

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



May 14, 2018

### The Upcoming Elections, Responsibilities of IEC and Government

In democratic societies, elections are the basis for establishment of a representative and legitimized governments. Afghanistan has been grinding in war for the last more than four decades, wrecking destruction on our national institutions, national resources and infrastructure and this has taken huge toll on the very fabric of our society. Almost two generations of Afghan populations have grown in war and this phenomenon has caused flurry of other deprivations and miseries on this war weary nation. Despite all this, people of Afghanistan look at elections as beacon of hope and the harbinger promising future. Political parties field their candidates with specific manifesto to contest elections including independent candidates. During last four major parliamentary and presidential elections of 2005-6 and 2010-11, men and women flocked to polling stations in thousands to cast their votes for their favorite candidates. Insurgents had not spared a moment to issue threats and warnings to people trying to stop them from casting their votes, but people defied these warnings and moved ahead to vote – sometimes walking for miles to reach the polling stations. There have been cases where insurgents have spotted ink on voters' fingers and chopped their fingers off as punishment for voting. Violence never caused a dent in people's resolve to support ongoing democratic processes started in 2002 in the country. But as much as people of Afghanistan presented sacrifices and endeavored to contribute towards democracy and fair and free elections in the country, institutions – including Independent Elections Commission (IEC) and government security organizations – have missed these opportunities and failed miserably to reflect peoples' desire to bring about a government and/or parliament of their real representatives. Fraud and cheating had become widespread, corruption in the rank of IEC and security agencies responsible for organizing and conducting elections were rampant and elections were tampered at every stages in the process. We have witnessed the results of these elections, and as a case in point presidential elections of 2014 had almost plunged the country into chaos if it wasn't for the intervention of the then US secretary of State John Kerry to encourage the two rival candidates to join hands and form a National Unity Government. The parliament that had come into shape after 2010 parliamentary elections continue to enjoy as a law making body despite expiration of its terms more than two years ago! It is a shame to see worsening economic, political and social conditions of people's lives despite the influx of billions of US dollars through the government channels from international community – mainly the United States of America for support and strengthening the very same conditions of people's lives. We have seen the brightest brain draining from the country due to worsening economic conditions and lack of access to employment opportunities, and all this have been happening because members of parliament and senior government officials have formed nexus to recruit only those with kinship to members of parliament or other senior government officials – depriving large swaths of educated, talented youths who would otherwise deserve to legitimately have access to some of these opportunities. Worsening security situation and lack of good governance and all forms of evils that continue to take toll on Afghan society are the result of fraudulent elections. The IEC and government agencies responsible for organizing and managing elections should plan for putting in place viable mechanisms to manage the upcoming elections with the least cases of frauds and cheating. One way to do so is to dispatch delegations to neighboring countries in the region including India, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Indonesia to observe elections there and learn from their experiences of how to conduct fraud free elections. There are elections in the state of Karnataka in India in April 2018, and it should be possible for IEC and ministry of interior of Afghanistan to constitute delegations and send them to Karnataka to observe election process, study mechanism in place and discuss techniques of management carried out. In addition, IEC should have close coordination with government security agencies for managing polling booths. For example, an external belt and interior belt of police teams should be formed at every polling booth. Both should check and control voters for their IDs and other specifics, but these police teams should not belong to a single agency. They should be from different government security agencies in order to avoid coalescing in favor of certain candidates. Also, IEC should devise a policy whereby staff recruited from one region should be sent for duties to another region in order to avoid favoring certain candidates of their kinship. These rules had been nominally in place in previous elections, but they were not implemented. Government officials should stop using government cars, means, resources and positions to influence voters. IEC and government agencies involved in election should constitute a powerful committee whose tasks should be to watch government officials trying to influence voters. Unless IEC makes the whole election process rules based and strictly implement these rules, frauds cannot be eliminated. Governors in all thirty four provinces should be given clear instructions to provide all out support to IEC and its observers, and keep themselves impartial during the process of elections. Under the instruction of the president of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, a powerful and independent committee should be formed with its members coming from various security agencies, IEC and foreign observers with authority to intervene in areas that required remedy or where there is a situation. Since chances are that disputes can occur in certain polling booths in certain geographical area, IEC should put in place mechanisms to immediately cordon off that particular polling booth and organize remedial steps including recount or re-cast of votes. This will avoid ripple effects of such cases to other polling booths during elections day. In the backdrop of continued, untold sufferings due to ongoing war on terror, and the formidable resolve of the people of Afghanistan to rebuild their country's national institutions, bring about real representative government and parliament members, it is the one most important duty before government of Afghanistan and IEC to conduct fair and free elections.



### Why North Korea's Kim Jong-un is in Peace Mode

By Denny Roy

In late 2017, a US preventive military strike on North Korean territory, which risked escalating into a new Korean War, looked likely. Washington had led a campaign, most importantly including China, to squeeze North Korea with economic sanctions. But North Korean leader Kim Jong-un persisted with testing and eventually demonstrated that a North Korean missile could probably reach the US east coast. That brought North Korea close to achieving a capability US President Donald Trump had promised "won't happen." This left Kim with two imminent problems. The first was the economic sanctions, which were causing his country considerable hardship. The second was the possibility of a US strike on his nuclear and missile facilities. If this occurred, Kim would have two choices. He could respond with a retaliatory military attack on South Korea or on US bases elsewhere in the region, which would almost certainly lead to the swift destruction of his own regime. Or he could forebear from serious retaliation, thereby proving his country had no practical recourse against American attacks. This explains Kim's peace offensive in 2018. In January he declared his nuclear weapons program "completed," and has conducted no observable bomb or missile tests since then. Using South Korean officials as go-betweens, Kim offered to meet Trump to negotiate "denuclearizing the Korean Peninsula." He reiterated this message during the summit with Republic of Korea (ROK, South Korea) President Moon Jae-in last month. That phrase made a meeting with the US president possible, because it met a long-standing US precondition that North Korea must be willing to put its nuclear weapons on the bargaining table. The Kim-Trump summit is planned for late May or June. Kim has a huge advantage: it is relatively easy for him to get what he wants. The Chinese government has already indicated that outside countries should reward Pyongyang for its diplomatic outreach, suggesting the Chinese are done with vigorously enforcing the sanctions. Since China accounts for 90 percent of North Korea's international trade, that means the sanctions are effectively lifted, and this before North Korea has taken even one concrete step toward denuclearizing. Furthermore, it is highly unlikely Washington will carry out a pre-

ventive strike against North Korea while Kim is in peace-talk mode. Thus Kim has solved his two most pressing problems, and has opened the door to pursuing two other objectives: getting South Korea to restart the flow of economic benefits to the North; and weakening the US-ROK alliance with the aim of eventually getting US forces off the Peninsula. The US president, on the other hand, has gained nothing yet except a pause in North Korean testing. There is a small chance the Trump-Kim summit could be the first step in a permanently improved situation from the standpoint of US interests. But there is a greater chance the summit could either produce no lasting benefit or even worsen the situation, especially for US allies. Extreme suspicion about Kim's willingness to denuclearize is warranted. In the past, "denuclearizing the Korean Peninsula" has been North Korean code for ending the alliance. In 2018, the price Kim has mentioned for bargaining away his nukes seems impossibly low: a promise of US non-hostility toward North Korea, something Washington has already done several times in the past. Even if Kim's offer is sincere, denuclearization would require many gradual steps and years of tough negotiations. He can be expected to demand concessions at every step. The talks could quickly fizzle if either side demands too much too soon, returning us to the situation of late 2017. Or Kim might take advantage of Trump's well-known weaknesses: impatience; lack of appreciation for the benefits to the United States of its alliances in Asia; unfamiliarity with inter-Korea issues; susceptibility to flattery; and desire for the appearance of a victory to prove his claim of being a master negotiator. Trump seeks a win, but Kim has already got his, and has the chance to get more. Once again Pyongyang has played a weak hand well. For Americans, at least this diplomatic thaw has bought us a few months of reduced tensions and a halt to the progress North Korea might have made toward a nuclear missile through further flight testing. Enjoy this Korean spring as if it might not last. Denny Roy is a Senior Fellow at the East-West Center specializing in East Asian security and international relations issues. He can be contacted at RoyD@EastWestCenter.org.

### Gulf Crisis Urends Fiction of a Separation of Sports and Politics

By James M. Dorsey

The Gulf crisis that has pitted World Cup host Qatar against a United Arab Emirates-Saudi Arabia-led alliance for the past eight months is showing up the fiction of a separation of sports and politics. Regional and international soccer bodies seeking to police the ban on a mixing of sports and politics are discovering that it amounts to banging their heads against a wall. As they attempted in recent months to halt politics from subverting Asian tournaments, domestic and regional politics seeped into the game via different avenues. Soccer governance bodies have long struggled to maintain the fiction of a separation in a trade off that gave regulators greater autonomy and created the breeding ground for widespread corruption while allowing governments and politicians to manipulate the sport to their advantage as long as they were not too blatant about it. The limits of that deal are being defined in the Middle East, a region wracked by conflict where virtually everything is politicized. While bodies like FIFA, the world soccer regulator, and the Asian Football Confederation (AFC), have focused in recent months on the Gulf crisis, Saudi domestic politics as well as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the Saudi-Iranian rivalry reared their ugly heads. Saudi businessman Prince Alwaleed bin Talal, in one of his first public acts since being released from three months of detention in Riyadh's Ritz Carlton hotel and in a demonstration of fealty to Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, donated \$533,000 to Saudi soccer club Al Hilal FC. Prince Alwaleed, who was among the more recalcitrant of the hundreds of members of Saudi Arabia's ruling family, senior officials, and prominent businessmen in what amounted to a power and asset grab under the mum of an anti-corruption campaign, said the donation was in response to a call by the government. Saudi authorities said they expected to collect some \$106 billion in assets and funds from released detainees as a result of the campaign, yet that figure is in doubt. "It has come as no surprise that the total haul will be a mere fraction of the sum anticipated... Authorities are only counting on the acquisition of \$13.3 billion in settlements by the end of the year, equivalent to the amount of revenue the country would receive from a small increase in the oil price," said Ambrose Carey, director of Alaco, a London-based business intelligence consultancy, who has been involved in some of the most high profile asset-tracing cases in past decades, and an expert on Saudi Arabia. Prince Mohammed reportedly had demanded that Prince Alwaleed, one of the world's richest men with investments in a host of Western blue chips, pay \$6 billion for his release. It is not known on what terms he was set free. Similarly, limits to Prince Mohammed's power and contrasting efforts by Gulf rivals to forge closer covert relations with Israel and woo the American Jewish community played out on multiple sports arenas. Media reporting on this month's participation of Israeli teams in a handball tournament in Doha suggested that social media criticism may have been engineered, a fixture of the Gulf crisis, that was sparked last May by fake news published on Qatari websites in a hack allegedly engineered by the United Arab Emirates. "It is not known whether the tweets critical of Doha actually originated from Qatar," Agence France Press reported in its coverage of the criticism. Despite Israeli athletes repeatedly competing in tournaments in the Gulf over the years, Prince Mohammed, the heir-apparent to the title of Custodian of the Holy Cities, Mecca and Medina, opted not to risk criticism by barring Israeli players from participating in a chess match in December in the kingdom. The decision suggested that Prince Mohammed was walking a tightrope in prioritizing the kingdom's rivalry with Iran at the expense of the Palestinian issue in his relations with Israel and the Trump admin-

istration. Its on the soccer pitch, however, that Gulf states may hit a wall in the willingness of international sports associations to look the other way in their increasingly difficult effort to maintain the fiction that sports and politics are separate as the divide in the region spills onto the field and Saudi Arabia and the UAE seek to engineer an environment in which Qatar would be deprived of its World Cup hosting rights. In an indication of the importance Gulf leaders attribute to Qatar's ability to garner soft power on the soft pitch, Dubai security chief Lt. Gen. Dhahi Khalfan suggested in October that the UAE-Saudi-led diplomatic and economic boycott of Qatar would be lifted if the Gulf state surrendered its hosting rights. That may have been an overstatement by the notoriously bombastic law enforcement official, but nonetheless reflected thinking about the political importance of sports in Qatar and among its detractors. The political manipulation of sports in the Gulf crisis has however prompted FIFA to closely monitor the Saudi and UAE efforts while the AFC has put its foot down in preventing the Gulf crisis from shaping the Asian Champions League following incidents in December during the Gulf Cup in Kuwait. Pro-Qatari and Spanish media said state-controlled Saudi media had offered Bahraini players bonuses during the Gulf Cup if they "defeated the (Qatari) terrorists". Saudi Arabia and the UAE, together with Bahrain and Egypt, accuse the Gulf state of funding militants and political violence. Saudi and UAE players and officials, moreover, refused to participate in news conferences in which Qatari media were present. The AFC thwarted a UAE-Saudi attempt to get Asian tournament matches that were scheduled to be hosted by Qatar moved to a neutral venue. The AFC warned the two countries that they would be penalized if they failed to play in Doha or host Qatari teams. As a result, an Asian Champions League game in Abu Dhabi between Al Gharafa of Qatar and Al Jazira of the UAE constituted the first breach of the eight-month old boycott of the idiosyncratic Gulf state. The AFC and FIFA's record in dealing with the inseparable relationship between sports and politics in the Gulf is, however, at best mixed. In a bizarre and contradictory sequence of events at the outset of the Gulf crisis, FIFA president Gianni Infantino rejected involving the group in the dispute by saying that "the essential role of FIFA, as I understand it, is to deal with football and not to interfere in geopolitics." Yet, on the same day that he made his statement, Mr. Infantino waded into the crisis by removing a Qatari referee from a 2018 World Cup qualifier at the request of the UAE. FIFA, beyond declaring that the decision was taken "in view of the current geopolitical situation," appeared to be saying by implication that a Qatari by definition of his nationality could not be an honest arbiter of a soccer match involving one of his country's detractors. In FIFA's decision, politics trumped professionalism, no pun intended. Similarly, the AFC has been less principled in its stand towards matches pitting Saudi Arabia and Iran against one another. Iranian club Traktor Sazi was forced earlier this month to play its home match against Al Ahli of Jeddah in Oman. It wasn't clear why the AFC did not uphold the principle it imposed on Qatar, the UAE and Saudi Arabia in the case of Iran. "Saudi teams have been able to select host stadiums and cities, and Saudi teams will host two Iranian football representatives in the UAE and Kuwait. In return, Iranian football representatives should be able to use their own rights to choose neutral venues," said Mohammad Reza Sabet, the head of the Islamic Republic of Iran's Football Federation in a recent letter to the AFC. Dr. James M. Dorsey is a senior fellow at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, co-director of the University of Würzburg's Institute for Fan Culture, and co-host of the New Books in Middle Eastern Studies podcast

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