

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



December 26, 2016

Cold Weather Adds Insult to Injury

With the approach of winter, the pain and sufferings of the individuals, who do not have a roof over their heads, increase and they seek shelter to survive the cold weather. The number of women and children has been compounded on the street begging, selling plastics, polishing shoes and doing many other manual labors from dawn to dusk to satiate their hunger. Unemployment and inflation add insult to injury. For some, life turns to hell.

The population increases with each passing day and there is no birth control in the country. On the contrary, some families have no more than one bread-winner, especially when the number of female children is higher than male. In such a case, it is next to impossible for a middle aged/old man to provide food, clothing, shelter and education for all his children. Moreover, there is no attention from the government to alleviate their sufferings through providing job opportunity or at least strengthening security situation so that the entrepreneurs could start factories and invest freely.

In addition, there is an unprecedented rise in recent months in the return of registered and unregistered refugees from Pakistan, averaging 5,000 people daily in early September. Combined with the new internally displaced, an alarming one million (57 per cent of whom are children) could be on the move just as winter sets in between September and December 2016. All will require urgent food assistance, health, shelter and other essential services. This spike in the numbers of IDPs and returnees will increase the percentage of the population facing seasonal or permanent food insecurity beyond the current estimate of 40 per cent, and will further strain already meager economic and employment opportunities and public services.

Child labor is a serious problem in the country and a number of children abandon the idea of going to school being engaged in manual labors to earn bread and butter for their family members.

They wander the streets, mainly in Kabul city, and return home with small penny. Similarly, some old men, who head their families, are involved in backbreaking works such as carrying heavy burdens on their shoulders or wheelbarrows but their income will suffice only bread for their large families. Few days back, an old man revealed his family issue in the same way. He was a shoe-polisher and said with a sigh of pain that he got out of home in early morning and returned home in late evening but he got no more than 80/100 Afs, which was not enough for only bread. His tired face and sad expressions would fill one with a deep sense of sorrow. The life plays really rough with our people. What about those women who lost their spouses in war or terrorist attacks?

The women who lost their spouses have to provide food and clothing for their children by hook or by crook and that is none of the government's business! Perhaps, they are born to suffer. There is no one to read or listen to their life story. They have no option other than doing laundry, cooking, cleaning or just begging on the streets to find a morsel of bread for their children. Don't you see the widows begging regularly in the cold weather? What about the children with filthy clothes? "Life" is, probably, the most meaningless, sorry, painful word for them. Their share from childhood is severe pain and bitter moment. No one can feel their grief and the lump in their throat. The question is that are not they still allowed to leave the country? The officials, especially high-ranking ones, who live in luxury buildings and skyscrapers, will answer negatively to this question. They never feel empathy towards them. Dear officials please find us job or provide security! Our rights are violated, our blood is spilt and the graph of civilian casualties goes high and higher with each passing day. The officials will simply say: no, you have to make your country. But how, they neither know nor care. What about the refugees who return home? Do they have any facilities, jobs or security? Their return it believed to add to economic, social and security problems. It is state in the preamble of constitution that the government is committed to "Strengthen political, social, economic as well as defense institutions; attain a prosperous life and sound living environment for all inhabitants of this land; and, eventually, regain Afghanistan's appropriate place in the international family".

Moreover, the mouth-watering agenda of the President and CEO during their presidential campaigns, got people to picture a utopian society with tight security and strong economy. But none have come true and the nation suffers more than before. The political challenges suggest that the Constitution has been violated frequently by the officials themselves. It is the government to provide job opportunities, security and "sound living environment for all inhabitants" and protect their rights and liberty.

When our youths have jobs and security, they do not need to abandon the country. It is simply said that 'actions speak louder than words'. Ordering the citizens to stay in the country is not a solution for the problem but providing them a safe and sound living environment is the panacea. The officials had better work for the nation rather than ordering too much so that the citizens do not seek/find solution in abandoning the country.

The Crisis of Market Fundamentalism

By Anatole Kaletsky

The biggest political surprise of 2016 was that everyone was so surprised. I certainly had no excuse to be caught unawares: soon after the 2008 crisis, I wrote a book suggesting that a collapse of confidence in political institutions would follow the economic collapse, with a lag of five years or so.

We've seen this sequence before. The first breakdown of globalization, described by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in their 1848 The Communist Manifesto, was followed by reform laws creating unprecedented rights for the working class. The breakdown of British imperialism after World War I was followed by the New Deal and the welfare state. And the breakdown of Keynesian economics after 1968 was followed by the Thatcher-Reagan revolution. In my book Capitalism 4.0, I argued that comparable political upheavals would follow the fourth systemic breakdown of global capitalism heralded by the 2008 crisis.

When a particular model of capitalism is working successfully, material progress relieves political pressures. But when the economy fails - and the failure is not just a transient phase but a symptom of deep contradictions - capitalism's disruptive social side effects can turn politically toxic.

That is what happened after 2008. Once the failure of free trade, deregulation, and monetarism came to be seen as leading to a "new normal" of permanent austerity and diminished expectations, rather than just to a temporary banking crisis, the inequalities, job losses, and cultural dislocations of the pre-crisis period could no longer be legitimized - just as the extortionate taxes of the 1950s and 1960s lost their legitimacy in the stagflation of the 1970s. If we are witnessing this kind of transformation, then piecemeal reformers who try to address specific grievances about immigration, trade, or income inequality will lose out to radical politicians who challenge the entire system. And, in some ways, the radicals will be right. The disappearance of "good" manufacturing jobs cannot be blamed on immigration, trade, or technology.

But whereas these vectors of economic competition increase total national income, they do not necessarily distribute income gains in a socially acceptable way. To do that requires deliberate political intervention on at least two fronts.

First, macroeconomic management must ensure that demand always grows as strongly as the supply potential created by technology and globalization. This is the fundamental Keynesian insight that was temporarily rejected in the heyday of monetarism during the early 1980s, successfully reinstated in the 1990s (at least in the US and Britain), but then forgotten again in the deficit panic after 2009. A return to Keynesian demand management could be the main economic benefit of Donald Trump's incoming US administration, as expansionary fiscal policies replace much less efficient efforts at monetary stimulus.

The US may now be ready to abandon the monetarist dogmas of central-bank independence and inflation targeting, and to restore full employment as the top priority of demand management. For Europe, however, this revolution in macroeconomic thinking is still years away. At the same time, a second, more momentous, intellectual revolution will be needed regarding government intervention in social outcomes and economic structures.

Market fundamentalism conceals a profound contradiction. Free trade, technological progress, and other forces that promote economic "efficiency" are presented as beneficial to society, even if they harm individual workers or businesses, because growing national incomes allow winners to compensate losers, ensuring

that nobody is left worse off.

This principle of so-called Pareto optimality underlies all moral claims for free-market economics.

Liberalizing policies are justified in theory only by the assumption that political decisions will redistribute some of the gains from winners to losers in socially acceptable ways. But what happens if politicians do the opposite in practice? By deregulating finance and trade, intensifying competition, and weakening unions, governments created the theoretical conditions that demanded redistribution from winners to losers. But advocates of market fundamentalism did not just forget redistribution; they forbade it.

The pretext was that taxes, welfare payments, and other government interventions impair incentives and distort competition, reducing economic growth for society as a whole. But, as Margaret Thatcher famously said, "[...] there's no such thing as society. There are individual men and women and there are families." By focusing on the social benefits of competition while ignoring the costs to specific people, the market fundamentalists disregarded the principle of individualism at the heart of their own ideology. After this year's political upheavals, the fatal contradiction between social benefits and individual losses can no longer be ignored. If trade, competition, and technological progress are to power the next phase of capitalism, they will have to be paired with government interventions to redistribute the gains from growth in ways that Thatcher and Reagan declared taboo.

Breaking these taboos need not mean returning to the high tax rates, inflation, and dependency culture of the 1970s. Just as fiscal and monetary policy can be calibrated to minimize both unemployment and inflation, redistribution can be designed not merely to recycle taxes into welfare, but to help more directly when workers and communities suffer from globalization and technological change.

Instead of providing cash handouts that push people from work into long-term unemployment or retirement, governments can redistribute the benefits of growth by supporting employment and incomes with regional and industrial subsidies and minimum-wage laws. Among the most effective interventions of this type, demonstrated in Germany and Scandinavia, is to spend money on high-quality vocational education and re-training for workers and students outside universities, creating non-academic routes to a middle-class standard of living.

These may all sound like obvious nostrums, but governments have mostly done the opposite. They have made tax systems less progressive and slashed spending on education, industrial policies and regional subsidies, pouring money instead into health care, pensions, and cash hand-outs that encourage early retirement and disability. The redistribution has been away from low-paid young workers, whose jobs and wages are genuinely threatened by trade and immigration, and toward the managerial and financial elites, who have gained the most from globalization, and elderly retirees, whose guaranteed pensions protect them from economic disruptions. Yet this year's political upheavals have been driven by elderly voters, while young voters mostly supported the status quo.

This paradox shows the post-crisis confusion and disillusionment is not yet over. But the search for new economic models that I called "Capitalism 4.1" has clearly started - for better or worse. (Courtesy Project Syndicate)

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Aleppo's Sobering Lessons

By Richard N. Haass

The fall of Aleppo to forces loyal to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad is neither the end of the beginning nor the beginning of the end of Syria's five-and-a-half-year-old civil war - a war that is also a proxy, regional, and to some extent global conflict. The next major battle will be fought in Idlib province; the only question is when. And even after that, the war will continue to fester in various parts of what will remain a divided country. Even so, now is a good time to take stock and focus on what has been learned, if only to learn from it. Little in history is inevitable, and the outcome in Syria is the result of what governments, groups, and individuals chose to do - and what they chose not to do. Indeed, not acting in Syria has proved to be as consequential as acting. At no point was this clearer than when the United States did not fulfill its threat to make Assad's government pay for its use of chemical weapons.

That proved to be a missed opportunity not only to alter the momentum of the conflict, but also to underscore the principle that any government that uses weapons of mass destruction will regret it. Enforcement, after all, is essential to the effectiveness of future deterrence.

Deriving additional lessons requires going back to 2011, when peaceful anti-government protesters were met with deadly force, leading US President Barack Obama and others to demand that Assad step down. Here, too, no action or resources backed the strong rhetoric. The emergence of such a wide gap between means and ends almost always dooms a policy to failure.

This is especially so when the goal is regime change, and when the incumbent regime represents a substantial minority of a divided population. These circumstances tend to give rise to winner-take-all - and loser-lose-all - struggles. Not surprisingly, those with the most to lose tend to conduct the fight with enormous tenacity.

Scholars of international relations often write about the perceived limits to the utility of military force. But Syria shows that military force can be decisive - especially when applied in massive doses, with little concern for the number of civilians killed or displaced. Russia, Iran, and Assad's government all demonstrated what large-scale and often indiscriminate use of military force could accomplish.

Another casualty of the Syria conflict is the term "international community." In fact, there is little in the way of a global community of thought or action. And, with more than 500,000 dead and another ten million displaced in Syria, the much-vaunted doctrine of the "responsibility to protect" (R2P) has been exposed

as well. Adopted unanimously by the United Nations General Assembly in 2005 (partly in response to Rwanda's genocide a decade earlier), R2P was premised on the notion that governments are obliged to protect their citizens from physical harm. When they are unable or unwilling to do so, according to R2P, other governments are obliged to intervene to protect those being subjected to harm.

If any government failed to meet the R2P norm, it was Syria's. But the international intervention that came about was not designed to protect innocent lives or to weaken the government's hold on power; instead, it was designed to ensure that the government prevailed. And it succeeded.

The international community did only somewhat better when it came to responding to the massive refugee crisis caused by the war. The fact that many countries have been unwilling to open their borders to meaningful numbers of asylum-seekers highlights the reality that the best refugee policy is one that prevents innocent men, women, and children from becoming refugees in the first place.

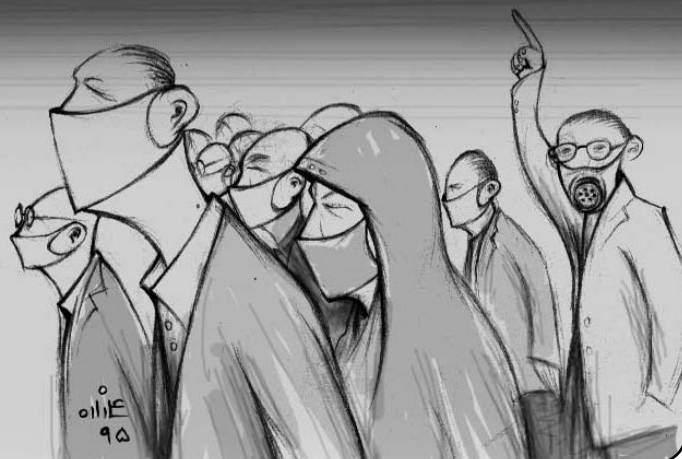
Diplomatic efforts failed to achieve much in the way of saving Aleppo or its inhabitants, and they are no more likely to bring an end to the war. However talented and committed diplomats may be, diplomacy tends to reflect, not create, realities on the ground. Future diplomatic efforts to bring about an end to the fighting or a particular political outcome will succeed only to the extent that the military balance and trends allow.

Looking ahead, Assad's government will remain in place and in control of much, but not all, of the country. Various Sunni terrorist groups, less radical Sunni rebels, proxy forces such as Hezbollah, the Turkish army, Syrian Kurdish forces, and others will compete for control of particular regions. Outsiders, such as the US, would be well advised to accept this reality for the immediate future and focus their energies on stabilizing areas liberated from the Islamic State, protecting civilian populations, developing political and military ties with non-terrorist Sunni groups, and forging local cease-fires to prevent further Aleppos.

The goal of bringing about a transition to a different and more broad-based government should be maintained. But that is a long-term proposition.

The lesson of the last five and a half years must be taken to heart: those who engage Syria with limited will and limited means must set limited goals if they are to accomplish even a limited amount of good. (Courtesy Project Syndicate)

Richard N. Haass is President of the Council on Foreign Relations and the author of A World in Disarray: American Foreign Policy and the Crisis of the Old Order.



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