

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



October 22, 2018

## Wolesi Jirga Elections: Afghan Voters Defy Violence to Cast Ballots

Wolesi Jirga Elections started on 20 October, 2018 and was extended amid delays, with some constituencies remaining open on Sunday. High participation of Afghan in Wolesi Jirga elections defied deadly attacks to cast ballots in large numbers in the Afghan long due Wolesi Jirga elections. Although, there were several explosions targeting polling stations, with dozens of people killed or injured in scores of incidents across Afghanistan.

The Taliban and ISIS had repeatedly vowed to disrupt the Afghan Wolesi Jirga elections. And it already had taken the lives of 10 candidates in run up to the polls and took the at least 36 people in nearly 200 attacks, including 27 civilians, on the first day of elections and 11 people were killed in the second day of elections.

However, security was not the only issue in Afghanistan threatening the vote on the elections day. There were technical problems with new biometric voter registration and experts argue that the biometric devices did not lead to quick voting in Afghanistan. Further, past elections have been marred by corruption and fraud, with cases of ballot box stuffing, multiple voting and voter intimidation all documented across the country. However, according to the AIHRC, no serious electoral violations have been registered yet. But it has pointed out other the electoral violations e.g delay in opening the polling stations, delay in biometric system transfer to the polling stations, lack of knowledge of biometric system, low quality inks, voting by underage and those whose names have not been on the list.

**The Strong Message of the high turnout of the Afghan voters**  
Afghan voters strongly conveyed a clear message to all the terrorist groups that they will not let them win in the country. Many have termed this as an act of bravery to vote in Afghan elections. In many polling stations the crowds were even larger this time than past elections and the queue of male voters kept getting longer. However, turnout has been low in the insecure areas.

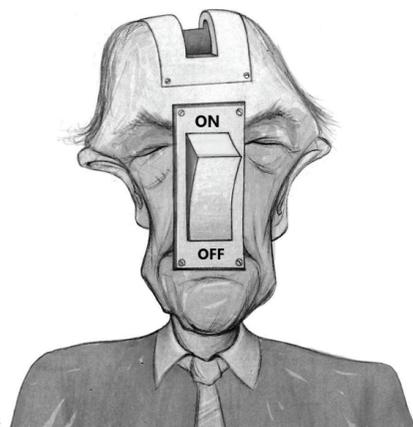
Anyhow, considering the volatile security conditions in the country, many believe even conducting this election is an achievement: It showed that Afghan officials and security forces can do it, and to usher in a more legitimate parliament to replace a discredited assembly and pushing to move toward presidential elections in 2019 and Taliban peace talks.

**Why do Afghan elections matter for the Afghans and the International Community?**

For most Afghans who looking for a better life, jobs, education and an end to the war with the Taliban, the Wolesi Jirga elections seem as strategic means to ensure them.

And for the country's foreign partners, seeing a flourishing democracy would be the return they're seeking after many years of investment, billions of dollars spent and thousands of lives lost in more than a decade of fighting in Afghanistan. So, they seriously backed up holding the Wolesi Jirga elections and urged the Afghan government to conduct it in a transparent, fair, free and credible manner.

However, this election has been seen as a key test ahead of the all-important presidential elections due in April 2019. The overall support of the international community, high peoples' turnout and overall relative good security are the strong points of Wolesi Jirga elections; while weak electoral management by IEC and lack of knowledge about how to use the biometric system, lack of on time delivery of the electoral materials and lack of on time presence of electoral workers and officials in the polling stations have been the most outstanding weakness of it that require to be addressed properly in the coming presidential elections due next year.



## Taliban – Foul Player in Peace Talks

By: Hujjatullah Zia

The death of 39-year-old Kandahar police chief General Abdul Raziq, which shocked all Afghan individuals, is a slap on the face of peace talks ushered in between Taliban representatives and US envoy Zalmay Khalilzad if the US is supporting Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process.

With the last month's peace talks in Qatar, both the US and the Taliban are raising hopes that a meaningful peace and reconciliation process may be underway in Afghanistan. Trump's administration that was strongly threatening the Taliban to be eradicated, has accepted to talk the pullout of its forces from the country. On the other hand, the Taliban have insisted on their preconditions including the release of their fighters from Afghan prisons, lifting sanctions on their leaders and the establishment of an official political office in Qatar.

All the preconditions from the Taliban side suggest that it is a win-lose game. If the Taliban come to the table with a bona fide intention, they have to stop fighting against the Kabul government and its allies. It is very naïve of the Taliban's interlocutor to hold peace talks despite the intensified attacks from their side. Only presenting on the table will not necessarily lead to peace and cannot be deemed a breakthrough in the peace process. I have constantly pointed out in my commentaries that the Taliban are foul players and have never respected the national or international rule of the talks.

The Taliban should accept two preconditions to prove their sincerity in the talks: For the one, they are supposed to stop their insurgency. Simultaneous negotiation and fight are ridiculous. Second, the Taliban will have to promise to be disbanded rather than opening an official political office. If the Taliban's preconditions are accepted by their US interlocutors, there will be no need for a militant group to operate anymore. Thus, their group must be disbanded and their members could live like normal citizens.

On the other hand, if the US is backing the Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process, it has to consider any rules and preconditions Kabul government sets up. Stopping insurgency is the first demand of both Afghan state and nation. The second precondition is the Taliban should practice upon the Afghan Constitution rather than their fundamental sharia if the two sides reach census on political settlement. Refusing Kabul's proposal for talks and continuing their insurgency against Afghan soldiers and civilians, the Taliban have already ush-

ered in a foul game and the peace talks are unlikely to come to fruition. It is believed that even if the US and the Taliban reach a political census, the Taliban will not stop fighting against Kabul government. What if the Taliban intensify their attacks following the full withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan?

It should be noted that the death of Raziq by his bodyguard suggests that the Taliban have infiltrated Afghan police and Afghanistan's intelligence is not strong enough. The Taliban carried out deadly attacks against Afghan soldiers several times by the support of their infiltrators. To overcome the security crisis, Afghan government will have to reinforce its intelligence.

All in all, the assassination of General Raziq suggests the lukewarm response and disregard of the Taliban to peace talks. Therefore, there is little room for optimism regarding the ongoing negotiations between the Taliban and Trump's envoy for talks.

The an-eye-for-an-eye policy of General Raziq was very effective in Kandahar province. The Taliban respect neither Afghanistan's Constitution nor international law and they are widely involved in violation of humanitarian law. Killing civilians and torturing soldiers are the daily practices of the Taliban. Therefore, Raziq adopted a tit-for-tat action against the Taliban and it bore effective result.

To view the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam (LTTE) in Sri Lanka (1972 - 2009), which was far stronger than the Taliban and assassinated Sri Lankan President Ranasinghe Premadasa on 1 May 1993 and Foreign minister Lakshman Kadirgamar on 25 October 2005 and many other high-profile officials including ministers and former prime minister of India Rajiv Gandhi in 1991, was defeated in 2009 when Sri Lankan government declared an all-out offensives against LTTE in 2006 following a series of failed negotiations.

Similarly, the self-styled Islamic State (IS) group was dismantled in Iraq and Syria as a result of strong military action. It is believed that if Kabul government and its international allies hold the stance of General Raziq against the Taliban and shoot them on the head, the Taliban group will be doomed to defeat similar to LTTE and IS. Indeed, the Taliban should either accept the rule of the talks and stop fighting or face the consequences. It is not stronger than the LTTE and will be defeated by military action.

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## A Gruesome Murder Bares World Powers' Flawed Policies

By: James M. Dorsey

Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi's gruesome murder raises fundamental questions that go far beyond Middle Eastern geopolitics.

They go to the risks of support for autocratic regimes by democratic and authoritarian world powers, the rise of illiberal democracy in the West, increasing authoritarianism in Russia, and absolute power in China in which checks and balances are weakened or non-existent.

Mr. Khashoggi's killing is but the latest incident of hubris that stems from the abandonment of notions of civility, tolerance and plurality; and the ability of leaders to get away with murder, literally and figuratively. It also is the product of political systems with no provisions to ensure that the power of men like Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman is restrained and checked.

Mr. Khashoggi was an advocate of the necessary checks and balances. In his last column published in The Washington Post posthumously, Mr. Khashoggi argued that "the Arab world needs a modern version of the old transnational media so citizens can be informed about global events. More important, we need to provide a platform for Arab voices. We suffer from poverty, mismanagement and poor education. Through the creation of an independent international forum, isolated from the influence of nationalist governments spreading hate through propaganda, ordinary people in the Arab world would be able to address the structural problems their societies face."

Mr. Khashoggi's words were echoed by prominent journalist and political analyst Rami Khouri. "We are heading to the law of the jungle if big power and Mideast state autocracy is not held accountable," Mr. Khouri said.

In a similar vein, a survey by the Arab Barometer survey concluded that public institutions in the Arab world, including the judiciary enjoyed little, if any, public trust.

"Part of the lack of trust comes from the disenfranchisement felt by many, especially youth and women... The lack of alternative political forces is adding to the fatigue and lack of trust in institutions. Citizens in the region struggle to find an alternative to the ruling elite that might help address the issues of ineffective governance and corruption," said a report by the Carnegie for Endowment of Peace.

"Citizens are increasingly turning toward informal mechanisms such as protests and boycotts, and focusing more on specific issues of governance, such as service provision, particularly at the local level. Furthermore, with democracy under threat across the globe, calls for broad democratic reform have been replaced by more basic demands," the report went on to say.

What puts the price Mr. Khashoggi paid for advocating controls of absolute power in a class of its own, is the brutality of his killing, the fact that he was murdered in the Saudi consulate in Istanbul rather than, for example, by an unknown killer on a motorbike; and the increasingly difficult effort to resolve politically the crisis his death sparked. Beyond the support by world powers of often brutal autocrats facilitated by a lack of checks and balances that in the past three decades has destroyed countries and costs the lives of millions, Mr. Khashoggi's murder is also the product of the failure of Western leaders to seriously address the breakdown in confidence in leadership and political systems at home and abroad.

The breakdown peaked with the 2011 popular Arab revolts; simultaneous widespread protests in Latin America, the United States and Europe; and the increased popularity of anti-system, nationalist and populist politicians on both the right and the left.

Mr. Khashoggi joins the victims of extrajudicial poisoning in Britain by Russian operatives of people who like him may have been a thorn in the side of their leaders but did not pose an existential threat - not that that would justify murder or attempted murder.

He also joins the millions of casualties of failed policy and hubris caused by Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein's gassing of Kurds in the 1980s and reckless 1990 invasion of Kuwait, support for Syrian president Bashar al-Assad's determination to cling to power irrespective of the human cost, the Saudi-UAE-led war in Yemen that has produced the worst humanitarian crisis since World War Two, and China's attempt to brainwash and socially engineer what the country's leaders see as the model Chinese citizen.

And those are just some of the most egregious instances.

No better are the multiple ways in which autocratic leaders try to ensure conformity not only through repression and suppression of a free press but also, for example, by deciding who deserves citizenship based upon whether they like their political, economic or social views rather than on birth right.

Take Bahrain whose minority Sunni Muslim regime has stripped hundreds of its nationals of their citizenship simply because it did not like their views or Turkey with its mass arrests of anyone critical of the government.

The irony is that if elections in democracies are producing illiberal leaders like US President Donald J. Trump, Turkey's Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Hungary's Victor Orban, in Asia and Africa they are bring forth governments mandated to reverse Belt and Road-related, Chinese funding of projects that primarily benefit China rather than the recipient economically and pave the way for greater Chinese influencing of domestic politics as well as the export of systems that enhance unchecked state power.

In some cases, like Malaysia, they produce leaders willing to take on China's creation of a 21st century Orwellian surveillance state in its north-western province of Xinjiang.

It matters little what label world powers put on their support for autocrats and illiberals. The United States has long justified its policy with the need for regional stability in the greater Middle East. Russia calls it international legality while China packages it as non-interference in the domestic affairs of others.

Said Middle East expert and former US official Charles Kestnbaum building on Mr. Khashoggi's words: "If they (Middle Eastern states) want to compete with the globe in IT (information technology) and tech more broadly, they must encourage risk, innovation and freedom to fail. Such social and political freedom does not exist adequately in the region. The opposite in fact, authoritarian regimes repress such initiative and openness. So what do they have to compete and globally engage in the 2020's? Nothing."

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