

Proposals For a Free, Independent and Modern Afghanistan

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With the rapid and irresponsible withdrawal of the United States from Afghanistan, the latter country faced chaotic political, social, and economic problems. The Taliban, an ethnic Pashtun radical group took over the country swiftly without any fight or resistance based upon a deal made and delivered by the previous envoy of the American government, Zalmay Khalilzad, an ethnic born Pashtun, Ashraf Ghani, the president of Afghanistan, another ethnic born Pashtun and the Trump administration. The American government thought that there is no need to be in Afghanistan any longer and they should leave the country and better leave it for the Taliban, which was proposed and orchestrated by their envoy and Afghan president, and they did. Democracy, albeit not perfect in Afghanistan due to mass corruption and tribalism of Ashraf Ghani, was derailed big time and replaced by ethnocracy. It is not only a regional, but also international disappointment. The US Secretary of State, Antony Blinken, in his recent trip to Africa laid out his democratic reforms for Africa, but in Afghanistan, democratic values were all compromised to ethnocracy and a radical ethnic terrorist group. It is almost four months that Afghanistan is in political vacuum. Neither the Afghan people pledged allegiance to the Taliban nor the international community recognized a terrorist organization that killed innocent people for the last twenty years, associated with Al Qaida, DAISH and other radical groups. Women are confined at home and the press and media, which was the most successful in the region, was suppressed. The economy nosedived. The United Nations reported that the banking system will collapse soon. The lingua franca of Afghanistan, which is Farsi/Dari replaced by the Pashto language and there is no clear communication with the people since the majority of Afghan people are Farsi/Dari speakers. A tribal, radical group under the name of Islam were allowed to take power that they do not adhere to human rights, gender equality or human dignity and integrity. Afghan democracy could be fixed by moderate Islamic values but they did not care and tribalism was more important to them than democracy.

It was 2010 that this author received an invitation from Denis Kucinich, then Congressman(D), from Ohio for a Congressional briefing at the US Congress to propose a peace plan for Afghanistan. The Peace plan was called "SEE." That is acronym for Security, Economy and Education. Over ten years has passed and now a new revised edition is needed.

Concerning Afghanistan, we are dealing with a country for which the entire fabric is Islamic. Hence, the solution should be found within Islam as well. However, since Afghanistan is a multicultural society, a new version and interpretation of Islam must be presented in order to bring peace and stability. For this reason, I have written "Islamic Democracy: Road Map to Peace in the Middle East," (2020).

Islam and politics are not separate from each other. However, according to the Quran, religion cannot be imposed on people. The Qur'an says, "Let be no compulsion in Deen (Religion)." The purpose of an Islamic government is not to impose religion but to establish law and order, establish a strong economy and mass education for the sake of all not just the privileged, respect human rights and adopt gender equality. Interestingly enough, Islam supports human rights, gender equality, free and independent media. It is all within the Islamic culture and value system. And this form of Islam should be implemented for peace and stability. Islam does not discriminate against women or other ethnic groups or religious denominations. Afghanistan should not make the same mistake as Iran did or the Saudi Arabia did impose their brand of religion on people. Even those who are not believing in Islam are our brothers in creation. And this what the true Islam is.

An inclusive government is NOT the answer as many people envisage. The Taliban may include some radicals from other ethnic groups and call it an inclusive government. Afghanistan should change the intellectuality of political system that imposing religion is against Islam and it is not the job of a government to interfere in people's personal lives or to control media and to decide about women.

Afghanistan is a multicultural country with 23 ethnic groups, two major religious denominations, three major languages and hundreds of dialects, values and cultures. However, the common denominator among Afghans is Islam. What Afghanistan needs is citizenship for all, that all people regardless of their gender, language, religious and tribal affiliation should be equal before the law. For the last two hundred years, Afghanistan suffered because of tribalism that caused mass discrimination against those who were not Pashtuns and Sunni. Under the name of the majority, minority people were deprived of human rights. In such a society for building trust and cooperation we should not emphasize majority and minority but citizenship, because the majority and minority in a developing country will cause discrimination and prejudices as it did in the past. For the purpose of building trust between all ethnic groups those areas and districts where the name of villages and districts were deliberately changed to Pashto should change back to its original Uzbek and Farsi names. The *Shura of Ulema* (Council of the scholars) all should be consisted of all religious denominations equally. They all should use their jurisprudence for progress and development.

Because of the nature of Afghan society, if not fully federal but semi federal government should be established and all 34 provinces should have the autonomy to decide about their governor, judges and other top officials in the system. And for fair elections either a general election should be held or each province should elect their candidate for presidency and send him/her for election. The bill of election committee should be written on qualifications and merit and everyone, rich and poor should have the right to participate. During the twenty years of American presence, the exported democracy required a candidate to pay some \$10,000. This tells us that democracy was for the rich not for the people.

Afghanistan is a small country but with an extremely important strategic and geo-political location in Central Asia as well as in the tail of the Middle East. Afghanistan was and still is the epicenter of "The Great Game" among all parties, regional proxies and global powers. In order to bring peace and stability and to stop the Great Game over Afghanistan, the country should be declared demilitarized. An international peace conference should be held to declare Afghanistan neutral and non-aligned. This will not only bring peace and stability to the region but also peace and stability in the world. We should not underestimate the danger of Islamic radicalism around the world. Because of its natural beauty, Afghanistan is called the Switzerland of Asia. With natural beauty, vast mineral resources and support of the international community, we should create the true Switzerland of Asia. Afghanistan needs to think about its economy and infrastructure rather than military buildup. It is one of the countries in Asia that does not have a central sewage system, heavily depended on power/ energy from outside sources and needs a well-connected paved roadway system including "Mega Highways" to connect the whole country, including remote areas like Wakhan or other districts. The highway project will reduce tribalism, improve economy and strengthen national relationship to create a true nation. One reason that Afghanistan has remained a tribal society is due to lack of modern communication and transportation. It is very important that the Salang Pass that connects the capital to the north should be reconstructed by digging a tunnel under the mountain. The Russian project is a total failure. The Salang

Pass caused thousands of deaths since its construction due to annual avalanches, and fuel consumption of cars, and its maintenance, which is very costly.

Afghanistan should invest in eliminating illiteracy rate, which is 43 percent. Within five years all Afghans under the age of 75 must be literate. This will give Afghanistan a literate labor force, and people will be able to decide for themselves rather than have the government dictate for them. The challenge of mass education for Afghanistan is a multicultural educational curriculum where all children up to the age of 14 study in their own ethnic language. The education system should not deculturize people but rather nourish and cherish the indigenous culture.

Afghanistan is one of the richest countries in the world due to its vast untapped mineral resources. Unfortunately, Afghanistan lacks technology and professional personnel for exploration. Therefore, for 10 years, Afghanistan should receive less than those who help explore these riches and to activate the economic wheel. Masses of people will be employed and the economy will flourish. After ten years Afghanistan should renegotiate its contracts.

The key for Afghanistan stability is having good relationships with its neighbors. During the Great Game, Afghanistan lost some territories to the north and to the south of the country to Russian Czars and the British empire. Those territories such as the Durand with Pakistan and Panj Deh with Russia will never come back and Afghans should better forget it, and especially recognize the Durand line as the official border between Afghanistan and Pakistan. As far as the Helmand River, also known as Hirmand River, with Iran is concerned; water is a natural resource for all people of the world. It is a blessing to humanity. Iran and Afghanistan, both should use Helmand River water equally as was done before 1857.

If the situation continues where people are exploited under the name of Islam, and we know that religion cannot be imposed, and one ethnic group rules over 22 other ethnic groups there will be a civil war or partition of Afghanistan between north and south.

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