

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



March 27, 2017

Depleting Water Resources

Water is one of the most important resources that human beings require to live alive. Life without water is impossible; therefore, it is necessary that human beings should have clean drinking water for themselves and ensure that the future generations will be able to have access to this important resource as well. Keeping in consideration the growing population of the world and the shrinking water resources it will be great challenge for human beings to ensure that they will have clean drinking water for all the human beings, as nearly billion people in the world already suffer from lack of clean drinking water.

To highlight the importance of water and its proper and sensible use, March 22 was celebrated as World Water Day internationally. In fact, the day is celebrated every year on the same date since 1993, when the day was first declared by the United Nations General Assembly. The day was basically proposed in 1992 during United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil and started being observed from March 1993.

The nations that observe the day strive to highlight the issues related to water, both nationally and internationally. They also make sure to implement the recommendations that are put forward by UN and design and pursue practical measures that can prove helpful in providing this basic requirements to all the people.

The theme for this year's World Water Day was, "Why Wastewater?" to focus on wastewater and ways to reduce and reuse as over 80% of all the wastewater from homes, cities, industry and agriculture flows back to nature polluting the environment and losing valuable nutrients and other recoverable materials. It was emphasized this year that human beings need to improve the collection and treatment of wastewater and safely reuse it. At the same time, they need to reduce the quantity and pollution load of wastewater they produce, to help protect the environment and water resources.

It would be unmanageable for human beings to live without water; therefore, they require to use it wisely and at the same time find out new ways of providing it to all human beings so that everyone can benefit from it in the best possible manner. They have to make sure that the economic and political systems must ensure providence of natural resources to all the human beings alike - unfortunately that is not the case in contemporary world of ours.

The short-comings in our administrative system have made the basic requirements seem lesser and inadequate though it is yet to face a serious threat of inadequacy.

It would be better for the world that it must cogitate seriously about every possibility of a new political economy so as to enable the world to compensate for the water and other shortages for the poor countries will have to suffer to a considerable extent as a result of the shortage of basic requirements and sources of energy.

Unfortunately, Afghanistan is one of the same countries and it will have to face serious challenges in the times to come to provide clean drinking water to its people. Decades of war in Afghanistan has affected the country to a large extent. Different sectors have been influenced by this menace. The basic infra-structure has not been able to get proper attention and people are suffering because of basic needs, among which food and water are the most basic ones.

Even the capital Kabul has been suffering because of the lack of these basic requirements. A report last year showed that underground water level would deplete considerably in Kabul till the end of 2017 and the residents of the city would face serious challenges in this regard. According to the Ministry of Water and Energy, "The growing populations, seasonal droughts and over pumping are some of the factors that contribute to the rapidly plummeting underground water resources in Kabul." The ground water resources decreased from 44 million cubic meter to 31 million in a decade.

"We have ground water for one million people, but the level is in great depletion because four million people in Kabul pump water from wells dug at homes." The ministry has already warned that ground water could become undrinkable after a couple of years if unplanned constructions continued, and the ministry had planned to initiate short and long term projects aimed at protecting the available ground water resources from contamination but they have not been successful in tackling the situation completely.

The shortage of basic requirements itself is a sure problem, but there are many other problems that are directly linked with the hunger and deprivation that result from such shortages. Many diseases would erupt and many social evils will find their way in the society and will further deteriorate the country's socio-political scenario.

It is really important that a decade of struggle for betterment in Afghanistan must not only end in peace and tranquility but also better living standards for the common Afghan people; and if that is not convenient, they must at least be provided the rudimentary requirements like clean drinking water, and the authorities need to promise that there would be serious efforts to provide all the people of Afghanistan with clean drinking water.

A More Dangerous Globalism

By Jeremy Adelman and Anne-Laure Delatte

America first," thumps Donald Trump. "Britain first," say the advocates of Brexit. "France first," crows Marine Le Pen and her National Front. "Russia first," proclaims Vladimir Putin's Kremlin. With so much emphasis on national sovereignty nowadays, globalization appears doomed.

It's not. The struggle playing out today is not one of globalism versus anti-globalism. Rather, the world is poised between two models of integration: one is multilateral and internationalist; the other is bilateral and imperialist. Throughout the modern age, the world has seesawed between them.

Since 1945, internationalists have had the upper hand. They advocate cooperation and multilateral institutions to promote global public goods like peace, security, financial stability, and environmental sustainability. There is a model that constrains national sovereignty by binding states to shared norms, conventions, and treaties.

The year 2016 tipped the scales toward bilateralists, who regard national sovereignty as an end in itself. The fewer external constraints, the better: peace and security result from a balance of great powers. There is a model that favors the strong and punishes the weak, and that rewards competitors at the expense of cooperators. For most of the nineteenth century, integration was a hybrid of internationalism and imperialism.

Free trade became gospel, mass migration was welcomed, and countries embraced new global norms, like the First Geneva Convention, concluded in 1864 to cover the treatment of the sick and wounded on the battlefield. Globalizers could also be bullies: the 1842 Treaty of Nanking between Britain and China subordinated the Middle Kingdom to the West. And bilateral imperialism's ugliest face was reflected in Europeans' carve-up of Africa into exclusive possessions.

In the most horrific period in human history, bilateralism had the upper hand. Between 1914 and 1945, the pursuit of national grandeur led to ruinous economic rivalry and mass violence. The Wall Street crash of 1929 kicked the legs out from under a struggling international order. Country after country turned inward; by 1933, world trade collapsed to one-third its 1929 level. Fueled by racism and fears of overcrowding, globalism turned predatory: powerful countries imposed uneven trade pacts on neighbors and partners, or simply overran them.

Japan set its sights on Manchuria in 1931 to create a puppet state, and invaded China in 1937. The Soviets dealt with Russian borderlands in the same spirit. The Nazis forced treaties on weaker neighbors and seized others, then sought to depopulate Slavic lands to make way for Teutonic settlers.

The brutality of bilateralism prompted US President Franklin Delano Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill to draft the Atlantic Charter in 1941. A blueprint for a post-war order, it declared that freedom was the cornerstone of peace and that bilateralism had to be curbed. No more grabbing. No more tariff bullying. Freedom of the seas.

What came of the Allies' victory in World War II and the Atlan-

tic Charter was a Global New Deal: by agreeing to play by international rules and institutions, countries could participate in the post-war bonanza. European integration was at the core of this experiment in multilateral globalism; with Franco-German reconciliation, Europe, a chronic conflict zone, became a region of exemplary cooperators.

Restraining national sovereignty allowed global trade, investment, and migration to buoy post-war prosperity. Billions escaped poverty. Relative peace was maintained.

But the Global New Deal seems to have run its course. For too many people, the world became messy, risky, stultifying, and threatening - the opposite of what the Atlantic Charter envisioned. After 1980, global integration was accompanied by rising domestic inequality. While the horizon of opportunities widened for educated cosmopolitans in big cities, the bonds between citizens weakened as national social contracts were dismantled. As the blurring of global divides deepened domestic cleavages, the stage was set for bilateralists to come storming back. In the wings, leaders like Russian President Vladimir Putin yearned for a return to a world of muscular sovereignty, unrestrained by multilateral niceties. They now have more company in key countries.

Two days after his inauguration, Trump announced that the US would have "another chance" to seize Iraqi oil. He then withdrew the US from the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade deal and vowed to re-negotiate the North American Free Trade Agreement. The future of the hard-won Paris climate agreement is now in doubt. Charges of currency manipulation and threats of protectionist measures have intensified. With the UK, which gave the world free trade in the 1840s, having now decided to go it alone, the old Atlantic Charter allies are putting national sovereignty ahead of global public goods.

Now the global spotlight turns to France and its looming presidential election. At stake is the sputtering Franco-German engine that has driven European integration and kept it at the center of the post-war multilateral system.

A victory for Le Pen in early May would spell the end of the EU, leaving German Chancellor Angela Merkel as the final pillar of a crumbling world order. The country most refashioned by post-1945 internationalism would be its last bastion, surrounded by bilateralists in France, the UK, and Russia, with its main patron, the US, in the hands of nativists. Imagine the scene a few weeks after a Le Pen victory, when the G7 leaders gather in a gilded hotel in Taormina, Sicily.

The US and Canada are feuding over NAFTA. The UK is squabbling with France and Germany over Brexit. Japan is reeling from the demise of the TPP. And, as they turn their backs on global commitments, refugees, drowning by the boatload in the surrounding sea, provide an epitaph for a bygone era. (Courtesy Project Syndicate)

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How Corruption Fuels Climate Change

By Lili Fuhr and Simon Taylor

Anti-corruption campaigners achieved a number of crucial victories in 2016, not least by ensuring accountability for one of Big Oil's most crooked deals: the acquisition of Nigerian offshore oil block OPL 245 in 2011 by Royal Dutch Shell and Eni, Italy's largest corporation. Last December, Nigeria's Economic and Financial Crimes Commission indicted some of the Nigerians involved, and Italian prosecutors then concluded their own investigation, bringing the executives and the companies responsible for the deal closer to standing trial. Several months earlier, in June 2016, the US Securities and Exchange Commission published a rule, under Section 1504 of the 2010 Dodd-Frank Act, requiring oil, gas, and mining companies to disclose all payments made to governments on a project-by-project basis. If the SEC had issued its rule earlier, Shell and Eni most likely would not have gone ahead with the OPL 245 deal, because they would have had to disclose their payment. But opposition from the oil industry delayed the rule, so the companies were able to conceal their payment.

Last year also marked the first time in millions of years that the concentration of CO2 in the atmosphere reached 400 parts per million (ppm). While the Paris climate agreement was hailed as a major success when it was concluded in December 2015, many signatories have displayed a remarkable lack of ambition in upholding their carbon-reduction commitments. To understand why is to see the sheer extent to which our systems of government have been captured by the corrupting influence of vested interests.

The story of OPL 245 began in 1998, when the Nigerian dictator Sani Abacha awarded the block to Malabu Oil and Gas, which was secretly owned by Dan Etete, Abacha's own oil minister. Thus, Etete had essentially given OPL 245 to himself. But after the Abacha regime fell, the block was taken from Malabu and awarded to Shell. This triggered a series of legal battles between Malabu, Shell, and the Nigerian government that ended only with the corrupt Shell-Eni deal in 2011.

Public documents show that the \$1.1 billion that Shell and Eni paid to the Nigerian government for the deal was, in reality, being paid to Malabu. Both companies knew that this payment method, through an account created by J.P. Morgan in London, was in breach of the Nigerian constitution, and that the funds would end up in private hands.

Eni claims that it investigated the deal and found "no evidence of corrupt conduct in relation to the transaction." Shell, for its part, says that it only paid the Nigerian government, and that it does "not agree with the premise behind various public statements made by Global Witness about Shell companies in relation to OPL 245." But Italian prosecutors have now requested a trial for several senior Eni executives - including the current CEO, Claudio Descalzi, and his predecessor - as well as Etete and several others; and they are pursuing separate charges

against four senior Shell executives.

Whether or not these prosecutions succeed, for now we can no longer celebrate the SEC's disclosure rule, or the United States' renewed support in creating a global standard of transparency for the extractive industries. With Donald Trump's presidency and a Republican-controlled Congress, the SEC rule was immediately vacated under the Congressional Review Act, an obscure law that had been used only once before.

Trump's frequently racist and misogynist campaign promised to "drain the swamp" of corruption in Washington politics. But congressional Republicans' decision to scrap the SEC rule, which Trump quickly signed into law, was an act of pure cynicism that helps perpetuate the "corrupt" system that Trump claims he ran against.

After the oil and gas industry failed to block Section 1504 through legal action, it appealed to its friends in Congress for help. And the arguments used by its congressional proxies would be risible had the consequences not been so tragic. Senator James Inhofe, a notorious climate-change denier who has received more than \$3 million in campaign contributions from the fossil-fuel industry, led the charge: the disclosure rule was an imposition from the Obama era that would be too costly to implement and add needless bureaucratic red tape. No mention was made of the costs borne by citizens when their national wealth is sold off through dirty deals, or by investors when corruption leads to prosecutions and massive fines. To fulfill the Paris agreement, efforts to combat corruption and climate change must go hand in hand. Corruption, in the widest sense of the word, is the glue that holds the "system" together, that ensures that moneyed and powerful interests are free from rules that are meant to hold them in check. It is why governments that pledged to make large reductions in greenhouse-gas emissions have been unable to meet their commitments.

Shell, Exxon, and most other major oil and gas companies knew decades ago that their products were fueling climate change. But instead of acting on that knowledge, and changing their business model, they embarked on a massive campaign to deceive the public and lure policymakers into complacency. Not surprisingly, Shell is one of 47 major hydrocarbon producers now being investigated by the Filipino government for its role in contributing to human-rights violations stemming from climate change. To sustain progress in the fight against climate change and corruption, environmental and anti-corruption movements will have to work together, and play to their respective strengths. If nothing else, Trump's election, and the possibility of more populist victories in Europe this year, have given us a wake-up call. (Courtesy Project Syndicate)

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