

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



August 12, 2018

### Disqualifying the Candidates: an Act to Counter Criminals or Cover Up Fraud

Elections is one of the crucial issues in Afghanistan; though it is a democratic tool to strengthen democracy and ensure ethnic diversity in the country, in Afghanistan, the dominance of the traditional norms and values have changed it to an ethnic politics. This trait has been one of the main factors behind warlords to throw their hat in the ring. Based on this electoral behavior of the Afghan ethnic groups, any measures by the Afghan Independent Electoral Complaints Commission to disqualify the national parliament and district councils' candidates will receive mixed reactions. In other words, the Afghan ethnic groups may support the disqualification of the candidates of other ethnic groups and will strongly reject the decision of the IECC on their own candidates and term it as a political move.

However, the removal of 35 names from the final list of parliamentary and District councils' election possible candidates by the Independent Electoral Complaints Commission (IECC) on Saturday, August 11, 2018, is a bold act to prevent warlords from dominating the Wolsi Jirga and DCs. The disqualified candidates have been charged with illegal armed groups, as well as involvement in security issues, coordinated crimes, drug smuggling and misuse of public and private assets. So a commitment by an independent commission to disqualify candidates having ties to militias and misusing the public assets might seem as a good beginning to cleaning up Afghanistan's electoral process and ensure transparency in the coming elections.

Indeed, the international community will applaud this move of the IECC as they deem the parliamentary and district councils' election as vital to improving the country's government. At least, this IECC decision will ensure less electoral fraud and that this will help Afghans learn how to strengthen their democratic processes. This decision of the IECC is a big step toward regaining the legitimacy of the electoral system in Afghanistan. In addition, it will signal this message to the Afghans and international community that electoral achievements are sustained in Afghanistan despite the mounting problems.

Conversely, the disqualified candidates will call it an act by the government to cheat the international community and sidelining the ethnic influential candidates. Also, the IECC shall be very cautious to act holistically, and shall pay specific attention not to keep the warlords accused of murdering people in its list, because the disqualified candidates will accuse the government that it is just trying to cover up its weakness to act decisively against the warlords by disqualifying these 35 candidates. Of course, the ranks of the powerful in Afghanistan include men, and some women, that have been accused by international organizations and local politicians of involvement in crimes against fellow citizens or being involved in different illegal acts. A disqualified candidate like Zardad Fariadi, the outstanding commander of Hizb e Islami, has notorious human rights records and men under his command murdered hundreds of civilians in Kabul in the early 1990s, according to the Human Rights groups.

Disqualifying the candidates charged with involvement in security issues, coordinated crimes, drug smuggling and misuse of public and private assets and other illegal acts is one of the basic authorities of the of Afghan IECC. The IEC shall ensure putting all the necessary mechanisms and tools to ensure transparency of the Wolsi Jirga and District council, in order to restore the legitimacy of the Afghan electoral system that has been damaged seriously with electoral frauds in the past elections. Doing so, the international community, Afghan political parties, Afghan civil society and the public masses shall support the IECC decision and participate actively in the election process to make the coming election a success. The decision of IECC to disqualify some of the candidates shall be a turning point in the Afghan electoral process and signify that warlords are seen as a losing ticket in Afghan election and Afghanistan will not further allow the warlords to keep the Afghan people as their hostages, misuse their resources and undermine our democracy by using such negative manners in the country.



### Short-Term Ceasefires & Their Effects on Long-Term Peace

By Mohammed Gul Sahibzada

Expectations and optimism for long-lasting peace rose to unprecedented heights when Government of Afghanistan and Taliban insurgents reached agreement to observe three days ceasefire during last three days Eid festivities across the country.

Peace prevailed throughout the country during three days Eid, minus three incidents of suicide bombings in Nangarhar and Logar provinces, which were claimed by Daesh, and the victims included Afghan security forces and Taliban fighters who were jointly controlling checkpoints at the gates of the city.

Taliban fighters poured in to cities throughout Afghanistan and enjoyed Eid festivities with people and Government officials, and the same was true for Government officials and those individuals who could not otherwise visit areas under Taliban control, managed to sneak in to their villages and enjoy Eid festivities with their family members and friends, who had been separated for years. The air was full of joy for ordinary people – both at cities and villages.

But immediately after the clock ticked past 12am mid-night, Taliban insurgents retreated back to their villages and Government officials rushed back to cities to avoid persecution. Not long passed, fighting erupted sporadically across the country and continued to till date, taking lives of more than two thousands five hundred ordinary civilians, including children, women and men, Government security personnel and Taliban fighters. Recurrent and continuation of this unholy war – after a joyful ceasefire – washed away all expectations and optimism for possibility of permanent peace.

While negotiations with Taliban insurgents for peace continues its course involving countries with high stakes in the process, including the United States of America, Government of Afghanistan, Pakistan, China, Russia, Saudi Arabia and UAE throughout this time since the cessation of ceasefire, Government of Afghanistan contemplates yet another ceasefire with Taliban insurgents for upcoming Eid festivities, which according to 2018 calendar, will start beginning 21 or 22 August this year. Any peace deal – be it long term or short term – should follow comparatively less violent period before it is implemented. Unofficial and unconfirmed figures, mentioned in the paragraph above, obtained from media outlets draw a grim picture of casualties inflicted on ordinary people, and on the families of security personnel and those of Taliban fighters. This state of affairs exhibit no tangible events and logical signs that should precede peace before it takes hold. The three days peace that prevailed last time was unprecedented and was welcomed by all quarters in Afghanistan.

It only increased optimism and expectations for permanent peace in the country. To say it in other words, the success of last time three days peace was very much founded in cooperation and acceptance by the people of Afghanistan across the country. However, it will be very hard to instill the same sort of optimism and expectations in people's

minds and hearts to welcome any short-term peace deal, without first laying out extensive, agreed foundations among warring factions for a long term, permanent peace. Because of resilient nature of insurgent fighters and absence of any guarantee for a long-term peace, it is not sensible and logical to embark on short-sighted and unproductive attempts to bring peace.

The risks of such actions might have many unknown fallouts, which can even include skirmishes and attempts to vengeance by Government security personnel and Taliban fighters when they mix together because the wounds inflicted on these individuals for losses of lives of their family members and / or closed relatives and friends would still be fresh. Therefore, it is incumbent on Government of Afghanistan to take into consideration all possibilities before embarking on any peace deals with Taliban insurgents. As was put forth by Mr. Upendra Baghel, an expert in building state institutions, '...Ceasefire does not mean to reduce deployment, but to increase them without combat function'. Therefore, it is highly advisable for Government of Afghanistan to keep military machinery strong in defense of the motherland. One major set-back to go ahead with the ceasefire last time, and reasons for Government to once again engage in fighting with Taliban insurgents were that Taliban insurgents continued to talk from a position of strength, which had resulted in their stubbornness, insistence to fight, and higher demands during peace negotiations. Unfortunately, the rush by US Government to engage US diplomats directly with Taliban insurgents to talk peace has come exactly at times when Taliban claimed supremacy over Afghan Government in the field.

This was what Taliban insurgents demanded right from the beginning. Exclusion of Afghanistan Government in peace negotiations with Taliban insurgents has only strengthened the will of the insurgents to insist on their demands – whatever they might be – and in case these demands are not met, they can easily resort to violence.

This is what has been encouraged by actions of the United States Government to rush to bring about so called peace without first laying out necessary ground work in place, which are mainly based on urges and policies at home to end this so called 'longest US war on foreign lands'. It is very important for the US Government and other international alliance, in support of stabilizing Afghanistan, to understand that a lot of blood has been shed, huge amount of resources have been expended to bring about the present progress in Afghanistan.

Taliban insurgents are under pressure from Pakistan for taking certain decisions, including the misplaced belief by Taliban so called leadership that they have had upper hand in ongoing war, hence they insisted to fight. These and so many other factors and undercurrents should be guarded against during ongoing peace negotiations.

Mohammed Gul Sahibzada is the permanent writer of the Daily Outlook Afghanistan. He can be reached at mohammed.g.sahibzada@gmail.com

### Multiple Diplomatic Spats Raise Questions about Saudi Concept of Sovereignty

By James M. Dorsey

The failure of Western allies to rally around Canada in its dispute with Saudi Arabia risks luring the kingdom into a false belief that economic sanctions will shield it from, if not reverse mounting criticism of its human rights record and conduct of the war in Yemen. It also risks convincing Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman that acting with impunity will not impinge on his efforts to attract badly needed foreign investment.

In a sign of the times, Canada was this week not the only country to take a critical approach towards Saudi Arabia. Weeks after announcing the withdrawal of Malaysian troops from the 41-nation, Saudi-sponsored Islamic Military Counter Terrorism Coalition (IMCTC), Malaysian defense minister Mohamad Sabu ordered the immediate closure of the Saudi-backed King Salman Centre for International Peace (KSCIP).

The Saudi-funded centre was established during a visit to Malaysia last year by King Salman to project the kingdom as a leader in the fight against political violence and the promotion of peace. The establishment of the centre constituted a shift in Saudi Arabia's soft power strategy that for decades was premised on generous global funding of ultra-conservative strands of Sunni Muslim Islam.

The centre would have also helped extend Saudi influence in Southeast Asia by bringing together Islamic scholars and intelligence agencies in an effort to counter extremist interpretations of Islam in cooperation with the Saudi-funded Islamic Science University of Malaysia, and the Muslim World League, a Saudi governmental non-governmental organization that long served as a vehicle for global propagation of ultra-conservatism.

The Saudi-Canadian spat erupted after Canada's ambassador to the kingdom, Dennis Horak, called on Saudi Arabia to release detained women activists, including Samar Badawi, the sister-in-law of a recently naturalized Canadian citizen, Ensaf Haidar. Ms. Haidar is married to Ms. Badawi's brother, Raif Badawi, who was arrested in 2012 and sentenced to ten years in prison and 1,000 lashes for promoting freedom of expression and women's rights.

The spat follows similar incidents with Sweden in 2015 and Germany in November of last year and is not dissimilar to approaches adopted by other autocracies like China which has responded similarly on issues such as Taiwan, the South China Sea and the deployment of a US anti-missile system on the Korean peninsula.

Saudi Arabia withdrew its ambassador to Sweden after Swedish foreign minister Margot Wallström criticized the kingdom's human rights record, including the sentencing and flogging of Mr. Badawi, and cancelled an arms agreement.

Similarly, Saudi Arabia recalled its ambassador in response to German criticism of the kingdom's attempt to interfere in Lebanon's internal affairs by putting Lebanese prime minister Saad Hariri under house arrest and forcing him to resign. The Saudi attempt backfired, and Mr. Hariri later withdrew his resignation.

In an indication that Saudi Arabia's intimidation tactics may be boomeranging, Germany in January said it was "immediately" stopping approving arms exports to anyone participating in the war in Yemen, including Saudi Arabia.

The Hariri incident as well as Saudi lobbying against US President Barack Obama's nuclear deal with Iran, President Donald J. Trump's

decision to move the American Embassy in Israel to Jerusalem, and what veteran Middle East journalist Brian Whitaker described as "hurling abuse at Qatar" puts Saudi complaints about interference in its internal affairs on thin ice.

In an editorial, The New York Times noted that the Saudi measures against Canada were "the kind of move that, in the past, would have immediately elicited a firm, unified opposition from the West. So far, there's hardly been even a whimper of protest."

The paper went on to say that "it's not unusual for countries to balk at external criticism. But this Saudi retribution is unnecessarily aggressive and clearly intended to intimidate critics into silence... The Saudis claim that the Canadian statement is 'an overt and blatant interference' in its internal affairs, but that argument is specious... Under Prince Mohammed, the Saudis have...not been shy about speaking out about, or directly intervening in, the affairs of other countries, including Yemen, Bahrain and Qatar."

In effect, the Saudi attempt to bully governments into refraining from criticism constitutes an attempt to curtail the sovereignty of others by dictating to them what they can and cannot say.

To the kingdom's detriment, it also blows incidents out of proportion that otherwise would have likely gone unnoticed. Few would have taken note of Mr. Horak's comment on Twitter had Saudi Arabia not put a glaring spotlight on them.

As a result, Saudi Arabia's harsh Saudi response to the Canadian ambassador's remarks, like earlier arbitrary arrests in the last year of hundreds of activists, religious figures, and prominent businessmen and senior members of the ruling Al Saud family on a host of charges ranging from treason to corruption and apostasy, threatens to further undermine investor confidence in the kingdom's adherence to the rule of law. The Saudi assertion that Canada had interfered in its internal affairs ignores the kingdom's legal obligations as a signatory to various international human rights treaties that override national sovereignty as well as its role in the United Nations Human Rights Council that operates on the principle of governments monitoring and criticizing each other's human rights record.

Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi, who last year went into voluntary exile in the United States despite being critically supportive of Prince Mohammed's social and economic reforms and having close, long-standing ties to the Al Saud family, warned that Saudi Arabia was in effect cutting off its nose to spite itself.

"Saudi Arabia simply cannot afford to alienate any other sections of the global community in the midst of its unpopular military engagement in Yemen... Most importantly, Saudi Arabia's economic transformation requires more friends than enemies. For MBS to achieve the economic and transformative vision that he espoused on his foreign tour, he needs to use ways and means that investors are accustomed to. If business executives fear a backlash over any possible criticism regarding their investment, the new vision of Saudi Arabia would be in serious jeopardy," Mr. Khashoggi said referring to Prince Mohammed by his initials.

Dr. James M. Dorsey is a senior fellow at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, co-director of the University of Würzburg's Institute for Fan Culture, and co-host of the New Books in Middle Eastern Studies podcast.

Chairman / Editor-in-Chief: Moh. Reza Huwaida

Editor: Moh. Sakhi Rezaei

Email: outlookafghanistan@gmail.com

Phone: 0093 (799) 005019/777-005019

www.outlookafghanistan.net



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