

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

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**Afghan Political Parties:
At the Crossroad of Going
Forward or Backward**

According to the article 61 of the Afghan Constitution, President Ghani's mandate ends on May 22. However, it has been scheduled to September 28 according to the Supreme Court ruling in the favor of the Afghan president. However, 15 presidential candidates have said that a caretaker government should be formed after Ghani's term ends on May 22.

What Would Be at Stake if a Caretaker Government is formed

Afghan citizens remember very well the proclamation of a new interim Afghan government which was supposed to start serving on 28 April 1992 based on Peshawar Accord. In March 1992, having lost the last remnants of Soviet support, President Mohammad Najibullah agreed to step aside and make way for a mujahedeen coalition government. However, one mujahedeen group, Hezbi Islami, refused to confer and discuss a coalition government under the Pakistani sponsored Peshawar Peace Accords and invaded Kabul. This kicked off a civil war, starting 25 April 1992, between initially three, but within weeks five or six mujahedeen groups or armies.

Consequences of the Interim Government

By the end of 1992, thousands had been killed, half a million residents had fled Kabul, the town badly damaged. Groups would form alliances and break them, peace accords were attempted and failed. War expanded over all Afghanistan. In November 1994, a new Islamic-inspired group and army, the Taliban, entered the scene. They gradually gained the upper hand, and in September 1996 conquered Kabul. Thus, the Taliban ruled most of Afghanistan until October 2001 when they were dethroned by a coalition of the United States of America with the Northern Alliance consisting of Jamiat-e Islami, Junbish-i Milli, Hizb-i-Wahdat, Harakat-i-Inqilab-i-Islami and the Eastern Shura.

It is feared that by forming a caretaker government in Afghanistan, the same mistakes will happen once again. A new round of civil war will start in the country and the new constitution, 18 year democratic achievements, national institutions, human rights, women rights and rights of minorities be lost. And it is not clear how many more decades the conflict will continue in the country.

What the solution is

Afghan government and the international community shall create a mechanism to ensure the concerns of the presidential candidate are addressed properly. One of the main concerns is the lack of political will and capacity of the Afghan Unity Government to ensure the Afghan people and the political parties of holding fair, free and transparent elections. Most of the political parties assume that Ghani would misuse his legal authorities to weaken his political rivals; e.g. Atmar claims Ghani has already sacked 12 government officials close to the Moderation and Peace elections team. Maintaining the security of the presidential candidates is one of the other important issues; they will be the priority target of the terrorist groups including the Taliban. As the Afghan government has collected weapons of these candidates, they claim that Afghan government has created a conducive environment to terror them through collecting their weapons and arsenal.

Afghan citizens would reject any plan leading to destroy their 18 year democratic achievements gained by the overall supports of the international community and specially the United States. Considering the bloody history of the conflicts and power transfer in Afghanistan, holding elections is the only and best option for power transfer in the country. We urge the presidential candidates to avoid leading the country to the new rounds of conflicts and chaos; All of them shall work together to ensure fair and free elections and give hope to the people and gain their trust to their future plans. Finally, they shall devise realistic plans in terms of their presidential campaigns and share them with the nation to win the elections through fair and free elections. Lawyers, mass media and scholars may play a vital role to provide their unbiased viewpoints on this issue in order to ensure security and stability in the country.

**Afghan parliament Brawls over
Electing new Speaker**

By: Mohammad Zahir Akbari

Today the local media, especially the social media networks vastly posted photos and comments that showed hot news and scene of physical clashes in the newly inaugurated parliament of the country. One of the lawmakers had hammer in his hand willing to attack the opposite group but another crowded group were trying to control the attacker. This way, they were engaged in physical fighting after verbal clashes that had happened over electing new speaker in their first day of general session on Sunday. A group of lawmakers, many of them women, blocked the Parliament's newly appointed speaker from taking his seat but others were angry to introduce the winner as a new speaker; at last the security forces interfered and dispatched them after a scuffle broke out.

Talking to TOLONews, a Kabul MP Ramazan Bashardost said the controversy in the parliament over the election of the new speaker can be solved through legitimate ways, but he says the lawmakers "are not willing to address the issue through legal channels". Thus, a number of citizens likened them to a group of wide animal in jungle still fighting for their packet and tribe while the world has reached on the pinnacle of advancement. Thus, a group of university students who were talking about the event said, "We wish there were some ones who shoot all of them because this generation cannot think beyond their tribe and personal interests."

According to the interim parliamentary administrations, 247 representatives were present in the House Hall on Saturday. Based on Article 8 of the internal principle, 50+1 of the votes are required for incumbent of speakership position. Rahmani and Osuli were nominated for this seat, and each orderly won 123 votes and 55 votes while 53 votes were invalid, 13 abstentions and 3 were missing. The argument started among the representatives over the three missing votes. Those who said Mir Rahman Rahmani had low vote they calculated 50+1 from 247 individuals who signed the attendance but others calculated from 244 votes which were cast in the ballot box.

So, based on the internal principle of parliament there were 247 MPs when the voting started and based on this quorum, 124 votes were needed for a winning candidate, but 244 MPs cast their votes at the end of voting. Based on the last quorum, 123 votes were needed for a winning candidate but the missing votes from the total 247 MPs turned the process controversial.

Referring to the past procedure of the parliament, a number of former MPs believe that Mir Rahman Rahmani is the winner of the election and should be the new speaker of the parliament. For instance, Nematullah Ghaffari, a former representative of the Hel-

mand in the parliament, as quoted said Rahmani was the winner of the elections based on the mentioned procedure. According to him, in many cases, ballot boxes did not match with the number of MPs that were present, and so the difference has fluctuated from one to four votes. He added that in the past, when this difference was made, the "votes were considered as criteria which came out of the ballot box not the number of people who were present and this way the controversy ended".

Nematollah Ghaffari says now it is possible to implement this procedure, although there is no direct reference to the internal principles of the parliament. It is so logical that the majority of votes are calculated from the votes which cast in ballot box not the people who just signed the attendance sheet. As it is possible one or few MPs go out during voting or not use their vote due to some reasons. He concludes that Mir Rahman Rahmani has gained 51+1 from the total votes which were cast in the ballot box, and so there is no need for arguments he is the winner of election.

On the other hand, a number of representatives believe that the internal rule of parliament does not allow accepting Rahmani as a speaker. "I am not supporting Osuli or Rahmani," Maryam Sama, a member of Parliament from Kabul, wrote on her Facebook page. "I protested to show that I am not in the Parliament to get rich or to support an ethnic group. With respect to both these colleagues, the Afghan Parliament could have a better speaker." Mariam Sulaimankhail, a lawmaker who represents the Kochi tribal community, posted on her Twitter account: "It's not about Osuli or Rahmani! It's about the law; I will always be on the law's side." Rahmani has not gained the majority of the votes, that's why he can not be the head of parliament. With referring to article 8 of the internal principle of parliament, she demands to repeat the election for appointment of speaker in the national house.

Finally, a committee of 15 lawmakers was formed to solve the tension over the election. Khan Agha Rezaee, Ajmal Rahmani, Mirdad Nijrabi, Nahid Farid and Humayun Harirod are the five members of the committee from Rahmani's side while Khan Mohammad Wardak, Jawed Safi, Sayed Ahmad Khadim, Razia Mangal and Abdul Rasheed Azizi are from Kamal Nasir Osuli. Meanwhile, five MPs, including Abdul Qayum Sajjadi, Irfanullah Irfan, Fraidoon Mohmand, Sediq Ahmad Osmani, and Mohammadullah Batash, are the impartial members of the committee. The committee's work did not yield any result on Sunday; therefore, they decided to announce their decision on Monday.

Mohammad Zahir Akbari is the permanent writer of the Daily Outlook Afghanistan. He can be reached at mohammadzahirakbari@gmail.com

Looking Back at 100

By: Richard N. Haass

This is my 100th column for Project Syndicate. It comes nearly 20 years after my first. As is the case with most milestones, it offers a good opportunity to take stock, to look back on what I have written, and to see what it says about the world over these two decades and where we may be heading.

Three themes stand out. The first is how much the Middle East consumed the world's attention, including mine. Think about it: This is a region that is home to around 6% of the world's people, and, despite possessing vast amounts of oil, accounts for less than 5% of global economic output. Yet it manages to account for a large share of the world's headlines, conflicts, terrorists, and refugees.

Some blame the Middle East's many problems on the European colonial powers. But that era is too distant from our own to explain today's failures. After all, many former colonies elsewhere in the world are thriving.

That said, outsiders have made things worse over the past two decades, both by what they did (the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 comes to mind, as does NATO's intervention in Libya and Russia's in Syria) and by what they failed to do.

Here I would list US reluctance to act in Syria even after the government there defied warnings and used chemical weapons. While the intervention in Libya was misguided, once that decision was made, it was incumbent upon the United States and its European partners to mount an effort to stabilize the country following the ouster of Muammar al-Qaddafi.

Yet the lion's share of the responsibility for the Middle East's terrible record lies with the region's leaders, who have largely failed to provide economic opportunity or political rights at home and who have refused to compromise in the cause of peace. Instead, what we have seen are prolonged and costly conflicts in Syria and Yemen, stagnation in Egypt, and fading prospects for any lasting settlement between Israel and the Palestinians.

The second theme that emerges from the past two decades is Asia's emergence as the central arena of modern international relations. If Europe was the principal venue of much of twentieth-century world history, including two hot wars and one cold war, now it is Asia's turn. The region is where one finds the bulk of the world's population, the majority of its economic output, and increasingly its military might. It is where the major powers of this era face one another. The good news is that for the past 20 years - in fact, since the end of the Cold War - Asia has remained stable, underpinned by America's steadying hand and buoyed by rapid economic growth. The question now is whether stability will continue to be the rule, given

China's rise, the near-certainty that North Korea will not just retain but possibly expand its nuclear and missile capabilities, and lingering disputes over the South and East China Seas, Taiwan, and numerous islands and borders.

The third theme that runs through many of the previous 99 columns is the demise of the world that we knew. The titles of several commentaries say it all: "Liberal World Order, R.I.P.," "Cold War II," "Europe in Disarray," "The Era of Disorder."

One reason for this downbeat assessment is the growing prominence of a China that remains illiberal at home, engages in myriad unfair practices that boost its trading position, and is mostly unwilling to assume global responsibilities commensurate with its strength. Another is President Vladimir Putin's Russia, which seeks to violate sovereignty - the most basic norm of what international order there is - with traditional and digital armies alike. Moreover, the gap between global challenges, such as climate change, and the willingness of the world to deal with them has widened. The thesis of my 2013 commentary, "What International Community?" still holds: the phrase stands for a concept that is more aspiration than reality.

One factor stands out amidst this deterioration: the refusal of the United States to continue to play its traditional role in the world. The last two decades have made clear that no post-Cold War US foreign policy consensus exists. What exists is wariness born of costly military interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan, and a populist surge fueled by the 2008 global financial crisis, growing inequality, and reduced upward mobility.

This is the context that gave rise to the election of President Donald Trump. Over the past two-plus years, Trump has added to global turbulence through his own unique mix of hostility to multilateral institutions and alliances; sustained use of tariffs and sanctions on behalf of goals that are so ambitious as to be unrealistic; increased military spending but decreased military action; a much-reduced emphasis on promoting democracy and human rights, coupled with a penchant for strongmen; and a faith in his own personal diplomacy but not in professional diplomats.

As suggested above, all this has contributed to the fading of the post-World War II, post-Cold War world. What will take its place is unclear; Trump is much more a disrupter than he is a builder. The next 20 years thus promise to be even more disorderly than the last 20. Sad to say, there will be more than enough material for at least a hundred more commentaries.

Richard N. Haass is president of the Council on Foreign Relations and author of *A World in Disarray*.



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

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