

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

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**Democratic Political System:
Key to Nation Building**

Awareness and positive involvement of the citizens in civic and political matters play a key role in the political stability and development of any political system. This is why democracy demands from the common man a certain level of ability and character: rational conduct and active participation in the government. In Afghanistan, political parties, politicians and transition programs have been marked with turbulence, uncertainties and violence. Afghan politics is characterized by greed, love of power, violence, assassination, thuggery and election rigging.

Unfortunately, violence has become equal to Afghan political culture such that virtually all elections held so far in the country are violent ridden. It is common that, during the election, there are reported cases of underage voting, distribution of money, manipulation of voters' register, diversion of electoral materials, ballot box snatching, unlawful possession of firearms and other electoral offences. This political scenario engendered lukewarm political attitude and participation among many Afghan citizens.

In a democratic political system, the citizens shall be involved in the political process and decision making by joining political process, political party, voting during election, participating in electoral campaign, community affairs and other political activities. Indeed, the level and pattern of political participation of the citizens determine, to some extent, the success of the political system. In Afghanistan, politics is seen by a number of people as a dirty game which must be avoided. This goes back to the background of undemocratic politics in Afghanistan. And undemocratic tendencies, deception, violence and uncertainties that characterize the political system are the results of such a political system in the past. In fact, political apathy displaced by some Afghan citizens during general elections, can be laminated as: voters' apathy in Afghanistan is no longer contentious. Voters turnout in the just concluded general elections in the past have provided a scientific and empirical evidence of the existence of voters' apathy and disinterestedness of sections of the electorates in elections and it may be more prevalent in the coming elections. This scenario will have very negative implications for popular participation and governance in the country.

However, the development and nourishment of true democracy in Afghanistan depends, to a large extent, on the electoral system. The electoral system of Afghanistan shall ensure the confidence of the citizens in the electoral system and their participation in the electoral process in order to bring the responsible and democratic leaders to the stage. As a result, the success of the 2018 Wolsi Jirga election requires transparent electoral process and mass participation of the electorates.

The political culture in Afghanistan is characterized by intolerance, intimidation, thuggery, assassination, bitterness, apathy, indolence, money, religious and ethnic politics. As a result of this, the ingredients of democracy have not been able to thrive in the country. Therefore, the Afghan electoral system shall act in a way to change the assumptions that the citizens possess and demonstrate some civic capacities. These civic capacities involve three qualities: intelligence, self-control and conscience. The citizens must be able to understand the interest of the community, to subordinate his own will to the general will and must feel his responsibility to the community and be prepared to serve it by voting. This can ensure nation building and one nation with one goal in Afghanistan.

Kabul: Decorated with Campaigner's Posters

By Mohammad Zahir Akbari

The upcoming parliamentary elections campaigns officials kicked off on last Friday night with many candidates decorated the whole city with billboards, pictures and posted videos and pictures on social media platforms. More than 2,500 candidates, including 400 women, will compete for 249 seats in Afghanistan's parliament. The vote for the Wolesi Jirga, the Lower House of parliament, is scheduled for October 20. However, it remains unclear if voting will take place in areas held by the Taliban. The first parliamentary election in the post-Taliban Afghanistan was held in 2005 while the second parliamentary polls took place in 2010. However, the third parliamentary polls, originally set to be held in early 2015 following presidential elections, were repeatedly delayed. The electoral campaign will end on Oct. 17 to give way to a two-day election silence.

In accordance with the Afghan electoral law, a series of principles and restrictions must be respected by the candidates, including the neutrality of organization and places for holding speeches, the impartiality of the national and private media, and transparency of the election campaign at the level of funding sources, as well as equity and equality of opportunity among all candidates.

According to IEC officials, more than 60 has been fined from 30,000 to 100,000 Afs over early campaigns. "Posting speeches on social media during the electoral campaigns that can damage national unity and promote ethnic, tribal and lingual differences are in contravention of the law," said Mohammad Rafi Rafiq Sidiqi, head of the IEC media committee.

However, Kabul residents complains that many candidates have installed their photos on walls of their houses and other places that they are not allowed. Some candidates use street children for carrying their campaigns picture and stick on any walls. According to residents, they should campaign based on the law and should not create pollution in the city and they must not install their banners on any walls, doors and shops without permission of their owners.

Among the candidates from the major tribes in Afghanistan, a number of youths from minority groups were also seen starting their campaigns. Anisa Pashae said she is the first female candidate from Pashae ethnic group. She said if she makes her way to the parliament, she will fight dis-

crimination against minorities. "I am from a deprived ethnic group. Maybe other ethnic groups are deprived too. Our Tajik ethnic group is deprived, our Pashtun ethnic group is deprived, because only the powerful people have entered into politics and have filled their pockets only," said Pashae. Another candidate from a minority group is Ajmal Baluchzada whose photos are mostly seen in the central parts of Kabul, according to some residents. "Justice for My Daughter" is his slogan. As quoted, he said he will work for equal justice in the society if he is elected as an MP. Baluchzada criticized the way some candidates carry on their campaigns, saying that the candidates should not disturb the people during their campaigns by installing their photos and banners on the walls of others' houses.

Anyway, the long disputed election's campaign has started but still there are challenges that may affect the process. The first and most threatening issue is insecurity which already caused many polling centers to remain closed. Though the Ministry of Interior inform of 54,776 members of the Afghan National Security and Defense Force will be deployed for security of 5,100 polling centers five days ahead of the elections. As quoted from Akhtar Mohammad Ibrahim, Senior Deputy Interior Minister for Security, this week, there would be 9,540 reserved forces.

The second issue is the bitter experience from election fraud; however, the Afghan government and IEC have agreed to use biometric system for the upcoming election - which will be the first time for Afghanistan to experience this technology for the electoral process. The use of new technology is a great development in Afghanistan.

The international community is pushing hard for the vote to happen before November's ministerial meeting in Geneva, which the United Nations says is a "crucial moment" for the Afghan government and its foreign partners to demonstrate progress. International donors are determined that the parliamentary elections timetable should not slip any more, despite continual setbacks. The UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) is helping the Afghan government prepare, backed by a group of international donors offering support, ideas and about €100 million to stage the 2018 elections, with more money in the process for the presidential poll in 2019.

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**Fragility of Middle East Alliances
Becomes ever More apparent**

By James M. Dorsey

Three recent developments lay bare the fragility of Middle Eastern alliances and a rebalancing of their priorities: the Russian-Turkish compromise on an assault on the rebel-held Syrian region of Idlib, the fate of troubled Abu Dhabi airline Etihad, and battles over reconstruction of Syria.

These developments highlight the fact that competition among Middle Eastern rivals and ultimate power within the region's various alliances is increasingly as much economic and commercial as it is military and geopolitical. Battles are fought as much on geopolitical fronts as they are on economic and cultural battlefields such as soccer.

As a result, the fault lines of various alliances across the greater Middle East, a region that stretches from North Africa to north-western China, are coming to the fore.

The cracks may be most apparent in the Russian-Turkish-Iranian alliance but lurk in the background of Gulf cooperation with Israel in confronting Iran as well as the unified front put forward by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

Russia, prevented, at least for now, a rupture with Turkey, by delaying an all-out attack on Idlib despite Iranian advocacy of an offensive. Turkey, already home to three million Syrians, feared that a Syrian-Russian assault, would push hundreds of thousands, if not millions more across its border.

If Iran was the weakest link in the debate about Idlib, it stands stronger in its coming competition with Russia for the spoils of reconstruction of war-ravaged Syria.

Similarly, Russia appears to be ambivalent towards a continued Iranian military presence in post-war Syria, a potential flashpoint given Israel's opposition and Israeli attacks that led earlier this month to the downing of a Russian aircraft.

By the same token, Turkey, despite its backing of Qatar in its 15-month-old dispute with a Saudi-UAE-led alliance that is boycotting the Gulf state diplomatically and economically, poses perhaps the greatest challenge to Qatari efforts to project itself globally by operating one of the world's best airlines and positioning itself as a sports hub.

Turkey, despite its failure this week to win the right to host Euro 2024 and its lack of the Gulf's financial muscle, competes favourably on every other front with Qatar as well as the UAE that too is seeking to project itself through soft as well as hard power and opposes Mr. Erdogan because of his Islamist leanings, ties to Iran, and support of Qatar. Turkey wins hands down against the small Gulf states when it comes to size, population, location, industrial base, military might, and sports performance.

That, coupled with a determination to undermine Qatar, was likely one reason, why the UAE's major carriers, Emirates and Etihad that is troubled by a failed business model, have, despite official denials, been quietly discussing a potential merger that would create the world's largest airline.

Countering competition from Turkish Airlines that outflanks both UAE carriers with 309 passenger planes that service 302 destinations in 120 countries may well have been another reason. Emirates, the larger of the two Emirati carriers, has a fleet of 256 aircraft flying to 150 destinations in 80 countries.

These recent developments suggest that alliances, particularly the one that groups Russia, Turkey and Iran, are brittle and transactional, geared towards capitalizing on immediate common interests rather than shared long-term goals, let alone values.

That is true even if Russia and Turkey increasingly find common ground in concepts of Eurasianism. It also applies to Turkey and Qatar who both support Islamist groups as well as to Saudi Arabia and the UAE who closely coordinate policies but see their different goals put on display in Yemen.

The fragility of the alliances is further underwritten by Turkish, Russian and Iranian aspirations of resurrecting empire in a 21st century mould and a Saudi quest for regional dominance.

Notions of empire have informed policies long before realignment across Eurasia as a result of the focus of the United States shifting from the Middle

East to Asia, the rise of China, increasingly strained relations between the West and Russia, and the greater assertiveness of Middle Eastern states like Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Iran.

Then president Suleyman Demirel told this writer already in the 1990s in the wake of the demise of the Soviet Union and the emergence of independent, mostly ethnically Turkic Central Asian republics that "Turkey's world stretches from the Adriatic to the Great Wall of China."

In a world in which globalization is shaped by geopolitical zones rather than individual countries, Russia's imperative is to be a region by defining itself as an Asian rather than a European power that would be on par with China, the European Union, and a US zone of influence.

"Putin does not think along national lines. He thinks in terms of larger blocks, and, ultimately in terms of the world order," said former Portuguese minister for Europe, Bruno Macaes in a recently published book, The Dawn of Eurasia. In doing so, Russia is effectively turning its back on Europe as it reinvents itself as an Asian power on the basis of a Eurasianism, a century-old ideology that defines Russia as a Eurasian rather than a European power.

The Eurasian Economic Union, that groups Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Belarus and Armenia, is a vehicle that allows Russia to establish itself as a block in the borderland between Europe and Asia.

Similarly, Eurasianism has gained currency in Turkey with President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who enabled by the demise of the Soviet Union and the re-emergence of a Turkic world, projects his country as a crossroads between Europe, Africa and Asia rather than a European bridge to Asia.

In that vein, Turkish columnist Sinan Baykent projected this week's fence-mending visit to Germany by Mr. Erdogan and his proposal for a summit on Syria of Turkish, Russian, German and French leaders as a Eurasian approach to problem solving.

The meeting between Mr. Erdogan and German chancellor Angela Merkel was meant "to pave the way for a Eurasian solution for the region... There is a new axis forming today between Berlin, Moscow, Ankara, Tehran and maybe Paris... All of these countries are fed up with American unilateralism and excessive policies displayed by the Trump administration," Mr. Baykent said.

If Turkey and Russia's vision of their place in the world is defined to a large extent by geography, Iran's topology dictates a more inward-looking view despite accusations that it is seeking to establish itself as the Middle East's hegemon.

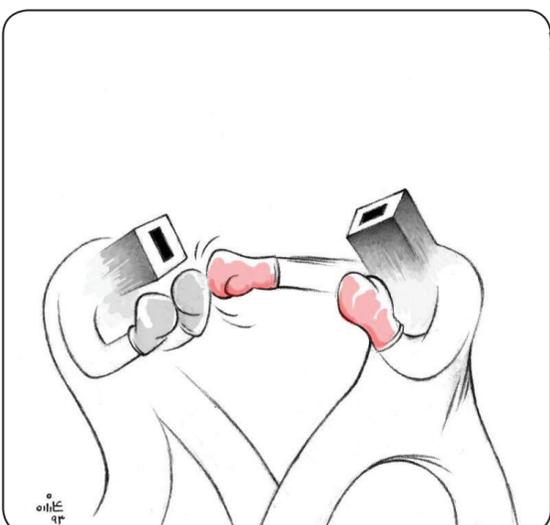
"Iran is a fortress. Surrounded on three sides by mountains and on the fourth by the ocean, with a wasteland at its centre," noted Stratfor, a geopolitical intelligence platform. Gulf fears are rooted not only in deep-seated distrust of Iran's Islamic regime, but also in the fact that the foundation of past Persian empire relied on control of plains in present-day Iraq.

As a result, the manoeuvring of Gulf states, in contrast to Turkey and Russia, is driven less by a conceptual framing of their place in the world and more by regional rivalry and regime survival. Countries like Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE walk a fine line focusing geopolitically on an increasingly unpredictable United States and economically on China and the rest of Asia, including Russia, Korea and Japan.

What the plight of Idlib, potential change in aviation and competition for reconstruction contracts highlight is the brittleness of Middle Eastern alliances that threatens to be reinforced by economics becoming an increasingly important factor alongside geopolitics.

"Stakes for all parties are starting to divert from each other in Syria and the prospects of cooperation with Russia and Iran are becoming more challenging," said Turkish columnist Nuray Mert commenting on the situation in Idlib. Her analysis is as valid for Idlib as it is for the prospects of many of the Middle East alliances.

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