

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



March 14, 2018

Right to Information: The foundation for Anti-corruption Initiatives

The right to information is a fundamental human right that enables people to have access to information. It is a multi-dimensional instrument that serves both governments and citizens equally. Thus, the right to information is a fundamental tool to ensure anti-corruption measures in the country through making accountable the government authorities; it facilitates the meaningful participation of the citizens with the government and ensures that the citizens have access to information they need. Further, the right to information helps the journalists in preparing investigative reports from different projects, enhance public participation in political and other decision making processes and provide a clearer understanding of government policies and strategies.

The right to information is vital to ensure transparency, unveiling corruption, and holding public officials accountable in the country. A strong and informed legal action requires information, because we only can make an informed decision to know what has happened, what is planned to happen and what are the parties involved in the concerned event. We may seek information for specific events, projects, corruption and any other legal issues that require an informed decision.

Problems with accessible information

The people and media always face problems in terms of access to information; these include first, documents that are full of technical jargon, which is difficult for common people to read them; second, lack of trust of the information provided by the government officials to them, due to lack of people to the government; third, there is almost an absence of background information to support government decision making which results to ill-informed government policies; 4. Lack of organizational culture in public sector for information provision in Afghanistan.

National Security and the right to information

National security is a common problem in any country. Based on this, it is a very critical factor in Afghanistan in terms of access to sensitive information in specific and access to ordinary information in general. However, it shall not be sued as pretext by the government not to provide information to the journalists and the citizens too. Because, this issue has been considered in terms of the right to information according to the global principles on national security and the right to information in order to provides guidance to those engaged in drafting, revising or implementing the laws or provisions relating to the state's authority to withhold information on national security grounds or to punish the disclosure of the sensitive information. Considering the current situation of Afghanistan that many terrorist groups are present in the country, disclosure of information is very sensitive and it is normal if the security institutions of Afghanistan act very cautiously in terms of access to information in the country. Thus, they shall act according to the international and national law, standards, and good practices. Indeed, these address national security-rather than all areas for withholding information. All other grounds for limiting access to information must meet these standards.

Furthermore, many states including the Afghan state have adopted the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) that ensures the right to freedom of expression includes the freedom to speak, receive and impart information from the State. As a result, the Afghan state shall comply with the obligations in the ICCPR, and should have mechanisms in place to facilitate requests for information and public authorities should have the capacity to process them and reply quickly and comprehensively. Right to Information is one of the vital tools for an informed society and informed decision making. The Afghan State like any other state is not only obligated to develop a comprehensive law on the right to information but, also shall develop a comprehensive mechanism to ensure the access of the people to it. As wide spread corruption is one of the main challenges of the public sector of Afghanistan, ensuring the access to information by the people and media is a fundamental tool that can assist the State to tackle the corruption problem in Afghanistan in a systematic and result based manner.



Could the Kim-Trump Summit Succeed?

By Ramesh Thakur

Last year, North Korea's Kim Jong-un and US President Donald Trump were hurling kindergarten insults at each other - "Rocket Man is on a suicide mission," said Trump of Kim; "mentally deranged US dotard," Kim retorted - while threatening to reduce East Asia to a post-atomic wasteland. Now, in a stunning and dramatic development, the two are to meet by May. Kim reportedly is willing to denuclearize and eager to talk directly to Trump, who has agreed.

But optimism about this turn of events must be tempered with cautious realism. North Korea is the nuclear problem from hell. Neither South Korea nor the United States can control the narrative; definitions of success or failure are highly relative; and Trump must enter the talks with no exit strategy. The six decades since the Korean War ended in 1953 - with a ceasefire but no peace agreement - have hardened an increasingly dangerous stalemate. Although neither side is likely to launch a premeditated nuclear attack, the risk of war from miscommunication, misperception, or miscalculation is real.

All key announcements so far have come from Seoul, not Pyongyang or Washington. President Moon Jae-in, a son of refugees from North Korea, was elected on the promise of a two-track approach to the North: sanctions and diplomacy. This led to the Olympic initiative whereby Kim's sister, Kim Yo-jong, attended the Winter Games in Pyeongchang, and the two countries competed as one team. Afterwards, Moon's national security adviser, Chung Eui-yong, and intelligence chief Suh Hoon traveled to Pyongyang and Washington, where, standing on the White House lawn with Cho Yoon-je, South Korea's ambassador to the US - but with no US officials present - they announced the summit.

North Korea conducted the first of six nuclear tests in 2006. The regime's nuclear program has many components, and discussions could founder on what is to be proscribed, permitted, and reversed, and in exchange for what concessions by the US. Will the deal require freezing North Korea's capability at current levels, or complete, verifiable, and irreversible denuclearization? The answer will depend on North Korea's motives in getting the bomb and agreeing to talk. For the Kim regime, the main lesson from the fates of Slobodan Milosević, Saddam Hussein, and Muammar el-Qaddafi was that only nuclear weapons can neutralize US efforts at regime change. But the US never attacked North Korea in the decades after 1953, when it clearly did not have the bomb. Conversely, the North's growing nuclear capability provoked the US into quietly preparing for war while hoping to avert one. Sanctions are an ineffective tool to force North Korea's compliance with the UN's demand that it give up nuclear weapons, and it could prove dangerous to conclude that their pain brought Kim to the talks.

Similarly, the threat of US military strikes did little to concentrate Kim's mind: even Western analysts do not find that threat credible. The US lacks the ability to identify, locate, and destroy all three categories of nuclear targets: warheads, bomb production infrastructure, and delivery vehicles. North Korea also has formidable conventional military capabilities, and estimates of human casualties could total as many as

25 million, depending on the types of weapons used, the geographical theater of the conflict, and the countries sucked into it.

In February, Moon said: "The United States needs to lower its bar for dialogue and the North, too, must show its willingness to denuclearize" as critical first steps. The summit became possible because the US acceded to that counsel, turning its demand for denuclearization, which had previously been a precondition for talks, into a goal of negotiations. But Kim will not trust unilateral US guarantees. Therefore, any deal would require the support of China and Russia, economic and energy assistance from Japan and others, and endorsement by the UN Security Council. China and Russia have welcomed news of the direct talks, but Japan is uneasy.

All parties will explore six elements of a deal that North Korea is seeking: a peace treaty to replace the 1953 armistice, comprehensive sanctions relief, an end to US-South Korea military exercises, diplomatic recognition, acceptance of North Korean space activities, and nuclear energy assistance.

The North must halt all nuclear and missile tests until the summit, and sanctions will remain in place. But will the US and South Korea suspend military exercises? To North Korea, complete denuclearization means the withdrawal of US extended nuclear deterrence from the peninsula.

The Kim-Trump summit is an opportunity that will be difficult to seize and easy to squander. For example, if Trump decertifies the Iran nuclear deal on May 12, ahead of the summit, the move would almost certainly call into question America's good faith and ability to honor negotiated international agreements.

Moreover, there is the general matter of Trump's ignorance, lack of foreign-policy experience, and the many unfilled posts in the US State Department. There is still no US ambassador in Seoul, and Joseph Yun, US Special Representative for North Korea Policy, retired this month. Without extensive diplomatic groundwork, the wily Kim could outsmart Trump. Participation in the Winter Olympics and willingness to sit down with Trump have already given the North a propaganda boost, and a summit with the US president will confer legitimacy on Kim.

Yet Trump has proven to be pragmatic, not ideological. His transactional approach could prove the key. Whether genuine or tactical, Moon has constantly praised Trump's tough stance of maximum pressure as helpful to gaining Kim's interest in a possible diplomatic solution.

Moreover, Trump carries no historical baggage, and his decisiveness, even if rooted in impulsiveness, could provide the necessary breakthrough to overcome decades of accumulated inertia. Trump's ability to reverse himself and deny having done so could be equally advantageous. If a good deal is on the table, nothing the US has done, or that Trump has said in the past, will stop him from seizing the moment. On such slender threads of hope hang nuclear peace.

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China is a Major Country Full of Sunshine (Part 2)

By Liu Jinsong

Chinese foreign policy is full of peace, its national defense policy is just for self-defence and its security policy is of comprehensive consideration, adhere to mutual security and common security. China is acting as the constructor of world peace, contributor to global development and safeguard of international order without any hesitation. China advocates a new type of international relations with the characteristics of mutual respect, fairness and justice, win-win cooperation. Our children should live in a world of durable peace, universal security, common prosperity, openness and inclusiveness, clean and beauty. This is the common dream of the people of China and Afghanistan. No matter how advanced China would be in the future, it will always be the good friend of developing countries including Afghanistan and regard them as the foundation of its diplomacy. In other words, China will uphold justice for weak and small countries and spare no efforts to help undeveloped countries to make progress. China has no intention and no necessity to replace the U.S. in the world arena since we still have many other affairs to deal with and a long way to go before being a power. Currently, Chinese GDP is only 2/3 of that of U.S. while GDP per capita of China is less than 1/6 of that of U.S. Besides, Chinese military expenditure is less than 1/3 of that of U.S. Even in someday when China is really strong and powerful, I believe the world is broad enough to provide a big stage on which the dragon and the eagle can dance together. Several days ago, I hosted an event with U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan Mr. John Bass, celebrating the 7th anniversary of China-US Joint Training Program for Afghan Diplomats together. Afghanistan should be the hub for cooperation between major countries rather than the arena where countries compete with each other.

In the current world, it is inappropriate to start another cold war or, and more unpopular to form a clique to confront with each other. There is no path of development or political model that is suitable to every country, nor exists "the end of history". We must let the people to decide the affairs of their own countries, and to deal with international affairs through international negotiation.

Fourth, the Belt and Road Initiative advocated by China is sunny.

The Belt and Road Initiative is a road inheriting history, a road with complementary advantages, a road for the benefit of all nations, and a road for peace. The Belt and Road is a China-proposed sunshine initiative, and its golden rule is the principle of wide consultation, joint contribution and shared benefits. As a global public product, the Belt and Road Initiative adheres to international laws and market laws, and is a product of high standard and high quality. Regardless of whether it is a blueprint or a concrete project, the participants will discuss the matter and everything will work under the sunshine. It is impossible for any country to dominate it, and there will be no black-box operations. In 2017, China's trade volume with countries along the Belt and Road reached 1.1 trillion US dollars, an increase of 26.8%. Chinese enterprises directly invest USD 14.4 billion in countries along the Belt and Road Initiative.

In today's world, a qualified major country or power should help other countries to carry out infrastructure construction, support the employment of underdeveloped countries and accelerate their poverty

alleviation. Major countries should not stay away from the difficulties of other countries, let alone make irresponsible remarks on other countries' constructive international cooperation initiatives.

Connectivity is a key to the Belt and Road Initiative, and Afghanistan will be the main beneficiary. In last month, the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan International highway cargo transportation from Andijon to Kashgar officially operated, which resulted in an average reduction of cargo transportation time by 2.3 days, and saved 300-500 US dollars per ton of freight. Such cooperation will provide Afghanistan with more opportunities for connectivity. In the future, if the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor is extended to Afghanistan in an appropriate manner, Afghanistan will be closer to realizing its dream of becoming a Silk Road hub again.

Fifth, China's policy towards Afghanistan and the China-Afghan relations is sunny.

China-Afghan relations have withstood the tests of time for over 2000 years. China makes friend with Afghanistan by heart. China has nothing to hide or hold back from Afghanistan. China cherish friendship with Afghanistan, positive image in Afghanistan and the outcomes of the bilateral cooperation. Good image and long-term friendship are China's greatest wealth in Afghanistan.

As a permanent member of the UN Security Council and a responsible major country, China has been engaging and will continue taking a more active position in helping resolve various international hot issues including the Afghan issues.

In settling various hot issues, our approach is of distinctive Chinese features:

Firstly, peacefulness. It means we prefer a political settlement for disputes through dialogue and negotiation, and firmly reject the use of force.

Secondly, rightness. It means we insist to act according to the UN Charter and UN resolutions, respect other countries' sovereignty, security and national dignity, and will never interfere in their internal affairs. We firmly reject imposing one's own will on others.

Thirdly, constructiveness. We do our best to be fair and objective and mediate from the merits of the matter. China attaches importance to the requirement of Afghan people in developing their economy and increasing jobs. Last year, the export volume of Afghan liquorice, saffron, spice and herbal medicine met 144 million USD. Most of them were exported to neighboring countries like China. China-Afghan trade volume was only 20 million USD in 2002, and it has now increased to about 1.1 billion USD, an increase of more than 50 times. Chinese Companies in Afghanistan has provided over one thousand jobs to Afghan people.

As one famous saying goes, "responsibility is direction, experience is capital, and character is destiny". China's sense of responsibility as a major country, the friendly history of China-Afghanistan relations, and the sunny nature of China's major country diplomacy mean that the 19th CPC National Congress and China's "two sessions" will bring China-Afghan relations a new momentum and a new hope.

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