

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



February 25, 2018

The Impact of Political Split on Nation

The political cleavage within the government's machinery has filled the air with a sense of mistrust. Political orientation and factional tendencies have overridden national interests as political figures pursue their personal ambitions. The persistent political turmoil is a strong blow to the nascent democracy of Afghanistan. Following the 2014 presidential election, the National Unity Government (NUG) was founded on the basis of an agreement signed between President Ashraf Ghani and CEO Dr. Abdullah Abdullah. The agreement stated that Loya Jirga (Grand National Assembly) would be held in 2016 to reform the constitution with a view to assigning the position of prime minister.

Despite the agreement, Loya Jirga was not held in 2016 which generated two horrible consequences. First, it widened the gap between officials as strong political rhetoric was exchanged between them. Dr. Abdullah urged the presidential palace to convene Loya Jirga but it was called against constitution. Second, Afghan people lost their trust in the officials and believed that they would prefer their political interests to national ones.

The wall of mistrust grew taller between state and nation as political turbulence was extended within the government's apparatus. For example, the tension between the presidential palace and the First Vice President Gen. Abdul Rashid Dostum, who lives in the self-imposed exile in Turkey, and the tension between Dostum and the former provincial governor of Jawzjan Ahmad Eshchi, who accused Dostum of sexual harassment, caused a serious trust deficit between state and nation.

With the continuation of the tug-of-war among political figures, the level of public trust declined further. The serious tension between presidential palace and the Balkh governor Ata Muhammad Noor, who refused to step down from his position despite presidential decree, did not only fill the air with distrust but also triggered factional sentiments. Jamiat-e-Islami Party, to which Ata Muhammad is affiliated, had to engage in negotiation with presidential palace so as to settle the political tension and postpone the removal of Ata from his position, which was not productive enough.

After all, the very recent refusal of Samangan provincial governor to step down from his position seemed highly surprising. Abdul Karim Khaddam, who is also affiliated with Jamiat-e-Islami, defied the presidential decree stating that he represented Turkman, an ethnic group, and would resign if Turkman or Jamiat Party asked him to do so.

Although the recent issue has been resolved, it spread a sense of panic among the public. Besides reflecting the wide gap within the government's machinery, Khaddam's defiance aggravated the fear of the public, who believed that defying presidential decree would change into a normal practice.

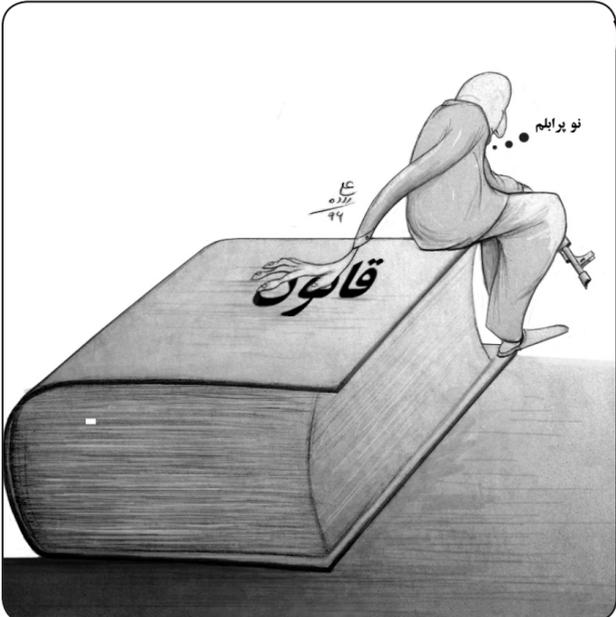
Generally speaking, the law has been widely disregarded by officials. In addition to the establishment of NUG on the basis of agreement rather than law, the legal period of parliament was terminated but election was not held. These issues indicate a blatant disregard to law and constitution and undermine the democratic principles.

Lack of trust between officials which resulted in breaking law such as standing against presidential decree, exchanging harsh rhetoric, and controversy over appointment of ministers, which lasted very long, were a strong blow to democracy.

It is believed that the security situation has been deteriorated following the lack of trust among officials. In other words, political tension has left a vacuum which was exploited by the militants. The increase in human fatalities in recent months mushroomed the scale of disappearance and distrust and the public is of the view that national interests were outweighed by political interests.

To strengthen democracy, both state and nation will have to respect law. Since all are equal in the eye of law, no one is supposed to violate it. Officials, who are also the law-enforcers, must respect the law so that all people learn from them. Similarly, the state should facilitate parliamentary election and conduct it on time. In democratic systems, parliament is considered the beating heart of democracy and if this heart does not beat, the society will be paralyzed politically and economically. Hence, conducting parliamentary election on time is highly essential.

Officials are also supposed to bridge the gap and focus their energy on social, political, and economic issues of the country rather than their factional interests. To regain the public trust, officials need to advocate democracy and bury their differences forthwith. They have to take serious steps in ensuring security and upholding the rights and freedoms of citizens. Otherwise, the wall of mistrust will remain tall between state and nation.



Women and the Unending Barriers

By Hujjatullah Zia

Woman, who is treated as historical pariah, lives a noisome life. She is doomed to suffer overwhelming pain and anguish in one way or another. Her beauty is deemed suitable for advertisement gimmicks and amorous films, her modesty is tainted and her rights and dignity are trampled upon. Her dulcet voice and strong emotional character are used to embellish lucrative and sentimental movies. Her feminine charms and fetishes are used to tantalize the viewers in movie theaters. Her tears roll down her cheeks either in romantic films or under the fists of a cruel man. Her blood is shed not by the villains in movies but by the vicious characters on the surface of earth.

In traditional society like Afghanistan, women's freedoms and social role are restricted within the cultural frames. In another item, they encounter manifold socio-cultural barriers to take active role in social issues. A woman is considered as a productive creature to give birth and to feed and train her children. She is chained in cradle at birth, bound to suffer within the four walls of the kitchen and finally buried in an unmarked grave or her ashes will melt away - she takes all her dreams to the grave with her. This is her role she plays in the traditional community like Afghanistan.

The truth is that a backlash against women rights campaigns started back in 2001 after the overthrow of the Taliban. Its first public face was the young TV presenter Shaima Rezaiee. Accused of flirting on TV, the music show presenter was found shot dead in 2005. The murder was never fully investigated but rumors abounded that hers was a Taliban murder or maybe an "honor killing". That these two possibilities could be expressed in one breath showed that the misogyny of the average Afghan family was perhaps not vastly different from that of a Taliban state.

Since the fall of the Taliban in 2001, Afghan women have made significant advances in rights, with millions of girls attending schools and women holding government posts. But with the steady withdrawal of foreign forces and the Taliban insurgency still resilient, there are growing fears the gains will be lost. "Afghanistan is facing an uncertain future, and is at

arguably the most critical moment in its recent history. Now is not the time for international governments to walk away."

Despite the progress made, women's struggle for civic and human rights still has a long way to go. Three decades of war has left many Afghans both eager for change and afraid of it. There are still many instances of ordinary women experiencing domestic violence, being sexually abused, or being forced into marriage. Women in senior leadership roles - such as in parliament or the police - are still being murdered. Some men feel threatened by the presence of women in senior positions. These men see women's rights as the "westernization" of Afghan culture.

A report has found out that by the time women facing violence reached institutions or informal mechanisms to report abusive conduct, they were often physically and mentally traumatized, with little or no financial and emotional support. For instance, women will be coerced to abandon their husbands' home in case of filing complaints against them. Therefore, a large number of cases will remain unreported.

Women should no more suffer men's fractious attitudes, mental and physical tortures. The religious guidelines and country's law should be practiced upon and the patriarchal system should end so that women's rights and dignity be held in respect. The Constitution of Afghanistan states in article 22 as, "Any kind of discrimination and distinction between citizens of Afghanistan shall be forbidden. The citizens of Afghanistan, man and woman, have equal rights and duties before the law." Moreover, article 24 asserts, "Liberty is the natural right of human beings. This right has no limits unless affecting others freedoms as well as the public interest, which shall be regulated by law. Liberty and human dignity are inviolable. The state shall respect and protect liberty as well as human dignity." Since women are considered inferior neither in religious narratives nor in country's law, the government should enforce the law strictly and empower women through safeguarding their rights and dignity.

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The Future of Putin's Illusion

By Sergey Aleksashenko

WASHINGTON, DC - The outcome of Russia's presidential election on March 18 is a foregone conclusion: the incumbent, Vladimir Putin, will win after garnering 5-6 times more votes than the second-place candidate. Elections in Russia today are no more fair, free, or competitive than in Soviet times. The only difference is that only one candidate was on the ballot back then, whereas nowadays there are several, to make the exercise seem more credible.

Another certainty about the upcoming election is that Putin will once again reincarnate himself, as he has done four times already. His earlier rebirths came in late October 2003, after the arrest of the now-exiled oligarch Mikhail Khodorkovsky, then in 2004, when another new-model Putin emerged for that year's election. After the 2008 election, Putin had to find ways to manage Russia's newly elected president, Dmitry Medvedev. And then in 2012, a belligerent Putin - the one who would later invade Ukraine - rallied his supporters on Moscow's Poklonnaya Gora plaza, overcame mass protests, and returned to the presidency.

Despite his knack for transformation, Putin is unlikely to introduce any substantive policy reversals after his coming victory. Bold, comprehensive reforms of the type proposed by the liberal former finance minister Alexei Kudrin are not in the cards. Putin is an old dog; he will not learn new tricks.

To predict what Putin might do in his next term in office, consider five trends that have defined Russia during his 18-year rule. The first is escalation of political and military confrontation with the West, which has turned Russia into a rogue state that threatens its neighbors. The second is a gradual consolidation of power in the hands of a small circle of elites, who have replaced the bureaucracy, parliament, and judiciary as Russia's ultimate decision-makers.

A third trend is growing reliance on the use of force, particularly on the part of the secret police, in political life. With little or even no evidence, the Federal Security Service (FSB), the successor to the KGB, may now jail federal ministers, regional governors, opposition leaders, theater directors, environmental activists, or ordinary Russian citizens who express political views on Twitter or Facebook.

A fourth, and related, trend is the restriction of constitutionally guaranteed freedoms, including voting rights and rights of expression and assembly. And a final trend is the gradual erosion of property rights, which has left Russian businessmen unwilling to invest in the country.

All of these negative trends will persist, even if the

pace of decline is debatable. Putin's reelection almost certainly means another six years of economic stagnation and international isolation. He may speak about the need for reform; but after nearly a generation in power, his words can no longer be trusted. To divine his intentions and future policies requires focusing on his actions - what he does, not what he says. In my view, there are four plausible scenarios. First, Putin would seek to position himself as president for life, by holding a referendum to eliminate the constitutional limit of two consecutive presidential terms. Or he could be elected as the president of the Union State of Russia and Belarus, with Belarus's current president, Alexander Lukashenko, serving as prime minister. The Union State has been dormant since 1997, but it could be revived to serve Putin's purposes.

In the second scenario, Putin would become a Russian Deng Xiaoping. He would acknowledge that Russia's current political model is unsustainable, and convene a "roundtable" of representatives from around the country to come up with a framework for a new system. The delegates could establish rules for a transitional period comprising the last two years of Putin's presidency, after which Russia would enter a new political era.

Or, like Boris Yeltsin before him, Putin might declare himself exhausted and nominate a successor. In the third scenario, that successor might be a liberal like Medvedev, whereas in the fourth scenario, it would be a conservative like Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin, who currently oversees the defense industry.

In these last two scenarios, it doesn't really matter whether the successor is a liberal or conservative. What matters is whether either type of leader could retain power once in office. Neither a Medvedev nor a Rogozin would be able to keep the current system as it is. But any reforms they might attempt would necessarily threaten powerful entrenched interests, and thus destabilize the existing balance of power. Moreover, it is unclear what kind of relationship Medvedev or Rogozin would have with the FSB, or whether either man could ensure the secret police's noninterference in the country's post-Putin political life.

I won't speculate about which of these four scenarios is most likely. At any rate, they all raise the same question: In 2024, will the leader of Russia be Putin 5.0, or someone else? Whatever happens, we can be sure that with every passing day, Putin will become increasingly preoccupied with his existential quan-

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