

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

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Supporting Peace Process or Playing Political Game?

A Taliban delegation, led by Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, traveled to Moscow to attend a meeting. A number of Afghan high-profile politicians, including head of Afghan High Peace Council (HPC) Mohammad Karim Khalili and former President Hamid Karzai, have also participated in the meeting as Afghanistan and Russia mark the 100th anniversary of their diplomatic relations.

Afghan politicians and Taliban delegation will hold informal talks on the sidelines of the meeting. With the ongoing talks, Moscow is hosting the second round of meeting between Afghan political figures and the Taliban leaders. The two sides also held talks in a two-day meeting in February in Moscow, without the presence of Kabul formal representatives, spurring fears Kabul was being marginalized in the peace process.

"The meeting is just an opportunity for exchanging views. The Taliban will never endorse those meetings where decisions are made unless there is a decision on the withdrawal of foreign forces from Afghanistan," a former Taliban member Sayed Akbar Agha is cited as saying.

The latest meeting in Moscow comes weeks after a sixth round of talks between the Taliban and US negotiating teams wrapped up in Doha, the capital of Qatar, with no progress reported. The Taliban appeared to have pushed for the US troop pullout, which the US has refused to agree as part of final deal until the Taliban agree on all conditions, including "intra-Afghan" dialogue with the Kabul government and other Afghan representatives.

The HPC has raised optimism that the meeting would be helpful in brokering direct talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban.

It is believed that Moscow is seeking to add to the international credibility of the Taliban leadership through such meetings. Inviting leaders from the militant movement in marking Moscow-Kabul anniversary of diplomatic relations suggests that Russia gives official recognition to the Taliban's political wing in Qatar. There seems no sincerity from Russian side in this invitation. If the Kremlin was genuinely seeking to broker talks between the Taliban and Ghani administration, it could brought the two sides to the negotiating table.

Feeling the weight of Russia behind itself, the Taliban's leadership would bargain for higher price at the able with its US interlocutors and its militants would fight with more confidence.

It should be noted that the Taliban are widely involved in killing Afghan soldiers and civilians and they are known terrorists by Afghans since they carry out terrorist activities across the country. There is no reasonable justification to invite the Taliban for marking Afghan-Russian diplomatic relations.

Russia has to support the Afghan government and its international allies in peace process through pushing the Taliban to hold direct talks with the Ghani administration. But boosting the Taliban's confidence in the battlefields will outrage the public conscience in Afghanistan and trigger the anger of Afghan officials.

Generally speaking, amidst the ongoing violence and bloodshed, supporting the Taliban's credibility or boosting their confidence would trigger public hatred against Russia in Afghanistan. Meanwhile, it is believed that the ongoing meeting hosted by Moscow will have no positive result. Although Kabul and Moscow mark the 100th anniversary of their diplomatic relations, the two sides are not enjoying a strong tie as a result of Moscow's unnecessary engagement in Afghanistan's issues.

Afghan stakeholders have to understand that individual gatherings with the Taliban will not lead to peace. They should understand that if they all persist to be represented in the talks, real negotiation will remain elusive. Real negotiation requires a smaller format that could represent the entire Afghan society. Thus, they have to form a national consensus and stop holding individual meetings with the Taliban since it will not yield a positive outcome.

Afghan representatives called on the Taliban, in the Loya Jirga, to stop spilling the blood of Afghan soldiers and civilians and end the 17 years of conflict through negotiation with the Kabul government and declare truce to show their genuine intention. Meanwhile, President Ghani declared to release some of the Taliban's militants jailed in Afghan prisons as a gesture of goodwill and urged the Taliban to stop killing people, at least in Ramadan, the holy month of Muslims. But the Taliban paid no respect to the public demand spilling the blood of people, including religious scholars and clerics, in Ramadan. It suggests that the Taliban simply pursue their political interests at the cost of Afghanistan's national stakes and all their claims are false and misleading. The Taliban are pawns in big political game played between regional players, except for a few, and do not deem themselves bound to law or religious tenets.

Why Political Parties Cannot Play Constructive Role in Afghanistan?

By: Mohammad Zahir Akbari

Before everything we need to have a clear understanding about function, operation and nature of political parties; Scientifically, there are several definitions for political party but commonly defined as a group of people having similar ideas about a country's policies and seeking to gain political power. According to Max Weber, the existential philosophy of political party is seeking power and privilege for its members; this feature causes a permanent and sound competition among political parties to gain power through providing better programs and political services. This way the negative competitions changed to positive competition and plays essential roles in a democratic system such as opinion-making, acting as a watchdog, introducing candidates, bridge between government and people, and propose useful political programs.

In fact, the relation between democracy and political party is likened to two wings of a bird or termed as backbone of democracy. No bird can fly without two wings and no democracy can succeed without active political parties. Therefore, all pioneer democracies are based on strong and lawful political parties. As aforementioned, seeking power is the first and most important characteristics of the political parties that make it different from the other groups. The issue of power gaining must be said that the acquisition of power is the goal of the parties and that plans and policies are a means of gaining power. On the other hand, macro-party programs and policies may be the main goal, and power is the only means to achieve and implement party policies and programs. The political parties must have useful political, economic and social programs for people and country, and so they need to seek power through sound competition with other parties in national elections.

The second important function of political party is political socialization which means that parties are aware people of values, norms, and political practices. Socialization essentially promotes the growth of political culture and ultimately makes people more active in the realm of politics. The greater participation of the people in fact increases the legitimacy of the electoral system. The Political parties should make effort to create coherence and unity among the people. In the absence of parties, people cannot communicate with the government individually and cannot express their wishes and opinions. Thus, the political parties have to shape public opinion which includes attitudes, values, and beliefs of the public.

In order to have a successful role, all political parties need to establish various levels of provincial offices following the structure of the state. The local party organizations are of particular importance for a stable and active party. Here, members can directly be politically active. At this level, they have the deepest contact with their party and politics in general. Local party organizations should conduct regular membership meetings, and support, promote and integrate (new) members. These should be invited to the party and district meetings and social events, as well as to discus-

sions on local politics issues and local initiatives, for instance, residential redevelopment such as building road, schools, business settlements etc.

Moreover, political parties need to hold internal election and introduce professional candidates to external election, but in countries where there is no strong party system such as Afghanistan, known or unknown individuals may be independently elected. Individuals may or may not have long term commitment to serve the country; that's why they easily deceive people with alluring promises during election campaign. Once they fill their pocket, other individuals usually replace them in next election and this way the wrong cycle continues. While political parties, even after they won the election they try not to lose the public trust through providing effective programs and fulfillment of its commitments. Otherwise next time they will lose the votes of people and face a fiasco.

Legally, In Afghanistan, every citizen holds a constitutional right to form a political party so as to attain some common political goals. The right to form a political party is derived from the constitutional right of association, free speech, and equal protection. A political party is a voluntary association formed out of the free will and consent of those who created it. A political party upholds certain principles regarding public policies of a government. Lawfully, it must have at least 20 offices across Afghanistan; the purposes of these branches are to pave the way to get in touch with the people and receive the demands and supports of the people and also bridge between government and people. In addition, it should protect the people from the direct blow of power which may come from the ruling government.

Practically, the political parties in Afghanistan do not have offices across the provinces as required by law and they are affiliated to individuals and their founders. The affiliation of the parties to the individual or the founding members causes the parties to never have a standard organization and select their leaders on the basis of election and democratic process, and so they cannot gain trust of people and neither can continue their activities after the death of its founder. The life of the parties ends with the life of the founder of the party. The lack of organization also makes the parties financially dependent on their founding persons. Therefore, parties are more likely to struggle for the goals of a person rather than for goal of a group.

By and large, the Affiliation of political parties to individuals, lack of common purpose, the absence of an organization, and the lack of branches across the country indicate that we do not have political parties as defined in political science and required by the ruling law. The Political parties are not able to play a constructive role in the country unless they start the reforms from themselves. Political parties should not be formed on the basis of sectarian criteria but merely on the basis of programs and meritocracy.

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How Inflation Could Return

By: Mohamed A. El-Erian

Debates about inflation in advanced economies have changed remarkably over the past decades. Setting aside (mis)measurement issues, concerns about debilitatingly high inflation and the excessive power of bond markets are long gone, and the worry now is that excessively low inflation may hamper growth.

Moreover, while persistently subdued – and, on nearly \$11 trillion of global bonds, negative – interest rates may be causing resource misallocations and undercutting long-term financial security for households, elevated asset prices have heightened the risk of future financial instability. Also, investors have become highly (and happily) dependent on central banks, when they should be prudently more fearful of them.

In search of new ways to produce higher inflation, the major central banks have tended to favor a cyclical mindset, making frequent references to insufficient aggregate demand. But what if that is the wrong lens through which to view current conditions, and we are actually in the middle of a multi-stage process in which strong disinflationary supply-side forces eventually give way to the return of higher inflation? In that case, monetary policymakers and market participants would need to consider quite a different opportunity-risk paradigm than the one currently being pursued. To be sure, after coming close to central banks' 2% target in 2018, core inflation rates in Europe and the United States have since been declining. The conventional measure of market expectations for inflation – the break-even rate on five-year US Treasuries – remains stubbornly below target, even though the six-month moving average pace of job creation is almost 50% above the historical level needed to absorb new labor-market entrants so deep in the economic cycle. Though the US unemployment rate (3.6%) is at its lowest level in around five decades, the labor-force participation rate (62.8%) also remains relatively low.

Owing to the persistence of low inflation, monetary policies have remained ultra-loose for an unusually long time, raising concerns that the US or Europe may succumb to "Japanification" as consumers postpone purchases and companies reduce investment outlays. So far, that risk has led to protractedly low or negative (in the case of the European Central Bank) policy rates and bloated central-bank balance sheets, despite the potentially deleterious effects of such policies on the integrity of the financial system.

In fact, some economic observers favor the ECB not just maintaining negative interest rates, but also restarting asset purchases under its quantitative-easing (QE) program. Likewise, there are those who want the US Federal Reserve to implement an "insurance cut," despite indicators suggesting that this will be another year of solid economic growth and job creation. Meanwhile, central banks have begun to look beyond their existing tool-kits (traditional and unconventional) for new ways to spur economy-wide price increases, such as by raising the inflation target, either directly or by pursuing an average and allowing for deviations over time.

But today's surprisingly low inflation also appears to be linked to larger structural forces, which means that it's not rooted only in insufficient aggregate demand. Technological innovations – particularly those related to artificial intelligence, big data, and mobility – have ushered in a more generalized breakdown of traditional economic relationships and an erosion of pricing power.

Taken together, I call these structural forces the Amazon/Google/Uber effect. While the Amazon model pushes down prices by allowing consumers to bypass more expensive intermediaries, Google undercuts companies' pricing power by reducing search costs, and Uber brings existing assets into the marketplace, further eroding established firms' pricing power.

The Amazon/Google/Uber effect has turbocharged a disinflationary process that began with the acceleration of globalization, bringing far more low-cost production online and reducing the power of organized labor in advanced economies (as has the gig economy more recently). But while these trends will most continue for now, they are likely to confront countervailing inflationary influences that have yet to reach critical mass: the slack in the labor market is diminishing every month, and increased industrial concentration is giving some companies, especially in the technology sector, far greater pricing power.

Now, consider those trends in the context of today's changing political landscape. Fueled by understandable anger over inequality (of income, wealth, and opportunity), more politicians are embracing populism, with promises of more active fiscal management and measures to curb the power of capital in favor of labor. At the same time, there is growing political pressure on central banks to bypass the asset channel (that is, QE bond purchases) and inject liquidity directly into the economy.

Economic anxieties are also driving anti-globalization politics. The weaponization of economic-policy tools such as tariffs and other trade measures is risking a fragmentation of global economic and financial relationships, favoring higher prices, and compelling a greater degree of more costly self-insurance by companies and consumers. At the same time, as expectations of continued low inflation become more entrenched, an upward price shock could expose vulnerabilities and increase the risk of policy mistakes and market accidents.

Considering how these competing forces are likely to play out over time, policymakers and investors should not rule out a return of inflation over time. Looking ahead, we will likely continue experiencing an initial stage in which the Amazon/Google/Uber effect remains dominant. But that may well be followed by a second stage in which tight labor markets, populist nationalism, and industry concentration begin to offset the one-time structural effects of new technologies being widely adopted. And in a third stage, the possible onset of higher inflation may catch policymakers and investors by surprise, producing excessive reactions that make a bad situation worse.

As with most paradigm shifts, there can be little certainty regarding the timing of this scenario. But, either way, policymakers in advanced economies must recognize that their inflation outlook is subject to a wider range of dynamic possibilities than they have considered so far. Focusing too much on the cyclical, rather than the structural, could pose serious risks to future economic wellbeing and financial stability. The longer we wait to broaden the prevailing mindset, the more likely we are to advance to the next stages of an inflationary process in which the impact of an exciting one-and-done technological event gives way to some old and more familiar tendencies.

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