relations with 54 cities in 49 countries - including 19 capitals of countries along the Belt and Road routes. To sum up, besides showing cultural and historical heritage, regional and global business is a highly significant issue in this country. It should be noted that attracting tourists through cultural heritage will support Chinese economy to a considerable extent.

There is no doubt that culture and history play crucial role in today's life. It is believed that with the development of technologies, human societies keep distant from the old days, which were pure and simple.

However, historical relics remain a nation's nostalgia and also speak the life and history of past generation - it can be a great lesson for human societies, especially for Afghanistan. No wonder, Afghanistan has a rich culture but decades of war and violence not only led to human casualties but also to cultural and historical damages.

It is hoped that Afghanistan will also protect its culture and history from erosion and pave the ground for tourism.

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The Varieties of Populist Experience

By Robert Skidelsky

Emmanuel Macron's decisive defeat of Marine Le Pen in the French presidential runoff was a major victory for liberal Europe. But it was a battle, not a war. The idea that one in three French citizens would vote for the National Front's Le Pen was inconceivable only a few years ago.

Commentators have affixed the "populist" label to the wave of demagogic politics sweeping Europe (and much of the rest of the world). But, beyond the raucous style common to populists, what do these movements share? After all, Spain's Podemos and Greece's Syriza are of the left. France's National Front, the Netherlands' Party for Freedom, and Germany's Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) are of the right. Beppe Grillo, the leader of Italy's Five Star Movement, says that his movement is neither left nor right.

And yet common themes run through all of them: economic nationalism, social protection, anti-Europeanism, anti-globalization, and hostility not just to the political establishment, but to politics itself.

To understand what this might mean for the evolution of European politics, consider the history of fascism. Benito Mussolini, the founder of Italian fascism in 1919, started as a revolutionary socialist. In Germany, the word Nazi was, we should recall, short for National Socialist German Workers' Party.

Initially, fascism was a nationalist, anti-capitalist movement. Later it confined its attack to liberal capitalism, especially "international finance." And this soon shaded into anti-Semitism - what the German Social Democrat August Bebel famously called "the socialism of fools." European fascism collapsed with the defeat of Germany in 1945, but less aggressive forms lived on elsewhere, such as Argentina with its Peronism.

The social base of interwar fascism made it reasonable to see it as a party of the right. At the time, the working class dependably supported parties of the left. The only political space left for fascism was the petit bourgeoisie: shopkeepers, small businessmen, and low-level civil servants.

Today, the social basis of left-wing politics has vanished. The classic working class has disappeared: social democratic parties and trade unions are shadows of their former selves. This means that left-wing populists are inevitably compelled to compete with right-wing populists for the support of exactly the same groups that turned to fascism between the wars: young unemployed males, the "small man" who feels threatened by the "oligarchy" of bankers, global supply chains, corrupt politicians, remote European Union bureaucrats, and "fat cats" of all kinds. Today's populists, of whatever political stripe, increasingly target not just the same potential supporters, but the enemies as well.

How much space exists for populism's further growth, and which variety - socialist or fascist - will attract the available votes?

The broad answer to the first part of the question was provided by former US President Bill Clinton's 1992 election campaign: "It's the economy, stupid." The EU has been the slowest of the world's major economic centers to recover from the post-2008 slump. In France, the unemployment rate is 10%. Youth unemployment there is around 24%, and 34% in Italy - creating fertile recruiting ground for the extremes of

left and right. Though Macron is by no means an obsessive fiscal hawk, he wants to narrow the French government deficit from 3.4% to 3% of GDP, in line with the ceiling set by the EU's Stability and Growth Pact. In the firing line are 120,000 civil service jobs. Yet he also wants to boost the economy with a €50 billion (\$55 billion) stimulus package and extend the welfare state.

To square the circle, Macron needs growth, and he is relying on supply-side reforms to deliver it. He plans to cut the corporate-tax rate from 33% to 25% and exclude financial investment from wealth taxation.

A vocal critic of protectionism, he will push for the EU-Canada Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement and the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership with the United States. His support of the El Khomri law, which made it easier to fire workers, and his opposition to the 35-hour week, indicate his desire to increase the French labor market's "flexibility."

Despite talk of the "green economy" and calls for a Europe-wide investment program, Macron's agenda is broadly neoliberal. Essentially, Macron is hoping that his agenda, if implemented at the EU level, will lift not just the French economy, but all European boats.

In fact, the likelihood is that such reforms will sink all boats, giving the populists their chance. In that case, which variety of populist will seize the opportunity?

The economist Dani Rodrik puts the appeal of populism into focus. He argues that democracy, national sovereignty, and global economic integration are mutually incompatible; at least one must be sacrificed. Given that many voters in Europe and the US feel battered by globalization, a populist party that aggressively puts the nation first has a head start against its rivals.

From this perspective, Macron was the ideal candidate for Le Pen to lose to. He embodies the globalist elite. He appears soft on immigration. And, assuming that his new political party fails to win a majority in next month's National Assembly election, his government will require support from the mainstream parties. Over the next five years, establishment figures may well coalesce around failing policies, giving Le Pen the perfect target for the National Front's 2022 presidential campaign.

To be sure, support for a leftist program certainly exists in France. About 20% of voters backed the left-wing populist Jean-Luc Mélenchon in the presidential election's first round. In the second round, one particularly illuminating Twitter hashtag was #NiPatronNiPatrie ("neither boss nor country"), reflecting many voters' dissatisfaction with the election's choice between neoliberalism and nationalism. The task of the left is to direct attention to the truly problematic aspects of global economic integration - financialization, the prioritization of capital over labor, of creditor over debtor, of patron over ouvrier - without lapsing into reactionary politics. (Courtesy Project Syndicate)

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