

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

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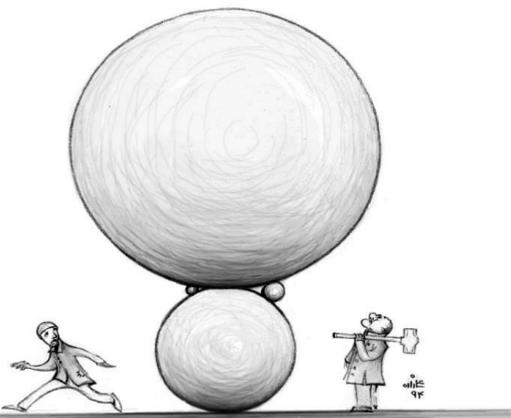
### IEC Integrity Is the Corner Stone for Credible & Transparent Elections

Recently, IEC has announced preliminary list of candidates nominated for Parliament for all provinces. This list included candidates who have been disqualified due to various reasons – mostly technical, for example candidates had failed to meet conditions for providing one thousand supporters' national identity papers (Tazkira). People of Afghanistan have noted that among these disqualified candidates, there are some influential and powerful persons who have been involved in murky activities in their provinces, which include smuggling, narcotics, illegal exploitation of mines and minerals to suit their vested interests, possession of illegal armed groups and illegal exploitation of their position in government and / or parliament. Supporters of some of these powerful candidates have already taken on social networks and are giving assurances that 'IEC has committed mistake', and that 'the issue of disqualification is already resolved with IEC...' etcetera and that 'our candidate will be cleared and contest elections...'. Though there are candidates with murky past records in the parliament and outside parliament who are qualified by IEC and their names are included in the preliminary list, people believe that the next stage of surfing of these candidates by Independent Election Complaint Commission (IECC) based on complaints from people about each individual candidate can further remove those candidates who have stain of corruption and misdeed on their hands. But this belief among the people of Afghanistan is rooted in the present IEC standing on their position concerning current disqualified candidates. Therefore, it is important that IEC stand strong on its decision concerning disqualification of certain candidates so that people can continue to trust IEC, hence credibility of IEC will prevail and people will flock to polling booths in thousands on the elections day to vote.

IEC should know that failure or success of the very existence of democracy, establishment of inclusive institutions and bringing about inclusive economic and social development of the people of Afghanistan are at stake and depend on transparent and fair and free elections. Keeping in view the current challenges put up before IEC by corrupt officials in the government, local and regional warlords and their access to power centers in the government, which they will definitely use to leverage their position and gerrymander, it is incumbent on IEC to face and defeat these challenges. By law, IEC is the most credible and indispensable independent organization in the country. It is a platform whereby people of Afghanistan's wishes are reflected without tampering in the process. Elections and electoral processes are important national events. Security forces put themselves on the line and sacrifice their lives in order to secure space for successful conduction of elections. They die in hundreds to achieve this goal. It is worth mentioning my personal account of a soldier whom I picked up from a military post en route to Kabul in Baghlan province while travelling from Kunduz, which was located right in the middle of an area checkered and attacked by insurgents frequently. The soldier, barely twenty-two years of age, asked for a left on compassionate basis to Parwan province – which was laying en route to Kabul. He was weeping profusely and told us that he got a message from Ghazni province about his brother's death. His brother was a soldier and on duty in Ghazni city. 'Their post was attacked by insurgents the night before'. He said 'out of total twenty-seven people on duty in that particular post, nine people were martyred – including his brother - and the rest were taken away as captive by insurgents...'. He was weeping badly. This is a point to ponder upon, one family sending two of their dearest ones to frontline to put their life on the line! There are hundreds of Afghan families who have sent their dearest ones in army and police lines for the sacred duty to protect the people of Afghanistan. These sacrifices should not go in vain only because of IEC succumbing to pressures from influential individuals. IEC should preserve integrity at any and all costs. This is the way forward for building a stronger and stable Afghanistan at this critical juncture.

Few words for Afghanistan's international friends, international community, regional and neighboring countries of Afghanistan: It is undeniable fact that regional powers, neighboring countries and international community – including countries whose military forces are in Afghanistan pursue their specific agendas in the framework of mandates given to them. They have huge impact on the success or failure of the upcoming elections in the country. IEC may not have the mechanisms and ground to face and stand strong against such a big tide with attempt to sway results and gerrymander in favor of certain candidates for their future niche in Afghan parliament, but it is incumbent on the government of Afghanistan to talk out all the worries with these stakeholders and reassure them about the fact that a stable and stronger Afghanistan can benefit all in the region in particular and in the world in general. Regional and international rivalries between neighbors of Afghanistan and major global powers have been taking huge toll on the country since last forty years now. It is time for these countries and powers to seek a common ground, agree on a viable mechanism to stabilize the country and let Afghanistan stand on her own feet. Continuation of ongoing debacle will continue to bleed resources, time and precious human lives of the stakeholder countries and Afghans. For international community and friends of Afghanistan, it is important to support legitimate Government and representatives of Afghanistan, buttress important national institutions including judiciary, police, army, support free market and provide opportunities for economic activities. A strong and centralized Afghan Government can effectively implement national strategies and exploit national resources including mines, ores, minerals, water, gems, gold and petroleum which are found and proven in big quantities in Afghanistan. A stronger and stable Afghanistan can deliver more benefits to stakeholders than a weak and unstable country, which can provide ungoverned space for terrorists and proxy armies to plan and disrupt peace in the region and the world.

IEC and IECC are important national institutions related to general elections in the country. Prosperity of Afghanistan depends on a fair and free elections and it is incumbent on IEC to make sure wishes of ordinary Afghans are translated in bringing real representatives of the people to the threshold of power and authority. This is the way out from ongoing debacle in the country. At this point in time, things are moving in the right directions at IEC and IECC, keeping in view all the challenges alluded to in the previous paragraphs. It is possible for IEC to deny access to disrupting hands and quarters during the electoral process. They can conduct relatively secure, fair and free elections resorting to universal values, their legal authority and by sharing all and everything with the people of Afghanistan in case they become under pressure from certain quarters. No one person and no one organizations have the right to interfere in IEC and IECC affairs. In the event such interferences are noted, IEC commissioners should make them public without delays. People of Afghanistan support democracy honest supporters of democracy. Let's stand strong and committed to protect Afghanistan's democratic institutions.



## Drought grips large parts of Afghanistan

By Mohammad Zahir Akbari

Afghanistan faces serious threat of drought after several decades of steady climate change across the country. At least 22 of 34 provinces are suffering from the drought crisis and nearly three million people are expected to become severely food insecure needing humanitarian assistance for survival. Water points and fountains across the country have dried up and the lack of rain and snow melt has made rivers run low or dry up completely. Faced with the lack of water, farmers have chosen to minimize their losses by delaying planting crops and reducing field sizes. However, a drought emergency task force has been set up by the Government to respond to the issue but it seems beyond their ability due to the vastness of the problem. "In many cases there was nothing farmers could do but watch the seeds dry out," quoted from Abdul Majid, the Food Security and Agriculture Cluster (FSAC) Coordinator of UN FAO.

The drought resulted in a shortage of grazing land and drinking water, affecting almost 95% of the farmers who rely on agriculture and livestock as their main source of income and food. Children living within these communities are more vulnerable, having to miss school so that they could find small jobs to help purchase basic household items. The shortage of water and fodder resulted in the deaths of livestock. In some areas, it is reported that at least 150,000 heads of livestock have perished due to the drought. According to some media reports, thousands of people migration have been recorded since the beginning of May moved to urban centers. Many families have been forced to sell the items in their house to buy food.

An estimated 100 families from the Bala Murghab district of Badghis have been forced to move to Herat to find alternative work due to failed crops and to access safe drinking water. The situation is further complicated, as a result of escalating conflict that often occurs at this time of year, leading to increased displacement and reduced access for humanitarian workers. Among the affected provinces, Badghis, Bamyan, Daykundi, Ghor, Helmand, Kandahar, Jawzjan, Nangarhar, Nimroz, Nuristan, Takhar, and Uruzgan are of critical priority for nutrition and water, sanitation, and hygiene assistance. Thirteen provinces, out of a country total of 34 provinces, received less than 30 % of their average annual precipitation in the period October 2017 to end February 2018.

Authorities from Daykundi estimated that the number of people who are going to be affected by the ongoing drought are around 267,000 people, more than one third of the population of the whole province. It is said that water scarcity has displaced between 70 and 100 people within Ghorak district of Hilmand province. Thus, in Badghis, nearly 4,000 people moved to Qala-e-Naw due to the drought while they extremely need food assistance.

There are several factors that strengthen droughts and also influence water quality such as climate change, agricultural activities, increasing population, types of water supplies, embedded technology

in water management sector, wastage of water, quality of sanitation activities, storage of raw water in dry season, quality of canalization network. In relevance to population growth and decreasing agricultural lands, the authorities are responsible to undertake certain measures such as prevention of water losing in traditional agricultural sectors and urban water system network, changing the consumption patterns, regulated plans for drought combating.

In case of climate change factor which is the most important one we need to draw national and international attentions as it is beyond capability of mere official units. With every passing decade, Afghanistan has lost 2 percent of its rain and snowfall due to Climate Change and its accompanying impacts on local and regional climates. Study indicate that average temperature across Afghanistan has increased by 0.6°C since 1960. This general warming across Afghanistan is in line with rising temperatures across the region in which Afghanistan is located.

In a statement released recently by the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) reads: "the extremely dry winter has affected 22 provinces across Afghanistan and now threatens to negatively impact the lives of one million people, with an additional two million who could feel its effects over the coming months." According to the statement, 23 - 30 % of water sources have gone dry. Food insecurity and reduced access to safe water are beginning to take their toll in the 10 worst affected provinces, where 20 to 30 % of water sources are reportedly dry. The impact on children could be devastating, as these areas have pre-existing high rates of malnutrition. Without adequate nutritious food and safe water for drinking, as well as for hygiene and sanitation, children's health will only worsen.

As a final point, Afghanistan is suffering from multiple issues such social insecurity, corruption, addiction, chronic poverty and so on but none of which would be achieved without food security for the people of Afghanistan. It is hunger and unemployment that are partly responsible for driving the vicious cycle of war and conflicts in Afghanistan. In fact, we need to have short term and long term plan in order to cope with growing crisis. For short term plan, according to UNICEF, emergency nutrition assistance is needed for 92 000 children and 8 500 pregnant and lactating women. UNICEF estimates also show that between July and December 2018, some 121 000 acutely malnourished children under five and 33 000 pregnant and lactating women could need life-saving nutrition services. In long term plan, it is imperative upon the government of Afghanistan to renew its commitment to moving forward and gradual implementation of Afghanistan National Development Strategy as the country's second most important national document after the Constitution.

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## Populism's Corrupt Core

By James A. Goldston

Populist electoral victories around the world in recent years have led many to conclude that liberal democracy is under assault. But the arrest this week of Malaysia's former prime minister on corruption charges is one of several signs suggesting that widespread predictions of the global demise of liberal democracy are premature.

The implication of the doom-and-gloom view is that liberal democracy's defenders cannot reclaim the moral high ground until they have reexamined their own political and economic assumptions. Yet it is a mistake to think that the rise of autocrats is all about ideology, or that it represents a widespread rejection of democracy, liberalism, or human and civil rights. Today's elected demagogues are motivated not so much by principle as by power and greed – they are in it for themselves, their families, and their cronies. Restoring balance to our off-kilter world requires that we expose the rank corruption at the heart of the new illiberalism.

In Hungary, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's friends and family members have grown rich on government loans and public contracts. In Orbán's hometown of Felcsút, one crony has overseen the construction of a soccer stadium that seats 4,000 people, even though the total population of the town is just 1,600. Whereas "corruption before 2010 was rather a dysfunction of the system," notes the watchdog group Transparency International, "Today, it's a part of the system."

In Turkey in 2014, people close to President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, including several senior members of his ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP), were implicated in a money-laundering scheme that purportedly sought to bypass US-led sanctions on Iran. The scandal led to the resignation of four cabinet ministers, and to the release of audio recordings in which Erdoğan allegedly can be heard telling his son to dispose of millions of dollars of ill-gotten funds. But Erdoğan dismissed the allegations as a set-up, and Turkish prosecutors eventually quashed the case.

In Malaysia, former Prime Minister Najib Razak and his associates now stand accused of pillaging more than \$4.5 billion from 1MDB, a government investment fund. According to the US Department of Justice, the pilfered money was used to purchase high-end real estate in Manhattan, mansions in Los Angeles, paintings by Monet and Van Gogh, a corporate jet, a yacht, and other luxury goods.

And in the United States, of course, questions continue to swirl around the private interests of President Donald Trump and his family, and how they may bear on his behavior in office.

The irony is that anger over corruption played a critical role in fueling the current wave of populist autocrats. So, to defend liberal democracy, we must reclaim the anti-corruption mantle. By redistributing stolen assets from political and corporate thieves and their legal and financial enablers, anti-corruption campaigns do not just hold the powerful to account. They can also address inequality – and thus the widespread frustration that populists have exploited.

But fighting corruption also means shining a spotlight on – and prosecuting – those who threaten, kill, or otherwise thwart journalists

working to expose abuses of power. Freedom of expression and other fundamental rights are not elitist luxuries, as authoritarians claim. They are indispensable for safeguarding free societies.

Moreover, a concerted campaign against corruption could serve as a unifying force in countries with deep political divisions. While a majoritarian government can ride roughshod over the interests of minorities, corrupt regimes steal from everyone. That is why corruption has provoked mass protests from Bucharest to Brasilia over the past year.

To be sure, those in power can turn anti-corruption campaigns into a political tool. In China, President Xi Jinping has made deft use of anti-corruption purges to eliminate political adversaries and secure near-absolute power. But this is all the more reason for proponents of liberal democracy to redouble their own efforts to combat violations of the public trust.

Fortunately, those efforts already have a strong track record. In the US, four decades of increasingly robust prosecutions under the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act have punished misconduct around the world and recovered billions of dollars in stolen assets. And despite Trump's own long-standing criticisms of the FCPA, he has yet to blunt its enforcement activities (though that may yet happen).

Likewise, in France, prosecutors recently charged a former president and a leading business tycoon with large-scale corruption in Africa. In the United Kingdom, the government has just adopted rules requiring that all British overseas territories – notorious havens for dark money – publicly list the real owners of registered companies by the end of 2020. And in Spain, the long-ruling Partido Popular recently lost a no-confidence vote following a criminal investigation of financial malfeasance that sent its treasurer to prison.

But despite these signs of progress, more action is needed. Anti-corruption enforcement remains uneven across different jurisdictions. To address transnational financial transactions, we must build stronger international networks of prosecutors and investigators.

At the same time, more governments should follow the UK's example, by ending the practice of "beneficial ownership" by secret third parties. Owners of some of the most expensive apartments in New York City have gone to great effort – much of it legal – to keep their identities hidden, by registering through trusts, limited liability companies, or other entities.

More broadly, public and private donors should bolster their support for civil-society organizations and independent media. These institutions can track and expose corruption, explain how it implicates powerful political figures, and push state actors to sanction those responsible.

Reining in corruption will not be easy, given that many economies are dependent on investment flows linked to criminal activity. But the consequences of doing nothing are clear. Corruption is a primary driver of populism and the retreat from liberal values. So the next time someone asks you what happened to liberal democracy, tell them to follow the money.

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