

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

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## Freedom of Choice

It is important to speak and to listen as these both actions are also a sort of virtue. So, every person must listen and listen carefully to what others have to say. They should never become the victim of a sole lie, and they must seek refuge from the virtue that is the only virtue and does not have any other alternative and at the same time from the sin that has no other substitute. True freedom demands that there should always be options for the people so that they are able to choose the best for themselves. Nobody should have the right to make decisions and start accepting and rejecting on others' behalf. Those, who try to be hurdle between men and their desires, would have the worst life ever. Who could claim what the truth really is and what lie really means? What is good forever and what is bad everlastingly. It is advisable to like for others what you like for your own self but never make you're like an order for others. You're like must resemble a wish and must never enter the limits of a decision. If decisions are imposed on the people, they will never remain loyal to themselves and neither to others and to the societies where they live. How could a person value a society where none of his wishes is valued? Where he has to spend his life by following the orders of others? No one would like to follow those rules and regulations willingly, which are formed without his involvement and are forcefully implemented on him. He would definitely question the authority of those who impose their decisions on others. He would ask who has given them the right to do so. No one among us has been sent from the sky and all of us have the same relation with the time and space. It is not right if some of the people start considering themselves superior to others as all belong to the same earth and live through the same time.

Today's human beings have degraded themselves and the ones, who mock the inferiority of others and consider themselves exalted, have further disgraced them. Such people have, as a matter of fact, gone astray but they believe that they are on the right path. Following that path they have to face the hatred and curse of others; they have to live through the abhorrence of their fellow beings. And, how can a person consider himself better and on the right path if his fellow beings detest him and tolerate him because of some compulsion? How can a person be so much absurd and stupid?

If a person is not able to choose an option from amongst different choices, he, in fact, does not exist. And, if he is free but he has sold his right of decision to someone else, it means he has lost himself willingly. While, he has lost himself, he does not have the right to live life with all its beauties. He, actually, resembles a nonliving being, that is lying uselessly on the face of earth without contributing anything positive to it.

The authoritative few have imposed such systems on other human beings that have taken their rights of decision from them. They themselves have right to choose as they have accumulated most of the wealth and enjoy the luxuries of life while others' decisions are dictated to them by their social, political and economic circumstances. Though today most of the societies chant the slogans of democracy, they have failed to implement it in true sense. Democracy, at least ideally, stands for the freedom of thought, expression and decision, but today's men living in democratic societies are deprived of their choices. They are enslaved in the invisible chains of deterministic systems.

Most of the people are only free to choose between the bad and worse. They either have to suffer extreme poverty or opt for a criminal life. They, on one hand, have the option to live a pathetic life or welcome the untimely death. Is it really democratic? Is it really a choice, wherein you are given a limited set of options to choose from when none of the choices is better than the other? On the other hand, people are not encouraged to choose; they are taught to compromise with what they have. Through the so-called educational institutions they are conditioned to live a life they are dictated to live. Parents, teachers and guides all have failed to teach the children and the students the capability to choose and to choose rightly. As quoted beautifully by David Foster Wallace, "But someone sometime let you forget how to choose, and what. Someone let your peoples forget it was the only thing of importance, choosing. . . How to choose any but a child's greedy choices if there is no loving-filled father to guide, inform, and teach the person how to choose? How is there freedom to choose if one does not learn how to choose?"



## US Direct Involvement in Talks with Afghan Taliban & Its Repercussions on Achieving Peace

By Mohammed Gul Sahibzada

Though the United States of America has been involved in peace process since the process of making peace with Taliban began in the twilight of 2000s, most of these involvements had been out of the press or public eyes. Stakeholders in the process have always been the Government of Afghanistan, Government and military establishment of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, some kind of representations from Taliban, People's Republic of China, neighboring countries including Russia and Iran, the United States and few allied countries from European Union. Efforts of some of these countries had been successful in bringing short-term ceasefire during three days Eid Festivities. Keeping in view the elusive and resilient nature of Taliban organization and their not-so-clear chain / line of command, peace talks with the group have consistently derailed in the past. Recent announcement by the US about their readiness to involve in peace talks directly with Taliban insurgents opens a new chapter in the efforts to bring peace in Afghanistan. Taliban has been asking for direct talks with the US because they believe it was the US who had 'toppled' their Government in 2001 and instead installed their 'puppet' government in Kabul. Afghan Government had in the past insisted that Taliban insurgents talk to them directly, but Taliban rejected any talks with them.

Taliban organization and the people manning it are completely different than its original form. Most of Taliban leaders have been killed during last two decades of war. In addition, most of their genuine leaders with patriotic mentality toward Afghanistan have either been killed or detained by Pakistani military junta, and this provides grim picture of what will be composition of the team Taliban in ongoing peace process. Though there are few structured teams of Taliban leadership currently existing under the names of 'Quetta Shura', 'Peshawar Shura' and 'Qatar Political Office of Afghan Taliban', it remains to be seen which one of these leadership groups have more leverage on Taliban fighters in the field in Afghanistan. An exhibit of unity of command was at play during three days Eid festivities where both Afghan Government and Taliban fighters agreed to a three days ceasefire. But in the backdrop of repeated failure of peace efforts during last eighteen years, owing to meddling of neighboring countries' intelligence agencies, it is unclear whether the entire insurgency is supported and structured in one shape, or they might fall in pieces in the event certain demands of countries with vested interest are not met. Those Taliban leaders, who were brought to Qatar in 2013 to open a currently defunct political office in that country, are almost out of touch and not aligned with the present Taliban military command and control structure and political organization, due to them being confined to a small space in different geographical locations, and due to operational changes inside the insurgents military campaign. For example, Taliban fighters were under a central command during the first decade of their military campaign against Afghan Government and international forces, but starting in 2014, Taliban military tactics and their operational organization has been decentralized. Their military commanders have been given autonomy to operate and decide at will across the country in Afghanistan in order to make sure their campaign moves forward. These changes and newly emerged leaders in the insurgents' ranks pose considerable challenges before the stakeholders to have comprehensive and inclusive peace process.

There are many interests involved and forces at play to involve the US in Afghan Taliban peace talks publicly. While legitimate concerns and interests of stakeholder countries can be accommodated, it is highly advisable for the US to be watchful about the Islamic Republic of Pakistan's designs, plans, undercurrents and agenda in the process of ongoing / or upcoming peace talks. A lot has been said, written and expressed about Pakistan's designs, so-called worries and future wishful thinking and it is not in the capacity of this piece to accommodate all of them, but it is for the US, Afghanistan Government and all other stakeholders to rein in Pakistan's negative perspective and unfounded worries about a peaceful and stable Afghanistan. In the event when the US, China, Russia and all other major world powers

guarantee a peace deal and ensure safety and prosperity of Pakistan with a peaceful and stable Afghanistan in her neighborhood, there shouldn't be any worries for Pakistan.

People of Afghanistan welcome any and all efforts to bring peace in the country. But keeping in view immense stakes and interests of Pakistan in the affairs of Afghanistan, which has the longest border (more than 2000 miles) with Afghanistan, and supports Taliban insurgents in ongoing war in the form of providing them with safe havens, logistical means, money, military training and mentoring, and rallying points for Taliban commanders and planners, the whole process and related efforts by major stakeholders who genuinely struggle to bring peace in Afghanistan become doubtful and wide of the mark. The people and Government of the United States of America have put their gold and spilled their blood to follow the footprint and search for the terrorists who had been responsible for the attack in New York on 9/11 in 2001, which they eventually located, found, captured and killed right in the middle of a military town inside Pakistan. To put it in a nutshell, all hard data show it, and the people of Afghanistan believe that Pakistan has been responsible for the ongoing destructive war in Afghanistan since last four decades. It is, therefore, pertinent to suggest that this new efforts by the US should keep these concerns at the very top of their agenda to bring peace in the country. The people and Government of Afghanistan have historically proven that all neighbors - including Pakistan - will not have hostile elements against them in any viable political and economic set up in Afghanistan. Afghans have historical records of honoring their words, and befriend with her neighbors. A case in point is the 1965 war between India and Pakistan. Despite not having good relations with Pakistan, the Government of Afghanistan had sent high level delegation to Pakistan to give assurances to Pakistan political and military junta about Afghanistan's neutral position in the war. The same was true in the war of 1971 for Afghanistan. These gestures were countenanced and practically implemented by the Government of Afghanistan at a time when relations were sour between the two countries, and Pakistan was worried that Afghanistan might provide space and resources to India, with whom Afghanistan has been enjoying historic good relationships since the beginning of time and continues till date. A stable and stronger Afghanistan will definitely do more good to Pakistan and all other immediate neighbors and the entire globe, than a weak and unstable Afghanistan.

Few words for Pakistan: - instead of supporting destructive elements for advancement of so called 'national interest' and 'strategic depth' in Afghanistan, it is the people and Government of Afghanistan's wish to start a new with Pakistan, and begin new era in our two countries relationship. Pakistan and Afghanistan are two neighbors with people of the same culture and belief at two sides of the 2000 miles long border. Pakistan should strengthen positive and friendly relationship with Afghanistan, and terminate support to and patronage of terrorist and religious fanatic groups inside Afghanistan. These groups can only cause destruction and instability in both Pakistan and Afghanistan. Pakistan cannot deny the deaths and destruction these fanatic groups brought in Pakistan during last fifteen years. There is no logical point behind supporting such groups - either in Afghanistan or inside Pakistan - under a false pretext and belief that they might defend Pakistan interest in 'enemy' countries i.e. India or Afghanistan. We can live together in harmony and peace and together we can fly high in the sky of development and better life. It is therefore, expected from Pakistan to keep these points in mind and welcome brotherly gestures of the people and Government of Afghanistan and the entire world community to change perspective. The ongoing peace talks are pivotal and require all parties to be honest and interested in a balanced, inclusive and stable peace deal so that the entire region can take a sigh of relief and let peace prevail.

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## Trump May Kill the Global Recovery

By Nouriel Roubini

How does the current global economic outlook compare to that of a year ago? In 2017, the world economy was undergoing a synchronized expansion, with growth accelerating in both advanced economies and emerging markets. Moreover, despite stronger growth, inflation was tame - if not falling - even in economies like the United States, where goods and labor markets were tightening.

Stronger growth with inflation still below target allowed unconventional monetary policies either to remain in full force, as in the eurozone and Japan, or to be rolled back very gradually, as in the US. The combination of strong growth, low inflation, and easy money implied that market volatility was low. And with the yields on government bonds also very low, investors' animal spirits were running high, boosting the price of many risky assets.

While US and global equities were delivering high returns, political and geopolitical risks were kept largely under control. Markets gave US President Donald Trump the benefit of the doubt during his first year in office; and investors celebrated his tax cuts and deregulatory policies. Many commentators even argued that the decade of the "new mediocre" and "secular stagnation" was giving way to a new "goldilocks" phase of steady, stronger growth.

Fast-forward to 2018, and the picture looks very different. Though the world economy is still experiencing a lukewarm expansion, growth is no longer synchronized. Economic growth in the eurozone, the United Kingdom, Japan, and a number of fragile emerging markets is slowing. And while the US and Chinese economies are still expanding, the former is being driven by unsustainable fiscal stimulus.

Worse still, the significant share of global growth driven by "Chimerica" (China and America) is now being threatened by an escalating trade war. The Trump administration has imposed import tariffs on steel, aluminum, and a wide range of Chinese goods (with many more to come), and it is considering additional levies on automobiles from Europe and the rest of the world. And currently the renegotiation of NAFTA is stalled. Thus, the risk of a full-scale trade war is rising.

Meanwhile, with the US economy near full employment, fiscal-stimulus policies, together with rising oil and commodity prices, are stoking domestic inflation. As a result, the US Federal Reserve must raise interest rates faster than expected, while also unwinding its balance sheet. And, unlike in 2017, the US dollar is now strengthening, which will lead to an even larger US trade deficit and more protectionist policies as Trump, assuming he remains true to form, blames other countries.

At the same time, the prospect of higher inflation has led even the European Central Bank to consider gradually ending unconventional monetary policies, implying less monetary accommodation at the global level. The combination of a stronger dollar, higher interest rates, and less liquidity does not bode well for emerging markets.

Likewise, slower growth, higher inflation, and less monetary-policy accommodation will temper investor sentiment as financial conditions tighten and volatility increases. Despite strong corporate earnings - which have been goosed by the US tax cuts - US and global equity markets have drifted side-

ways in recent months. Since February, equity markets have been buffeted by fears of rising inflation and import tariffs, and by the backlash against big tech. There are also growing concerns over emerging markets such as Turkey, Argentina, Brazil, and Mexico, and over the threat posed by populist governments in Italy and other European countries.

The danger now is that a negative feedback loop between economies and markets will take hold. The slowdown in some economies could lead to even tighter financial conditions in equity, bond, and credit markets, which could further limit growth.

Since 2010, economic slowdowns, risk-off episodes, and market corrections have heightened the risks of stag-deflation (slow growth and low inflation); but major central banks came to the rescue with unconventional monetary policies as both growth and inflation were falling. Yet for the first time in a decade, the biggest risks are now stagflationary (slow growth and higher inflation). These risks include the negative supply shock that could come from a trade war; higher oil prices, owing to politically motivated supply constraints; and inflationary domestic policies in the US.

Thus, unlike the short risk-off periods in 2015 and 2016, which lasted just two months, investors have now been in risk-off mode since February, and markets are still moving sideways or downward. But this time the Fed and other central banks are starting or continuing to tighten monetary policies, and, with inflation rising, cannot come to the markets' rescue this time.

Another big difference in 2018 is that Trump's policies are creating further uncertainty. In addition to launching a trade war, Trump is also actively undermining the global economic and geostrategic order that the US created after World War II.

Moreover, while the Trump administration's modest growth-boosting policies are already behind us, the effects of policies that could hamper growth have yet to be fully felt. Trump's favored fiscal and trade policies will crowd out private investment, reduce foreign direct investment in the US, and produce larger external deficits. His draconian approach to immigration will diminish the supply of labor needed to support an aging society. His environmental policies will make it harder for the US to compete in the green economy of the future. And his bullying of the private sector will make firms hesitant to hire or invest in the US.

Over time, growth-enhancing US policies will be swamped by growth-reducing measures. Even if the US economy exceeds potential growth over the next year, the effects of fiscal stimulus will fade by the second half of 2019, and the Fed will overshoot its long-term equilibrium policy rate as it tries to control inflation; thus, achieving a soft landing will become harder. By then, and with protectionism rising, frothy global markets will probably have become even bumpier, owing to the serious risk of a growth stall - or even a downturn - in 2020. With the era of low volatility now behind us, it would seem that the current risk-off era is here to stay.

Nouriel Roubini, a professor at NYU's Stern School of Business and CEO of Roubini Macro Associates, was Senior Economist for International Affairs in the White House's Council of Economic Advisers during the Clinton Administration. He has worked for the International Monetary Fund, the US Federal Reserve, and the World Bank.

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