

Democracy and Stability in Fragile States

International Conference (8-10) March 2006, Berlin

By: M.Masoom Stanekzai

Distinguished delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am privileged to participate in this important conference. The interesting but somehow unusual phrasing of the topic will generate much debate, I am sure we will all benefit from diversity and wealth of experiences gathered from around the world and may reflect different prospective of stakeholders which is the advantage of these conferences . Our experience in Afghanistan might be helpful in many ways because it show a faire degree of support from outside but mainly from an internal process strongly driven by the will and need of Afghan society for transition from war to peace. This is the beginning of a long road to walk before we can declare the democratic process a full success. It will take time and will need vast commitment resources and energy to be translated into durable institutionalized tool to build a society based on rights for achieving prosperity.

The trends of promoting democracy is now reflected in policies and strategies both at government (US, EU etc) as well as nongovernmental levels (multinational organizations UN, WB, ADB, NGO's and civil society networks). Promoting democracy is an important advancement towards justice and prosperity, but the question is how it can be achieved, sustained and promoted? There is no solid answer and it will require a lot of research, debate and stocktaking by independent institutions (bodies) trusted for (impartiality- credibility) using a process of engagement that should be inclusive.

Despite much advancement in social and political science and anthropology there remains a need to define the boundaries of human social cultural and behavior dimensions. They are not fixed structures but something dynamic and constantly changing. While we believe about many issues today to be the right thing, but they may not work in other circumstances and times. To use the metaphor of medicine; we can not treat all patients in the same way as they may require different treatment in accordance to the nature of their specific problem.

Dealing with democracy particularly in failed states is a complicated multi- dimensional phenomena and one has to assess the internal and external drivers, social perceptions, cultural diversities, regional compositions and most importantly the legitimacy of the process that has to be strongly driven by internal dynamic, widely and consistently supported through a net of integrated and coordinated approaches.

From what we have experienced in Afghanistan, there are circumstances where a nation can be trapped in the vicious circle, unable to get out of it unless they are helped. By allowing the situation to continue ordinary people will suffer, humanitarian crisis and out migration will continue and threats will not remain in the boundaries of that particular country and can cause harm to wider international community. In this case helping to create minimum conditions for people to practice their legitimate rights freely is fundamentally a different concept and logic for justification to promote democracy.

Successful implementation of Bonn agreement under the wise leadership of H.E. Hammed Karzai is a good example of synergy between internal processes and external support) Despite of all challenges the country faced or continue to face our achievements¹ during past four years are remarkable.

¹ National Development strategy (2006- ANDS – London conference) progress since Bonn (pp-34-39)

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I will briefly summarize my findings from our own experience during the past four years:

1. There is distinction between exported² and support, democracy is not a trade commodity that can be exported. Imposing a model of democracy by force against the will of people will not work. Such democracy is neither successful nor sustainable, but supporting a process for creating minimum conditions that provide space for people (in fragile states) to practice their rights in accordance to their own ways, methods and wishes is the legitimate support they deserve.
2. Democracy itself has many enemies; ranging from those who are ousted from power to those who dreams to get to such unlimited power through any possible means including those beyond the national boundaries who fear that it will arrive on their door step sooner or later and their people will ask for their rights. Therefore they will work hand in hand to suppress the young emerging democracy at birth.
3. Sustaining democracy without security and good governance is not possible, and without improving the wellbeing of people it is meaningless. Democracy in absolute poverty is another type of seamless dictatorship of inequality of access to wealth, thus services. Unless we work towards creating a vibrant middle class, people will not feel the thorough meaning of democracy in fragile states and the poor will be again under represented. We should be aware of the danger of giving legitimacy to the criminals to benefit from a democratic process due to the weakness of vetting and judiciary systems.

Other key obstacles which have to be overcome include:

- a. Suspicions attached to the Western promotion of democracy in fragile states. The most vivid memory of this is rooted in the cold War era. Under the slogan of internationalism and social justice the soviet bloc supported developing nations in their fight against colonialism. In doing this, they imposed communist ideology and its connected paradigm for political and economic development. As a result of this, in some cases perception of democracy is distorted by the belief that it is a strategic tool for the expansion of Western influence.
- b. Democracy itself is equality and rights and respect to dignity and sovereignty. Therefore using double standards in democracy and implementation of human rights is just strengthening the above perception.
- c. Security and good governance are the preconditions for promoting the social wellbeing, economic growth (prosperity) and environmental integrity as the triple bottom lines for sustainable reconstruction and development. The combined effect of these five elements will help the fragile states to achieve stability. Such stability, therefore, will form strong foundation to institutionalize durable democratic processes. The relations are not simple hierarchy but rather dynamics and complex the architecture design for each case should suite specific situations.

² Ian Burma in an interview for a new book called "The End of Tolerance" Says; 'democracy cannot simply be exported, off the shelf as it were, to non-western countries. Conversely their political institutions must be "culturally appropriate" for their societies

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- d. Under the name of rights and freedom of expression, undermining respect to the rights of others, particularly if it ends up with ignition of social tension, suffering and loss of lives will affect the promotion of democracy in different ways. Partnership, precise dialogue and agreeing on a set of universal code of ethics are necessary while promoting and supporting democracy from outside.

I am very interested if we can explore some of the following issues in some details during the coming days of conference.

- Internal dynamics and drivers for promoting democracy
- External drivers/ methods of support and building trust
- Assessing the very sensitive context of fragile states and links between stability and democracy

I would like to sincerely thank (Heinrich Boll Foundation & German Institute for international and security affairs) for providing us with this wonderful opportunity to share our thoughts and ideas and work together for a better and just world.

Thanks