

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

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## Elections Must not be Hindered

One of the basic political issues in Afghanistan is fraud-tainted and controversial election process and election system. Though there have been a few presidential and parliamentary elections in the country, the basic structure for a fraud-free and transparent election has not been developed. The election processes have been vehemently dominated by allegations of fraud and misconduct, and the election commissions, both Independent Election Commission (IEC) and Independent Electoral Complaints Commission (IECC) of Afghanistan, have not been able to function independently. Moreover, security has been one of the main issues influencing the election system and process. Even today, there are doubts about the upcoming presidential election. It has already been postponed; and if there is no deal with Taliban, there are fears that it may further be postponed, which will raise serious concerns regarding the political system in the country as the legitimacy of current government is already being questioned. Thus, it is vital that the election must continue in the country without delay and disturbance so that the way to democracy should be paved.

One of the most dominating attributes of democracy is the process of election. If elections continue democracy prospers. This claim can be strengthened by the evidences that lie in the history of greatest democratic states. American democratic history depicts a serious of elections, continued for more than two centuries. United Kingdom's history depicts even a longer continuation of series of elections and today both the countries enjoy a dominant role in international political scenario. They both enjoy economic and political might and there are many countries that have been trying to adopt their systems so as to have justice and order in their systems.

In true sense, elections let the public govern themselves; therefore, in a democratic state government is not anything beyond the General Will. People get the chance of listening the motives and mottos of the leaders and they get time even to analyze them properly. Afterward, they are given chance of casting their votes and choosing the leaders whom they consider capable enough to govern them. It is possible that the leaders who are chosen to form government may not be the best, but they are better than the ones who are not chosen by the will of the majority as every nation in the world have the right to choose what they think better for themselves, without bringing harm to others.

However, there are certain thinkers who believe that even though the elections continue the miseries of the people continue as there is no any change in their lives as a result of the elections. They argue that though the elections change faces of the rulers but do not change the lives of the common people who are being ruled. They basically relate to standard of living of the common people and their access to justice and rights and claim that though elections continue, miseries prevail. However, it would be self-contradictory statement to say that elections continue and miseries prevail because elections can provide opportunities to the people to choose the sort of government that they like for themselves.

In reality miseries prevail because elections do not continue. It would be better to explain it in a simpler manner. In fact, every new election is a new step in the evolution of democracy and every new step is better than the earlier one. No matter, if the government after new election is corrupt. It is always better than the earlier one as the election before the earlier one had also contributed a little in the awareness enhancement, so will do this new one and the election after this one would have better decisions. People will have a chance to see what the chosen government has been able to offer to them. They can have the chance of not casting their votes to one who have not been able to serve them properly. So now, it would be wise to conclude that when elections continue miseries diminish, awareness enhances, democracy evolves and prosperity reigns.

It would be better to discuss the matter in context of Afghanistan. Recently, there have been different sorts of discussions regarding the upcoming elections in Afghanistan and continuously there have been discussions regarding the democratic system in country and its outcomes. There are intellectuals who basically believe that democracy will not be able to lead Afghan political system and they even argue that Afghan society is not so far ready for it. But it would be better to be more logical and scientific. The history of democracy in Afghanistan is very short and before blaming democracy for the miseries in our country, it would be better to ask ourselves, "Has there been democracy in real sense in Afghanistan?" Never! So, when there has never been democracy and elections have a very short history then how can we blame democracy for miseries?

In order to have a fruitful tree of democracy, we need to water it continuously with elections, safeguard it from the parasites of corruption, fertilize it with freedom of expression and above all avoid deformation by dominance of dictatorship. Only then we would be able to have true democracy and would be able to stand strong against political and economic challenges.



## Will Upcoming Election Ensure Democracy?

By: Hujjatullah Zia

Afghans are preparing to celebrate democracy through participating the fourth round of presidential election, for which a number of political heavyweights have been nominated. The candidates seek to form their political teams so as to beat out their opponents in the upcoming election. However, the nascent democracy is highly vulnerable in Afghanistan and likely to sustain strong blow by electoral fraud and obstacles before the election.

The upcoming presidential election will not ensure democracy in the country for four main reasons. For the one, the election is scheduled to be held few months later than its legal period, which is a violation of Constitutional law. Second, the security threat will prevent a large proportion of voters from participation. Thus, they will not be able to use their suffrage, which will be another slap in the face of democracy. Third, the past presidential, provincial and parliamentary elections have proved that electoral fraud seems to be an unavoidable phenomenon in Afghanistan and election will be rigged in one way or another. Fourth, the vacuum for female nominees is felt strongly in the upcoming election. That is, although women are entitled constitutionally to run for presidency, the chance for their victory is highly restricted as a result of traditional mindset holding sway in the country and a large number of individuals, mainly in the tribal belts, are believed to be against their leadership at the country level. In his book titled "The Envoy", US envoy for peace talks Zalmay Khalilzad writes regarding Masuda Jalal, who sought to compete against the former president Hamid Karzai as head of the interim government in 2002 Loya Jirga, that her acquiescence to cabinet post offer in return for not running for presidency "would have avoided a clash with Islamist factions within the Loya Jirga, who were threatening her on the grounds that her candidacy, because she was a woman, violated Islam." In the first presidential election, Jalal ran for presidency, however, she could not win the public support or votes. Thus, sexual discrimination still rules the country.

Meanwhile, political cleavage between officials within the government body on the one hand and negative rivalries between parties vis-à-vis electoral campaign on the other hand will leave little room for the public incentives to participate in the election. Since the establishment of the National Unity Government (NUG) following the 2014 presidential election, the rift widened between officials, who exchanged harsh rhetoric against one another. To the unmitigated chagrin of Afghan men

and women, the mouth-watering promises made by candidates before the election faded away. Worst of all, the NUG failed to decrease the level of corruption in the government's machinery or take more practical step in stabilizing the country. For instance, the death toll of Afghan soldiers, which according to President Ghani has reached 45,000 since 2014, is extremely disappointing. It indicates that despite conducting elections, the challenges, including the administrative corruption and instability, will continue unabated that will deal a strong blow to democracy.

Generally speaking, Afghan officials could not win the public trust and the incentive for participating in the election is incredibly low. Now political parties and candidates' teams are leaving no stone unturned to win the public support for the upcoming election. They have tough task ahead preparing their mouth-watering promises for the masses.

After all, the Taliban are also preparing to have a stake in the government as they are haggling at the table with US envoy Zalmay Khalilzad, who called the recent six-day talks with the Taliban in Qatar "productive". Rumors suggest that if the Taliban reach a consensus with their interlocutors on ending the Afghanistan's conflict, presidential election is unlikely to be conducted since the Taliban insist on establishing "Islamic Emirate", which has nothing to do with election. The Taliban, however, had stated that they would reform their ideology and not impose as strict law as they did during their regime. Thus, Afghans are in limbo and wait impatiently for the result of negotiations. To put it succinctly, a sense of ambivalence about fair and free election as well as fruitful talks fill the air across the country.

The Taliban's relentless refusal to hold talks with Kabul government has enraged Afghan officials, who are at a crossroads. The public also believe that fighting against Afghan government, however, holding talks with US delegates is nonsense. If the Taliban are genuine in the talks, they have to come to the table with Afghan officials. Thus, the Taliban are still considered a strong obstacle before election and democracy in the country.

All in all, although presidential election and peace talks are debated hotly, the outcome of both are ambiguous and Afghans doubt establishment of a democratic country through the election.

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## Nancy Pelosi's Great Wall of Resistance

By: Elizabeth Drew

Whoever explained to then-President-elect Donald Trump what it meant to be president - if anyone did - neglected to tell him that on occasion a president loses a policy fight. That person also forgot to explain to the US president-in-waiting that making a big promise he might be unable to keep required him to figure out how to prevent his most ardent followers from turning against him when he failed to fulfill it.

Sloppy job preparation, together with Trump's distorted personality, led to the near-paralysis of much of the federal government for 35 days, the longest such period in US history, hurting around 800,000 innocent employees and ultimately humiliating a president who sets great store by being seen as strong. But, like most bullies, Trump occasionally reveals his inner weakness.

One person who spotted this is Nancy Pelosi, the Speaker of the House of Representatives. Returning from a televised White House meeting with the president and Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer last December, Pelosi informed her Democratic colleagues of Trump's near-hallucinogenic insistence on funding for a wall along the border between the United States and Mexico to keep out illegal immigrants. "It's like a manhood thing for him," Pelosi said, "As if manhood could ever be associated with him."

Trump had got himself into a major jam. One problem was that he hadn't expected to win the election, which meant that he could promise anything without worrying about whether he could deliver. In early January, The New York Times reported that Trump's longtime former adviser, the now-indicted Roger Stone, suggested using the idea of constructing the wall to help the professional builder remember to bring up immigration, which was to be a major issue for him, at his campaign rallies.

The trick worked too well. Trump came to rely on the wall to bring rally audiences alive. "And who will pay for the wall?" he would shout to his audience. "Mexico!" the crowds would respond in unison. Of course, Mexico had no intention of paying for such a wall.

Pelosi, as Trump has learned, is not the wimpy "San Francisco liberal" of Republican repute. Though she leans left in her political positions, she is strategically pragmatic and as tough as a situation requires. In fact, she's a product of the brass-knuckle politics of Baltimore, where her father was the boss-mayor.

Pelosi clearly flummoxes Trump. He has never had to deal with a woman as smart, dignified, and tough as she is. She is his only known political rival for whom he has not been able to devise a withering nickname (as in "crooked Hillary"): "Nancy, as I call her," he said, as he began to weaken against her, eliciting mockery in much of Washington (and on Twitter).

Trump's immaturity and abysmal judgment were on display when, in his December meeting with Pelosi and Schumer, he blurted out, "I am proud to shut down the government for border security." He added: "I will take the mantle. I will be the one to shut it down." Schumer visibly struggled not to laugh at Trump's monumental blunder. Anyone minimally well informed knows that the person recognized as causing a shutdown loses in the opinion polls. Trump had trapped himself.

Every time there's a government shutdown, Americans learn the same three things: that federal workers - derisively called "bureaucrats" - are human beings with families, illnesses, and other issues; that most don't live in the Washington area, but are spread around the country; and that government contractors get hit, too - not Boeing and the like, but

building cleaners, cafeteria workers, and so forth. So, in addition to the 800,000 or so government workers - some furloughed, some required to work without pay - an estimated one million others were also directly affected. Moreover, restaurants and other small businesses in the vicinity of government facilities were hurt by a lack of business. Stories of the shutdown's harsh impact quickly began to dominate the news.

As the shutdown dragged on, politicians from both parties became increasingly restive. Republicans from areas with numerous government workers, many of them part of Trump's base, became impatient. Many Democrats worried that though Trump was getting most of the blame for the shutdown, Pelosi's intransigence would begin to backfire on them. But Pelosi held firm, counseling patience and explaining that as soon as Democrats offered Trump money for his wall, they would be playing his game and would lose their argument that the government must not be shut down because of a policy disagreement.

After government workers went without their first paycheck, the politically harmful anecdotes started rolling in: a woman who would have to decide between chemotherapy and paying the rent; a guard at the Smithsonian Institution threatened with eviction; parents who couldn't explain to their children why they weren't working and had no money.

Administration billionaires, like Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross, said lunkheaded things (such as, "Why can't they get a loan?"). Some employees who were forced to work without pay, in particular air traffic controllers, called in sick. FBI employees, among others, were lining up at food banks. Trump's approval ratings dropped. Airline delays became the norm. Finally, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, who above all wants to keep the Senate in Republican hands, warned Trump that their side was losing the public-relations war.

McConnell's warning, plus Republicans' expressions of anger to administration officials, turned the tide. On Friday, January 25, after five weeks of endangering thousands of travelers' lives, and making millions of innocent people miserable, Trump caved. He agreed to open the government for three weeks, with no promise of funding for the wall; it was hoped that a resolution could be found during that time. Trump had come away empty-handed.

As is his wont, Trump tried to camouflage his retreat. In a Rose Garden speech, he rambled on with familiar misleading statistics about alleged crimes committed by illegal immigrants and lied about how drugs enter the country - omitting that most come through legal ports of entry in cars, trucks, and trains rather than through openings along the southern border.

Pelosi had outmaneuvered Trump. Suddenly, the president didn't seem so dangerous; he had tried various stratagems: a nationally broadcast speech from the Oval Office that even he knew was leaden; a visit to the southern border that even he didn't think would change any minds; threats to build his "wall" - which by now had become steel slats - by decreeing a national emergency (which would probably land in the courts), though virtually no one agreed that there was an emergency. In fact, entries into the US through the southern border are lower than they have been in years.

As it happens, on that Friday night when Trump buckled, I was at a restaurant where Pelosi and her husband, Paul, were dining with another couple. When the House Speaker left her table, customers and staff alike applauded her. A waitress standing beside me was nearly in tears. She choked out, "We need someone who will fight for us."

Elizabeth Drew is a Washington-based journalist and the author, most recently, of *Washington Journal: Reporting Watergate and Richard Nixon's Downfall*.

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