

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



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Political Disappointment: Causes and Consequences

Political disappointment is one of the features that the citizens relate to government. As the Afghan government is in the process of conducting the elections of Wolsi Jirga and District Councils, we are witnessing the low voters registration and high registration turn out of the candidates. The question which rises is here is why Afghanistan is witnessing the unprecedented voter's registration? Indeed low voters registration is an evident political disappointment of the Afghan citizens. Afghan citizens expected certain outputs from the MPs as their representatives in the Wolsi Jirga, or they expected them to have certain qualities or behavior as they had pledged during their campaigns, yet they see that they fall short of these standards, resulting feeling of let-down. More or less, this applies to the government as well. Because both of the winning candidates, Dr. Ghani and Dr. Abdullah have fallen short of their standards and have not fulfilled what they had promised to the people.

We may identify disappointment in terms of thwarted expectations; the mismatch between what someone expects from politics and what they perceive they actually get. Recent studies have identified a pervasive disappointment among citizens of Afghanistan, and attributed declining levels of trust and satisfaction with political institutions to a sense of thwarted expectations among members of the public. Political disappointment among the Afghan citizens has two main reasons: First) Most of the candidates have made too many pledges and promises to the people in the past. Many of them, have made such promises because they did not have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities according to the law. Of course, there are some candidates who have made vague promises to the people although they knew that they were not capable to fulfill them. However, these candidates only wanted to get votes and once they achieved their goals they neither have cared about the people, nor have been committed to their constituents. As a result, Afghan citizens feel a sense of disappointment which, over time, it can easily turn into frustration with political institutions or with the political system of the country as a whole. Political disappointment, as any other social phenomenon, requires to accept it as a social reality and then to address it in a rigorous and scientific manner.

The Afghan government and candidates of Wolsi Jirga and District Councils should build upon the good and bad lessons of the previous elections in the country. The government can contribute to reviving the independence and authority of the Afghanistan Independent Election Commission by taking practical steps; it may prevent any interference in the activities of the IEC and at the same time never interfere in the IEC conducts itself. Candidates of Wolsi Jirga and District Councils should review and revise their campaign approaches. They should have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities. Further, they should not make vague promises to the people. Their promises should be based on the ground realities of Afghanistan. Voters, as the main decision makers during the electoral process should analyze the plans and programs of the candidates. They also should identify the candidates and have a good understanding of their competencies and capabilities. If the people are vigilant, democracy will prevail and if democratic processes mature naturally in a given context, the competent and qualified leaders would emerge and lead the people towards a better future; a future with a vision supported by all Afghan citizens that can ensure the rights of all of them. However, if political disappointment as an output of weak legitimacy of the electoral processes and institutions of Afghanistan continue, we will witness the most low voters turn out in our elections. Indeed, this would be the worst blow against the new democracy in Afghanistan. It would mean that democratic processes and institutions have largely lost their legitimacy before the Afghans.

Political disappointment is the output of the widespread electoral fraud and short fall of the Wolsi Jirga and the Afghan government in meeting their pledges to the people. Political disappointment can contribute to the frustration of the people from the government and undermine the democratic process in Afghanistan. Although it may seem late, but yet there is time for the government and the candidates to revive the legitimacy of the electoral process and institutions in order to have a fair and free elections in order to put in place functioning institutions in the country to address the basics needs of the people.



"Shanghai Spirit" Contributes to Afghan Peace

By Liu Jinsong

Next month, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization Summit will be held in Qingdao, China. Leaders of the SCO member states and observer states, including Afghanistan, will be warmly welcomed. This will be an important international conference China hosts this year. It is not only the "coming-of-age ceremony" of SCO, but also the first summit after India and Pakistan got their full membership. Thus, the summit has a great significance of inheriting the past and exploring the future.

The current security situation in Asia is generally stable, but most countries are facing the threats of terrorism, extremism, separatism, drug smuggling, and transnational organized crimes. The hustle and bustle of unilateralism, protectionism, and populism are lingering in our ears. The situation has raised us a question: Should we go back to isolationism, adopting the beggar-thy-neighbor policy, cliquing and confronting, or should we work together to meet these challenges?

Afghanistan's reconciliation process and peaceful reconstruction are also at a new crossroad. The security and well-being of the Afghan people are closely connected with the policies of its neighbors and major powers, as well as the international community's contribution to the Afghan issue. This also raises us another question: Can Afghanistan get rid of the curse of history, stop being a battlefield for big games, and become a harbor of cooperation?

The history and achievements of SCO provide a positive frame of reference for answering the above-mentioned questions. The upcoming Qingdao SCO Summit will make more contributions to Afghanistan's peace and stability.

First, the soul and foundation of SCO is "Shanghai Spirit", featuring mutual trust, mutual benefit, equality, consultation, respecting diverse civilizations and seeking common development. The Spirit abandons the foisted self-righteousness, orients from Asian countries' traditional values and common interests, fabricates the characteristics and constructs the prestige of SCO. "Shanghai Spirit" is not only a bond for SCO members, but also has practical significance for the international community's responding to the Afghan issue, and it is an positive attempt to foster a new type of international relations and to build a community with shared future for mankind.

Second, SCO has always committed itself to the principle of good-neighborliness and friendship, respected the sovereignty, independence, integrity and national dignity of its member states as well as observer states. It insists on solving hot-spot issues through multilateralism, opposes to interference other countries' internal affairs, imposing political or economic pressure on a sovereign state with unilateral sanctions, or the willfully use or threat to use force. On solving the hot-spot issues, China and SCO always follow the principles of "peaceful, justifiable and constructive". Therefore, every country including Afghanistan feels equal and comfortable when participating in SCO events, and find their sovereignty and security are enhanced instead of being weakened.

Third, SCO is highly concerned with Afghan affairs. It published Statement of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization Member States and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan on combating terrorism, illicit drug trafficking and organized crime, as well as its Plan of Action, with the Afghan government, held a special meeting on Afghan affairs in 2009, resumed the SCO-Afghanistan Contact Group and has held its second meeting at deputy foreign minister's level. SCO has al-

ways been supporting the efforts of the Afghan government and its people in achieving national reconciliation and fighting against terrorism, calling for enhanced cooperation of international community under the leadership and coordination of UN, and pushing forward the political settlement of Afghan issue. Although Afghanistan is an observer state of SCO, China always supports Afghanistan to have more participation in relevant activities under the framework of SCO, appreciates Afghanistan's positive will of becoming a full member state. SCO has not only broadened the channels of Afghanistan's contacts abroad, but also provided a suitable platform for enhancing cooperation between Afghanistan and its neighboring countries.

Fourth, the anti-terrorism efforts of SCO have strengthened Afghanistan's confidence and ability in countering terrorism. Since its establishment, SCO has always maintained the security and stability of the region as its priority, and severely crack down on "Three Evils" such as "East Turkistan" separatists. On fighting terrorism, the SCO not only has mature documents and mechanisms, but also carried out a large number of concrete actions, including cooperation on anti-terrorism intelligence, law enforcement, and judiciary. Member states hold joint anti-terrorism exercises regularly, adopt coordinated actions to cut off funding and material supply channels for terrorism, implement effective border control and conduct joint investigations on transnational terrorist crimes. Last June, the Astana Declaration of SCO pointed out in particular that it is necessary to fight against the spread of terrorist ideology and propaganda, step up our efforts to counteract the radicalization of society leading to manifestations of radical forms of extremism, including terrorism, primarily among young people, as well as to prevent religious, ethnic, ideological and political extremism, ethnic and racial intolerance, and xenophobia.

Fifth, SCO attaches great importance to development issues, and provides a springboard for Afghanistan to participate in regional integration and promote connectivity. In recent years, SCO member states have coordinated their development strategies for the jointly building of Belt and Road Initiative, promoted capacity cooperation and achieved fruitful results in fields of cross-border transportation, energy and chemical industries, agricultural and pastoral products trade, culture exchanges, environment protection and etc. SCO is gradually establishing institutional arrangements for regional economic cooperation, promoting trade and investment facilitation, constructing railways and other transportation infrastructures.

SCO member states have signed the Agreement on Facilitation of International Road Transport. A transportation line of 9300 km will be opened and available to its member states by 2020, and regional countries are welcomed to join in the future. It's well-worthy for Afghan businessmen to study and explore ways to connect and use this line through which Afghanistan can hold an advantageous position in the regional industrial chain, value chain, and logistical chain, to be the heart of the regional connectivity, and regain Afghanistan's glories during the era of the ancient silk road.

The SCO Qingdao Summit, to be hosted by China, will be a historical grand gathering with comprehensive contents, extensive participation, multiple highlights which featuring the spirit of forging ahead. China's chairmanship and coordination ability will be well observed, Afghanistan's participation and contribution will also be of great importance. Let's wait with expectation!

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Strong Parliament Needs Strong Candidates

By Mohammad Zahir Akbari

Being on the verge of parliamentary and district council's elections, the Independent Election Commission (IEC) has started to register candidates for the long-delayed and disputed elections. In first day, IEC has registered about 500 names to contest for the legislative polls. It seems that every one including the jobless, teachers, businessmen, war-lords, and etc... have nominated themselves for sake of reaching personal agenda. Unfortunately, there is no modern mechanism to filter those who are not qualified to be successful parliamentarian while it is not logical to expect strong parliament by electing weak people.

According to the current election law, any Afghan citizen, who is 25 or over, can register his name and contest the legislative polls. The only required criteria is to provide 1,000 ID cards of voters at the time of registration while education plays no role in their candidacy status. Lack of educational criteria, will not only cause unsound competition, but also cultivate poor political culture and finally weak parliament. Some of the candidates, instead of talking about educational background, political experiences, legal rules, plans and etc., are trying to attract people's votes by offering a meal or money. These prove that the current election law is fully obsolete and extremely needs update and reform.

Legally, all eligible people can nominate themselves or vote. Nobody can prevent a person from such citizenship right. The field is open for all but one needs political and intellectual capacity to win but the powerful and the rich are more probable to win in the context of Afghanistan. On the other hand, the candidates' figure is astronomical, making it hard for some to recognize the candidates or created hesitancy for voting. For this reason, the only suitable option to introduce competent nominee is cultural activity and continuous awareness based on an academic and specific strategy. In other words, awareness can segregate the best from bad but it has become so complicated due to high number of nominees; it means, the weak candidates can trouble the water to misuse from the poverty of people.

However, the candidates have access to social networks. They publish their pictures, slogans, everyday programs and subsequent strategies. Many young voters have even expressed their stance and directly encourage others to cooperate with their particular candidate. In fact, seeking fame under the pretext of parliamentary and district elections is a hot issue. Some practically started their activities. They go among the people, asking their problems and make their calculation. Some are holding cultural, social and academic meetings. Some are trying to write for a printing press or to talk on the visual press. Everything is a sign of representation; representation among the people for fame

and to obtain votes in the near future. Communication networks, brochures, and scientific parties are good areas for candidates to pose themselves. Those candidates should be supported that deserve such valuable responsibility; otherwise, we will have the same scandalous parliament.

The other paralyzing issue is insecurity; From one hand, it deters people from registering, voting and doing campaign which is useful for promotion of democratic culture. On the other hand, insecurity is the main deterrent to government's ability to hold inclusive election in the country. As report shows, more than 1,000 voter registration centers stayed closed for insecurity reasons. While tens of opened registration centers have already been attacked. Last month on one of those centers in the capital left 60 people killed in the west of Kabul while smaller string of incidents continued in different parts of the country. Overall most of the people have lost their confidence over election process due to unfavorable election management and wide spread fraud carried out in last presidential election. While still it continues in one way or other way. In addition, they are facing with a series of hurdles including technical problems, worries over lack of participation and major security concerns. Within nearly two months, only some 3.2 million people have registered to vote so far which is well short of the potential electorate of 14 million. In fact, this election is viewed as a prelude to Afghanistan's 2019 presidential vote. If IEC fails to revive the confidence, and thus the government fails to ensure the security then the democratic process would be severely damaged in Afghanistan. While militants have even warned civilians that they should stay away from key government-run positions, including polling stations. However, the IEC official stress that they will remain neutral during the elections and urged the government to support the commission as a partner. The Independent Election Commission Chief also emphasize that no one will be permitted to commit fraud in the elections. In regards to the security of the elections and voting centers, IEC officials inform of close coordination with the security institutions to ensure security of the voters during the elections day. The parliamentary and district councils elections are due to be organized on 20th October this year. In terms of insecurity in some districts, IEC officials say that the commission was in contact with the security agencies over the problem. He offered that people can go to secure areas in their immediate neighbourhood to vote. On IEC office in Ghazni which remains closed for a month, head of IEC informed that commissioners would soon visit the province to resolve the problem. The closure was forced by protesters who demanded smaller constituencies.

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