

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



June 10, 2018

## Eid Ceasefire: an Opportunity for Diplomacy

The Afghan Taliban surprised the world with their three-day ceasefire over the Eid holiday in the middle of June. This announcement came after a ceasefire announced by the government on Thursday. However they have excluded the international forces and they have preserved the right of self-defense against any attacks for themselves.

Though, this ceasefire is for a short time, but it is a unique event during the course of more than four decades of war and conflict in the country. We hope that the members of the Taliban participate in the gatherings in public gatherings during the Eid festivities, because it will bring them closer to the society to be once more integrated in the it and distance themselves from the insurgent groups. Though it is very idealistic but it is possible to put an end to the prolog conflict if there is a strong political will among the different sides of the conflict. The government of Afghanistan has termed this move of the Taliban as "a good start", and has added that the Afghan government expects, "the window that has been opened should turn to better opportunities". The government of Afghanistan and all the Afghan citizens expect the Taliban act positively against the demands of Ulama and focus more on stopping the war in the country.

The Afghan government and its international partners need to make sure they use this time in the best possible way. They cannot afford to miss this opportunity and realize we have lost the best chance in after decades of war. Indeed much depends on how all the relevant factors involved seize this opportunity to turn it into a base of longer ceasefire and peace agreement in the country.

The NUG leadership has shown it is willing to engage with the Taliban and HN in a very different way. The NUG has repeatedly announced its readiness to talk with the Taliban and HN and has repeatedly called them to come to negotiations table to reach mutually acceptable solutions.

There is no doubt that time will test the goodwill of all sides. Linking the ceasefire announcement by the Taliban to the unconditional ceasefire announced by the government, we may conclude that the decision of the NUG has been promising, and so far taken a very positive step towards putting an end to conflict in Afghanistan, even if it is for 3 days; because it can be changed to a basis for better understanding and mutual cooperation between the conflicting parties to put aside their differences through a constructive dialogue.

In addition to this, goodwill is not enough. In other words, it needs strong will and wisdom to shape our common future in order to tackle our common challenges in Afghanistan. Challenges in Afghanistan are very complicated and each one needs to be addressed in a unique manner in order to reach to a viable peace in the country. It is clear as crystal that some challenges have been here for decades, some are relatively new, and some may remain for a long time in the future. Issues of religion and ethnicity have been mixed with a fight for regional hegemony in the country for several centuries. Regional actors look for different agendas, for historical reasons and because of their current interests in Afghanistan. Amid such an explosive mix, we shall fight for greater opportunities fought by secular Afghans across the country.

This ceasefire is a test for multi-lateralism, as well because it reinvigorates those who still put trust in the multilateral system to address the national and international conflicts. It actually shows that nothing is as effective as working together when looking for lasting solutions to a given problem. This approach emphasizes on: dialogue, diplomacy, partnership, perseverance; a win-win approach.

The three day ceasefire announced by the Taliban insurgents was a surprising move that gave hope to the people that, first of all they would have a peaceful Eid for 3 days. At the same time it is a sign of different approach of the Taliban group to the ceasefires and peace negotiations offered by the government in the past. Though, it is a short period, but in terms of diplomacy, it is a big achievement for the NUG. So far, it has proven that a multilateralism approach aiming at dialogue, diplomacy, partnership, and perseverance; a win-win approach prevails.



## 2018 World Cup Potentially set to Become Latest Middle Eastern battlefield

By James M. Dorsey

A possible Saudi-Iranian clash on the soccer pitch promises to be a highlight of this month's World Cup in Russia.

It would add significant drama to multiple soccer-related battles involving Saudi attempts to control Middle Eastern and Asian governance of the sport at the expense of Iran as well as challenges to Qatar's 2022 hosting rights and its holding of World Cup broadcasting rights that threaten to deprive Gulf fans of access to the Russian tournament's matches.

For the clash to happen, both Iran, the highest ranked Middle Eastern team to have qualified for the 2018 tournament, and Saudi Arabia, widely viewed as an outsider, would have to make it out of the group stage. That could prove to be for both a tall order.

Nonetheless, the two teams' presence in Russia is likely to shine a spotlight on the covert wars between Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Iran as well as a related dispute with 2022 World Cup host Qatar, which did not qualify for this year's tournament, even if failure to perform fails to bring the kingdom and the Islamic republic face to face on the pitch.

Iran plays into the dispute with Qatar that this week commemorates the imposition a year of a diplomatic and economic embargo by Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain and Egypt in part because of the Gulf state's relationship with the Islamic republic. Already, Gulf fans are feeling the impact with uncertainty over whether the boycotting states will allow broadcasts of matches by BeIN, the sports subsidiary of the Qatar-owned Al Jazeera television network that owns the broadcasting rights.

The boycotting states are demanding that Qatar shutter Al Jazeera or at least curb its freewheeling reporting and talk shows that often challenge the policies of countries like Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

As a matter of principle, BeIN has been blocked in the boycotting states for the past year. While Saudi Arabia has sought to ignore Qatar's rights by creating beOutQ, a 10-channel bootlegging operation based in the kingdom, the UAE has backed down from its initial blockage of BeIN broadcasts but maintained its jamming of Al Jazeera.

beOutQ transmits over Arabsat, a Riyadh-based satellite provider Arabsat owned by Saudi Arabia.

Unable to challenge the Saudi action in Saudi courts, Qatar has urged world soccer body FIFA to take action against what it described as Saudi pirate broadcasters.

In a soccer-crazy part of the world in which the sport is politically sensitive because it evokes the kind of deep-seated passion that religion and nationalist sentiment does, Qatar appears to have decided to stir the pot by blocking BeIN broadcasts to the UAE.

"We regret to inform that our customers are temporarily unable to view BeIN sports channels and packages as a result of a

decision by the broadcaster of BeIN sports," UAE telecom and digital television company Du said in a statement this weekend on its website.

Qatar's move appeared to be designed to force UAE carriers to accept commercial terms. In doing so it would score a political success by breaching the boycott.

Its strategy appeared to be working with Du's competitor. Etisalat, announcing 24 hours after the Du statement that customers could sign up for BeIN broadcasts of World Cup matches.

The dispute nevertheless reflects deep-seated disagreement within the lame-duck six-nation Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) over the campaign against Qatar. Oman, which like Qatar maintains close ties to Iran and has offered to mediate, sought to thwart the Saudi bootlegging effort by banning the import of beOutQ decoders.

"The import of these decoders, called beOutQ, was banned because they violate the law on intellectual property," an Omani official said. Oman was responding to a Qatari request.

Qatar's broadcasting rights are but one soccer battlefield on which the Gulf dispute is being fought.

Saudi and UAE media together with UK tabloid The Sun exploited this week's London launch of the Foundation for Sports Integrity by Jamie Fuller, a prominent Australian campaigner for a clean-up of global soccer governance.

The launch involved a reiteration of assertions of Qatari wrongdoing in its successful World Cup bid that media like Abu Dhabi's The National and Saudi Arabia's Al Arabiya projected as pressure on FIFA to deprive Qatar of its hosting rights.

In a further bid to complicate life for Qatar, Saudi Arabia has backed a proposal to speed up the expansion of the World Cup to 48 teams from 32, which is now scheduled for 2026, by making it already applicable to the 2022 World Cup.

If adopted, Qatar could be forced to share the hosting of the 2022 tournament with others in the region. Iran has already offered to help Qatar.

The Saudi-UAE moves come on the back of a two-pronged Saudi effort to gain a measure of control of global soccer governance.

As a result, Saudi Arabia's bid for regional soccer hegemony runs parallel to US President Donald J. Trump's vow to isolate Iran and makes a mockery of global sports governance's insistence that sports and politics are separate.

The joker in the Saudi bid are East Asian nations with China, Japan and South Korea in the lead, that are powerhouses within the AFC and maintain close economic and diplomatic ties to the kingdom but have studiously remained on the side lines of its struggle with Iran. East Asian nations are unlikely to want to be sucked into Saudi Arabia's battles.

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## Getting to Yes With Kim Jong-un

By Yoon Young-kwan

Has North Korea's ruler, Kim Jong-un, made a strategic decision to trade away his nuclear program, or is he just engaged in another round of deceptive diplomacy, pretending that he will denuclearize in exchange for material benefits for his impoverished country?

This is, perhaps, the key question in the run-up to the summit between Kim and US President Donald Trump in Singapore on June 12. Until then, no one will know the answer, perhaps not even Kim himself.

Optimists tend to believe that Kim's declared intention to denuclearize is sincere. They highlight the fact that North Korea's economy has changed fundamentally since he succeeded his father, Kim Jong-il, in 2011. It is now more open, with foreign trade accounting for almost half of GDP, the result of a gradual marketization process that began in the mid-1990s. But with this openness comes vulnerability, which explains Kim's active diplomatic efforts to prevent serious economic disruption from the existing international sanctions regime.

Unlike his father, the 34-year-old Kim has been active in pursuing pro-market economic growth and may be aiming to emulate Deng Xiaoping, the architect of China's reforms in the late 1970s. Kim's recent sacking of three senior old-guard military officials may hint that he is ready to offer some important concessions to prepare a favorable diplomatic environment for concentrating on economic development. The key question remains whether Trump is now ready to embrace Kim's North Korea as President Richard Nixon did with Deng's China.

Pessimists, however, caution against believing that Kim is serious about denuclearization. There is so far no evidence, they argue, that Kim is different from his father (and grandfather, Kim Il-sung), when it comes to adhering to international agreements. They are skeptical, for example, that North Korea will cooperate fully on three major issues.

First, despite Kim's declaration, it remains unclear whether he is agreeing to "complete, verifiable, and irreversible dismantlement" (CVID) of North Korea's nuclear weapons program. His commitment remains aspirational and lacks substance or operational content. Second, given North Korea's bad track record, the pessimists think it unlikely that Kim will permit intrusive nuclear inspections, which is a critical component of CVID. Finally, North Korea has not yet clarified the terms of its denuclearization. Its past official position - withdrawal of US troops from South Korea and an end to the bilateral alliance, would be a non-starter.

But there may be a way to achieve denuclearization that satisfies both optimists and pessimists. To find it requires taking a step back and considering the most fundamental reason for the diplomatic failures of the last three decades: the high level of mutual distrust, which has made a small and weak country like North Korea, surrounded by big powers, paranoid about its own security. In order to address this problem at the root, the US should have taken a political approach, rather than focusing repeatedly on concluding a narrowly defined military-security deal.

For example, President George H.W. Bush's administration declined North Korea's offer to establish diplomatic relations in 1991-92, when the fall of the Soviet Union heightened Kim Il-sung's sense of insecurity. Likewise, North Korea's major complaint regarding the October 1994 Geneva Agreed Framework was that the US did not keep its promise to improve political relations with North Korea. The Clinton administration tried a political approach in 2000, but it was too little too late.

The first Trump-Kim summit may not be able to resolve all three major issues dividing the US and North Korea all at once. But that does not mean the summit will be a failure. For the first time, the US is tackling the fundamental cause of the North Korea problem, rather than focusing on its symptoms. And this is why Trump's seemingly impromptu decision to meet Kim face to face is meaningful and productive, especially if he can bolster Kim's confidence that he and his regime will be safe without nuclear weapons and that the international community will help him to focus on economic growth.

That said, Trump would be well advised to leave the details of the denuclearization process in the hands of diplomats who have much experience in dealing with North Korea. In the meantime, he will need to rebuild an international coalition to maintain effective economic sanctions, which is the most powerful leverage for persuading Kim to accept CVID. Here, close cooperation with China will be essential. Moreover, the US should reward critical concessions by North Korea - for example, permission to conduct intrusive inspections of its entire nuclear program by international inspectors - even before the completion of CVID. There are of course no guarantees that it will work. What is clear is that successful denuclearization of North Korea will require a combination of bold political decisions - say, formally ending the Korean War, opening liaison offices, or relaxing some economic sanctions - and realistic prudence.

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