

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



May 18, 2019

Peace: The First Priority of The US in Afghanistan

United States and Taliban negotiators wrapped up their sixth round of peace talks with "some progress" made on a draft agreement for when foreign troops might withdraw from Afghanistan. Both sides have expressed their happiness with the talks progress so far. However, the positive message is that the US is determined that it will not agree to any withdrawal of troops as part of an eventual peace deal until the Taliban put in place security guarantees, implement a ceasefire and sign off on other commitments including an "intra-Afghan" dialogue with the Kabul government and other Afghan representatives.

At the same time, US State Department Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary Alice Wells arrived in Kabul on Saturday 12 May 2018, to participate in the opening of the US-Afghan Civilian Assistance Review. In the following lines we would briefly analyze the main objectives and outcomes of the Wells travel to Kabul.

Discussing US-Afghan Civilians Assistance Review

In her meeting with President Ashraf Ghani on the day of her arrival on Sunday May 12, they discussed US-Afghan Civilians Assistance Review to promote strong governance and self-reliance as proposed by President Ghani in his letter to US President Donald Trump and other issues related to Afghanistan. According to the political economy analysts the Review will strengthen Afghan institutions and promote Afghan self-reliance, and is an element of the investment the US makes in the social and economic development of Afghanistan.

Discussing Peace Process

During her visit, she met with men and women from civil society to hear their views on peace and reaffirm US support for a peaceful, stable Afghanistan. Although, she repeated the stance of the US on the Peace Process and Presidential elections as two independent processes in the country, but she clarified that for the US Peace was more important than the Presidential elections in the country; It is a fair peace that can bring durable stability, economic development and prosperity to the Afghan nation and can put an end to the several decades of the suffering of the Afghan people. Referring to the ethnic concerns, she clearly said that Taliban shall respect the rights of the ethnic minority groups and women rights in the country as the key principles and values of a democratic system.

Discussing Preparations for the upcoming presidential elections

Elections is always a controversial issue in Afghanistan. The latest example is the Parliamentary elections that not only was one of the most delayed announced elections but also one of the most corrupt and fraudulent ones as well. As a result, elections as a democratic process in Afghanistan, has not been much transparent and credible, so people have lost their trust to the process and electoral institutions. Considering this, during her visit, Wells met with stakeholders of the September 28 Afghan Presidential Elections to learn about ongoing preparations and underscore US commitment to a transparent and efficient presidential elections process. She reaffirmed US Support for transparent and credible elections in order to have a strong and legitimate government in Afghanistan to be able to cooperate and work with the US, regional and international community for a better future of Afghanistan.

The Way Forward

It is crystal cut that ensuring peace and economic development without military and economic supports of the US is impossible in the country. Thus, the presence of the US is necessary in Afghanistan. In order to ensure such long term and strategic partnership, BSA is the best framework for sustainable partnership between the two countries. Even if there is a peace deal with the Taliban, it is necessary to review and align the BSA according to the new political conditions of the country. For many Afghan citizens, the presence of the US and observing the implementation of the peace deal along with the UN is the only mechanism that ensures them that they will not be suppressed and marginalized once more by the Taliban as a hardline group that does not tolerate religious and ethnic diversity.

Alice Well's visit to Kabul was one of the strong indications of US continuous support to Afghanistan. Reviewing US-Afghan Civilians Assistance promotes strong governance and self-reliance in the country. And the US support of the Intra-Afghan Peace talks that must consider the inclusion of all Afghans, ensuring the rights of minority groups, women rights, and humans rights will guarantee a dignified and acceptable peace deal. A transparent and credible elections supported by the US, regional and international community will ensure a strong government that can work as a reliable partner with the US, regional and international community to achieve Peace and prosperity in the country.



Child Abuse Should be Prevented

By: Hujjatullah Zia

Afghan children have been highly vulnerable to domestic and collective violence across the country. Falling victim to social and economic challenges, children suffer painfully. Their rights to life, liberty and education are trampled upon with impunity and the ongoing war has compounded violence against them.

Violation of children's rights to education is the tip of the iceberg. They encounter with life-threatening challenges triggered by insurgency. Children's death by warring parties, mainly the Taliban, has made the national and international headlines in recent months.

With the growing insurgency, children are left at the mercy of militancy and used as a cannon fodder by the Taliban and IS fighters. Afghan children suffered many challenges in the country as a result of war and conflicts, especially during the Taliban's regime, and their anguish continues unabated. In addition to being targeted by warring parties, children have been recruited by the Taliban and IS insurgents to fight against the Kabul government. In short, on the one hand, children easily fall for the bogus claim and ideological indoctrination of radical parties. On the other hand, they are targeted by warring parties losing their lives in Improvised Explosive Device, suicide bombings, and airstrikes.

Meanwhile, Afghan children are widely involved in forced labor across the country. The families, who suffer extreme poverty, have no option except for forcing their children to back-breaking labor. To walk on the streets in Kabul, one will see a large number of under-aged boys and girls who are searching for bread and butter in one way or another. With this in mind, children laborers are deprived of their rights to education.

Underage marriage is also a common practice in Afghanistan. A number of female children are forced to getting married, which leads to horrible consequences.

Recruiting children to fight are highly cruel of the militant fighters that exploit children as object. Targeting children or carrying out indiscriminate attacks are not only against the national and international law but also against the code of ethics and religious tenets. The militants, who claim to practice upon religious tenets, should realize, if they have only rudimentary knowledge about religion, that recruiting children is banned in Islam.

To prevent child abuse and decrease violence against them, Afghan clerics have to raise their voice. It is the responsibility of

religious scholars and mullahs to uphold the rights of children. They have to preach against forced labor, underage marriage, and children's recruitment by the Taliban and IS insurgents. As it is stated in Article 49 of Afghan Constitution that "forced labor on children shall not be allowed", Afghan government must take necessary measures to prevent force labor on Afghan children. Meanwhile, it is the government's responsibility to provide free education for children not only in cities but also in remote areas of the country. All children should have access to free education. Creating jobs and supporting the families, who have lost their bread-winners, is most likely to reduce forced labor. The government should also take necessary measures to alleviate poverty.

International humanitarian law, or the laws of war, prohibits the recruitment or use of children by parties to a conflict. "Conscripting or enlisting children under the age of fifteen years into armed forces or groups or using them to participate actively in hostilities" is a war crime under the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC), to which Afghanistan belongs. Those who commit, order, assist, or have command responsibility for war crimes are subject to prosecution by the ICC or national courts.

The Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict, which Afghanistan ratified in 2003, also places obligations on governments to "take all feasible measures to prevent such recruitment and use, including the adoption of legal measures necessary to prohibit and criminalize such practices." Military forces also have an obligation to provide children with special respect and attention. The Convention on the Rights of the Child requires that governments "take all feasible measures to ensure protection and care of children who are affected by armed conflict."

The international community has to uphold children's rights, freedoms, and dignity and empower them through schooling. That is, the terrible effect of war should be mitigated via global campaign against extremism and providing education for children. After all, the perpetrators of war crimes and violators of children rights have to be pursued and prosecuted in the first instance. Since targeting or recruiting children is against national and international laws and religious tenets, the militant fighters have to stop it.

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A Carbon Dividend Is Better than a Carbon Tax

By: Mark Paul and Anthony Underwood

Climate change is the world's most urgent problem, and in the United States, the left, at least, is taking it seriously. Earlier this year, Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez of New York and Senator Edward Markey of Massachusetts, both Democrats, introduced a Green New Deal (GND) resolution, which offers a blueprint for decarbonizing the US economy. But while a growing number of Democratic presidential contenders have endorsed their proposal, centrist Democrats and Republicans continue to cling to a different climate-policy approach.

The key centrist proposal, in keeping with the prevailing neoliberal dispensation, is a carbon tax. The idea is simple: if you tax fossil fuels where they enter the economy - be it at a well-head, mine, or port - you can fully capture the social cost of pollution. In economic parlance, this is known as a Pigovian tax, because it is meant to correct an undesirable outcome in the market, or what the British economist Arthur Pigou defined as a negative externality - in this case, the greenhouse-gas emissions that are responsible for global warming.

As a response to climate change, a carbon tax is immensely popular among economists from across the political spectrum, and it does have an important role to play. But it is far from sufficient. Rapidly decarbonizing the economy in a way that is economically equitable and politically feasible will require a comprehensive package on the order of the GND. That means combining some market-based policies with large-scale private- and public-sector investments and carefully crafted environmental regulations.

Even in this case, including a standard carbon tax involves certain risks. Just ask French President Emmanuel Macron, whose country has been roiled by months of demonstrations that were initially launched in response to a new tax on diesel fuel. The lesson from the weekly "yellow vests" protests is clear: unless environmental policies account for today's high levels of inequality, voters will reject them.

Nonetheless, as progressives push for more green investment, they will look to the carbon tax as a source of revenue. After all, depending on the size, it could raise almost a trillion dollars per year. But rather than a straightforward levy, they should consider implementing a carbon dividend, whereby carbon would be taxed, but the proceeds would be returned to the people in equal shares. Yes, this would preclude one option for funding the GND; but it would ensure that the transition to a carbon-free economy remains on track, by protecting the incomes of low- and middle-class households.

A common objection to a carbon dividend is that it would defeat the original purpose of a carbon price, which is to encourage people to reduce emissions. But this isn't true. To see why, suppose you are a low-income American, currently spending

\$75 per month on gas. Assuming that your driving behavior does not change, a carbon tax of \$230 per ton - the level needed just to put us on a path toward limiting global warming to 2.5° C above pre-industrial levels - would raise your monthly fuel expenditure by \$59, to \$134, or 79%. In this case, you unquestionably will feel poorer. This is what economists call an "income effect."

Now imagine that a carbon dividend is in place: you would receive a monthly payment of \$187, more than offsetting the price increase, and leaving you feeling richer. But wouldn't this also leave you with a greater incentive to use gasoline? Economic theory suggests not.

Just because the price of gas increases does not mean that everything else in the economy will follow suit. Rather, goods and services that produce a lot of carbon dioxide emissions will become relatively more expensive than those that do not. Hence, you would have a choice between using the dividend to drive more and using it to increase your consumption of other things, from dinners with friends to new running shoes. Those social gatherings and shoes are your incentive to use less carbon. This is what economists call the "substitution effect."

In this way, a carbon dividend would gradually nudge people, large businesses, and the government away from carbon-intensive consumption and toward activities and investments that reduce their emissions. Equally important, a carbon dividend would protect the poor. A straightforward carbon tax is inherently regressive, because it imposes the same cost on the poor as it does on the rich. But a carbon dividend inverts this effect, because every dollar that is returned will be worth more to a low-income household than it will be to a wealthy one.

Moreover, it is the rich who fly all over the world, heat and cool enormous homes, and drive inefficient sports cars. Because they lead far more carbon-intensive lifestyles than everyone else, they would contribute far more per capita to the carbon dividend. More to the point, they would pay in much more than they get back, while the poorest 60% of Americans would get back more than they put in.

In short, a carbon dividend would distribute money from predominantly wealthy high polluters to predominantly low- and middle-income low polluters, all while reducing CO2 emissions. On its own, it would represent a smart step in the right direction - one that wouldn't invite a "yellow vest" reaction. But don't let anyone tell you it's a silver bullet. When it comes to climate change, there isn't one.

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