

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



September 11, 2017

Martyrs Make the History

Afghan nation made great sacrifices in safeguarding their freedom, dignity and territorial integrity throughout the history. Afghans' blood was spilled to protect their honor. They embraced martyrdom with strong bravery and devoted their lives to keep their religious values, cultural norms and ethical code safe. People resisted against colonial powers and any elements that would pose threat to their societal values.

The true spirit of jihad is to uphold humanity and say "no" to atrocities and oppression. Historical revolutions not only in Afghanistan but around the globe were carried out to cherish human rights and dignity and dismantle dictatorial regimes or invaders. That is to say, revolution, similar to jihad, bears sacred meaning and is intended to end cruelty and barbaric practices of merciless regimes or individuals.

In Islamic societies, jihad has a holy and altruistic goal. For instance, a number of people sacrifice their lives for the sake of their religious values or protection of their nation and homeland. Jihad, which is a sacred term for Muslims, tends to revive moral values and keep humanity safe from erosion. In terms of upholding honor, life is not deemed valuable enough. In modern world, peaceful solution to challenges is underlined and international instruments put emphasis on respecting freedom and human rights and dignity and urge the world not to violate the integral integrity of any states. Nonetheless, sometimes blood is the only panacea for challenges imposed on a nation. Therefore, Afghan people carried out jihad throughout the history to save territorial integrity and deny to be subdued by violent forces or despotic regimes. The altruistic acts of martyrs which are recorded in the history must be respected. The objective of martyrs is not to bow down before those who lust for power, oppress people for their own political interests, spill the blood of individuals out of cruel nature, etc.

However, the true meaning of jihad is misconstrued recently. For example, warring factions that pay no heed to moral standard or humanity call their barbaric acts jihad which is, indeed, desecrating this term. They kill men, women and children in cold blood and trample upon the rights and liberty of people in the worst possible way. In other words, terrorist networks which are the products of religious radicalism seek to justify their acts of violence through religious term. Therefore, they have spread Islamophobia in many parts of the world.

Terrorist networks are believed to fight either for political or ideological reasons. But they use the sacred term of jihad for two main reasons: First to recruit a number of gullible people, particularly those who seek to fill their spiritual vacuum in modern world. Second, there are political brains behind the issue masterminding it in this manner not only to tarnish Islam but also to attract radical elements for continuing proxy wars so as to protect their political interests.

Jihad is a defensive strategy rather than offensive one. It is not to kill people out of cruelty but to save human and humanity at the cost of your life and blood. In the history of Islam, religious role model of Muslims and spiritual leaders sought to mitigate atrocities, injustice and moral turpitude through jihad and uphold the rights and dignity of people. So, jihad is a revolution against cruelty and dictatorship.

Afghan nation also has a glorious history and showed great bravery and heroism in fighting against cruelty and invasion. Afghans struggled to protect their national solidarity, honor and dignity. This nation has scores of martyrs who devoted their lives wholeheartedly for national values.

In spite of this fact, the true meaning of jihad and the good intention of martyrs are eroded to a great extent in the country. The days of national heroes and martyrs are celebrated with gunfire which is against the objective of martyrs. In addition, it shows that gun holds strong sway and violence prevails in the society. It also leads to social disorder and hurts the public feelings. The glorious jihad of real Mujahideen will be reduced if this trend continues.

To value the blood of martyrs, our nation will have to follow their footsteps through supporting humanity and moral standards. Their followers should respect the rights and freedoms of all citizens. The reason behind celebrating the days of martyrs is to revive their sacred and altruistic aims and human commitments besides glorifying their heroism and selflessness.

St. John of Kronstadt has aptly said, "The candles lit before icons of saints reflect their ardent love for God for Whose sake they gave up everything that man prizes in life, including their very lives, as did the holy apostles, martyrs and others. These candles also mean that these saints are lamps burning for us and providing light for us by their own saintly living, their virtues and their ardent intercession for us before God through their constant prayers by day and night. The burning candles also stand for our ardent zeal and the sincere sacrifice we make out of reverence and gratitude to them for their solicitude on our behalf before God."



The Solutions to Religious Violence and Fundamentalism

By Mohammad Eshaq Arifi

Violence, hatred and killing or, that is to say, radicalism and religious violence are one of the horrific issues of the contemporary world. Regardless of the fact that radicalism is the product of political agreement at international level, it also relates to religious issue, since warring factions seek to legitimize their violent and radical practices.

It is self-explanatory that a number of seminaries, where fundamental elements rule, are the hotbed of radicalism and violence. It is the individuals from seminaries who legitimize their acts of violence and find the guts, through their radical interpretation of religion, to massacre people and destroy their symbols of modernity. There is no doubt that radical culture leads to the formation of religious fundamentalists and paves the ground for horrific episodes of attacks and suicide bombings.

This commentary will not discuss whether those interpretations are right or wrong, the issue is that the horrific and destructive acts of violence and radicalism have dismantled the individual and collective life of Muslims and non-Muslims. All social layers, mainly religious elements, will have to be determined to campaign against this issue in some ways.

Based on this concept regarding violence and radicalism, military and political action may lead to the eradication of this event. However, inter-religious solutions are believed to be dynamic and extensive that will curb this frightening issue. The eradication of this shocking challenge will lie in moderate interpretation of religious sharia based on the foundation of supporting the life of mankind and upholding the fundamental rights of human societies. It is most likely that if inter-religious solutions are not pursued for eliminating this regional and global event, military and political solutions may be fruitful in repressing this phenomenon; however, the root causes may remain active. Thus, inter-religious solution will be instrumental in putting an end to this issue.

It is believed that profound religious study besides valuing the fundamental principles of human rights such as the rights to life, liberty, property, etc. and finding out the true spirit of religious messages regardless of any kinds of tendencies will be the right solution to the persisting challenge. In other words, the human values should be pursued in primary resources of religion and these values must be institutionalized. This study needs to be done regardless of religious or sectarian classifications and viewed from new intellectual and legal system on the basis of inherent dignity and rights of mankind.

Indeed, the primary sources of our religion and branches of religious human-oriented knowledge will uphold this issue.

The mechanism to be pursued in this respect is founding a strong educational center within the structure of High Peace Council (HPC) which will gain its objectives through allocating the necessary budget for achieving this goal and gathering religious experts that will break this deadlock and will act effectively for religious and global interests.

The center for profound study will end the cul-de-sac and the legitimacy which is supported via ideological, radical and violent theories of fundamental groups. This center has to be equipped with necessary elements and supported by HPC so as to come to fruition.

The second way that will be fruitful in eliminating violence and religious fundamentalism is promoting and spreading legal and human societies from religious perspective around the human societies. Since the spread of such issues is backed by strong religious logic, it will be of high significance and play a key role in ending the issue of violence and radicalism. It is believed to be very prolific if the two said solutions are put into practice to complete each other. Furthermore, the outcome of this center of religious study needs to be promoted and it will only come to fruition if the promotion of such mentalities changes into a ruling intellectual and religious discourse. Therefore, it is necessary to take the following steps:

(1) Extensive spread of human and legal values from religious perspectives in the frame of conducting seminars in provinces and the capital and sustainable promotion of these values through the media, including social media.

(2) Financing and encouraging moderate religious tendencies in promoting the values of human rights in mosques, seminaries and religious centers.

(3) Teaching religious education with the approach of human rights and inserting the content of Islamic human rights and Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in text books both in scientific and religious centers.

Although the aforementioned solutions are in need of sufficient energy, strong budget and enough time; Afghan government has to consider these solutions besides political and military deals. Unluckily, Afghan government does not have a certain blueprint in this regard. It is crystal clear that if these solutions are disregarded, the state's political and military campaigns will not come to fruition.

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How Much Does Trump Matter?

By Joseph S. Nye

With a narcissistic personality and a short attention span, and lacking experience in world affairs, Donald Trump tends to project slogans rather than strategy in foreign policy. But just as US global primacy never depended on the personality of its president, so America's ability to retain its geopolitical role may not depend on Trump's.

The United States has never had a president like Donald Trump. With a narcissistic personality and a short attention span, and lacking experience in world affairs, he tends to project slogans rather than strategy in foreign policy. Some presidents, like Richard Nixon, had similar personal insecurities and social biases, but Nixon had a strategic view of foreign policy. Others, such as Lyndon Johnson, were highly egotistical, but also had great political skill in working with Congress and other leaders.

Will future historians look back at Trump's presidency as a temporary aberration or a major turning point in America's role in the world? Journalists tend to focus too heavily on leaders' personalities, because it makes good copy. In contrast, social scientists tend to offer broad structural theories about economic growth and geographic location that make history seem inevitable.

I once wrote a book that tried to test the importance of leaders by examining important turning points in the creation a century ago of the "American era" and speculating about what might have happened had the president's most plausible contender been in his place instead. Would structural forces have brought about the same era of US global leadership under different presidents?

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Theodore Roosevelt was an activist leader, but he affected mostly timing. Economic growth and geography were the powerful determinants. Woodrow Wilson broke with America's hemispheric traditions by sending US forces to fight in Europe; but where Wilson made a bigger difference was in the moral tone of American exceptionalism in his justification of - and, counterproductively, his stubborn insistence on - all-or-nothing involvement in the League of Nations.

As for Franklin Roosevelt, it is at least debatable whether structural forces would have brought the US into World War II under a conservative isolationist. Clearly, FDR's framing of the threat posed by Hitler, and his preparation for taking advantage of an event like Pearl Harbor, were crucial factors.

The post-1945 structural bipolarity of the US and the Soviet Union set the framework for the Cold War. But a Henry Wallace presidency (which would have occurred if FDR had not switched him for Harry Truman as vice president in 1944) might have changed the style of the US response. Similarly, a Robert Taft or Douglas MacArthur presidency might have disrupted the relatively smooth consolidation of the containment system over which Dwight Eisenhower presided.

At the end of the century, the structural forces of global economic change caused the erosion of the Soviet superpower, and Mikhail Gorbachev's attempts at reform accelerated the Soviet Union's collapse. However, Ronald Reagan's defense buildup and negotiating savvy, along with George H.W. Bush's skill in managing

the end of the Cold War, were important to the final outcome. Is there a plausible story in which, owing to different presidential leadership, America would not have achieved global primacy by the end of the twentieth century?

Perhaps if FDR had not been president and Germany had consolidated its power, the international system in the 1940s could have realized George Orwell's vision of a conflict-prone multipolar world. Perhaps if Truman had not been president and Stalin had made major gains in Europe and the Middle East, the Soviet empire would have been stronger, and bipolarity might have persisted longer. Perhaps if Eisenhower or Bush had not been president and a different leader had been less successful in avoiding war, the American ascendancy would have been driven off track (as it was for a time by US intervention in Vietnam). Given its economic size and favorable geography, structural forces would likely have produced some form of American primacy in the twentieth century. Nonetheless, leaders' decisions strongly affected the timing and type of primacy. In that sense, even when structure explains a lot, leadership within the structure can make a difference. If history is a river whose course and flow are shaped by the large structural forces of climate and topography, human agents can be portrayed as ants clinging to a log swept along by the current, or as white-water rafters steering and avoiding rocks, occasionally overturning and sometimes succeeding.

So leadership matters, but how much? There will never be a definitive answer. Scholars who have tried to measure the effects of leadership in corporations or laboratory experiments have sometimes come up with numbers in the range of 10% or 15%, depending on the context. But these are highly structured situations where change is often linear. In unstructured situations, such as post-apartheid South Africa, the transformational leadership of Nelson Mandela made a huge difference.

American foreign policy is structured by institutions and a constitution, but external crises can create a context much more susceptible to leaders' choices, for better or worse. If Al Gore had been declared president in 2000, the US probably would have gone to war in Afghanistan, but not in Iraq. Because foreign-policy events are what social scientists call "path dependent," relatively small choices by leaders, even in the range of 10-15% early on a path, can lead to major divergences in outcomes over time. As Robert Frost once put it, when two roads diverge in a wood, taking the one less traveled can sometimes make all the difference.

Finally, the risks created by the personality of a leader may not be symmetrical; they may make more of a difference for a mature power than for a rising power. Striking a rock or causing a war can sink the ship. If Trump avoids a major war, and if he is not re-elected, future scholars may look back at his presidency as a curious blip on the curve of American history. But those are big "ifs." (Courtesy Project Syndicate)

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