

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

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Intelligentsia Must Rise to the Occasion

In contemporary situation in Afghanistan, the worth of writers and intellectuals have multiplied manifold. As war and instability have grabbed Afghan society from all sides, the need for peace and tranquility is felt more than ever before. And, such peace and tranquility have to come through the pen-holders and the disseminators of education and knowledge, not through the guns of militants. Definitely, the ruling elite has a tremendous role as well, but the narrative has to be built by the intellectuals or the intelligentsia.

However, the unfortunate fact is that through most part of history, the intellectuals and writers were not given the position and status that they deserved. It can be observed that during the monarchies and aristocratic regimes the poets and writers were given rewards and gifts but they were meant to display the magnificence of the kings and the rulers and to pay for the unwarranted approbation they would receive in the works of those poets and writers, not to pay them what they deserved as the reward for their work on truth and reality.

At the same time, the contemporary society does not put the intellectuals in the position they deserve as well. In the modern technological and scientific world, people do not find any achievement of philosophy and literature, as they are not directly involved in inventions and discoveries. They do not seem to need any poet or philosopher in their routines and daily activities; thus, it is not possible for them to appreciate their significance and their status.

Nevertheless, this sort of thinking is not only business-oriented but at the same time it is logically unfitting. If everything in the society is measured as per their capacity to fulfill the temporary material benefit, the whole system of the society would collapse and the whole world would become nothing else except a market, where people can only sell and buy commodities. Though, the world has almost been turned into a market, there is still some respect for values and ethics, which can be a ray of hope in complete darkness. The most tragic and unfortunate aspect of this sort of thinking is that it does not try to see the actual reasons of the incidents and happenings. The whole society, based on the same sort of thinking, starts accepting the material advancements as miracles and tends to neglect all those pillars on which the building of all these advancements is placed. If the modern technological and scientific era is analyzed, there would be few ideas of some thinkers and few thoughts of certain intellectuals and today's materialistic advancement is based on the same ideas and thoughts.

It has to be understood that the material advancement itself is not an achievement; rather it is a source to satiate the psychological and spiritual thirst. While, the wisdom and the experience, which are shared through philosophy and literature, are the real achievements – the real creativity of human capacities. And, on the other hand, the attitude of the society towards such wisdom and experience is disappointing.

Our societies really need intellectuals. It is really weird to note that the intellectuals are totally dependent on society and their favors, whereas, the society should depend on them and seek their favors for proper guidance. If there is any relation between the real beauty in nature and the society, it is because of the intellectuals. If there is no intellectual in a society, such a society is really orphan, as far as aesthetic sense and spiritual guidance is concerned.

It is vital that in a society the intellectuals must have the authority to set the standards; only then the society can have balanced development and advancement. The advancement then would not be limited only to the materialistic aspects but would also include the emotional and the aesthetic aspects of life.

Nonetheless, it is also important to ask: "Who are the real intellectuals?" Whether, the ones in our society whose most dominant quality is their ignorance and self-praise are the intellectuals? As a matter of fact, the definition and title of intellectual has become very cheap. Every other person claims to be intellectual, poet or critic. Therefore, poetry and literature have no creditability left within them. They have become a joke though they should be the most reputable part of the culture, which is their true status.

Every profession needs some sort of practice and hard work. Even a beggar has to practice and then he is able to earn money; otherwise, he won't be able to earn even a penny. However, our poets can be the authors of tens of books and poetry collections without even reading a single book. With such a setting how would it be possible to face the society and ask for status, respect and proper position? It is not debatable that the intellectuals and writers must have the most reputable status in the society; nevertheless, it is significant to ask whether they have really satisfied the requirements of being the real intellectuals and they have made themselves of worthy of such an exalted position.

Advancing the Role of Women in Politics and Civil Society

By: Ahmad Shah Karimi

Undoubtedly women are an influential and inspiring class of our society. They are source of change and shining examples of diligence and endurance who are able to push the country towards development. Besides, their contributions toward a strong and vibrant society are increasingly well documented, there is also growing understanding of why women's meaningful participation is essential to building and sustaining democracy. Because women's political participation results in tangible gains for democracy, including greater responsiveness to citizen needs, progress and more sustainable peace. Therefore, their productive abilities, skills and participation should be cherished and utilized at all levels, and chiefly in politics and civil society due to many factors.

Firstly, women's meaningful participation in politics affects both the range of policy issues that are considered and the types of solutions that are proposed. Research indicates that a legislator's gender has a distinct impact on policy priorities, making it critical that women are present in politics to represent the concerns of women and other marginalized citizens and help improve the responsiveness of policy-making and governance. And as more women reach leadership positions, they tend to prioritize issues that impact health education, and other quality life issues that help women to rise and shine also the country as a whole. In addition, there is strong evidence that as more women are elected to office, there is also a corollary increase in policy-making that reflects the priorities of families, women, and ethnic and racial minorities. Women's political participation has profound positive and democratic impacts on communities, legislatures, political parties, and citizen's lives. Secondly, women are deeply committed to peace-building and post-conflict reconstruction and have a

unique and powerful perspective to bring to the negotiating table. Women often suffer disproportionately during armed conflict and often advocate most strongly for stabilization, reconstruction and the prevention of further conflict. Peace agreements, post-conflict reconstruction and governance have a better chance of long-term success when women are involved. Furthermore, establishing sustainable peace requires transforming power relationships, including achieving more equitable gender relations. For instance, when women are empowered as political leaders, countries often experience higher standards of living with positive developments in education, infrastructure and health, and concrete steps being taken to help make democracy deliver.

Despite these positive indicators and gains, considerable challenges remain to women's meaningful political participation. And while no ideal environment currently exists to jumpstart the advancement of women's political advancement, there are certain conditions that make it easier. First, women must have reasonable access to positions of power. Political leadership is often centralized and informal. Holding a formal position, even an elected position, does not necessarily lead to greater influence, as the real leaders do not always hold formal titles. Power in democracies is further built on relationships that often have existed many years. In Afghanistan where women's public roles are only beginning to develop, women's absence from this history can present significant barriers. However, by giving women the tools they need to lead, creating the opportunity for advancement and helping build networks of like-minded men and women, and ensuring that

women's legal rights are firmly entrenched, a pathway to power can be developed.

Next, transparency in the political and legislative processes is critical to the advancement of women in political and civil society. The lack of openness in political decision-making and undemocratic internal processes are challenging for all newcomers, but particularly for women. Similarly, the complex hierarchies in political parties and legislatures represent a barrier to many women who enter politics at the local level and aspire to rise to other levels of leadership.

Moreover, there must be the willingness of citizens specially men to accept new ideas about gender roles in society despite the fact that there will be challenges in doing that because there are still possibilities in discouraging women from competing directly with men or consider childcare and housekeeping to be the exclusive domain of women. As such, it is common throughout the world to see women activists supporting democratic activities at the grassroots level, yet to see few women in leadership positions, thereby creating an absence of women from whom to draw for higher levels of political leadership. Concerted efforts must be made to raise awareness of gender inequality and the ways in which stereotypical gender roles create both formal and informal barriers. The support of male political leaders is also a key ingredient in creating a political climate that encourages women's political participation. Moreover, there are many more effective approaches to encourage women's political participation in political arena. Conducting ongoing communications trainings, focusing on building leadership skills, training women to train other women, developing the capacity and preparedness of elected women, and engaging youth to help change socio-political attitudes and behavior.

Participation of women in civil society organizations (CSOs) and particularly where women hold leadership positions can play a key role in supporting increased women's political participation and women leaders. Furthermore, they can advocate for issues concerning them and provide technical expertise on key policy issues and help illustrate how policies may affect men and women, and boys and girls differently. Involvement in civil society also gives women the opportunity to influence government and gain visibility, credibility and respect, and to help mitigate barriers to women's political participation.

In many regions, civic organizations are led by women, and are often viewed as vehicles for women's leadership; they have emerged as incubators for women to cultivate their political and personal power. Creating strong partnerships among women in civic organizations and women in political parties and elected office can help advance a common women's agenda in a coordinated way. Furthermore, partnerships between civic organizations - that are critical in reaching and educating citizens - political parties and elected officials help build networks, develop relationships, and sustain trust and communication at the grassroots level.

In last consideration, the government, influential leaders, political parties should increase the political participation of women because where women are at the same table with men, inevitably there is greater stability, greater progress and greater chance to translate dreams to reality and push the country towards equality and prosperity because women are the driving force behind every success story.

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The Global Impact of a Chinese Recession

By: Kenneth Rogoff

When China finally has its inevitable growth recession – which will almost surely be amplified by a financial crisis, given the economy's massive leverage – how will the rest of world be affected? With US President Donald Trump's trade war hitting China just as growth was already slowing, this is no idle question. Typical estimates, for example those embodied in the International Monetary Fund's assessments of country risk, suggest that an economic slowdown in China will hurt everyone. But the acute pain, according to the IMF, will be more regionally concentrated and confined than would be the case for a deep recession in the United States. Unfortunately, this might be wishful thinking.

First, the effect on international capital markets could be vastly greater than Chinese capital market linkages would suggest. However jittery global investors may be about prospects for profit growth, a hit to Chinese growth would make things a lot worse. Although it is true that the US is still by far the biggest importer of final consumption goods (a large share of Chinese manufacturing imports are intermediate goods that end up being embodied in exports to the US and Europe), foreign firms nonetheless still enjoy huge profits on sales in China.

Investors today are also concerned about rising interest rates, which not only put a damper on consumption and investment, but also reduce the market value of companies (particularly tech firms) whose valuations depend heavily on profit growth far in the future. A Chinese recession could again make the situation worse.

I appreciate the usual Keynesian thinking that if any economy anywhere slows, this lowers world aggregate demand, and therefore puts downward pressure on global interest rates. But modern thinking is more nuanced. High Asian saving rates over the past two decades have been a significant factor in the low overall level of real (inflation-adjusted) interest rates in both the United States and Europe, thanks to the fact that underdeveloped Asian capital markets simply cannot constructively absorb the surplus savings.

Former US Federal Reserve chair Ben Bernanke famously characterized this much-studied phenomenon as a key component of the "global savings glut." Thus, instead of leading to lower global real interest rates, a Chinese slowdown that spreads across Asia could paradoxically lead to higher interest rates elsewhere – especially if a second Asian financial crisis leads to a sharp draw-down of central bank reserves. Thus, for global capital markets, a Chinese recession could easily prove to be a double whammy.

As bad as a slowdown in exports to China would be for many coun-

tries, a significant rise in global interest rates would be much worse. Eurozone leaders, particularly German Chancellor Angela Merkel, get less credit than they deserve for holding together the politically and economically fragile single currency against steep economic and political odds. But their task would have been well-nigh impossible but for the ultra-low global interest rates that have allowed politically paralyzed eurozone officials to skirt needed debt write-downs and restructurings in the periphery.

When the advanced countries had their financial crisis a decade ago, emerging markets recovered relatively quickly, thanks to low debt levels and strong commodity prices. Today, however, debt levels have risen significantly, and a sharp rise in global real interest rates would almost certainly extend today's brewing crises beyond the handful of countries (including Argentina and Turkey) that have already been hit.

Nor is the US immune. For the moment, the US can finance its trillion-dollar deficits at relatively low cost. But the relatively short-term duration of its borrowing – under four years if one integrates the Treasury and Federal Reserve balance sheets – means that a rise in interest rates would soon cause debt service to crowd out needed expenditures in other areas. At the same time, Trump's trade war also threatens to undermine the US economy's dynamism. Its somewhat arbitrary and politically driven nature makes it at least as harmful to US growth as the regulations Trump has so proudly eliminated. Those who assumed that Trump's stance on trade was mostly campaign bluster should be worried.

The good news is that trade negotiations often seem intractable until the eleventh hour. The US and China could reach an agreement before Trump's punitive tariffs go into effect on January 1. Such an agreement, one hopes, would reflect a maturing of China's attitude toward intellectual property rights – akin to what occurred in the US during the late nineteenth century. (In America's high growth years, US entrepreneurs often thought little of pilfering patented inventions from the United Kingdom.)

A recession in China, amplified by a financial crisis, would constitute the third leg of the debt supercycle that began in the US in 2008 and moved to Europe in 2010. Up to this point, the Chinese authorities have done a remarkable job in postponing the inevitable slowdown. Unfortunately, when the downturn arrives, the world is likely to discover that China's economy matters even more than most people thought.

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