

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

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## Public Fear and Hope for Presidential Elections

Afghans will celebrate democracy through flocking to ballot boxes to elect their president. Their participation in political activities indicate that Afghans support democracy and will not approve of the Islamic Emirate, put on the negotiating table by the Taliban leadership.

Afghans have paid heavy sacrifices for supporting democratic principles and having their rights and freedoms safeguarded. Despite sustaining heavy sacrifices, Afghan men and women have backed the Afghan democratic administration and participated in parliamentary and presidential elections to show that democracy is the only option that can ensure the public rights.

In spite of the fact that the Taliban have warned the public not to participate in the upcoming presidential elections and intensified their attacks against civilians to fill the air with fear, Afghans are determined to participate in the elections. That is, the Taliban are unlikely to achieve their interests through carrying out terrorist activities.

Within the past 18 years, Afghans' political maturity has grown to a great extent and they have voiced their concern regarding political injustice. Even Afghan ordinary people are mentally engaged with the issue of peace talks and urge the inclusion of their representatives in the talks. In the Loya Jirga held in April, Afghans sent their representatives to call on the Taliban to reduce violence and hold direct talks with the Afghan government, which were turned down by the Taliban group.

Afghans still hold out their hope that forming "a civil society void of oppression, atrocity, discrimination as well as violence, based on rule of law, social justice, protecting integrity and human rights, and attaining peoples' freedoms and fundamental rights", strengthening political, social, economic as well as defense institutions, and attaining a prosperous life and sound living environment for all inhabitants of this land, which are stated in the preamble of Afghan Constitution, will be achieved only through democratic principles and participating in elections.

However, the public concern is lack of transparency in the elections, not to mention security issue. Since the past elections, including 2014 presidential elections, were rigged, Afghans have lost their trust in officials. They worry that the candidates will seek to resort to rigging for their self-interests. Meanwhile, presidential candidates, during their past presidential campaigns, promised to fulfill the public needs and protect their rights and freedoms, which was not achieved. Moreover, national laws and constitution have been violated by officials. Despite the candidates' mouth-watering promises, instability and administrative corruption are still the two main issues in the country.

Although Afghans used their suffrage to support democratic principles, their rights and freedoms have been largely violated in one way or another. They still suffer as a result of instability, unmitigated poverty, corruption in judicial system and other government organs, lack of public facilities, etc.

The next president has a heavy burden on his shoulder and has to consider all the ongoing problems. For example, he has to struggle for bringing in security and pushing for peace talks, campaigning against administrative corruption, alleviating poverty, and promoting the country's economy.

The would-be president has to exploit Afghanistan's mineral resources in the best possible way, promote the country's trade level, and connect it with the entire region. Based on Chinese saying that if you want to be rich, build roads first, Afghan officials have to build international airports in provinces and promote the country's connectivity to the region.

Establishing the rule of law and campaigning against corruption is also the obligation of the next administration. Based on recent reports, the United States announced it is withdrawing about \$100 million earmarked for an Afghan energy project and would withhold another \$60 million in planned assistance as a result of corruption and the country's "inability to transparently manage US government resources". US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo is cited as saying, "Afghan government institutions and leaders must be transparent and accountable to the Afghan people. We stand against those who exploit their positions of power and influence to deprive the Afghan people of the benefits of foreign assistance." This indicates unmitigated corruption within the government's machinery and the National Unity Government failed to decrease the level of corruption. With this in mind, the government has to campaign seriously against the corruption and prosecute the corrupt figures regardless of their economic or political status.

Democracy is valuable for Afghan people if it could fulfill their expectations, mitigate their suffering, and protect their rights and freedoms. Hence, Afghan officials and presidential candidates have to play their role responsibly and work devotedly for national interests so that they could win not only the public votes but also their hearts and minds.

## China Has No Intention of Militarizing South China Sea

By: Gen Li, Yuhao Wang &amp; Ruijing Qin

In recent years, with the continuous development of China's economy, the importance of marine resources has become increasingly prominent. The Chinese government attaches greater importance to the development and utilization of marine resources and has introduced corresponding policies. In 2012, the Chinese government set up Sansha, at the southernmost tip of its geographical dimension, to govern the reefs and waters of Paracel Islands, Zhongsha Islands and Spratly Islands. This shows that the Chinese government attaches great importance to the exploitation of marine resources in the South China Sea. The South China Sea is rich in oil, gas and fishery resources, and is of strategic importance to China. China's land reclamation and exploitation of oil fields in the south China Seapose a threat to some southeast Asian countries, and some of them still have territorial disputes with China. On August 23, 2019, the Philippines expressed concern over China's ability to drop nuclear bombs in the South China Sea, according to media reports. Subsequently, the Vietnamese Foreign Ministry issued a statement expressing concern over China's militarization of the South China Sea.

It is obvious that China's actions in the South China Sea are in fact aimed at exploring the sea resources and promoting the common development of all parties. China has no intention of militarizing the South China Sea issues, as it does not serve China's fundamental interests. The main reasons are as follows:

First of all, China has always pursued a foreign policy of mutual benefit, win-win results and peaceful coexistence. Although the islands in the South China Sea have been owned by China since ancient times, Southeast Asian countries have occupied a large number of islands in the South China Sea for various reasons. According to statistics, among the 52 existing islands and reefs in the South China Sea, Vietnam Occupies 29, the Philippines 8 and Malaysia 5. Although China and Southeast Asian countries have been disputing over the territory, militarization of the South China Sea is inconsistent with China's long-standing foreign policy. "Putting aside disputes for joint development" was the policy that was proclaimed by Prime Minister Deng Xiaoping in the 1970s over territorial disputes between China and Japan. This proposal provides a new way of thinking for resolving the territorial disputes between China and Japan and is effective. This policy also applies to the South China Sea issue, with the ultimate goal of resolving the South China Sea issue peacefully to create a favorable international environment for the development of China and the countries in the South China Sea.

Secondly, for China, development in the South China Sea is primarily for economic reason, not that of military. In 2002, China signed the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea with Southeast Asian countries. The declaration stressed

that "the two sides should resolve the relevant disputes in the South China Sea by peaceful means through friendly consultations and negotiations." Peaceful Development is the theme of the times. It is in the interests of China and Southeast Asian countries to demilitarize the South China Sea, shelve disputes and engage in joint development. China is an interest-related country in the South China Sea, so peace and stability in this area is of great significance to China's development. With the implementation of the Belt and Road, countries in Southeast Asia have become key countries along the Belt and Road, and peaceful coexistence with these countries is crucial to the implementation of the Belt and Road. It is not in China's fundamental interest to militarize the South China Sea at a time when the "Belt and Road" initiative is at an important juncture. And peace, increased economic and trade exchanges between the two sides, will bring more benefits.

Thirdly, against the backdrop of a trade war between China and the United States, the United States keeps stirring up trouble in the South China Sea, trying to contain China's development through the South China Sea issue. Recently, U.S. warships have repeatedly illegally intruded within 12 kilometers of the reef in South China Sea. The U.S. goal is self-evident, namely, to increase the risk of military conflict in the South China Sea by promoting U.S. military power in the Asian-Pacific region. It will provide a legal basis for the United States to intervene in the South China Sea and enhance its military strength around it. Clearly, it is not in China's interest to provoke militarization of the Sea.

Last but not the least, the focus of China's island building in the South China Sea is on people's livelihood and the provision of international public goods, rather than the military facilities that other countries glorify. China's relevant construction has made great contributions to the Marine Research, maritime rescue and logistic supply of the countries in the South China Sea. This is not a militarization of the South China Sea. Moreover, China has been building islands in the South China Sea for nearly 30 years. History also proves that China has no intention to militarize the South China Sea issue.

Confrontation and conflict in the South China Sea is clearly not in the interests of all parties. Deliberately playing up China's threat to resolve the issue of the South China Sea is meaningless. Therefore, in order to resolve the South China Sea issue peacefully and earnestly safeguard the national interests of Southeast Asian countries, the wisest thing for Southeast Asian countries to do is to shelve disputes, jointly develop and deepen cooperation with China, and further implement the DOC, we will work together to maintain peace and stability in the South China Sea and promote the common prosperity and development of Southeast Asian countries.

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## Another War Looming in Yemen

By: Manish Rai

Last month port city of Aden which is currently the seat of exiled President Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi government was captured by southern separatists demanding secession of South Yemen. The separatists are backed by the UAE, Saudi Arabia's "So Called" partners in Yemen. The recent clashes are not the first time the two sides that is exiled President Hadi and Southern separatists have engaged in deadly fighting. Three days of battles in January last year killed dozens of people and wounded hundreds in Aden. Earlier in last month things escalated to new heights again when the Southern separatists group called Southern Transitional Council (STC) fully backed by UAE took effective control of Aden on August 10 after four days of fierce battles that killed at least 40. In practical terms, there are now three power centres and multiple militias in today's Yemen: The Houthis, who control capital Sana'a and the northern towns, the southern separatists who are strong in and around Aden, and the internationally recognised government that is run from Saudi Arabia. Fight against the Houthis have almost stalled but another conflict i.e. between Hadi government and Southern separatists is gaining momentum. A temporary stalemate has set in, as Saudi and Emirati officials hold discussions. The two governments have issued statements supporting unity and legitimacy in Yemen. But there is little guarantee that the joint Saudi-UAE appeal, will be heeded on the ground in Aden. Current situation in South is very fragile and clashes can erupt anytime.

To understand this conflict first we have to know some historical background of North and South Yemen. The present-day Yemen consists of two formerly independent countries which united in 1990: the Yemen Arab Republic (North Yemen) and the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (South Yemen). The two Yemen's had never been formally unified prior to 1990 and developed along different political and religious lines. North Yemen's origin can be traced back to the founding of a Zaydi Shi'a imam, a theocracy ruled by an imam, by Imam Yahya in 897. Yahya, a descendant of the Prophet Muhammad, was the first to unify the northern part of Yemen under Islamic rule. South Yemen has a different story. The area of Southern Yemen, other than being briefly ruled by the Ottomans and the Ayyubid Dynasty, had been largely ungoverned due to its sparse population and harsh environment. But in the 19th century the Britishers colonised South Yemen as they were looking for a place, ideally on the Arabian Peninsula, where they could service ships en route to India. Still in 1994 two Yemen's merged in the name of better economy and administrative apparatus but this merger was never imple-

mented in its true spirit. Moreover, this unification left many southerners with unaddressed grievances about representation in the new central government and the distribution of state resources. These southern grievances persisted and became strong through a secessionist civil war in 1994 and the subsequent rise of the grassroots separatist's movement called Southern Movement (or Hirak) in 2007.

Even today widespread grassroots support for secession persists in the south and was exemplified by a massive rally in support of the STC's takeover of Aden. For a time being it look like that fighting in the South have stopped but there is a strong under current which can easily lead to full fledged armed conflict between Hadi government and Southern separatists. There are already reports coming from local officials on the ground that both sides are gathering troops and preparing military hardware for battle. It's being speculated that in the oil-producing Shabwa province, government forces have been preparing to recapture the neighbouring Abyan region and the port city Aden. For sure this incoming conflict won't be over soon as both the sides have powerful backers i.e. Saudis and Emiratis which won't let their respective proxies to lose easily.

The international community and Arab world can't just remain mute spectators of this conflict. As a divided Yemen will result in years of on and off war between the north and south and Southern Yemen will be more of a haven for militant Salafi groups like Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and Iran may deepen its relationship with the Houthis in the north and make it a client state. A divided Yemen is a perfect recipe for chronic instability and conflict in a country that occupies a strategic position along one of the world's most important trade routes. A decentralized federalist state that provides equal degrees of autonomy and resource sharing to southern separatists, northern Houthis, and other traditionally independent regions in Yemen might form the foundations of a future Yemeni state. The first step toward de-escalation of this conflict should be that outside powers reduce their roles and let Yemenis come in forefront and decide for themselves. There is an urgent requirement of talks between President Hadi government and Southern separatists. So that some legitimate demands of separatists like better representation in the government can be addressed immediately. Otherwise unfortunately Yemen will be dragged into another bloody conflict which will only add to the ongoing sufferings of the common Yemeni.

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