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

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Illiteracy is more Perilous than Terrorism for Afghanistan

I am living in a society of which educational infrastructures have been repeatedly damaged during four decades of conflicts and civil wars; likewise, whose people need education more than anything else. In 2002, an estimated one million children, mostly boys, attended school, while women and girls were almost completely excluded from educational opportunities. Since then, the Afghan government, USAID, and international donors have worked together to rebuild Afghanistan's education sectors. But it seems that despite the infusion of billions of USDby foreign countries into Afghanistan since 2001, still, Afghanistan is suffering from high poverty, widespread instability, and mainly high scale of illiteracy.

According to Afghanistan's Ministry of Education, currently,there are 17,500 active schools across the country. Of the 17,500 schools, 1,075 of them are closed due to severe violence and insecurity. There are more than 6 million children enrolled at schools in 34 provinces of Afghanistan.Around3.5 million children, according to UNICEF statistics, are not going to school – and 75 percent of them are girls. When it comes to illiteracy, the percentage is significantly high – 64 percent of people who are over the age of 15 are illiterate. It is argued that more than 400,000 children in Afghanistan annually– over 1,100 students per dayare expected to abandon school due to growing instability.

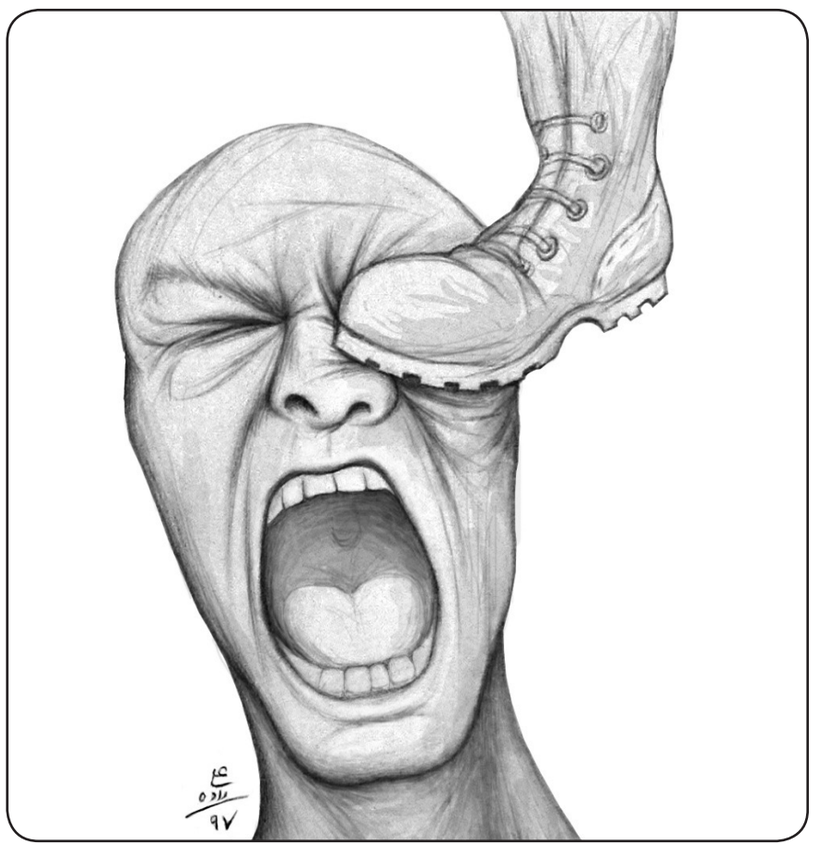
Apart from widespread war conflicts in Afghanistan that led to closing schools and forcing families to avoid their children from going to schools, rampant and rooted administrative corruption in educational sectors is widening the gap between people and educational institutions. In June 2015, Afghanistan's Independent Joint Anti-Corruption Monitoring and Evaluation Committee reported that education was significantly undermined by bribery and nepotism.

As per 2015 SIGAR report, there were 75,000 ghost teachers and 3,500 ghost schools in Afghanistan when Farooq Wardak was the minister of education.In the meantime, it is argued that despite roughly $1 billion that the U.S. has spent on the Afghan education system, concerns rise over unqualified teachers, inadequate general education curriculum, students' lack of access to textbooks, and unbalanced educational services.All the above challenges cause that more students are leaving schools incomplete, parents are losing their hopes from the educational sectors, and finally, this situation leads to more illiteracy in Afghanistan.And more illiteracy means disasters and challenges.

If Afghanistan's Z-Generation is bereft of obtaining education because of conflicts and insecurity, Afghanistan might be stuck in the trenches of wars and adversities for the rest of 21 century. Ultimately, Afghanistan's twenty-first-century generation will encounter the fate of theirtwentieth-century generation – fathers and grandfathers who were kept away from schooling due to social, economic and mainly political problems and conflicts. It means another dark century for the young generation of Afghanistan. Worse than that when Afghanistan's Z-Generation is deprived of education and development, it threatens and challenges the fate of A-1 generation in Afghanistan who are not born yet.

The government of Afghanistan may not be able to embrace a bright and strong economy, political stability and stable peace in the future unless paying a serious attention to the education of its youth. In the other words,the key to bringing sustainable changesin lives of Afghanistan's citizenry is pertaining to the education of its young generation. As Erasmus very vividly and nicely articulates, "The main hope of a nation lies in the proper education of its youth." So, thefuture of security stability, economic development, democratic government, civic awareness in Afghanistan, and finally givinghopes to Afghans for a better future lies in investing on educating the young generation of this country.

Researchers argue that there is less chance of occurring fights between two educated persons because they know that wars will hurt both of them.But there is more possibility that two illiterate persons fight with each other over an issue due to having narrow understanding the consequences of the skirmishes. Likewise, I can easily cope with a Pashtunwho is going to school, but I am afraid of a Pashtun who is deprived of schooling. I can easily live together with a Tajik who prefers education to wars and violence, but I am worried about a Tajikwho is not encouraged toward gaining education. Finally, I may have problems with a Hazarawho decides to leave schools because of financial challenges, but I am not afraid of a Hazara who is being helped by the government to obtain education. By and large, the future of Afghanistan's economic, political, and security improvement is tied to the education of its today's youth and children.



The Known Unknowns of US Sanctions Against Iran

By Anatole Kaletsky

The sanctions against Iran reinstated by US President Donald Trump raise two all-important questions that have no convincing answers. First, will this action make the world safer, as Trump claims, or will it further destabilize the Middle East and undermine future efforts to limit nuclear weapons, as argued by most geopolitical experts not directly employed by the US, Israeli, or Saudi governments? And, second, will US efforts to compel foreign companies to observe its sanctions against Iran prove as tough as Trump's belligerent rhetoric? The Iran sanctions could of course turn out to be an empty gesture. As a former Chinese ambassador to Iran recently put it: "For more than a year, Trump's diplomacy, from the North American Free Trade Agreement, the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade pact and the Paris climate deal to the Korean Peninsula nuclear issue and the Syrian civil war, can be described as loud thunder but little rain."

Still, the question of war and peace is impossible to answer. Fifteen years of Middle East chaos unleashed by the 2003 Iraq war have taught the world one indisputable lesson: nobody in the White House, the CIA, Mossad, or the Saudi intelligence services has a clue as to what might happen next in the region.

The commercial question is also hard to answer, for a simpler reason: The real extent of sanctions enforcement will not be clear until the late stages of the six-month "wind-down period" provided by the new US regulations for businesses to disengage from Iran.

But at this early stage in the US-Iran confrontation, another, even more important, economic question is worth considering: What will the US sanctions do to the price of oil?

At first sight, the answer seems too obvious to bother discussing: The oil price will surely rise as sanctions curb Iran's output and exports, while traders brace themselves for a possible war. But financial markets have a disconcerting habit: predictions viewed by investors as completely obvious often turn out to be wrong. The outlook for oil prices could turn out to be such a case, for several reasons.

Oil prices are already 70% above their level last summer – and expectations of US sanctions against Iran have been an important driver of this surge. To "buy on the rumor and sell on the news" is a time-honored principle of financial speculation. Unprecedented recent purchases of oil contracts by non-commercial speculators in the New York and London futures markets suggest that sanctions may already be priced in, with Brent oil trading at $78 a barrel.

This price had never risen above $70 since 2014, when the upsurge in US shale production caused oil prices to collapse. And oil for future delivery in 2020 still costs well below $70, creating an unusual market condition called "deep backwardation," which was last seen in the autumn of 2014 and often presages a steep price decline.

Turning from speculative conditions to the fundamentals of oil production, it is far from clear that sanctions will reduce Iran's exports sufficiently to affect the global balance of supply and demand. While Iran's exports almost doubled after the previous sanctions were lifted in 2015, from 1.5 million barrels a day to around 2.5 million barrels currently, most of this oil has been sold to China, India and Turkey, all of which are likely to ignore or circumvent US sanctions. The genuinely vulnerable part of Iran's oil trade are exports of just 750,000 barrels daily to the European Union, South Korea, and Japan. The EU has promised to protect its trade with Iran, but even if this proves impossible, much of the Iranian oil now flowing to Europe, Japan, or other US allies will doubtless be diverted to countries such as India and China, which will free up more Saudi, Iraqi, or Russian oil for Europe and Japan.

The fact that oil traders constantly redirect oil cargoes around the globe explains why most analysts expect sanctions to reduce global oil supplies by less than 500,000 barrels a day. A shift on this scale would be smaller than the 700,000-barrel collapse of Venezuelan oil exports since last year, and much smaller than the increase in US daily output of 1.1 million barrels projected over the next 12 months, not to mention the probable reduction in global oil demand caused by the sharp increase in prices since last summer.

In short, the Iran sanctions will have less impact on the global balance of supply and demand than the performance of the world economy and the behavior of other oil producers. This suggests another reason why the US-Iran confrontation could lead to lower, not higher, prices: Trump and his Saudi allies now have a very strong political incentive to resist further upward pressure on oil prices.

Rising gasoline costs have already reversed almost half the gains from this year's tax cuts for middle-class Americans. If oil prices rise much further during the summer "driving season" that starts in the US about now, Trump will be blamed by voters and Republicans could suffer in November's midterm congressional elections, especially in Midwestern swing states.

Assuming that Trump now finds it politically expedient to curb oil prices, the Saudi leadership can be expected to offer him whatever support he requires. On the other hand, Iran and Russia, which had previously been less hawkish than Saudi Arabia about OPEC pricing, might now support tougher supply restraints, precisely because a sharp rise in oil prices could cause a punishing backlash against Trump. Past experience suggests that US and Saudi political interests are likely to prevail, at least in the short term. That was certainly true after the two Iraq wars. Oil prices plunged by 45% in 1991, and by 35% in 2003, within a month of the US launching its attacks. A fall on this scale seems inconceivable today, but oil prices are likely to head downward, despite the Iran sanctions – or maybe because of them.

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Where the Water Is

By Manzoor Qadir and Vladimir Smakhtin

In many parts of the world, there are simply no more conventional freshwater resources available to meet growing demand. Beyond limiting economic development, the lack of sufficient freshwater resources threatens the wellbeing of billions of people by causing conflict, social unrest, and migration. The only way to address this challenge is by radically rethinking water-resource planning and management in a way that emphasizes the creative exploitation of unconventional water sources.

There is a large and growing number of unconventional sources of fresh water with massive potential, beginning with desalinated seawater or highly brackish groundwater. Already, there are 18,000 desalination facilities in more than 100 countries producing roughly 32 billion cubic meters (8.45 trillion gallons) of fresh water – about one-third of the volume passing over Niagara Falls annually.

Some 44% of global desalinated-water production is taking place in the Middle East and North Africa, and new facilities are being built across Asia, the United States, and Latin America. Annual desalination capacity worldwide is increasing by 7-9%, on average.

Recent studies show that, though the cost of irrigation with desalinated water remains higher than with conventional fresh water, it is declining. A couple of decades ago, desalinated water cost more than $5 per cubic meter (264 gallons); today, it costs less than $0.50.

A second promising alternative source of fresh water is fog: a vertical mesh can be used to capture moisture from the air, with the droplets accumulating in a tank or distribution system. Given that fog is very common even in dry areas, fog-harvesting systems amount to a practical, cost-effective way to deliver fresh water directly to rural communities.

Some countries are already taking advantage of this technology. In Cape Verde, a square meter of a collection system yields up to 12 liters (3.2 gallons) of fresh water daily in peak season. In Eritrea, a 1,600-square-meter net harvests up to 12,000 liters per day. The world's largest fog collection and distribution system was built in 2015 in the mountains of Morocco – an area with low water availability but abundant fog six months out of the year. Fog harvesting today costs $1-3 per cubic meter of water. Costs are expected to decrease further as the market for equipment grows and as more village populations take charge of operations and maintenance. Given their simplicity, fog-harvesting systems have minimal running costs and are easily managed by unskilled teams.

Similarly, "micro-catchment rainwater harvesting" – which uses particular slopes and contours to increase runoff from rain and concentrate it in a planting basin where it is effectively "stored" in the soil – is useful for dryland ecosystems where most precipitation is lost. Several projects in the Middle East and North Africa demonstrate the potential of this approach to sustain vegetation growth in very dry areas.

Yet another unconventional source of freshwater is used greywater and wastewater from urban areas. Mechanisms for safely collecting, treating, and reusing such water have been demonstrated and documented, with stringent effluent-discharge regulations in North America, Northern Europe, and Japan setting an example for the world. Groundwater confined in deep geological formations and in offshore aquifers may also be tapped.

A final – and particularly surprising – potential option, which the United Arab Emirates is now exploring, is iceberg towage. While Canada's oil and gas industry regularly tows icebergs to avoid damage to offshore platforms, for the UAE, keeping ice intact over a 10,000-kilometer (6,200-mile) southward journey, which can take up to a year, is no easy feat. But, given how much water is locked in an average-size iceberg, it is worth consideration.

Despite the demonstrated promise of unconventional water sources, not to mention the urgency of the water challenge in many countries, the potential of these solutions remains woefully underexplored. While most water-scarce countries regulate the use of desalinated water, decision-makers need to update their investment strategies, water-management policies, and public budgets to integrate the full range of water resources. To this end, governments must abandon their outdated assumption that tapping unconventional water sources would be technically impractical or excessively costly. Efforts should be made to analyze the potential benefits of such investment, taking into account the economic, social, environmental, and health trade-offs of water scarcity.

Governments must also clarify the responsibilities of national water agencies and improve the capacity of water-related institutions at all levels to institute large-scale unconventional-water programs. Best practices should be clarified, innovations identified and tested, and knowledge and experience shared.

The private sector also has a role to play in the shift toward unconventional water resources – a role that must extend beyond current efforts to tap desalinated water and urban greywater and wastewater. Finally, local institutions, nongovernmental organizations, and local communities must be mobilized – for example, through public campaigns showcasing the benefits of harnessing the potential of unconventional water resources.

Sustainable Development Goal 6 calls for universal access to clean water and sanitation. If governments do not embrace unconventional water resources, achieving that goal will be as difficult as getting water from a stone – and the consequences for water-scarce regions will be dire.

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