

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

Daily Outlook

AFGHANISTAN

The Leading Independent Newspaper

June 27, 2018

Voting Along Ethnic Lines: A Democratic Practice Guided by Ethnic Patterns

On 20th October 2018, Afghanistan would hold its third elections of Wolsi Jirga and first elections of District Councils since the democratic opening in 2001. The assessment of people voting behavior shows that, they will vote along the ethnic lines once more. The experience of the conflict prone countries including Afghanistan shows that, there are internal unrests and public dissatisfactions after the elections in these countries. For instance, Afghanistan's presidential election in 2014 was plunged into crisis after Dr. Abdullah asked for halting to vote counting, suspended cooperation with election authorities and called for a UN commission to mediate over cases of "blatant fraud". The same crisis had happened in the previous presidential election as well. As the voting pattern not only has not changed but also has been empowered in the country, it is not difficult to foresee the recurrence of such crisis for the Wolsi Jirga and District Councils in Afghanistan.

However, the question that requires to be answered is that, why the Afghans vote along ethnic lines?

The ultimate answer to this question may be: ethnicity. But I believe ethnicity is not the only significant marker in our politics. Social scholars hold that there are causal mechanisms behind Afghan electoral behavior. Socio-economic policies and issues affecting the economic well-being of groups, communities or individuals are equally important factors behind the Afghan voting patterns that cause post electoral crisis in the country.

As a rule, the pre-election campaign in Afghanistan is marked by a political rhetoric with strong ethnic undertones and a mobilization that divides the country along ethnic lines. It is evident that the election discourse of the candidates is not focused on the national interests and national level priorities. This approach just will push the politicians to further incite the people around ethnic priorities and rhetoric. As a result, the politicians shall highlight the demands of their ethnic group that have not been met by government. According to the studies, the end-result of an ethnic electoral battle is that the voters are driven exclusively by ethnic grudges and loyalties. Then the electoral violence with an ethnic character is usually imminent. The reaction of the International community in general is mixed; some of them react with surprise and shock to the events following the election, others interpret them simply as the inevitable culmination of political tensions that had been developing for decades in the country. In conflict-prone countries the uproar and ethnic violence is not however something new, except perhaps for the scale of it. And the international media usually cover up the post-election violence as an ethnic conflict.

Although there certainly is an ethnic dimension to the conflict arising after the general elections, the fundamental issues are more complex than just ethnicity. Social scholars assume that "violence is a process, not an event. Based on this violent acts could be impulsive, but they are more often the product of a longer sequence of historical decisions and political actions". There is a consensus that what usually triggers the post election violence in Afghanistan is a flawed election with wide spread fraud across the country.

What is evident is that elections and elections results are vital to the Afghan people. They consider it a political framework that can ensure their representation in the government. This representation can ensure their relative to the national scarce resources, policy making decisions that have direct and indirect impacts on their current and future life.

The electoral violence in Afghanistan and its reasons are the negative consequences of the wrong policies of the governments of Afghanistan in the past. Such policies not only have further dividend the Afghan citizens along the ethnic lines but have acted as a main barrier against shaping a national interest line: a line with huge potentials to mobilize and unite all Afghan citizens pursuing one shared goal to live in peace, harmony and have a prosperous country. Reaching to this dream is not impossible. There have been many countries in the world with the same problems which our country is facing today. What they have done is acknowledging to the wrong ethnic policies pursued in the past and implementing a holistic and broad based nation building policies aiming at including all the nation in the national processes, equal distribution of resources and opportunities among all their citizens to ensure their socio-economic well being.

The Depreciating Effect of Afghan Currency Value on People's Lives

By Mohammad Zahir Akbari

Since about a year, Afghan money has lost its value insofar as unprecedented in nearly past two decades in exchange for the US dollar. This news is not only a concern of the Afghan money exchange Union but has negatively affected on the daily life of people. Economic analysts say that the impoverishment of Afghan money directly affects the people's living's standard and thus will weaken the Afghan economy. Currently, one dollar is close to 72.85 AFN. It is said that the Central Bank of Afghanistan inject the US dollar twice a week, while, according to experts and money exchangers it is neither a permanent solution nor enough to keep the value of Afghani stable. The Afghan government needs to take regular and long-term plans to increase national income, domestic production and exports to maintain the national currency stable. Given that Afghanistan is an import country and that large transactions are conducted with the dollar, the rise of the dollar against the Afghani currency normally effect ordinary people as they are to do their jobs and transactions with Afghani money. So, high exchange rate will directly reduce their living standards and purchasing power. The only solution to increase the value of the Afghani against the foreign currency is to increase the economic strength and national income of Afghanistan.

Unfortunately, the central bank, as a policymaker and responsible institution for the stability of the Afghan currency has not done anything effective, except direct intervention by pumping dollars to maintain its value. Whereas, the currency policy is all economic policy which affect the supply and demand of currencies, in particular the exchange rate of domestic currency against foreign currencies. Other countries, never allow to use direct-policy (Direction Action) using the Auction tool, but the central bank has relied on this policy inappropriately. This shows ineffectiveness of the Central Bank of Afghanistan as the value of Afghan currencies today is decreasing with the passing of every moment.

However, recently officials from the Central Bank of Afghanistan (CBA) said that the value of the Afghani currency continues to drop against the US dollar in the face of ongoing political tension in the country. "The tensions we witnessed in the country over the past two months is one of the key reasons behind the price hikes and the dropping of the Afghani currency against the dollar; these issues need to be resolved, because it has major implications," said Khalil Sediq, Chairman.

According to some of the parliament members, the current currency falls is really 'worrysome' as this would worsen economic problems in the country. Comparing to few years ago, one dollar was around 50AFs but it jumped to 72.80 now and if no steps were taken for stabilizing the currency's value, people would face serious economic problems. In the past, Da Afghanistan Bank (DAB) would offer millions of dollars to the market for maintaining the value of Afghani but now

either the amount had decreased or some mafia circles purchase the dollars to bring them to market as soon as the dollar's rate go higher. Residents and moneychangers in Kabul are also concerned about the fast depreciating value of the Afghani against dollar. They believe further decline in the Afghani may moreintensely harm people's lives and small businesses because they the ones who use Afghan currency and pay the rising price for goods on the local markets. In late March the price of one US dollar was 69 Afghani compared to the current date is 72.85 Afghani. As quoted from some Moneychangers at Shazada Market, say the Afghani has been unstable from the beginning of the solar year. Even today, Tuesday 4:00pm, it further depreciated until one dollar was purchased for 72.85 Afghani and sold for 72.95 Afghani in the market. It is true that the value of dollar has increased against many global currencies but Afghani is the one which greatly decreased as our economic problems are greater.

Moreover, they believe that the insecurity, reliance on imports, the dependent economy, and the US economy growth are blamable factors for why the dollar worth has increased against the Afghani. Afghanistan is an importing country and regularly the money goes out of the country while, domestic exports are lower, it cannot return the paid money to the Afghan market.

Given that Afghanistan is an import country, as long as our currency policy is managed on the basis of myopia policy, the direct intervention by pumping dollars, the Afghani currency will keep losing its value against other currencies. The recent history has clearly taught us that this strategy is not successful for longer term as the rate of US dollar increased from around 50 up to 72.85 afs now. Meanwhile, on the assumption that the importance of economy in Afghanistan is overridden by other political agendas, it is not likely to anticipate significant changes in economy of the country. However, the national unity government paid some good attention in build of economic infrastructures but it is not enough to satiate the needs of growing population and persistent droughts. We extremely, need to take long-term economic strategy to increase national income, domestic production and increase the exports in order to maintain the national currency stable. And more importantly, we have to ensure a safe environment for investors, industrialists and overall economic activities throughout the country.

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The End of Global Britain

By Mark Malloch-Brown

Nowadays, Britain's words and actions on the world stage are so at odds with its values that one must wonder what has happened to the country. Since the June 2016 Brexit referendum, British foreign policy seems to have all but collapsed - and even to have disowned its past and its governing ideas.

Worse, this has coincided with the emergence of US President Donald Trump's erratic administration, which is pursuing goals that are completely detached from those of Britain - and of Europe generally. Trump's abandonment of the Iran nuclear deal, combined with Russian President Vladimir Putin's increasing belligerence and Chinese President Xi Jinping's growing ambitions, indicates that the world is entering an ever-more confrontational and dangerous phase.

Trump's evident lack of personal chemistry with British Prime Minister Theresa May - and the Anglophobia of his new national security adviser, John Bolton - ensured that this was never going to be the best of times for the United Kingdom. But it also doesn't help that generations of British foreign-policy hands have regarded themselves as ancient Greeks to America's Rome. To a Brit like myself, this analogy always seemed too confident. Having lived in America, I suspected that US leaders did not heed the advice of British diplomats nearly as much as those diplomats liked to think. Still, if ever there was a moment for Britain to sprinkle some of its characteristic calm and resolve over world affairs, that moment is now. And yet, the UK appears to have checked out. Since World War II, Britain's close relationships with continental Europe and the US have served as the two anchors of its foreign policy. But now, both lines have essentially been severed.

At the same time, the British government's all-consuming preoccupation with untying the Gordian knot of Brexit has blinded it to what is happening in the rest of the world. And its blinkered view seems certain to persist. Negotiating the terms of Britain's withdrawal from the European Union is likely to take years, and the outcome will inevitably have implications for the country's unity, given the intractable issue of the Northern Irish border. Even if that issue can be sorted out, a campaign in Scotland to link it to the EU rather than to London will continue to command the attention of the government and civil service for the foreseeable future.

At any rate, the promise of a "global Britain" freed from the chains of the EU was never more than idle talk and sloganeering. At the recent Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in London, business and political leaders from Commonwealth countries around the world heard plenty of Brexiteer bluster, but little concrete talk of future trade deals.

A country like India could potentially be a major UK trade partner after Brexit. The problem is that Indians see Britain and Europe as one market. To them, Britain's quest to adopt its own rules and standards amounts to a frivolous inconvenience. Before expand-

ing trade and investment with Britain, India will most likely pursue a deeper relationship with the EU. Indeed, India never saw Britain as a particular champion of its interests inside the EU.

Likewise, most of those outside of the "Leave" camp regard the Brexiteers' aspiration for Britain to lead the vast "Anglosphere" into a brave new world as a comical delusion. To be sure, the show of US and European support after the nerve-agent attack on a former Russian spy and his daughter in Salisbury, England, might suggest that Britain is still punching above its weight. The coordinated expulsion of Russian spies from the EU and the United States was a victory for British diplomacy; and suspicions that the Russians were exploiting Britain's increasing isolation seem to have mobilized NATO. But the larger truth is that the Russians are right: Britain is now Western Europe's weak link.

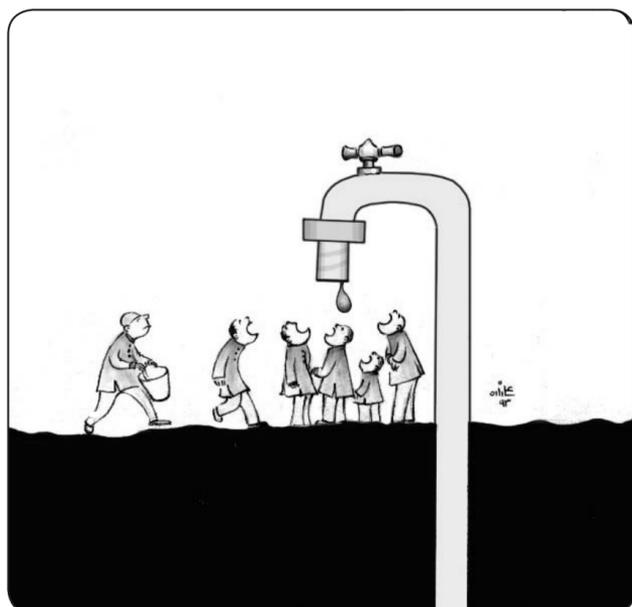
Thus, it is only a matter of time before Russian President Vladimir Putin probes British weakness again. And, as if the old sin of turning a blind eye to Russian oligarchs laundering money through the UK were not problematic enough, the suicidal act of quitting the EU leaves Britain with fewer tools to combat Russian meddling in its affairs. Britain is losing its influence over EU cybersecurity and energy policies just as cyber warfare and energy geopolitics are becoming key fronts for hostile state and non-state actors.

Worse, at the same time that Britain is giving up its seat at the EU table, it also seems to be giving up its liberal-democratic values. During the Brexit referendum campaign, the Leave camp openly stoked hostility toward outsiders. And the recent "Windrush" scandal over the government's poor treatment of Caribbean-born legal residents has reprised the illiberal legacy of May's previous tenure at the Home Office.

But equally insidious has been the government's embrace of "Britain First" mercantilism, under which arms sales to Saudi Arabia are not a matter for caution, but rather an opportunity for profit. When the UK joins the Trump administration in putting trade and investment before human rights and good governance, it is journalists, opposition politicians, and human-rights activists around the world who bear the costs. By retreating from liberal norms, the May government has become, like the Trump administration, an enabler of authoritarian behaviors around the world.

The collapse of British foreign policy has come at a time of deepening uncertainty. The global re-balancing between the US and China is a generational challenge that will outlast Trump and even Xi, who is now unbound by term limits. In an increasingly off-kilter world, the duty will fall to Europe to serve as ballast. But a Europe without Britain's traditional leadership, judgment, and diplomacy will be a lesser Europe. And Britain, by its own hand, risks being reduced to a footnote.

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