

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



June 25, 2019

## Cultural Interactions Likely to Promote Religious Tolerance

Promoting religious tolerance and respecting one's faith, race, and color will pave the ground for peaceful coexistence and uphold the spirit of brotherhood. In a community, all individuals are supposed to be able to exercise their rights and freedoms regardless of their religious, ethnic, and racial background.

On the other hand, discrimination on the basis of one's caste, color, or creed and lack of religious tolerance will trigger hate, violence, and conflict.

It is said that cultural exchanges will create room for tolerance and patience. For example, the ancient Silk Road, which provided a platform for cultural exchanges, played an essential role in promoting religious tolerance. The Silk Road traders carried their religion and faith with them and constructed religious edifices wherever they traveled, which cemented commercial ties and promoted mutual understanding and mutual trust. The diffusion of culture, including literary, science, medicine, and tradition also played a key role in the development of Asian region. After all, Islam and Buddhism were also spread in China and Malaysia and Indonesia by the Silk Road merchants.

Dance and music were also carried through the Silk Road from one location to another. "Musical traditions are portable, but they are also durable, and stubbornly take root in the lands where they were born. One of the most powerfully surviving features of the old Silk Road today is the variety of music performed, on instruments old and new, indigenous and imported, everywhere from the shores of the Mediterranean to the shores of the Pacific."

The Silk Roads were a "complex network of trade routes" that gave people the chance to exchange goods and culture. That is, cross-cultural contacts allowed individuals and peoples to adapt to the cultural values of one another. Meanwhile, the Silk Road traders tried to learn the language of one another for not only trading goods and but also exchanging ideas.

As the "center of the Asian crossroads", Afghanistan played a highly significant role in the history of the Silk Road. The Buddhist shrines and Buddha statues, found in Afghanistan, suggest that Afghanistan was a peaceful country, where caravans and Buddha monks could exercise their faith and religions without obstacles.

Meanwhile, Islamic Sufis could exercise and carried their faith in different parts of the world. The full diversity of Muslim traditions, schools of thought, and civilizing influences flourished along the Silk Road. Thus, the Silk Road not only enriched the merchants, who carried and exchanged goods, but the people of countries and cultures all across Eurasia.

With this in mind, regional states in general and Afghanistan in particular need to promote cultural exchanges through enhancing trade and transit. If nations have more cultural interactions and people-to-people contacts, their horizons will be broadened and they will learn to be tolerant towards one another and respect the cultural values of one another.

The Silk Road was termed the "Road of Dialogue" in the UNESCO Plan to promote trade and dialogue.

Currently, the bulk of the challenges in Afghanistan, including the violence and conflict, are believed to stem from lack of religious tolerance. Afghanistan, which has been the hotbed of tolerance, knowledge, and science, is harmed by radicalism and destroyed by violence.

If the Afghan government upholds trade routes and networks, the culture of dialogue will also be promoted, which will necessarily lead to peace and stability. Afghanistan needs to open wider to the outside world, similar to that of China, and pave the ground for further interactions and exchanges. Cultural exchange is not necessarily the only way for promoting religious tolerance. Afghans have to promote their knowledge and social and human rights awareness. Moreover, they should promote their legal awareness and try to practice legal principles in their individual and collective life. Constitutionally, all Afghan citizens are equal in rights and dignity regardless of their racial and sexual backgrounds and no one should be discriminated. Thus, providing equal opportunities for Afghan citizens to learn knowledge and get education will lead to de-radicalization in the country.

To promote religious tolerance and eliminate discrimination on the basis of one's faith, race, or sex, cultural interactions have to be upheld, the cultural of dialogue should be established, and there will be equal opportunities for all individuals to have access to education. So, the government has to pay especial heed to the aforementioned issues to mitigate the ongoing violence and conflict.

## Optimism and pessimism over Pakistan and Qatar peace process

By: Mohammad Zahir Akbari

The "Lahore Peace Conference" kicked off in Bhurban, a Pakistani town located near Lahore and Islamabad, on Saturday morning where many Afghan politicians have attended. In the Lahore peace conference which was titled "Lahore Process" at Bhurban in Murree nearly 50 senior Afghan leaders have been invited. Out of the invited leaders into the conference, the Afghan Former president Hamid Karzai has not attended the meeting saying due to a limited time for preparations. However, he thanked Pakistan for hosting the meeting and said he will visit the neighboring country in another opportunity.

The key Afghan politicians who have attended the conference are Hizb-e-Islami leader Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, former Balkh governor Atta Mohammad Noor, second deputy chief executive Mohammad Mohaqeq, and presidential candidate Abdul Latif Pedram. Other important figures include the High Peace Council Chairman Mohammad Karim Khalili, presidential candidate Mohammad Haneef Atmar, former vice president Mohammad Yunus Qanooni, and former governor Ismail Khan. The event was organized by Lahore Center for Peace Research (LCPR) and the South Asian Strategic Stability Institute (SASSI). The Afghan leaders are also scheduled to hold a meeting with Prime Minister Imran Khan during their visit.

Given the various opinions debated in Afghan political community and media, there were both optimisms and pessimisms about the conference. According to optimists, the Lahore conference will provide an opportunity for the Afghan leaders and Pakistani experts to exchange views on the peace process. According to pessimists, the Lahore conference seems suspicious because it was organized too suddenly and also in a sensitive step of Doha peace talks. On the other hand, none of the main stakeholders of peace and war such as Taliban and government of Afghanistan and nor the academic figures of Afghanistan have been invited to the meeting. When such meetings are organized by the academic institutes of Pakistan, LCPR and SASSI, it is expected to invite the academic figures of Afghanistan, not the faces who are famous in political deal.

Other comments which were raised in Afghan media community are that Islamabad probably attempts to change the content of the US-Taliban talks by launching a new process. The main current discussions between the Taliban and the US are about the withdrawal of American troops from Afghanistan, the future of the fight against terrorism in the region, and the fate Afghan political system. The concerns of Islamabad are to reduce the influence of New Delhi, raise the Durand-line issue and also include the Islamabad's regional status in order to redefine its national interests. Overall, Islamabad wants to redefine its role in Afghanistan with the help of the armed and unarmed opposition group of Afghan government before the President Ghani visit Islamabad on June 27 and importantly before the Doha talks finalize in Qatar.

Given that the Afghan president is coming to Pakistan soon, given that the peace process has apparently reached a sensitive stage, and given that Pakistan is still blamed for supporting Taliban in planning suicide attacks on Afghanistan, the aforementioned analysis seems meaningful. Many Afghan asks if really Pakistan is honest in what they said as not seeking strategic depth in Afghanistan, why they do not abolish the Quetta Council and why they do not stop funding terrorism. Indeed, if this country does not seek strategic depth, why they do not invite academic faces in the conference. These and dozens of other questions were reflected today in Afghan local media.

Anyway, the Pakistani Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi opened the conference by saying that his country will continue its efforts toward peace and stability in Afghanistan. He stressed that Pakistan is committed in its efforts to bring peace and stability in Afghanistan. "For far too long, the vicious circle of mistrust, often fed into by our common enemies, has affected our relationship. The blame-game has not helped either of us," Qureshi said, according to his speech notes released by the Pakistani media. "It is indispensable to move away from this negative paradigm. It is incumbent upon the leadership of the two countries to take practical steps to build mutual trust and confidence."

Among the Afghan leaders who addressed in the conference was Hekmatyar; he pointed out that talks between Taliban and US is not enough to solve Afghan conflict but only Afghans can solve the problem. He said that a halt to foreign intervention can help end the Afghan war. Hekmatyar said that he wants Afghans unanimous voice to call for foreign forces' withdrawal from the country.

Following this conference, the seventh round of peace talks between the United States and the Taliban in Qatar have already scheduled for June 29. Both Washington and Kabul believe that Pakistan has influence over Taliban and Islamabad's support is considered key to ending the nearly 18-year insurgency. Kabul and Washington have long accused Pakistan of harboring Taliban militants who launch attacks inside Afghanistan, but Ghani recently said he was hopeful that years of mistrust can be replaced by cooperation toward peace.

However, the main purpose Qatar peace talks and US's goals are also not clear to many Afghan people. Recently Moh Hadi Muslimyar, the speaker of Mshran Girga, criticized that why Afghan people and their representatives in the house of nation do not know about the contents of US and Taliban Talks. On the other hand, Washington ensures that Qatar talk is to end the 18 years war in Afghanistan. Ghani, his political opponents and Afghan civil society have been holding meetings in recent days with the United States' special envoy to Afghanistan, Zalmay Khalilzad, who continues to press for talks between the Afghan government, the opposition and the Taliban.

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## Expansions Don't Die of Old Age

By: Anatole Kaletsky

The US economy has entered its 11th year of uninterrupted expansion, breaking the previous record for the longest period of growth in American history without a recession. But far from celebrating, many economists conclude from this unprecedented performance that a recession is now overdue, if not immediately then surely before the 2020 presidential election. Fortunately for the US economy, but sadly for President Donald Trump's opponents, the idea that economic expansions have some kind of natural lifespan and then die of old age has neither empirical nor theoretical support.

History shows that US expansions since the end of World War II have varied in length from 12 months to 120 months, with no sign of mean reversion. Moreover, it can be argued that the 18-year period from 1982 to 2000 was really one continuous economic upswing, interrupted only briefly by the spike in oil prices caused by Iraq's invasion of Kuwait.

And there are clearer instances of advanced economies that have avoided recessions for much longer than the ten-year record the United States has just surpassed. Australia is now in its 28th year without a recession, and the United Kingdom experienced 17 years of uninterrupted growth from 1992 to 2008. Unlike the US, both Australia and the UK are more recession-prone because of their dependence on commodities, finance, and property speculation.

Economic principles are equally unhelpful to advocates of the "overdue recession" theory. The normal condition of any reasonably well-managed market economy since the invention of active demand-management policies in the 1940s is to continue expanding at around its trend rate of growth (roughly 2% in the US). In the postwar period, recessions have generally resulted from three causes: substantial monetary or fiscal tightening in response to inflationary pressures; some kind of financial crisis, such as the subprime mortgage collapse of 2008 and the technology bust of 2000; or a massive external shock that vastly increased energy prices. Until one of these events occurs, we can be fairly confident that the US expansion will not just "die of old age."

Why, then, are so many economists now worried about a US recession and convinced that financial markets are underestimating the downside risks to economic growth? The main reasons are the US-China trade war and a financial warning signal: the "inverted yield curve." The first risk is obvious; the second requires some explanation.

An inverted yield curve is a relatively unusual condition that occurs when long-term bond yields fall below short-term interest rates. In the US, the overnight federal funds rate is around 2.4%, but ten-year yields recently fell to below 2%.

Such an inversion is often cited as a signal of imminent recession, but it shouldn't be. The "signal" often comes years before the recession it claims to predict. More important, bond market pricing has drastically changed in the decade since the global financial crisis. Bond yields have become increasingly divorced from real economic conditions, partly because of quantitative easing and regulatory pressures on pension funds to buy bonds regardless of economic conditions, but mainly because in-

flation seems to have decoupled from unemployment and growth.

Even if the decoupling of growth and inflation ultimately turns out to be illusory, the mere fact that the US Federal Reserve and other central banks believe that the old growth-inflation linkage is broken means that they will keep interest rates much lower for much longer than in previous economic cycles. As long as central bankers continue to behave like this, bond yields will continue to reflect investors' expectations about what central banks will do with short-term interest rates, rather than their expectations about economic prospects or recession risks. The main message from financial markets, as I argued in April, is not that the US is near a recession; it is simply that the Fed is preparing to cut interest rates. If that happens - and it almost certainly will - a US recession will become less likely, not more so.

The same is true in China. The Chinese government and central bank have responded to Trump's trade war, albeit somewhat belatedly, by cutting interest rates and reserve requirements, reducing taxes, ramping up public spending, and easing credit restraints. China's stimulus measures, like the Fed's expected easing, will take some time to feed through into economic data, but these measures virtually guarantee that the US-China trade war will cause only limited damage to growth prospects in both countries, at least in the next year or two, which is the time horizon over which macroeconomic policies operate.

A much more serious threat to the world economy comes from Europe, an innocent bystander in the US-China trade war that has already suffered far more than either of the belligerents. When the International Monetary Fund revised its 2019 growth projections in April to take account of the problems that emerged in late 2018, the forecasts for China and the US were essentially unchanged, despite their trade war (up 0.1 percentage point in China, down 0.2 in the US). But the IMF downgraded its growth forecast for Germany by 1.1 percentage points, by 0.9 for Italy, and by 0.6 for the eurozone as a whole.

Europe has been the main victim of the US-China trade war, for the same reason it was the main victim of the 2008 financial crisis, which also originated in the US. While the US and China are stimulating their economies to counteract the trade slowdown, the European authorities are, as usual, responding with exactly the wrong policies. Instead of easing monetary, fiscal, or credit policies, the eurozone response is "pro-cyclical." The European Commission is trying to force Italy to reduce public spending and raise taxes. Germany's finance ministry is using lower-than-expected budget surpluses as an excuse to squeeze investment and delay tax cuts. And bank supervisors are forcing banks to tighten their credit standards, increase loss provisions, and cut lending to preserve capital.

Such policies condemned Europe to spend most of the post-crisis period in recession or near-recession, while the US and China enjoyed a decade of uninterrupted growth. If similarly foolish policies are maintained, the same thing will happen again.

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