

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

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Growth of Water Dams and its Impacts on Domestic Security

On Saturday, President Ghani once again emphasized on the management and control of the country's frontier waters on a visit to the Farah province. The president especially spoke about Baksh Abad Dam located near the Iranian border, and emphasized that the Afghan government is serious about the construction of this dam. One of the important features of the president has been his special attention to water issues and construction of economic infrastructure. Since the day he has occupied the presidency of Afghanistan, he has paid serious attention to these issues, and so the construction of water infrastructure has dramatically improved in recent years.

The most common question that comes in our mind is about the impact of these measures on Afghan national security. In recent years it is vastly believed that the neighboring countries have always benefited from the crisis and weakness of Afghanistan and even there are people who think that the root cause of the neighbors intervention in Afghanistan's affairs are due to water issues. Afghanistan has nearly 5,800 km border with its neighbors, and so it is said that a large parts border issues are rooted in water sharing issue.

Afghanistan has an enormous amount of water but most of them flow to neighboring countries including Iran, Pakistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan while Afghanistan itself extremely needs water.

In spite the extreme domestic need, unfortunately the former governments did not pay any attentions to water management for internal uses. Now that the government, especially the president is interested to manage the water, the fundamental question is how will this stance of the president and government affect the national security of the country? This question is important because it seems that neighboring countries have been trying to prevent Afghanistan from control of water of Hindu Kush, Baba and other rivers over the past years.

If we think a bit superficially, the control and management of the country's waters will have a negative impact on national security because the neighboring countries will try to prevent Afghanistan from management and control of its water. They will create insecurity troubles on the borders of the country like in previous years and they will help illegal armed groups to make Afghanistan insecure. As in the past years, the Salma and Kajaki dam have always been subject to security threats in the west and south of the country.

But if we want to think a bit longer and more strategically, Afghanistan can only help its country by managing its water resources. Based on this idea, the current government has proceeded to construct several dams in the country despite such concerns among ordinary people. One of its clear examples is Shatoot dam on the Kabul River. This dam is supposed to provide drinking water to the burgeoning population of Kabul City, but there have been protests from Pakistan that the dam would reduce the water flows into Pakistan. The Dawn in one of the articles has alleged that there could be a drop of 16 to 17 percent of water in the Pakistan side.

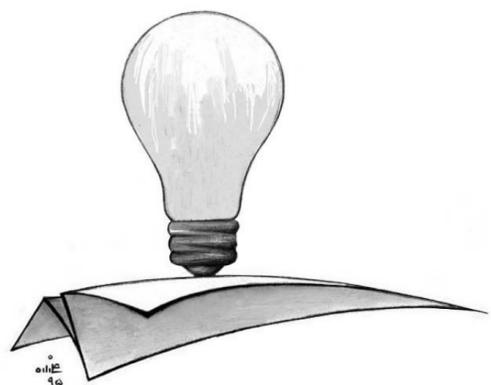
Since India has offered assistance in building the dam, the Pakistan media has alleged that a strategic water war is being waged against Pakistan. On the other hand, there has been no water treaty between Afghanistan and Pakistan and in the absence of any water regulating infrastructure in Afghanistan, downstream Pakistan has been utilizing all the unused waters that flow from Afghanistan. The Kabul River irrigates 85 percent of land in Charsala, 80 percent in Peshawar and 47.5 percent in Nowshera and is also the source of drinking water for millions of Pakistanis living around the basin.

Moreover, The Afghanistan- Pakistan border has a complex maze of rivers and there has been no legal frame work to regulate or share the rivers by both countries. Thus, whatever little the country had by way of water infrastructure have been completely destroyed due to war and even the very institutions that were meant to protect the rivers are no longer in position to take care of the waters.

It is only during President Ghani that the immense water potential of Afghanistan should be exploited for the economic welfare of the country. It is said that India has assisted Afghanistan in conducting feasibility studies that would provide 12 smaller dams and generate over 1177 Megawatts of Power. A dam on the Panjshir Canyon alone would be able to store much more water and could generate enormous amount of power for Afghanistan's economy.

It is said that Pakistan which has been freely using disproportionate share of waters coming from Afghanistan is suddenly putting immense pressure on Afghanistan to sign a bilateral treaty now to share the waters. There is international pressure too. Till now Pakistan had no complaints as it could use all the waters coming from Afghanistan, but it has realized that it cannot continue when Afghanistan has started using its waters for the development of the country.

Once a treaty is signed, there is no doubt that Pakistan will try to delay as much as possible the new initiatives taken by Ghani Government to make use of its water resources. It is therefore putting immense pressure on Afghanistan to sign a deal on sharing of water resources as it would then have a legal claim to stop or delay various plans Afghanistan has in developing its water resources. It is therefore of utmost importance that Afghanistan goes ahead with Indian assistance to complete the Shatoot dam that would cost no more than 380 million dollars in time, to relieve the sufferings of the people of Kabul who by one study is said to have more than 60 percent of its water contaminated and unfit for drinking.



Afghan Women's Achievements Undeniable

By: Hujjatullah Zia

If I were an Afghan feminist, then I wouldn't spend my time complaining that the Americans haven't pulled out a chair for me "at the table." I'd march up to the table on my own. I would form a delegation and go speak to the Taliban directly," wrote Cheryl Benard in her recent commentary in The National Interest titled "Afghan Women are In Charge of their Own Fate". Benard also said that the Taliban were not the "worst problem" of Afghan women but "deep-seated cultural values and traditions, such as the so-called Pashtun "honor code," are far more devastating to women's lives, and most of these are clearly un-Islamic or even anti-Islamic." She also approved of the Taliban's Moscow Declaration that despite 17 years of investment on women's rights, women lose their lives during delivery "due to lack of health facilities".

However, Benard did not point out the progress made by Afghan women in the past 17 years. She did not mention a single female ambassador, minister, deputy minister, governor, MP, lecturer, teacher or trader to show that how Afghan women made strides on the long road.

Benard made no mention of how Afghan women backtracked in light of the civil conflict and the Taliban's repressive and despotic regime and how long it will take to make it from the beginning.

The progress made by Afghan women within the past 17 years is undeniable. They also fought for their rights and freedoms, raised their voice against injustice, participated in demonstrations for supporting their human rights, and participated in social and political decision makings. Afghan women had their representatives in Loya Jirga for the approval of constitution, they participated in presidential and provincial elections to defend their rights and gained seats in parliament, they studied hard to hold better positions in social and political arenas. For example, Afghan women are acting as ministers, ambassadors, MPs, etc. Recently, a woman, Adela Raz, has been appointed as Permanent Representative of Afghanistan to the United Nations. Afghan women also play active role in social, cultural, educational and economic arenas. They are teachers, doctors, engineers, lecturers, and traders, to name but a few. To put it succinctly, Afghan women made great progress in social, cultural, political, and economic arenas if one compares them with two decades ago.

Although Benard referred to deep-seated traditional culture of Afghanistan but did not mention the Taliban's role in this regard. To ponder over this issue, traditional culture, which has curtailed the freedom of Afghan women to a great extent, came from the same ideology as that of the Taliban. To adopt iconoclastic approach, both men and women have to undermine radical ideology and un-Islamic or anti-Islamic interpretation of religious tenets in one way or another. Meanwhile, it should be noted that the Taliban supported and reinforced the "honor code" and imposed their radical mindset on a large number of youths in tribal belts. In other words, the Taliban supported tribal code of conduct - which are mostly un-Islamic or anti-Islamic - conducted desert courts, flagellated women in tribal areas, burnt schools, etc. in the areas under their control.

Afghan women have to urge the Taliban's interlocutors not to compromise their achievements at the table with the Taliban. Women have to raise their voice in this regard so that the agreement should not put their rights and freedoms at stake.

Women are worried that if the "Islamic Emirate" of the Taliban return with the same mindset and ideology as that during their regime, they would not accept such an agreement. The Taliban's harsh practices are evident. For example, if the Taliban return with their guns and talk to people with the barrel of gun, what could Afghan women do?

Now Afghan women urge Benard's spouse not to undo their achievements, but if the Taliban hold talks with Afghan government, Afghan women also have their representatives, who are members of High Peace Council (HPC). For instance, two women representatives, along with heads of political parties, participated in the Moscow summit.

All in all, in the post-Taliban administration, Afghan women have been playing highly essential role in collective life. Personally speaking, women's active role in social and political issues, despite many cultural barriers, is jaw-dropping. But I have to admit that the strides made by Afghan women were not possible without the support of U.S. and its allies, and all those individuals such as Benard and her colleagues. The supports paved the ground for the progress of Afghan women and empowered them in social and political arenas have to be appreciated.

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Market Concentration Is Threatening the US Economy

By: Joseph E. Stiglitz

The world's advanced economies are suffering from a number of deep-seated problems. In the United States, in particular, inequality is at its highest since 1928, and GDP growth remains woefully tepid compared to the decades after World War II.

After promising annual growth of "4, 5, and even 6%," US President Donald Trump and his congressional Republican enablers have delivered only unprecedented deficits. According to the Congressional Budget Office's latest projections, the federal budget deficit will reach \$900 billion this year, and will surpass the \$1 trillion mark every year after 2021. And yet, the sugar high induced by the latest deficit increase is already fading, with the International Monetary Fund forecasting US growth of 2.5% in 2019 and 1.8% in 2020, down from 2.9% in 2018.

Many factors are contributing to the US economy's low-growth/high-inequality problem. Trump and the Republicans' poorly designed tax "reform" has exacerbated existing deficiencies in the tax code, funneling even more income to the highest earners. At the same time, globalization continues to be poorly managed, and financial markets continue to be geared toward extracting profits (rent-seeking, in economists' parlance), rather than providing useful services.

But an even deeper and more fundamental problem is the growing concentration of market power, which allows dominant firms to exploit their customers and squeeze their employees, whose own bargaining power and legal protections are being weakened. CEOs and senior executives are increasingly extracting higher pay for themselves at the expense of workers and investment.

For example, US corporate executives made sure that the vast majority of the benefits from the tax cut went into dividends and stock buybacks, which exceeded a record-breaking \$1.1 trillion in 2018. Buybacks raised share prices and boosted the earnings-per-share ratio, on which many executives' compensation is based. Meanwhile, at 13.7% of GDP, annual investment remained weak, while many corporate pensions went underfunded.

Evidence of rising market power can be found almost anywhere one looks. Large markups are contributing to high corporate profits. In sector after sector, from little things like cat food to big things like telecoms, cable providers, airlines, and technology platforms, a few firms now dominate 75-90% of the market, if not more; and the problem is even more pronounced at the level of local markets.

As corporate behemoths' market power has increased, so, too, has their ability to influence America's money-driven politics. And as the system has become more rigged in business's favor, it has become much harder for ordinary citizens to seek redress for mistreatment or abuse. A perfect example of this is the spread of arbitration clauses in labor contracts and user agreements, which allow corporations to settle disputes with employees and customers through a sympathetic mediator, rather than in court. Multiple forces are driving the increase in market power. One is the growth of sectors with large network effects, where a single

firm - like Google or Facebook - can easily dominate. Another is the prevailing attitude among business leaders, who have come to assume that market power is the only way to ensure durable profits. As the venture capitalist Peter Thiel famously put it, "competition is for losers."

Some US business leaders have shown real ingenuity in creating market barriers to prevent any kind of meaningful competition, aided by lax enforcement of existing competition laws and the failure to update those laws for the twenty-first-century economy. As a result, the share of new firms in the US is declining. None of this bodes well for the US economy. Rising inequality implies falling aggregate demand, because those at the top of the wealth distribution tend to consume a smaller share of their income than those of more modest means.

Moreover, on the supply side, market power weakens incentives to invest and innovate. Firms know that if they produce more, they will have to lower their prices. This is why investment remains weak, despite corporate America's record profits and trillions of dollars of cash reserves. And besides, why bother producing anything of value when you can use your political power to extract more rents through market exploitation? Political investments in getting lower taxes yield far higher returns than real investments in plant and equipment.

Making matters worse, America's low tax-to-GDP ratio - just 27.1% even before the Trump tax cut - means a dearth of money for investment in the infrastructure, education, health care, and basic research needed to ensure future growth. These are the supply-side measures that actually do "trickle down" to everyone.

The policies for combating economically damaging power imbalances are straightforward. Over the past half-century, Chicago School economists, acting on the assumption that markets are generally competitive, narrowed the focus of competition policy solely to economic efficiency, rather than broader concerns about power and inequality. The irony is that this assumption became dominant in policymaking circles just when economists were beginning to reveal its flaws. The development of game theory and new models of imperfect and asymmetric information laid bare the profound limitations of the competition model.

The law needs to catch up. Anti-competitive practices should be illegal, period. And beyond that, there are a host of other changes needed to modernize US antitrust legislation. Americans need the same resolve in fighting for competition that their corporations have shown in fighting against it.

The challenge, as always, is political. But with US corporations having amassed so much power, there is reason to doubt that the American political system is up to the task of reform. Add to that the globalization of corporate power and the orgy of deregulation and crony capitalism under Trump, and it is clear that Europe will have to take the lead.

Joseph E. Stiglitz is University Professor at Columbia University and the 2001 recipient of the Nobel Memorial Prize in Economics. His latest book, *People, Power, and Profits: Progressive Capitalism for an Age of Discontent*, will be published in April.

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