

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



November 13, 2016

Improving our Ways of Living

With the rise of specialization and professionalism, human beings excelled in the formation of institutions and offices. They started sparing more time to these institutions and organizations and also started following certain rules and procedures the required them to do certain tasks repeatedly. Being part of a particular organization, or a certain department in the organization, or being a member of a particular team in an industry and involved in a set of well-defined tasks, human beings started valuing routine to a great extent. Today, it is difficult to think of our lives without routine. Nevertheless, it is significant to realize that though routine has given us certain blessings, it has also made our lives and existence more mechanical and our sentiments and feelings more artificial.

Repetitions in a certain task generate mastery in that task and even guarantee consistency and uncertainty. Today, large industries would not be able to manufacture their goods, if the workers standing in the assembly line do not perform their routine tasks. Same can be said about the activities, tasks and objectives within a public office. There will be severe difficulties in achieving anything worthwhile in the offices, if the staff are not regularly present and do not pursue their routines.

Having accepted the blessings of routine, one cannot neglect its negative impacts on human mind, human behavior and creativity. Experiences have shown that human mind remains active when faced with different sorts of challenges. It can be thrilled to do a new task but if it keeps on repeating the same, it gets sluggish and dull. It then adjusts itself within the whole mechanism and stops thinking out of the box, thus hindering the ways to new achievements and creative initiatives. Moreover, routine has a sort of adverse impacts on human temperament and behavior as it results in frustration and dissatisfaction.

The frustration that erupts because of routine displays itself through various means; the example can be easily observed in daily life. People working in offices often have skirmishes with each other on pity matters. Teachers, because of very small mistakes, punish the students and even beat them. Traffic police, who has been working for years on the same square, have zero tolerance for any disobedience. There are many such instances which clearly depict that frustration from routine results in skirmishes and even serious fights.

It is necessary to manage routine in an appropriate manner. Ways should be identified and pursued that may result in lightening the load of the daily tasks. If it is not possible to change the routine, there are certain other techniques that can assist in making routine acceptable to a certain extent. Daily exercise can be very much helpful in this regard. Exercise before the work, mostly early in the morning, can help in keeping good health and at the same time good mind. Apart from that weekly or monthly outings and picnics or even celebrations of different kinds can support people in refreshing their minds. These will also help in maintaining a balance between work and fun, which is very much necessary for all human beings. Exposure visits or trips to other cities and countries annually and biannually can also be very much supportive in this regard.

The techniques to fight routines are not only helpful for the individuals but they can be very much supportive for the management of different organizations as well. Today's modern techniques of management would require taking care of the human factors in work environment as well. They want to make sure that their workers are provided some sorts of activities that can help them in escaping the ghost of routine and monotony as it would ultimately result in less production and output. Therefore, they have different sorts of field trips and training facilities to keep on increasing their capacities and changing their perceptions and understandings. Management of the organizations can also bring about changes in the daily work environment, like changing the seating arrangement and decorations, in different ways so as to avoid monotony.

Although the routines can be very tiresome, they can be very much helpful in achieving an intended objective. Sometimes the goals are really very difficult to achieve; therefore, persistent efforts would be required to achieve them. A good example can be considered in this regard; water is considered to be very soft as compared to rock and it is very difficult to think that water would ever break the stone or make a hole in it. Nonetheless, it can be observed that with consistency, water can break the stone or make a hole in it. Same is the case with human cause or purpose; if there is a great cause and that is very much fruitful for the society as a whole, it is worth a routine.

In short, we as human beings need entertainment and refreshment as well in addition to a monotonous routine. We have to understand this basic fact that we are not machines but human beings with a sensitive heart and a hard working mind.



Unending War in Syria

By Hujjatullah Zia

Syria is the worst war, the worst humanitarian crisis, the worst displacement crisis, the worst refugee crisis in a generation. So we expect there to be continued, uninterrupted US help and engagement in the coming months," these words were spoken by the US newly-elected President Donald Trump.

The Arab Spring uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Bahrain and Yemen inspired protests in Syria. Pro-democracy protests erupted in March 2011 in the southern city of Deraa after the arrest and torture of some teenagers who painted revolutionary slogans on a school wall. After security forces opened fire on demonstrators, killing several, more took to the streets. The unrest triggered nationwide protests demanding President Assad's resignation.

The government's use of force to crush the opposition merely hardened the protesters' resolve. By July 2011, hundreds of thousands were taking to the streets in Syria. Opposition supporters eventually began to take up arms, first to defend themselves and later to expel security forces from their local areas. Violence escalated and the country descended into civil war as rebel brigades were formed to battle government forces for control of cities, towns and the countryside. Fighting reached the capital Damascus and second city of Aleppo in 2012. By June 2013, the UN said 90,000 people had been killed in the conflict. More than five years after it began, the war has killed over 250,000 people, half of whom are believed to be civilians. Bombings are destroying crowded cities and horrific human rights violations are widespread.

The emergence of the self-styled Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) compounded the political turmoil. The ISIL group capitalized on the chaos and took control of large swathes of Syria and Iraq, where it proclaimed the creation of a "caliphate" in June 2014. Its many foreign fighters are involved in a "war within a war" in Syria.

In September 2014, a US-led coalition launched air strikes inside Syria in an effort to "degrade and ultimately destroy" ISIL. But the coalition has avoided attacks that might benefit Assad's forces. Russia began an air campaign targeting "terrorists" in Syria a year later, but opposition activists say its strikes have mostly killed Western-backed rebels and civilians.

Ten months after vowing to "degrade and ultimately destroy" the organization, President Obama ruefully acknowledged that ISIL "has been particularly effective at reaching out to and recruiting vulnerable people around the world including here in the United States, and they are targeting Muslim communities around the world."

He added, "Ideologies are not defeated with guns, they are defeated by better ideas, a more attractive and more com-

elling vision." From the declaration of the caliphate until early 2016, some 90 terrorist attacks were either carried out or inspired by ISIL in 21 countries around the globe, from California to Sydney, with an estimated 1,400 people killed. The attacks carried the same message of punishment, deterrence and provocation as the hostage beheadings, while also demonstrating ISIL's global reach.

The UN accused ISIL of waging a campaign of terror. It has inflicted severe punishments on those who transgress or refuse to accept its rules, including hundreds of public executions and amputations. Its fighters have also carried out mass killings of rival armed groups, members of the security forces and religious minorities, and beheaded hostages, including several Westerners.

Families are struggling to survive inside Syria, or make a new home in neighboring countries. Others are risking their lives on the way to Europe, hoping to find acceptance and opportunity. And harsh winters make life as a refugee even more difficult.

At times, the effects of the conflict can seem overwhelming. More than a million migrants and refugees crossed into Europe in 2015, sparking a crisis as countries struggled to cope with the influx creating division in the EU over how best to deal with resettling people.

It is said that thousands of Syrians flee their country every day. They often decide to finally escape after seeing their neighborhoods bombed or family members killed. The risks on the journey to the border can be as high as staying. Families walk for miles through the night to avoid being shot at by snipers or being caught by warring parties who will kidnap young men to fight for their cause.

There are now 4.8 million Syrians scattered throughout the region, making them the world's largest refugee population under the United Nations' mandate. It's the worst exodus since the Rwandan genocide 20 years ago.

During 2016, the UN predicts \$7.7 billion is required to provide emergency support and stabilization to families throughout the region. As of October, less than half of this appeal has been funded.

The humanitarian rights are violated to a large extent and men and women suffer painfully. Violence and bloodshed are on the rise and warring parties, mainly the ISIL, inflict heavy casualties upon the civilians. The ethnic minority groups are discriminated on the grounds of their race and beliefs and Yazidi women are raped by the ISIL fighters - this is believed to be a stain on the collective conscience and a slap in the face of humanity. International community, will have to tackle the crisis and protect the fundamental rights of Syrian men, women and children.

Hujjatullah Zia is the permanent writer of the Daily Outlook Afghanistan. He can be reached at zia_hujjat@yahoo.com

Preparing Asia for Trump

By Gareth Evans

Whether or not US President-elect Donald Trump behaves better once in office than he did on the campaign trail, America's global authority has already taken a battering, not least among its allies and partners in Asia. Exercising soft power - leading by democratic and moral example - will not be easy for Trump, given the disdain he showed for truth, rational argument, basic human decency, and racial, religious, and gender differences, not to mention the fact that he was not actually elected by a majority of voters. And when it comes to exercising harder power - doing what it takes to counter serious challenges to peace and security - there will be little confidence in Trump's judgment, given that almost every statement he made during his campaign was either wildly contradictory or downright alarming.

Maintaining security, stability, and prosperity in Asia requires a cooperative environment, in which countries secure their national interests through partnerships - not rivalries - and trade freely with one another. The only grounds for confidence on this front after Trump's victory is that he may actually do none of the things he said he would, such as starting a trade war with China, walking away from alliance commitments, and supporting Japan and South Korea going nuclear.

With little or no hard knowledge of international affairs, Trump is relying on instincts that are all over the map. He combines "America first" isolationist rhetoric with muscular talk of "making America great again." Staking out impossibly extreme positions that you can readily abandon may work in negotiating property deals; but it is not a sound basis for conducting foreign policy.

Trump's dangerous instincts may be bridled if he is capable of assembling an experienced and sophisticated team of foreign-policy advisers. But this remains to be seen, and the US Constitution grants him extraordinary personal power as Commander-in-Chief, if he chooses to exercise it.

US leadership in Asia is a double-edged sword. Noisy assertions of continued primacy are counterproductive. China's legitimate demand to be accepted as a joint rule-maker, not just a rule-follower, has to be recognized. But when China overreaches, as it has done with its territorial assertions in the South China Sea, there does need to be pushback. On that front, a quiet but firm US role remains necessary and welcome.

Shortly after former President Bill Clinton left office, I heard him say privately (though never publicly) that the US could choose to use its "great and unrivaled economic and military power to try to stay top dog on the global block in perpetuity." A better choice, however, would be "to try to create a world in

which we will be comfortable living, when we are no longer top dog on the global block." That kind of language seems to be anathema for anyone holding high office in the US, at least publicly. But it is what Asia wants to hear.

For Australia and other US allies and partners in the region, this presidential election makes it clear that we can no longer - assuming we ever could - take coherent, smart American leadership for granted. We must do more for ourselves and work together more, while relying less on the US.

Trump will probably have more instinctive sympathy for Australia than he will for many other US allies. We are seen as paying our alliance dues, not least by having fought alongside the US in every one of its foreign wars - for better or worse - over the past century. And, as cohabitants in the Anglosphere, we are in Trump's cultural comfort zone. But Australia will be anything but comfortable if the larger regional dynamics go off the rails.

We should have learned by now that the US, under administrations with far more prima facie credibility than Trump's, is perfectly capable of making terrible mistakes, such as the wars in Vietnam and Iraq. We now have to be ready for American blunders as bad as, or worse than, in the past. We will have to make our own judgments about how to react to events, based on our own national interests.

This does not mean that Australia should walk away from its alliance with the US. But we will need to be more skeptical of American policies and actions than in recent decades. Australia should become much more self-consciously independent, and assign much higher priority to building closer trade and security ties with Japan, South Korea, India, and especially Indonesia, our huge near-neighbor.

No one should give ground if China overreaches, and Australia should, now more than ever, work closely with our Asian neighbors to ensure that it does not. But we must also recognize the legitimacy of China's new great-power aspirations, and engage with it non-confrontationally. We will all benefit from a common regional-security framework based on mutual respect and reciprocity, not least when confronting regional threats such as North Korea's nuclear chest-beating.

We can only hope that Trump will dispel our worst fears when he is in office. But in the meantime, Australian and other regional policymakers should adhere to a simple mantra: More self-reliance. More Asia. Less US. (Courtesy Project Syndicate)

Gareth Evans, Australia's foreign minister from 1988 to 1996 and President of the International Crisis Group from 2000 to 2009, is Chancellor of the Australian National University. He is the author of *The Responsibility to Protect: Ending Mass Atrocity Crimes Once and For All*.



Chairman / Editor-in-Chief: Dr. Hussain Yasa
Vice-Chairman: Kazim Ali Gulzari
Email: outlookafghanistan@gmail.com
Phone: 0093 (799) 005019/777-005019
www.outlookafghanistan.net



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