

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



January 19, 2019

Afghanistan: Democracy and Political Participation

Popular participation by citizens in political decision-making is one of the most important aspects of a functioning democracy. In other words, the active and meaningful participation of citizens in public affairs is the distinguishing feature of democratic societies, which are judged by the extent to which governments open up to citizen involvement in public affairs and the space they give for citizens to hold the government accountable. It is because of this that citizens in Afghanistan in general continue to demand increased space for participation.

Historically, citizen participation in political decision making in Afghanistan is a new phenomenon, because they have nearly always been denied such a right. However, the new constitution has addressed some of these challenges by establishing strong checks on the powers of the executive as well as two levels of government: national and sub-national.

Indeed, public participation requires that people be at the center of decision-making processes. This is an important element of democracy because 'rule by the people' is the underlying and founding principle of democracy. Accordingly, providing the chance to people in making decisions that concern their lives is a distinguishing feature of democratic societies. In fact, Participatory democracy needs active and meaningful engagement of citizens in public affairs. That is why it is a principle universally accepted as mandatory for a just society.

Participation in public affairs is important in another respect as well. It builds people's abilities to hold authorities accountable for the implementation of decisions and actions agreed upon. Based on this, the quest to promote participatory democracy and to make participation an important principle in the governance of public affairs, has been an important theme in debates on governance in Afghanistan. Because of this, and in recognition of protracted struggles for democratic reforms in the preamble, articles, 6, and 35 in Afghanistan's new constitution have included democracy and participation of the people among the values and principles of governance, which bind all state organs and institutions as well as state officials. In assessing the quality of democracy in the country, there are critical questions whether successive governments have consistently upheld the rule of law, allowed citizens to freely elect their leaders, and whether or not people have been making political choices without hindrance.

Transition to democracy in a tradition society with authoritarian governance background implies progress in both opening up decision-making processes to active participation of the people, as well as enhancing the accountability of governments to their citizens. Such a transition involves developing a culture of constitutionalism and accountability to citizens. Giving people freedom to make political choices, especially in elections, is central in consolidating democracy. This freedom of choice empowers them to put in place an accountable and responsive government whose mandate is renewed periodically - depending on the extent to which it has governed in line with the aspirations of the people. Therefore, if the elected government applies the law without discrimination, citizens obey the law conscientiously. When the government however applies the law in an inconsistent manner, citizens tend to disconnect from the government. The distance between government and society widens in tandem with the failure of government to account to society and abide by the founding principle of democracy, rule by the people.

How to secure and consolidate participatory democracy has dominated discourses on governance in Afghanistan for a long time. The struggle for political liberalization from the late 1940s was particularly informed by the need to open the political space to competitive politics after several decades of domination by the one-family regime.

Political decision making is one of the vital aspects of democracy. Afghan citizens have been neglected this right in most part of the Afghanistan history. However, the 2004 constitution provides for a break from the past; it charts the path for a new beginning in many ways. It creates a new structure of governance and provides specifically for a devolved system of government where people effectively participate in the governance decision makings. Therefore, the core democratic values of this constitution calls to be safe guarded by all Afghan citizens in order to have a better future.



Taliban Refusal to Talk to Afghan Government is a Botched Attempt and a Bitter Reminder of 1990s

By: Mohammed Gul Sahibzada

Since the start of peace negotiations in late 2018 and the appointment of US special representative for Afghan reconciliation, Mr. Zalmay Khalizad, many rounds of meetings have been held with interlocutors including US and Taliban representatives in different countries in the Middle East. In addition, another stream of talks has been hosted by the Government of Russian Federation whereby two rounds of meetings have so far been held. The purpose of all these meetings is to reach a negotiated settlement between Afghan Government and Afghan Taliban insurgents. It appears that schedule of these meetings have been disrupted by two major parties to the negotiation, firstly by Taliban insurgents who have demanded they do not want to talk to Afghan Government and that they only talk to US Government because they believe it was the US military that had toppled their regime after the fateful incident of 9/11 in 2001 which was planned and executed by Al-Qaeda leader, Osama bin Laden who was harbored and given refuge to, by Taliban regime during their rule in the country between 1995 and 2001. On the other side, Afghan Government questions validity of all and any peace talks and meetings with Taliban insurgents where they are not included and the agenda is not agreed upon by Afghan Government. This situation has stalled peace talks with Taliban insurgents with some grim repercussions in the shape of a large suicide attack targeting foreign nationals in a fortified guesthouse, near Kabul international airport where four people were dead and more than hundred and twenty were injured. All of this is happening at a time when US Government leans hard on reaching a peace deal with Taliban insurgents more than any time during its intervention in Afghanistan since last almost two decades - based on urges arising from policy changes at home and campaign promises during elections in 2016. This scenario is an exact repetition of the events that occurred during early 1990s when the then Government of late Dr. Najeebullah, supported by the then USSR, was pleading for peace and reconciliation with Afghan Mujahedeen, who were supported by Pakistan, US and Iran. Dr. Najeeb's Government did not want destruction of Afghan institutions and indiscriminate killings of innocent civilians so he repeatedly pleaded for peace. But peace plan, though supported by UN and United States, was disrupted by Pakistani Generals sitting in army headquarters in Rawalpindi who had encouraged Mujahedeen not to enter into peace process with Dr. Najeeb's Government. The

motive behind not making peace with the then Afghan Government was to destroy all standing institutions of Afghan Government and to completely annihilate and invade Afghans and their country by Pakistani trained, supported and indoctrinated Afghan Mujahedeen groups. This is reminder of a bitter and grim reality for Afghans of those fateful events when peaceful settlement was not reached, after a long stalemate, Mujahedeen groups under different banners and organizational names, entered in Kabul and other Afghan cities and fought with each other for power, title and position for more than five years. During this senseless killing and destruction episode, hundreds of thousands of Afghan civilians - including children and women - were killed, millions were migrated to Iran and Pakistan, economy of the country was destroyed and the country was plunged into a no-man's land! People of Afghanistan foresee exactly the same scenario taking shape. US government is threatening to leave the country and is pushing for a hasty peace deal with an entrenched insurgency without sketching long-term plans and strategy of how to avoid repetition of the failure of 1990s peace plan. The then USSR was also trying to reach peace deal with Mujahedeen and wanted to leave the country.

Taliban insurgents demands to push for US forces to leave Afghanistan and refusing to talk to Afghan Government is exactly the same when Mujahedeen were refusing to enter into peace deal with Dr. Najeebullah's Government and asking for the then USSR forces to leave the country. This idea is the brain child of ISI of Pakistan and is designed to once again plunge Afghanistan into a civil war, destruction and complete annihilation of its institutions. Taliban should know that hundreds of thousands of Afghans are standing guard to protect the progress made in areas of military advances, economic development, education and long-term development programs. Afghanistan is not going to repeat events of 1990s because such a scenario is not in the interest of any nation in the region and internationally, and that such doomed fate will not be allowed by both international and regional friendly countries of Afghanistan. Therefore, keeping in view the present realities and plenty of opportunities for a strong, prosperous and developed Afghanistan, Taliban insurgents should give it a re-think and join Afghan Government in its efforts to bring long-lasting peace and prosperity in the country.

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The Kabul Initial Election Results Announced after Long Ups and Downs

By: Mohammad Zahir Akbari

After nearly three months delay, the Independent Election Commission (IEC) announced the preliminary Wolesi Jirga (Lower House of the Parliament) election results of capital Kabul, saying the results were not final and changes are possible in the final results. The IEC said that 33 candidates including 24 men and nine women have secured seats in Wolesi Jirga from the parliamentary elections which were held about three months ago, in 2018. According to IEC, the men candidates who have won the required votes for the parliament consists of: Haji Ajmal Rahmani, Qayoum Khairkhwa, Fida Mohamad Ulfat Saleh, Javid Jaihoon, Khan Aqa Rezaiee, Ramazan Bashedost, Amir Gul Shaheen, Gulam Hussain Naseri, Mullah Mohammad Khan Ahmadi, Allah Gul Mujahid, Syed Mohammad Mohammadi, Amanullah Gozar, Haji Khan Mohammad Wardak, Qazi Mir Afghan Safi, Ajmal Gulab, Ahmad Zia Azimi Shinozada, Tawfiq Wahdat, Obaidullah Kalimzai Wardak, Hafizullah Jalili, Farhad Sediqi, Anwar Khan Oryakhail, Haji Zergai Habibi, Habib Ur Rehman Sayaf and Najibullah Nasir.

The women candidates who have secured seats are including; Fatima Nazari, Mursal Nabizada, Shinkai Karo Khail, Robina Jalali, Mariam Sama, Fawzia Nasiryar Guldarayi, Salima Nikbin, Zahra Nawruzi and General Nazifa Zaki. Meanwhile, The Kuchi tribe candidates who have secured seats in parliament include: Shah Wazir Tarakhail, Habib-ur-Rahman Afghan, Mirwais Hussain Khail, Nangialai Lung, Haji Parwaiz Arabzada, Haidar Jan Naimzoi, Rasool Khan Kochi, Hamida Ahmadzai, Maryam Saliman Khail and Farzana Kuchi. In general, with the announcement of the Kabul initial election result, there would be 10 more provinces that have not been announced yet. Nevertheless, the initial result of Kabul election comes after a lot of disputes and disagreements; once the Independent Election Complaints Commission had canceled the whole Kabul election due to the widespread fraud took place in Kabul constituency. According to legal experts, the IECC decision considered final decision but they retreated from their decision after some tiring arguments. In fact, it was not the first and neither would be the last brawls in the election process. There have been lots of distrusts and arguments since the beginning steps of election until now. According to the electoral calendar, the parliamentary elections should have been held in 20th of September 2018, within one day, in all 34 provinces of the country, but because of the poor management the voting was held in two days in Kabul with double spending of the election budget. On contrary to the law, the parliamentary elections in Kandahar were held with a one-week delay. The parliamentary elections in Ghazni have not held yet.

According to the schedules, the Initial results of the parliamentary election were supposed to be announced on 10th of November 2018 and its final results were supposed to be announced on 20th of December 2018. Unfortunately, the Independent Election Commission could not fulfill its legal obligation. On contrary to the law, they (IEC) have gradually announced the initial results while it is not clear when the

rest of 10 more provinces results will be announced. This clearly indicates that the IEC does not have sufficient ability and knowledge to manage the election process.

The Independent Election Commission was supposed to hold the parliamentary elections and district council elections simultaneously on 20th of September 2018, but failed due to the mismanagement issues. Overall, the (IEC) with its management weakness, inflicted a huge and irreversible blow to the democratic process and collective motivation of the people while neither they apologized from the people of Afghanistan and nor prosecuted by justice system of the country. Recently, both electoral institutions and international partners have strongly expressed their concerns regarding the challenges of the parliamentary elections and skepticism about ability of IEC if they could hold the elections next year.

The IEC also extremely downgraded in the public opinion and amongst the political elites. Therefore, it is very difficult to restore confidence of the people in the elections with the same commission for holding the elections next year. Thus, the Afghan government has strongly expressed dissatisfaction from the IEC operations. Recently, the second vice president of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan spoke of comprehensive reforms in the Afghan electoral commissions, saying that, due to widespread allegations, fraud, misconduct and corruption, not only the elections commissions' credibility damaged but also the prestige of the government and the people of Afghanistan have been completely damaged. As a senior government official, he reiterated that the work of the electoral commissions has become a tool for teasing and insulting of friends and enemies.

Warning the election commissions, the vice president stressed that the patience of the people has overflowed and no longer can tolerate the weaknesses and the inefficiencies. It is clear that the view of the vice president is not his sole personal opinion, and he, on behalf of the leadership of the Afghan government, has made it clear not only to the electoral commissions but also to the people of Afghanistan and the international community that the Government of Afghanistan is not satisfied with the current status of the commission. And there is need for fundamental changes in these two commissions.

It is highly expected that the government of Afghanistan shows its practical will in reform of the two commissions. Both government and its international partners, especially UNAMA, should have close coordination to reform the Afghan electoral commissions; otherwise the repeated blow will be inflicted on democratic processes of the country. In fact, the failure in election process has seriously damaged the democratic process and it must be stopped here. Without fundamental changes in the structure of election commissions, it is not possible to hold three important coming elections (presidential election, provincial council election and district council election).

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