

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

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## A Glance at Electoral Atmosphere in Afghanistan

In the first days of the election campaign, the atmosphere of election campaign was mostly cold and unassuming. Many of the presidential candidates showed little interest in election campaigns except one or two teams, others either was unhelpful to win the election or was unsure in holding election due to the ongoing Doha peace talks. Therefore, they sufficed at registration they had previously made at election commission. For almost a month, there was only one team that seriously campaigned but others remained inactive. In recent days, the election atmosphere has largely become competitive due to the changes occurred in one of the electoral teams, and so some of the political figures joined other prominent teams.

Now, it is felt that the election campaign has divided into two main bipolar which may attract other teams towards themselves. The two strongest teams are likely to stay against each other until the end. Regardless of how convincing they are in the election arena, both teams have enough political incentives to hold and continue the election process. No other teams are hopeful to win the election while some of them even do not believe in holding election. Therefore, other teams are more likely to join the two prominent teams before the Election Day.

The reason why the election atmosphere became more serious and competitive, is the recent coalitions and convergence reactively created against the high-flying team lead by the current president. However, the mentioned team has indirectly played a positive role in drawing or unifying its opponent in the field of election competition, and so they may consider the electoral competition as a product of its several months of hard work. Anyway, what seems new and important is the polarization of society and political actors into two prominent teams while in previous elections there was a sort of uni-polar election in Afghanistan. If the polarizations are built on the basis of programs and meritocracy it would open a new chapter of the politics in Afghanistan, but if it is built on the basis of ethnicity interests it will not have a pleasant outcome in the future.

Unfortunately, the past experience shows that political Polarization or political coalitions are most often created on the basis of personal, family and ethnicity interests or created as a reaction against the ruling government. Thus, most of the political parties are established on the basis of ethnicity interests or established as a movement against the ruling team. If we look at the political history of Afghanistan, we can find many examples that personal or family interests are preferred over the public interests. Thus, in recent years, it has seen that sometimes the political parties or political figures are changed their position according to their personal interests; those who embrace each other today were serious enemy yesterday. Therefore, there is no guarantee that tomorrow they may not stand against each other for minor issues. However, this is the characteristics of politics, but it is worse in Afghanistan than elsewhere.

The other issue is poor political culture in Afghanistan; unfortunately, the political is culture is very traditional and ethnical in Afghanistan. In last parliamentary election, many of the masters and PHD holders could not win the election while the tribal leaders and businesspersons who distributed food or money among people won the election. The poor political culture is one of the reasons that encourage people vote on the basis of race, language, religion and also money. On the other hand, the experience of past elections shows that candidates will use from every option, including money, power, raising differences and buying people's vote.

Therefore, a large number of people have never gone to the ballot box with well-consideration of sensible views, but with the attitudes and interests of their personal, ethnic, linguistic, and regional tendencies. In last elections, there were few cases that young people voted for good-looking faces without paying importance to the consequences of their action. These kinds of example might be more in rural areas of the country. As a result, a large part of the social problems comes from selection of weak leaders who inflicted irreversible harm to our nation. Now, what matters to us is that these coalitions and convergence must not drive society towards ethnicity competition. Those who sit around a single table and discuss about big issues must not build their policy on the basis of their own personal or tribal interests. We all know that ethnicity in Afghanistan acts as a fire under the ashes. As soon as an accident occurs somewhere, we give it an ethnic color and use it as tool for reaching personal and family interests. Unfortunately, most people neither are aware of importance of election and nor know the criteria for making a right decision at ballot box. This is the responsibility of impartial thinkers, writers and media to encourage people vote for meritocracy and programs. The candidates must be able to present a coherent and applicable program for solving problems of the country. In order to achieve the aforementioned goal, the candidates should be able to analyse the root cause of problems. It means, unless a doctor does not diagnose the main disease properly, any issuance of prescription would not be effective and may even aggravate the illness. Therefore, the tasks of the candidates are rooted in proficient identification of the problems. The programs that are provided without scientific support and non-professional work are ineffective and will not cure the pain of people. In addition, No one should be allowed to use from unsound campaign methods which end up to divisions in our society.

## Will the Iran Conflict Break the West?

By: Mark Leonard

Before the G7 summit in Biarritz, France, this month, it was a toss-up whether the greater disruption would come from US President Donald Trump or British Prime Minister Boris Johnson. Yet the attendee who had the biggest impact was someone who was not expected to be there at all: Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif.

Although media coverage of the summit focused on trade wars, fires in the Amazon, and the looming danger of a "no-deal" Brexit, the discussions about Iran were probably the most consequential. The fate of the 2015 Iran nuclear deal could determine not only whether the world's most combustible region descends into a nuclear-arms race, but also whether the Western political alliance can survive.

In Biarritz, French President Emmanuel Macron opened the way for a US-Iranian détente. And in recent days, the main players in the Iran drama have all pulled back from the brink. The United Kingdom has released the Iranian tanker (Grace 1) that it seized in Gibraltar. And, more important, Trump has expressed a willingness to meet with Iranian President Hassan Rouhani, even suggesting that he would not object to Iran receiving a "short-term line of credit or loan."

Nonetheless, several factors could derail de-escalation. For starters, the Trump administration remains convinced that the more pressure it puts on Iran (and on America's European allies), the better. US National Security Adviser John Bolton, in particular, wants to asphyxiate the Iranian economy, and believes that cutting off any lifelines from Europe is the way to do it. He and other US officials will use all means at their disposal to chip away at European unity, with the most obvious pressure point being the UK. Worse, beyond applying economic pressure, some in the US - and in the region - also want to set a trap to lure Iran into a military conflagration.

There is also the problem of Iran's hardliners, many of whom feel as though they have gotten nothing from adhering to the nuclear deal, and that the way to build leverage is to become a bigger nuisance. That reasoning has led Iran's leaders to dial up its disruptive activities in a number of theaters, not least by seizing a British tanker in the Strait of Hormuz last month (they, too, have noticed that the UK is Europe's weak link).

Iran's increasing aggressiveness has already raised hackles in Israel, which is reportedly targeting Iranian assets in Iraq (having already launched strikes against Iranian forces in Syria). The danger now is that Iran or its proxies in the Middle East will misread the situation and cross a red line.

Iran has been understandably frustrated by Europe's slow progress in launching Instex, a bartering mechanism designed to allow for some trade between Europe and Iran despite US sanctions. But those in Iran who claim they have gotten nothing from Europe are simply wrong. If the European Union were to abandon its current

approach and join Trump in squeezing Iran, they would certainly notice the difference. In fact, by continuing its policy of escalation, Iran risks losing the moral high ground, and thus the support of Europeans who have gone out on a limb to decouple their Iran policy from that of the US.

Europe's ability to maintain support for the Iran deal in defiance of US pressure has surprised many. Even the British government has adhered closely to the EU position so far. But that could change. If Iran were to seize another British ship and hold UK citizens hostage, it could prompt Johnson to break from the EU and adopt the Trump administration's stance.

Given this risk, it is disappointing that France, Germany, and the UK have not launched a joint European mission in the Persian Gulf, so that an attack on one would be an attack on all. If the UK breaks from the EU line, Germany will be the next target for hardliners (in both Iran and the US) to peel off. In the meantime, the US may ramp up its diplomacy in Central and Eastern Europe, where it has a higher chance of pulling EU member states over to its side. To head off these risks, Macron is asking Trump to consider sanctions exemptions if Iran complies once more with the nuclear deal by curtailing its enrichment activities and opens the door to further talks with the West. He has pointed out that Trump's leverage will diminish over time as Iran builds its stockpile of enriched material and develops ever more ways to circumvent US sanctions. At this point, further escalation by the US could push the Iranians away from the negotiating table for good, raising the possibility of a military confrontation in the middle of Trump's re-election campaign. In this context, it is worth remembering that in his first campaign, Trump promised to end to America's endless wars and pointless adventures abroad.

The Europeans also must persuade the Iranians not to overestimate their own power. Macron's proposal for a new credit line to Iran could strengthen the position of Iranian moderates, but his credibility in Iran will be diminished if the Europeans cannot get Instex up and running. The goal, in any case, should be to encourage Iran to hang on until after the US presidential election in November 2020. Europe should continue to offer financial support, but it also must make clear that further Iranian attacks on European interests could force the EU to adopt the US's containment strategy.

Finally, Europeans need to keep a close eye on the Persian Gulf. Even if they aren't going to organize a joint naval force, they should be developing a de-escalation strategy in case the US or Iran provokes a confrontation. Organizing a naval conference that includes Iran could be a prudent first step.

In broad terms, this is the agenda that Macron will be pushing in the run-up to the United Nations General Assembly meeting in late September. If the strategy succeeds, the Biarritz summit may turn out to be the first successful G7 gathering of Trump's presidency (whether he knows it or not).

Mark Leonard is Director of the European Council on Foreign Relations.

## Gross Violation of Human Rights in Myanmar

By: Hujjatullah Zia

Religious tensions are still felt in Myanmar between the majority Buddhists and the minority Muslims, as minor disputes turned into violent clashes few years back. A number of Muslims were murdered and burnt inhumanely by Buddhists in Myanmar (Burma) - this tragedy, which puts the humanity of the perpetrators under question, was highly traumatic.

Myanmar is a Buddhist nation of 50 million. But an estimated 1.3 million Rohingya Muslims, who are known to have migrated from neighboring Bangladesh generations ago, live in the northern tip of Rakhine state.

The Rohingya Muslims have been denied Myanmar citizenship and attacked by Buddhist mobs, which has left hundreds dead and more than 140,000 trapped in camps. Few years back, Myanmar authorities launched an aggressive campaign to register Rohingya members as Bengalis and label them as illegal migrants from Bangladesh.

Sporadic violence since 2012 has led to great casualties, most of whom are Muslims. To put it in the words of UN reports, Rohingya Muslims are among the world's most persecuted people. They are officially stateless, as neither the Myanmar government nor neighboring Bangladesh recognize their citizenship. There are 800,000 Rohingya living in Myanmar, mostly in slums and refugee camps. Thousands of Rohingya Muslims who left Myanmar in boats in November 2014 have not reached their destinations. The U.N. General Assembly's human rights committee on Nov. 21, 2014, approved a resolution urging Myanmar to provide citizenship on an equal basis to the 1.3 million Rohingya Muslim minority people in the country.

Reports say that authorities commit honor killings against Rohingya Muslim women since 2012 in the State of Arakan as a tactic to drive people out of that land. Hundreds of Rohingya Muslim women, mostly teenagers, became the victims of savagery of the Buddhist Burmese forces, they are deprived of their honor amidst the sufferings as a result of the violence committed by the Buddhist ethnics of Arakan in their villages.

In some cases, locals say, "Security forces entered the village during the night to check out the list of families where those forces raped the Rohingya women in the houses as there were no more men in the houses."

The Rohingya Muslims are killed while their houses and mosques are burnt down, their properties are seized and honor killings are committed against the women.

Strangely, the Burmese Government appears incapable in facing

the brutality of its forces and citizens. According to an elder of Maungdaw, the government is deliberately committing a systematic ethnic cleansing to make the Muslim Rohingya community run away from their land.

In human rights discourse, men are entitled with natural and inalienable rights - rights to life, liberty and property - which must be protected, irrespective of one's sex, color, race and beliefs. It is rightly stated in the preamble of Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) as, "Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world,

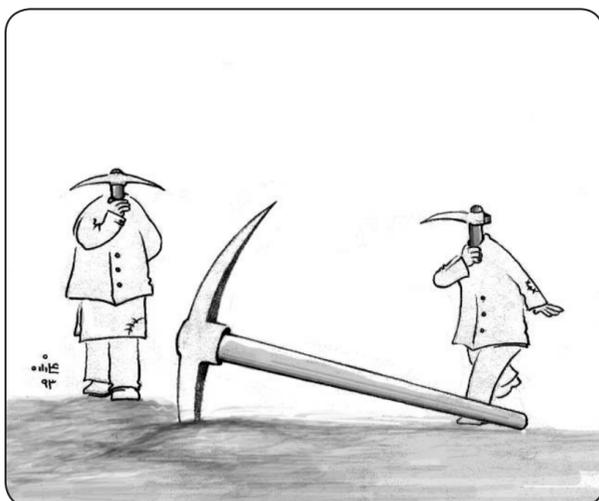
Whereas disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind, and the advent of a world in which human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear and want has been proclaimed as the highest aspiration of the common people...."

We live in modern era, in which barbarity and violence is considered against the international propriety and civil rights. Human societies have left bloody history behind and millions of people lost their lives, had their limbs amputated and sustained mortal injuries in wars and conflagrations - especially in World Wars. Historical wars originated from claiming racial superiorities such as apartheid or Nazism, religious beliefs (Crusades), ethnocentrism, etc. To remedy the problems and prevent from war, violence and violation of men's rights and dignities and to suggest peaceful way of dealing the challenges, the international community was established and international instruments were enacted.

The international community has to address the challenges of the minority groups through putting pressures on the Burmese authorities in Myanmar and prosecute the perpetrators. Since racial and religious tensions lead to further violence and bloodshed and spark regional unrests, the rights and dignities of the minority groups must be protected and recognized in Myanmar. The ongoing violence in Myanmar is highly outrageous to the public conscience.

The international community and the states who claim to advocate human rights should pressure on the Rohingya state to treat all individuals with dignity and stop violating their rights and freedoms. Moreover, the perpetrators must be brought to justice immediately.

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