

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



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Fundamentalism Originates in Societal Structure

The emergence of the Taliban in the last decade of twentieth century (1994) and the terrorist act on September 11, 2001 followed by the US-led military intervention in Afghanistan for combating "international terrorism" led to a global challenge. Taliban are not only a local group restricted in a small geography but represent an ideological-political process across the region and their strength and decline will affect global issues. The Middle East, which was engaged with the native Islamic fundamentalists' militancy, felt the Taliban's threat. Similarly, after suppressing the insurgency of Muslim-dominated area, regional countries felt a serious threat with the emergence of the Taliban close to its border.

Taliban came under world's attention for two reasons: First, for their support to nurture a new type of Islamic fundamentalism. Since the Taliban were equipped with educational centers and political supports, they strengthened the systemization of a new generation of Islamic fundamentalists. The fundamentalists, who were supported and sent to fight against the former Soviet, aligned themselves with the Taliban to fight against the US-led coalition forces. Secondly, it was their strange ideology, beliefs and practices. Arriving in Kabul, the Taliban closed beauty parlors and declared that tailors were not allowed to measure women's bodies for making dresses and banned photography, listening to music and clapping. Although the US strike led to the fall of the Taliban's regime, they changed into a "silent volcano" and reemerged strongly. The Taliban fighters intensified their terrorist attacks and suicide bombings and inflicted great harms on Afghanistan's nascent democracy. They continued operating against the US-led international and Afghan security forces. Following the appointment of Haibatullah Akhundzada as Mansour's successor, the insurgency has increased in the country and the political stability deteriorated. With the end of cold war and decline of Socialism's hegemony and emergence of democracy, social rift surfaced around the globe and paved the way for norms and social-cultural anomalies - this cultural particularism crossed the borders. Currently, political and social movements are seen around the globe, including the first, second and third worlds. It is believed that the social-political cleavages bred radicalism.

Although "radicalism" reminds one of fundamental ideology and parochial mindsets of some Islamic groups, a number of researchers consider radicalism as a wide political process around the globe which does not necessarily belong to one religion. According to some researchers, radicalism is a method of controlling the body of women, a political way that rejects pluralism and a movement that support merging religion and policy as an instrument for continuing their objectives.

Fundamentalism is the result of discontentment, chagrin, social and political anomalies and alienation. Whenever these factors are compounded with social injustice, the individuals will show great inclination towards social movements. Jeff Hynes believes that Islamic fundamentalism is the product of disappointment stemmed from the failure of Socialistic and Nationalistic movements. According to him, within 1950s and 60s, Arab people desired they would gain their objectives under the aegis of Socialism. However, with the defeat of Arabs and Israel's victory, Arab world witnessed the emergence of fundamentalism under religious terms. Their economy could not compete with global rivalry and technological revolution of the modern world. Hence, the educated youths and townspeople failed to gain their desires. Moreover, the underprivileged that were forced to take refuge to cities, for imbalanced modernization in agricultural fields, joined the discontented individuals. These all sowed the seeds of a revolution and caused tendency towards fundamentalism.

Furthermore, modernization created cultural rifts and the concept of democracy, as western product, faced a backlash from the fundamental groups in Islamic world. Currently, the Taliban continue their violence and bloodshed in the country under the terms of establishing Islamic caliphate and combating western products and western-backed administrations. As a result, the Taliban stated the complete withdrawal of US forces as a precondition for peace talks and intensify their attacks against Afghan government and US forces.

The self-proclaimed Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), which stage deadly attacks against Iraq and Syria, and also gained foothold in Afghanistan and Pakistan, is also a reaction towards modernization and operates under the traditional term of "caliphate".

This highly fundamental group blackmails the world through carrying out attacks in different parts of the world, including Europe and America - this year's deadly attacks in America and France reveal the very fact. Members of warring parties, including the Taliban and ISIL group, come from poor families and erupt suddenly as volcano for years of deprivation. The Jihad-e-Nikah, innovated by ISIL, discloses the fact that they seek to satiate their carnal desires rather than fighting as a bona fide ideologue. Hence, the backlash against modernization does not originate only from radical ideology but also extreme disappointments and chagrin formed by deprivations. A large number of mercenary fighters join terrorist networks to meet their physical and material needs rather than filling the vacuum in their souls. Hence, it is believed that one way for countering insurgency is combating poverty and building strong economy. The world should also provide employments and fight financial crises so as to undermine terrorist networks.



Great Step Towards Democracy Development in Afghanistan

By Mohammad Zahir Akbari

According to international conventions to which Afghanistan is a signatory and according to Article 50 of the Afghan Constitution, "Right to Know" or "Right of Access to Information" is a fundamental human right for every Afghan citizen. Playing an important role in the fight against corruption, the right to access information increases transparency, accountability, public participation, democracy development and paves the way for journalists prepare investigative reports that inform the public. The limited access to information by citizens is an obstacle in fighting corruption and increase transparency and accountability. Access to information encourages citizen participation, ensures good governance, social inclusion, promotes free media and improves the efficiency of public institutions. The law will not only apply to state institutions at national, provincial and district levels, but also to non-state actors that exploit natural resources and that receive public funds or benefits and that carry out public functions, including the provision of public services. The Act will therefore allow citizens to influence policies beyond that of the state: they will be able to have a voice in the aid processes and the decisions surrounding the exploitation of natural resources. Citizens will be able to know essential information about the provision of public services, such as land distribution and its criteria, timeframe for issuing passports or identity cards, school construction costs and electricity distribution. Most importantly, the law will empower the poor; Studies and surveys show that corruption and lack of accountability affect the poor the most. Access to information will allow poor citizens to have a chance to regain ground in their struggle for a just existence. Moreover, right of access to information is considered as a need for the protection of values like democracy, freedom of expression and freedom of speech. Journalists in Afghanistan are however faced with a lot of problems in accessing information. However, the sole legislation does not guarantee expected results - an independent mechanism required to address public complaints and take action against those limiting public access to information for the sake of fishing in. The Oversight Commission on Access to Information complains that the ground has not been paved for the implementation of law of the access to information. The commission says that government did not allocate adequate budget to the commission. The lack of financial and technical facilities from government side is the reasons that the commission is being belittled and the commission is faced with lots of problems. So paying serious attention to paving the ground for the implementation of the laws will show the real will of government towards approved law. In addition, a number of lawmakers believe that the access to information law still has some problems. For example article 15 of the law states that giving information is prohibited if it puts someone's life, property, pride or dignity at risk. The experts believe that words like pride and dignity should not be included. Because they are not legal terms; they are the escaping way from law and open-

ing door for misuses. "I will definitely lose my pride, if my daughter knows that her father is taking bribe," member of Wolesi Jirga Ramazan Bashardost said.

Anyway, with approval of access to information law, Afghanistan has entered the list of countries that recognize right to Information of its citizens as a fundamental human right. In modern times, the United States was the first country to adopt the Freedom of Information Act, in 1966, granting its citizens the right to information held by federal government agencies. The full law with amendments came into effect in 1974. In the decades that followed other countries adopted similar laws awarding their citizens of similar rights. The first countries that followed the example of the United States and adopted such laws were developed countries with stable democracies. However, in the last few decades, a number of developing countries have passed similar laws and the number of countries with access to information legislation has increased significantly. By 2008 more than 70 countries, including China, Jordan and Turkey had specific legal provisions governing the right or access to information by the public. Given the experience of modern countries the following can be proposed for better implementation of this law in Afghanistan: (1) An awareness raising campaign is needed to be initiated by the government and civil society (2) Organizations on the Access to Information Law and its benefits for the public and state interests. (3) Particular attention need to be paid to awareness raising among the illiterate and particularly in rural / remote areas. (4) Incorporate awareness of the right / access to information legislation in education curricula from primary to post-secondary education as well as in literacy programs. (5) As much as possible, set up specific, clearly identifiable information points or sections in governmental organizations with the main task of assisting the public in its requests for information. (6) Ensure that government and semi-government entities have specific provisions for access to information by the public in their strategies, as a specific policy, or a clear section in the communication policy (7) Formalize the citizens' right to approach public and state-related officials and entities for information Without having a ministerial authorization letter, the current precondition for release of information by all government, semi-government, and some non-government organizations and entities. (8) Make innovative uses of digital technology such use of mobile or smart phones and hotlines to encourage the public to exercise its right. (9) Train government and semi-government officials of their responsibilities, rights, and the consequences of failing to operate according to the obligations set out in the Access to Information Law. (10) In future reforms of the Access to Information Law, attempts should be made to define the boundaries of the law more precisely on what constitutes national interest or personal freedom in the context of access to information.

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Why is the US Presidential Race So Close?

By Elizabeth Drew

Many people around the world are probably wondering why Hillary Clinton - who is obviously more prepared and better suited for the American presidency than her opponent, Donald Trump - isn't waltzing to victory. Many Americans share the world's bewilderment.

National opinion polls may well continue to fluctuate until the election on November 8. But Trump has been closing in on Clinton in recent weeks, even threatening to catch up with her in the Electoral College vote, where the Democrats' control of some of the most populous states (New York and California) give Clinton an advantage. Why is this happening?

For starters, Trump, despite knowing almost nothing about governance or public policy, has managed to consolidate most Republicans behind him. One motivation is Republicans' long-held hatred of Clinton. Another is the Supreme Court; the court already has one vacant seat for the next president to fill and is likely to have more over the next four years. Trump has also exploited many Americans' economic anxieties, tapping the same anti-immigrant, anti-elite rage that is sweeping across European countries. But Trump cannot win by appealing only to white men without a college degree. So he has been clumsily trying to suggest that he also cares about African Americans and Latinos - not by talking to African-American and Latino voters, but by speaking in exaggerated stereotypes about them to white audiences. Not surprisingly, African-Americans and Latinos consider his comments insensitive and patronizing; white women - his real target audience - haven't yet been persuaded, either. Meanwhile, Clinton is having her own difficulties reconstructing President Barack Obama's coalition of women, African Americans, Latinos, and millennials. Many young people who passionately supported Clinton's Democratic primary opponent, Senator Bernie Sanders, have ignored Sanders's own admonitions to support Clinton, and are saying that they'll vote for third-party candidates, which would help Trump. Since the two major parties' national conventions in July, each candidate has alternately made gains and suffered losses. This month, just as Trump was rising in the polls, he attempted to separate himself from the racist "birther" movement, which falsely claims that Obama - America's first black president - wasn't born in the United States, and thus was ineligible for the presidency.

Trump's remarks, terse and grudging, reminded everyone that he himself was one of the loudest "birthers" of all. His damage-control effort further backfired, because he falsely claimed that Clinton and her 2008 presidential campaign had started the birther rumor. Many news outlets finally used the word "lie" in their coverage of Trump, who had gone essentially unchallenged on past fabrications. Trump's recent polling gains say less about his improvement as a candidate than they do about Clinton's own weaknesses and bad luck. Outside her base of passionate loyalists, Clinton has always had a voter-enthusiasm problem. She comes across to many as a packaged know-it-all, the super-smart girl who put off the boys in school. And she confronts a fair amount of sexism, even among her supporters. (A former Democratic governor recently declared that she should smile more. Would he have said that about a man?) But Clinton has also created some of her own problems. Her poor judgment in using a private email server as Secretary of State, thereby risking the disclosure of classified material, has become a chronic burden for her campaign. She compounded the problem when she claimed, falsely, that

her predecessors had done the same thing, and that State Department security officials had cleared it. And, unlike Trump, she received no deference from the press on this issue.

The email saga added to voters' long-held impression that Clinton isn't "honest and trustworthy," and it exposed her to attacks from adversaries on the right. The highly conservative advocacy group Judicial Watch has continually called attention to the issue, forcing the disclosure of emails that Clinton hadn't turned over to the State Department. (The FBI found nearly 15,000 emails on Clinton's server that she hadn't provided.) Numerous as-yet-undisclosed emails with the potential to damage Clinton may well be released before the election.

While FBI Director James Comey decided not to recommend prosecution of Clinton for the email issue, he hurt her campaign by commenting that she'd been "extremely careless." In any case, the choice not to prosecute had Republicans and conservative commentators howling that she'd received preferential treatment from the Democratic administration. Polls showed that 56% of respondents agreed that Clinton should have been prosecuted. A new issue for Clinton arose in August, when the Associated Press reported that numerous donors to the Clinton Foundation had received special treatment by the State Department during Clinton's tenure there, mainly by winning an appointment with her. But many of these people would have received an appointment anyway; and there is no evidence that State Department policies were changed as a result. Meanwhile, the Washington Post has begun to report on questionable - possibly illegal - expenditures by Trump's own charitable foundation. Trump, who hadn't donated to his foundation since 2008, subsequently used its funds to buy personal items (including a six-foot portrait of himself) and to pay legal settlements. Previously, it had also been disclosed that funds from the Trump Foundation had been used to contribute to the election campaigns of attorneys-general in Florida and Texas, which would also be illegal. Finally, Clinton had the bad luck of falling ill, with cellphone video showing her nearly collapsing as she left early a ceremony in New York City commemorating the September 11, 2001, terrorist attack. This added further fuel to right-wing media speculation that she is in poor health; Trump added the sexist charge that she lacks the "stamina" to be president. After initially claiming exhaustion, Clinton's camp revealed that she had been diagnosed with pneumonia two days earlier. Much of the press was furious that she had not shared the information sooner. But American presidential elections are brutal marathons, and it's understandable that she did not want to cancel planned events. A later poll showed that the majority of the public agreed.

Clinton's four-day convalescence came just as she was preparing to make the case for why people should vote for her, rather than why they shouldn't vote for Trump. Just as she resumed campaigning, there were bombings in New York and New Jersey, and two more police shootings of unarmed African Americans, which spurred demonstrations in North Carolina, a swing state. The events took over the national dialogue, with Trump, as usual, playing on racial divisions and blaming Obama and Clinton. This is the background against which the candidates will head into face-to-face debates, which tend to play a large (even excessive) role in shaping US elections. It would be unwise to call this election over before it is. (Courtesy Project Syndicate)

Elizabeth Drew is a regular contributor to The New York Review of Books and the author, most recently, of Washington Journal: Reporting Watergate and Richard Nixon's Downfall.

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