

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



July 29, 2018

Ethnic Politics: The Cause of Ethnic Violence

In Afghan Politics, ethnicity is a salient cleavage within the political spheres of the nation. In our politics, where ethnic parties dominate, this is the case. Despite the differences in the salience of ethnicity, our country has had multiethnic coalitions following post 9/11 attack of the United States for elections and before it for fighting with the Taliban or other ethnic groups in the country. Our country has had different levels of successes and failures with multiethnic coalitions in the past. Ethnicity is a highly salient cleavage in Afghanistan. Political leadership is based on ethnic identity, and those who become political leaders are expected to serve their ethnic communities, which results in zero sum game for those who are involved. There is no agreement about the percentage of the ethnic groups, especially the four main ethnic groups namely Pashtuns, Tajiks, Hazaras and Uzbics in the country. However, based on some assessments Pashtuns make up around 40%, Tajiks make up around 39%, Hazaras account for about 15% of the population, and The Uzbek and Turkmen minorities in Afghanistan make up about 10% of the population of Afghanistan. The formation of multi ethnic coalition sometimes has resulted to success such as 2004 Presidential election that Hamid Karzai won the election and most often has failed in Afghanistan as different ethnic coalitions were formed during 90s. Despite the success of forming a coalition government (NUG) in 2014, the success of the multiethnic coalition was short-lived. Different partners began to promote hysteria and allowed their supporters to issue warnings of the dangers of ethnic conflicts in the country. This had very negative impacts on the public perception in the country and weakened the public trust in the government. This situation finally led to the formation of the Afghanistan Grand National Coalition of those opposed to the president Ashraf Ghani and his team. Sadly, the language of the ethnic groups' leaders against the president is similar to the 90s, a period that Afghanistan witnessed its harshest civil conflict. This zero sum mentality matches with the violence that erupted following Najib was ousted from power in 90s. Both sides erupted in ethnic violence against each other. And the main cause of zero sum mentality is favoring one ethnic group over others, that results in great animosity from other ethnic groups. In such case, members of other ethnic groups feel that their ethnic group is economically, politically and socially disadvantaged, both before and after the violence. According to studies, the mechanism at play in Afghanistan is zero sum ethnic politics and institutionalized violence. Presence of politicized ethnic parties has led to ethnic outbidding in Afghanistan. This ethnic outbidding looks to be largely responsible for the ethnic violence. It also seems that institutionalized violence relates to the presence of political ethnicity in Afghanistan. In a nutshell, political ethnicity can be used to institutionalize violence, as was the case in 90s in Afghanistan. Afghanistan government shall be very cautious of consequences of political ethnicity and shall conduct researches into the relationship between politicized ethnicity and the institutionalization of violence, which could help multiethnic communities and policy makers in their management of multiethnic issues. Also, further research requires to be conducted into the relationship between a lack of politicized ethnicity and a lack of institutionalized violence to determine whether this is a pattern or not. Social scholars hold that ethnicity is not salient because it is non-issue, politically. The research findings show that ethnicity may be salient to one's personal identity, but it is not salient in the public realm likely because it has not been politicized. It is necessary to conduct research whether or not ethnicity does matter in one's personal life in Afghanistan, and if it does, how people are able to keep it separate from political issues. Let us not be burden by the weight of past, but let us not forget its lessons. The last four decades have given us considerable experience in confronting and coping with inter-ethnic issues. Based on these lessons, Afghan leaders must seek to build a country open to diversity, rooted in a strong foundation of democratic governance and respect for human rights, and co-operative in its neighbored relations.



Lack of Global Leadership Spurs Instability in the Middle East

By James M. Dorsey

With multiple Middle Eastern disputes threatening to spill out of control, United Arab Emirates minister of state for foreign affairs Anwar Gargash acknowledged what many in the Middle East have long said privately: the UAE's recently-found assertiveness and determination to punch above its weight stems from its inability to rely on traditional allies like the United States. What is true for the UAE is equally true for Saudi Arabia and Israel. It also shapes responses of those on the US's list of bad guys, including Iran, the Palestinians, and Iranian-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen. Perceptions of US unreliability were initially sparked by former US president Obama Barak's Middle East policies, including his declared pivot to Asia, support of the 2011 Arab popular revolts, criticism of Israel, and willingness to engage with Iran. President Donald J. Trump has proven to be more partisan than Mr. Obama in his backing of the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Israel and his confrontational approach of Iran. Yet, his mercurial unpredictability has made him no less unreliable in the perception of US allies even if he appears to have granted Middle Eastern partners near carte-blanche. "We are ready to take up more of the burden of security in our own neighbourhood. We know that we can no longer rely on the United States, or the United Kingdom, to lead such military operations," Mr. Gargash said in a speech in London. Mr. Trump's partisan approach as well as his refusal to reign in US allies has led to potential escalation of multiple conflicts, including the war in Yemen, mounting tension in Gaza between Israel and Hamas, a race for control of ports and military facilities in the Horn of Africa, Israeli challenging of Iran's presence in Syria, and confrontation with Iran. To be sure, the UAE, driven by a quest to control ports in the Horn of Africa and create a string of military bases, together with Saudi Arabia, played a key role in reconciling Ethiopia and Eritrea after more than two decades of cold war. More often however, US allies appear to be increasingly locked into pathways that threaten mounting violence, if not outright military confrontation. Bad guys help fuel escalation. The escalatory policies of US allies as well as their opponents are frequently designed to either suck the United States and/or the international community into stepped-up support, including military intervention, or favourable mediation as a means of achieving their goals through negotiation. Arguably, and perhaps in a twist of irony, escalatory policies often constitute a conscious or unconscious clamour for US leadership in the absence of other powers such as China, Russia and Europe, able or willing to shoulder responsibility. This week's escalation of the Yemen war that threatens the free flow of oil with Saudi Arabia halting oil shipments through the Bab el Mandeb strait and an unverified claim by Houthi rebels to have targeted Abu Dhabi's international airport constitutes the latest fallout of US failure. Analysts see the halt in oil shipments as an effort to get major military powers, including the United States, Europe, and Muslim allies like Pakistan and Egypt who have shied away from sending troops to Yemen, to intervene to defeat the Houthis. Many of those powers depend on oil shipments through Bab el Mandeb.

The bid to suck them into the Yemen war is an effort to secure a victory that neither Saudi Arabia or the UAE have been able to achieve in more than three years of fighting that has devastated Yemen. By the same token, Houthi rebels have sought to gain leverage in stalled United Nations peace efforts by targeting Saudi cities with ballistic missiles and making claims of attacks like on the Abu Dhabi airport that they have so far failed to back up with evidence. "The real impact (of the halt) would be felt if other countries followed suit and halted shipments," said Wael Mahdi, an energy reporter and columnist for Saudi newspaper Arab News, referring to Kuwait, Iraq and the UAE that also ship through Bab el Mandeb. Mr. Mahdi argued that without a total halt of the flow of oil through Bab el Mandeb "things appear under control for the (oil) market," but, he warned, "how can the world's oil community be sure that the waterway is safe?" In what amounted to a call for foreign intervention, Mr. Mahdi went on to caution that "countries might react too late. Will the world's powers wait longer...before they ensure the safety of this vital waterway?" Badr al-Khashti, chairman of Kuwait Oil Tanker Company (KOTC) disclosed that Kuwait was studying whether to halt oil exports through the strait. Mr. Al-Khashti's statement was notable given that Kuwait has sought to steer a middle ground in Saudi Arabia and the UAE's disputes with Iran and Qatar. Similarly, Iraq, despite warming relations with Saudi Arabia, may not want to irritate Iran, with whom it maintains close ties. External powers responded cautiously to the Saudi halt of oil shipments. US and EU spokespeople said they were aware of the Saudi move. Captain Bill Urban, a spokesman for US Central Command said: "We remain vigilant and ready to work with our partners to preserve the free flow of commerce throughout the region." An EU spokesman noted that attacks on vessels in the strait were "a threat to international trade movements and heighten regional tensions." US recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital as well as unequal support for Israel's hardhanded efforts aided by Egypt and the Palestine Authority to squeeze Hamas and suppress sustained protests along the Gaza-Israel border have emboldened Israeli hardliners, prompted Palestinians to refuse US mediation and, together with Hamas moves to capitalize on the mounting tension, threaten to spark renewed military confrontation that neither side wants. The United States and Iran are locked into an escalating war of words threatening further interruptions of the flow of oil as well as doom and gloom against a backdrop of the imposition of harsh US sanctions and the US and Saudi Arabia toying with attempting to spur ethnic unrest in Iran in an effort to topple the regime in Tehran. Said political scientist Ian Bremmer: "The lack of clear, uncontested international leadership is everywhere we look these days... Yet nowhere is the destabilizing impact of this trend more obvious, and pressing, than in the Middle East... The result... will be more uncertainty, more assertive behaviour, more lines crossed and rising fears that no one has the power to contain the risk of new forms of Middle East conflict." Dr. James M. Dorsey is a senior fellow at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, co-director of the University of Wuerzburg's Institute for Fan Culture, and co-host of the New Books in Middle Eastern Studies podcast

Dostum welcomed with Deadlyattacks

By Mohammad Zahir Akbari

After a few weeks of relatively calm, once again Daesh Takfiri terrorist group attacked Kabul targeting the Afghan Vice President, Abdul Rashid Dostum welcome-convoy. The attack happened as scores of people were leaving the airport after had welcomed the Vice President. The toll from the suicide attack has risen to 23 and at least 107 others were wounded in the Sunday's powerful explosion, as the health ministry said on Monday. The health ministry warned the latest toll number could possibly change. "This is the first time I have seen a suicide attack," quoted from one witness. "People were collecting human flesh with their hands," he said, shaking as he spoke. "What is going on in Afghanistan?" The suicide bomber was on foot, interior ministry spokesman Najib Danish said, adding that civilians, including a child, and security force members were among the casualties. On contrary to this, Mr Dostum was warmly welcomed by a large number of political leaders, the leaders of the National Coalition for the Salvation of Afghanistan, high-level government officials and hundreds of his fans in capital Kabul. The Wolesi Jirga or lower house of parliament, on Monday, also welcomed First Vice-president Gen. Abdul Rashid Dostum's homecoming and stressed the need for consolidating national unity and finding peaceful solution to political wrangling... Dostum went to Turkey in May 2017 as he said for medical check-ups and some family reasons. He was travelling in an armored vehicle and narrowly escaped the attack. The attack was claimed by the Islamic State group through its official Amaq news agency, according to the SITE intelligence monitoring group. It is said that President Ashraf Ghani, might have given the green light for Dostum to come home to stabilize the north and secure Uzbek support before next year's presidential election, which he is widely expected to contest. His return, took place after 20 day successive protests in several provinces across northern Afghanistan, his traditional power base. The protests were launched when the security forces arrested Nezamuddin Qaisari - the special representative of Mr. Dostum - in northern Faryab province. The protesters demanded the release of Mr. Qaisari and the return of Mr. Dostum. The Protests spread to eleven provinces in past days, and protesters closed a number of election commission offices and a number of trade routes in the provinces. "We don't trust the government. We will continue our protests unless General Dostum tells us to stop," quoted from Ehsanullah Qowanch, a protest leader in Faryab province. Another protester, Massoud Khan, said: "We have been on the streets for 20 days now. We are not going to stop our protests unless our demands are met." Many countries, national and international organization strongly condemned the brutal attacks on the welcoming convey of Mr. Dostum. "This was a senseless attack that served no purpose other than to spread terror and try to promote division," said Tadamichi Yamamoto, the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for Afghanistan. "The organizers of these attacks, those supporting these cynical crimes, must be

held accountable and brought to justice." Attacks targeting civilians are violations of international humanitarian law. Under international humanitarian law, such attacks may amount to war crimes. The United Nations maintains that all parties to the conflict must at all times uphold their obligations to protect civilians from harm. On behalf of the United Nations in Afghanistan, Yamamoto expressed his condolences to the loved ones of those killed in the attack and wished a full and speedy recovery to those injured. The UN Security Council also condemned the use of violence by the Taliban and the Islamic State group to disrupt Afghanistan's electoral process, a day after 23 people were killed in a suicide bombing in Kabul. According to UNAMA's 2018 mid-year report on civilian casualties, suicide and complex attacks by anti-government insurgents killed 427 civilians and injured 986, a 22 per cent increase in the total casualties from the same period in 2017. "At a time when Afghans are exploring ways toward much-needed peace, we must not allow such attacks to deter our collective resolve to make progress on ending the conflict," said Yamamoto. President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani, First Vice President General Abdul Rashid Dostum, and Chief Executive of Jamiat Islami Ata Mohammad Noor strongly condemned yesterday's deadly suicide attack in Kabul city. Calling the attack an act of the enemies of Afghanistan, Gen. Dostum said the enemies think that they can create barriers on the way of the people of Afghanistan in their efforts for development. However, he said the Afghan nation and the government of Afghanistan will continue to their efforts for a bright future. The Chief Executive of Jamiat Islami Ata Mohammad Noor also reacted at the attack and said he strongly condemns the bombing that left a number of innocent civilians' dead or wounded. The Office of the President, ARG Palace, said the enemies of Afghanistan once again committed a crime that resulted into the martyrdom of a number of civilians and security personnel while leaving a number of others wounded. A statement by ARG Palace stated that President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani hailed the security forces for their sacrifices and ensuring security of the people. The attacks which usually carried out by so-called Islamic State are more dreadful and very meaningful in comparison to Taliban; two years ago, at the same days they killed hundreds of protesters organized by the enlighten movement in Kabul. They have always tried to target the main values of the Afghan nation such as unity, diversity and democracy. The purpose of the Islamic State is to divide and further weaken the government and striking at the legitimacy of democracy, unity and diversity. On the other hand, they have good experience of his presence against terrorist groups, especially against themselves. Mohammad Zahir Akbari is the permanent writer of the Daily Outlook Afghanistan. He can be reached at mohammadzahirakbari@gmail.com

Chairman / Editor-in-Chief: Moh. Reza Huwaida
Vice Chairman/ Senior Editor: Moh. Sakhi Rezaie
Email: outlookafghanistan@gmail.com
Phone: 0093 (799) 005019/777-005019
www.outlookafghanistan.net



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