

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



October 23, 2018

Deepening Democracy: Election Management in Afghanistan's Divided Society

Elections in Afghanistan tend to widen long-standing social, political and tribal fault lines. By their very nature, elections are adversarial and divisive, triggering violence notably in countries that lack strong democratic institutions or struggle to manage diversity. Elections have generally failed to nourish cohesion: polls have divided people rather than uniting them. Elections are marred by a remarkable decline in civil citizenship resulting from the preponderant rise of sectarian mobilization, violence and intimidation.

However, in the context of populism, disregard for the rule of law and extremism, elections have become a liability for emerging democracy in Afghanistan. As the UN former Secretary General, Ban Ki-Moon rightly observed, "diversity may be a source of creativity and growth" but when poorly managed, it "often becomes a source of unhealthy competition, conflict and instability."

In Afghanistan, free, fair and peaceful elections are possible where mandated institutions are able to ensure integrity of the electoral process. As the political crises demonstrate, electoral violence is more likely to occur when the electoral process lacks integrity, when there is a perceived critical departure from the accepted rules that govern the process. Efficient and strong Afghan electoral mechanisms are needed to underpin credible elections and transform elections into an asset. Electoral integrity is necessary to turn elections into instruments for promoting social cohesion and inclusion, creating political legitimacy and effective management of diversity. Internal democracy within political parties is becoming necessary in entrenching democracy and electoral management bodies are increasingly called upon to administer free, fair and transparent party nomination processes in the country.

In Afghanistan, the Independent Election Commission (IEC) has a role to play in electoral dispute resolution. Credible election management system is central to democratic stability. Lessons and good practice from across Afghanistan will go a long way in improving electoral management systems and practices to deliver results with integrity. However, preventing electoral violence in Afghanistan requires a multistep approach that takes into account the full electoral cycle and the multiplicity of actors involved in the process. It also requires taking specific measures to eliminate loopholes identified from previous elections, guaranteeing inclusivity and the rights of all Afghan citizens, and responding to vulnerability to divisive political rhetoric and violent extremism.

For free, fair and credible elections, a lot of responsibility is placed on IEC and ECC, which are responsible for managing the electoral process and elections that produce results acceptable to candidates and the electorate. This entails creating a level playing ground by ensuring all actors adhere to rules. For the IEC to be independent, it needs to be supported by the media, political class, the civil society, the judiciary and members of the public when it is attacked. On its part, the ECC should act according to conscience and the law.

Public confidence in the IEC is very important at the national and local level. Experience from Afghanistan's 2014 elections suggests that the level of trust in the IEC at the National and local level were low. However, it is early to judge about the final judgment of the people about Independent Election Commission in terms of 2018 Wolesi Jirga Elections, but the overall feedback of the people, political parties, Civil Society Organizations and Mass media suggest that the level of trust in the IEC at the National and local level is even lower than 2014. This suggests that it is important for the ECC to maintain constant dialogue with politicians who matter at the national level. It is the Duty of IEC and ECC, and all Afghan citizens to ensure Democracy in Afghanistan make good progress.

Right Time to Work Together For a Community of Shared Future

By: Liu Jinsong

A few days ago, I attended the Special Week activity hosted by the Afghan Red Crescent Society, where Afghan friends spoke highly of the efforts of the Chinese Red Cross Foundation to help 100 Afghan children with Congenital Heart Disease. All the operations were successfully performed by Chinese doctors in my hometown, Urumqi. This miracle, embodied with painstaking work of many Chinese people, restored laughter, happiness and hope for the hundred Afghan families.

October 1st is the National Day of the People's Republic of China. The Chinese Embassy shared joy of the festival together with Afghan friends. The Gansu Acrobatic Troupe, regardless of fatigue and physical discomfort after traveling thousands of miles from Gansu province of China to Kabul and Bamyan, made five consecutive wonderful performances to war orphans, university teachers and students within a short week. The waves of applause and laughter from the children and the youth reflected the pristine humanity amid the chaos of war as well as the people's pursuit of a colorful life of culture, and touched a wide range of friends in China and Afghanistan.

Afghanistan has entered election season. Almost all political parties leaders and candidates told me that, although they hold different political views between each other, they do share one commonality, i.e. they regard themselves as friends of China and are enthusiastic about China-Afghanistan relations. They said that being a major country adjacent to Afghanistan, China has never interfered in the internal affairs of Afghanistan, never lectured Afghanistan on its elections, electoral institutions or candidates, never imposed its own will on Afghanistan, never attached any political strings to the economic assistance to Afghanistan, and never seek any agents in Afghanistan. This kind of country is trusted by Afghanistan and this kind of people is respected by the Afghan people.

Afghan friends also told me that, Afghanistan admires the fact that China has enjoyed political stability, lifted more than 700 million people out of poverty over the past four decades, that all the 56 ethnic groups of China live in harmony, nearly 1.4 billion people live and work in peace, and people from all walks of life of different regions and religions all have a sense of security, gains, happiness and beautiful prospects for life and career. Although having made remarkable achievements in reform and opening-up as well as the building of democracy and rule of law, instead of being arrogant, China has always been modest and prudent, and always treated all countries as equals. China never exports its own model, and always supports others to build the country by exploring a development path matching their respective national conditions. This image of a responsible major country has earned the heart of the Afghan people.

China has a tradition of making new friends while never forgetting the old ones. The other day I met with relatives of His Majesty Former King Mohammed Zahir Shah, and they also cherished this tradition very much. I was told that His Majesty had great feelings towards China all through his life. He once told people around him when inspecting a China-aided fish farm in 1965 that, China was a trustworthy and close friend of Afghanistan, all the China-constructed projects were out of true friendship and benefited all the Afghan people, China did this without any self-interests and even asked for nothing in return.

Some Afghan friends express their concerns towards the ongoing interna-

tional situation and Afghan domestic security, and ask me about the Chinese solution to world pattern and China-Afghanistan relations. This is my answer: fostering a new type of international relations and building a community with a shared future for mankind is the "Chinese Approach", promoting China-Afghanistan strategic partnership for the community with a shared future is the "Chinese Promise".

China and Afghanistan have already been partners with a shared future. Both countries sympathized and supported each other in anti-imperialist and anti-colonialist struggles, experienced the rise and fall of the ancient Silk Road together, fought for independence and self-reliance together, supported Non-Aligned Movement and UN Agenda for Sustainable Development together, and combated international terrorism and transnational organized crimes together.

China has linked its own development closely with the reconstruction of Afghanistan, and welcomed Afghanistan to share the opportunity of its development. China provided thousands of training opportunities for Afghan professionals and nearly 200 scholarships to Afghan youths every year, encouraged capable Chinese companies to invest in Afghanistan, and built schools and hospitals for Afghanistan. China takes the request of Afghan brothers seriously and fulfills promises to the utmost extent. China has taken the initiative to open its transportation line and domestic market to Afghanistan and now Afghan saffron, pine nuts, marble and carpets can be sold at a good price in China. Afghan farmer and businessmen are the biggest beneficiaries of this initiative.

China, with its words and deeds unanimously, supports Afghan peace and reconciliation process based on the principle of "Afghan-led and Afghan-owned", and promotes dialogue and negotiation among relevant parties. China makes active efforts for Afghanistan but never makes decisions for Afghanistan, fully respecting the Afghan people's sense of sovereignty, safety and dignity. The reason that China advocates the China-Afghanistan-Pakistan Trilateral Foreign Ministers' Dialogue is that good-neighborhood is one of the prerequisites for the long-term stability in Afghanistan. China sincerely hopes that Afghanistan will become a harbor for cooperation instead of a competitive platform for major powers and is willing to work with the international community to support the Afghan peaceful reconstruction. China welcomes and supports everything that is for the benefit of Afghanistan and thinks that the whole world should also act in the same way.

As the international and regional situation's changing and so as our domestic social conditions and public opinions, China and Afghan need to keep pace with the trend of the times. As a community of shared interests, responsibilities and destiny, the two countries can work together to lead the international community to a new path of mutual respect, fairness, justice and win-win cooperation. The two countries can deepen cooperation on jointly building the Belt and Road Initiative, stick to the principle of achieving shared growth through discussion and collaboration, and implement projects in the fields of connectivity, trade and investment, people-people exchanges and provincial cooperation in a down-to-earth manner. The two countries can expand political dialogue and policy coordination at all levels, strengthen mutual understanding and support each other on issues involving core interests and major concerns, and deepen bilateral and regional counter-terrorism cooperation.

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Khashoggi Crisis Highlights Why Investment in Asia Is More Productive than in the Middle East

By: James M. Dorsey

Growing Western political and corporate reluctance to be associated with Saudi Arabia in the wake of the suspected killing of journalist Jamal Khashoggi spotlights fundamentally different investment strategies and environments in the bulk of Asia and the oil-rich Gulf states, the continent's most western flank.

The Khashoggi crisis highlighted the fact that much of investment in the Gulf, irrespective of whether it is domestic, Western or Chinese, comes from financial, technology and other service industries, the arms industry or Gulf governments. It is focused on services, infrastructure or enhancing the state's capacities rather than on manufacturing, industrial development, and the nurturing of an independent private sector.

The crisis has put on display the risks Gulf governments run by adopting policies that significantly tarnish their international reputations. Technology, media, financial and other services industries as well as various European ministers and the US Treasury Secretary have cancelled, in the wake of Mr. Khashoggi's disappearance and likely killing while visiting the Saudi consulate in Istanbul, their participation in Davos in the Desert, a high-profile investors' conference in Riyadh later this month.

By contrast, the military industry, with US President Donald J. Trump's encouragement, has proven so far less worried about reputational damage. Sponsored by Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, who is suspected of being responsible for Mr. Khashoggi's likely murder, the conference was intended to attract investment in his Vision 2030 plan to reform and diversify the Saudi economy.

In highlighting differences in investment strategies in the Middle East and the rest of Asia, the fallout of Mr. Khashoggi's disappearance goes beyond the parameters of a single incident. It suggests that foreign investment must be embedded in broader social and economic policies as well as an environment that promises stability to ensure that it is productive, contributes to sustainable growth, and benefits broad segments of the population. In contrast to the Gulf where, with the exception of state-run airlines and DP World, Dubai's global port operator, the bulk of investment is portfolios managed by sovereign wealth funds, trophies or investment designed to enhance a country's international prestige and soft power, major Asian nations like China and India have used investment to lift hundreds of millions of people out of poverty, foster a substantial middle class, and create an industrial base.

To be sure, with small populations, Gulf states are more likely to ensure sustainability in services and oil and gas derivatives rather than in manufacturing and industry. Nonetheless, that too requires enabling policies and an education system that encourages critical thinking and the freedom to question, allow one's mind to roam without fear of repercussion, and grants free, unfettered access to information - categories that are becom-

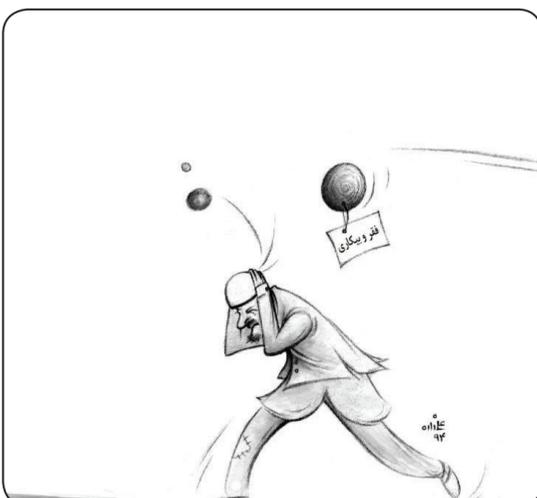
ing increasingly rare in a part of the world in which freedoms are severely curtailed.

China's US\$1 trillion, infrastructure-driven Belt and Road initiative may be the Asian exception that would come closest to some of the Gulf's soft power investments. Yet, even so, the Belt and Road initiative, designed to alleviate domestic over capacity by state-owned companies that are not beholden to shareholders' short term demands and/or geo-political gain, contributes to productive economic growth in the People's Republic itself. Asian nations, moreover, have been able to manage investors' expectations in an environment of relative political stability. By contrast, Saudi Arabia damaged confidence in its ability to reform and diversify its oil-based economy when after repeated delays it suspended indefinitely plans to list five percent of its national oil company, Saudi Arabian Oil Company or Aramco, in what would have been the world's largest ever initial public offering.

The Khashoggi crisis and the Aramco delay followed a series of political initiatives for which there was little equivalent in the rest of Asia. These included the Saudi-United Arab Emirates military campaign in Yemen causing the world's worst post-World War Two humanitarian crisis; the 16-month-old diplomatic and economic embargo of Qatar by Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain and Egypt; the detention and failed effort to force Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Hariri to resign; and the diplomatic Saudi spat with Canada in response to a tweet criticizing the kingdom's human rights record. As a result, foreign direct investment in Saudi Arabia last year plunged to a 14-year low.

All of this is not to say that the rest of Asia does not have its own questionable policies such as Chinese claims in the South China Sea or the Pakistani-Indian feud, and questionable business practices such as China's alleged industrial espionage. However, with the exception of China's massive repression of Turkic Muslims in its north-western province of Xinjiang, none of these are likely to fundamentally undermine investor confidence, derail existing social and economic policies that have produced results or produce situations in which avoidance of reputational damage becomes a priority. At the bottom line, China is no less autocratic than the Gulf states, while Hindu nationalism in India fits a global trend towards populism and illiberal democracy. Nevertheless, what differentiates much of Asia from the Gulf and accounts for its economic success are policies that ensure a relatively stable environment and are focussed on social and economic enhancement rather than primarily on regime survival. That may be the lesson for Gulf rulers.

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