

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



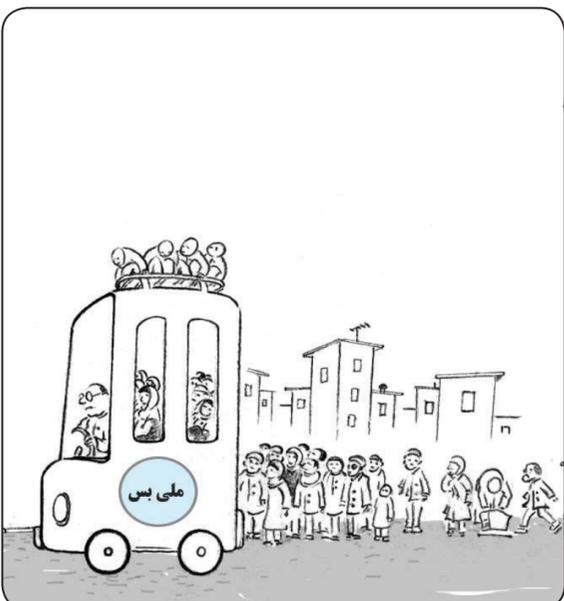
September 03, 2018

Deepening Democracy: Election Management and Stability in Afghanistan's Divided Society

Across Afghanistan, elections have become more frequent and the accepted mechanism of choice for popular expression, choice and change of leaders and political accountability. They are increasingly considered as the path to good governance and getting rid of corrupt leaders. Political transitions tend to be more participatory, peaceful and constitutional, a trend attributed to citizens' awareness that their votes matter and demand for transparency, greater independence of Electoral Management Bodies, a clear move towards issue-based politics and national ownership of electoral processes.

Despite these progresses, democratization in Afghanistan is a paradox. The democratic experiment remains fragile and susceptible to instability and violent conflict. What puts the democratic achievements of Afghanistan is systematic corruption in public sector institutions, weak electoral system susceptible to fraud, ethnicity, social divisions and ethnic political parties. These factors strongly impact the pace of democratic progress and make the country vulnerable to political chaos. In a country like Afghanistan social divides and distrust act as an inactive volcano having a huge power to push the country towards ethnic conflicts. Therefore, Afghanistan requires free, fair and peaceful elections. To ensure this, Afghanistan must have mandated institutions able to ensure integrity of the electoral process. The lessons of previous elections of Afghanistan and political crises in other countries, especially the developing countries, show that 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. As a result, efficient and strong Afghan mechanisms are required to underpin credible elections and transform elections into an asset in the country. For Afghanistan, electoral integrity is necessary to turn elections into instruments for promoting social cohesion and inclusion, creating political legitimacy and effective management of diversity and closing the ethnic gaps. Thus, internal democracy within Afghan political parties is becoming necessary in entrenching democracy and electoral management bodies are increasingly called upon to administer free, fair and transparent electoral processes. In Afghanistan, the Independent Election Commission and Electoral Complaints Commission have a critical role to play in preventing electoral violence and electoral dispute resolution. As a result, the electoral commission should be accountable to the Afghan citizens and Afghan political parties. It is mandated to take all the necessary measures in terms of allegations of fraud Tazkeras or ID papers that maintained the special stickers of the Independent Election Commission. Though, IEC has rejected its involvement in the alleged rigging efforts and has termed it as parties hitched negative propaganda against the election body which has nothing to do with the IEC. However, it is necessary the Independent Election Commission takes the necessary steps to clarify the issue to the nation. And if it is really a false allegation by the political parties to undermine legitimacy of the IEC or confuse the Afghan citizens, the NGA should be referred to the relevant legal institutions.

Free, fair and credible elections are the responsibilities placed on Afghanistan Independent Election Commission. As a result, IEC is responsible for managing the electoral processes and elections that produce results acceptable to candidates and electorate. This entails creating a level playing ground by ensuring all actors adhere to rules. For the IEC to be independent, it requires to be supported by the media, political parties, the civil society, the judiciary and members of the public when it is attacked. On its part IEC should act according to conscience and law. If not so, Afghanistan may face a challenging and dangerous political crisis due to the refusal of the results of the coming elections in the country. And IEC would be the main institution responsible for the consequences of a political conflict based on ethnic identity and the motives of enter ethnic differences, ethnic mobilization and conflict in the country.



Why Should China Deepen its Cooperation with Afghanistan?

By Wenxian Zha, Youhong Lin & Aijiao Liu

On December 26th, 2017, Wang Yi, Foreign Minister of the People's Republic of China, Rabbani, Foreign Minister of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and Asif, Foreign Minister of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan held the first trilateral foreign ministers' dialogue in Beijing, China. During the dialogue, the three foreign ministers agreed to make concerted efforts to promote tripartite cooperation under the three themes of "political mutual trust and reconciliation", "development cooperation and connectivity" and "security cooperation and counter-terrorism". China and Pakistan were ready to work with Afghanistan to adhere to the principle of mutual benefit and win-win results, so as to actively explore the extension of the Sino-Pakistan economic corridor to Afghanistan in an appropriate manner. On January 8th, 2018, Afghan President Ashraf Ghani received the letter of credence from China's new ambassador to Afghanistan at the presidential palace, claiming Afghanistan would treat China as a permanent and reliable strategic partner and was willing to actively participate in the construction of The Belt and Road". All in all, as the relations between China and Afghanistan continue to improve, the areas of cooperation between both countries have further expanded. What factors have made the cooperation between China and Afghanistan more and more extensive? Here are several humble opinions from the author below:

First and foremost, both countries have the common vision of development. As the international environment changes, China and Afghanistan have encountered common development issues in the international environment. Both countries share the same circumstances in security and development. The two countries can complement each other's interests with existing conditions, and develop security cooperation and political mutual trust to ease their own problems. Under the continuous threat of terrorism, Afghanistan has undergone slow economic construction. Compared to other nations, China has lower level of influence upon Afghanistan, acting as a low-key active participant though. China has always hoped to promote Afghanistan's peace and development through bilateral and multilateral cooperation with Afghanistan, as well as to create a favorable international environment for China. Obviously, the cooperation between China and Afghanistan has had a real common development vision.

Secondly, both countries share the same economic and cultural needs of development. Afghanistan is a major country along the "belt" and "road" as mentioned in the the Belt and Road Ini-

tiative, and deepening Sino-Afghanistan cooperation will set a good example for the smooth progress of bilateral relations between China and other countries along the "belt" and "road". Therefore, China attaches great importance to the cooperation with Afghanistan. The friendly cooperation between the two countries will bring a happy and harmonious life to people in both countries. The protruding strip of land in the northeastern Afghanistan is bordered with Xinjiang in China. Xinjiang of China and Afghanistan share certain similarities in habits, customs and geographical environment. Therefore, huge potential for bilateral economic and trade cooperation could be expected along the border. Meanwhile, driven by The Belt and Road Initiative in recent years, education cooperation between the two countries has ushered in a new period of development as relations between China and Argentina gets increasingly closer. The number of Chinese and Afghan students studying abroad has been expanding year by year, and education cooperation has been intensified continuously, which has trained a large number of high-quality talents for both countries and promoted bilateral exchanges to a new level.

Last but not least, the two countries have the common concerns about security environment. China and Afghanistan share common security interests. Afghanistan and China are vital neighbors of each other, and their security problems have a great impact on each other. China regards the security and development issue of Afghanistan, and has always believed that only when Afghanistan enjoys a peaceful and stable development environment, security in the country would prevail. And the same applies at the international level as well. China has a long-term development prospect. China hopes that Afghanistan will take an active part in cooperation with China and actively solve the problems affecting their bilateral cooperation. Ultimately, the relationship between China and Afghanistan has been improving and the areas of cooperation have been expanding. As the Chinese proverb goes, "many hands make light work". China and Afghanistan are not rivals but partners. In the face of various difficulties, China and Afghanistan can eliminate the issues of common concern through friendly consultation. On the basis of political mutual trust, both countries should strengthen the friendly relations between each other by broadening cooperation in the fields of economy, culture and security, and thus jointly seek the future of peace and prosperity for the two countries.

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The Populist War Against Intelligence

By Kent Harrington

Despite his seemingly limitless capacity for vindictiveness, it would be a mistake to interpret US President Donald Trump's decision to withdraw the security clearance of former CIA director John Brennan as only his latest vendetta for lèse-majesté. True, Brennan has all but labeled Trump and his behavior, including his Russian connections, a national security threat. But Trump's move is more than personal payback. As the most recent blow in his two-year-long attack on the intelligence community, his slap at Brennan is a harbinger of more to come as he tries to bring his espionage agencies to heel.

More ominously for the health of the democracies of the West, other populists are following Trump's example. In Europe, a variety of right-wing parties, having now found themselves in power, are taking on former government antagonists, who have monitored and policed their extremism for decades. In Austria, the country's populist leaders have been intimidating, muzzling, and purging the country's intelligence services. In February, on orders from the populist interior minister, Austrian police raided the country's main intelligence agency - the very organization charged with monitoring right-wing extremism. (It should be recalled that the Freedom Party, the coalition partner in Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz's government, was founded by ex-SS officers).

And what was the pretext for the raid and subsequent demotion of senior Austrian intelligence officials? That the agency was running an operation aimed at harming North Korea. No doubt, Trump wishes that he could pull off such a stunt, and both halt the investigation of him led by Robert Mueller and bring to heel all of the US intelligence agencies. A fan of strongman leaders who "get it done," Trump admires diktats and brazen contempt for legal processes. He almost certainly will pay even closer attention as the intelligence-fueled investigations into his presidential campaign's possible collusion with Moscow in 2016 close in on him.

It is this combination of self-interest and contempt for law that makes Trump's revocation of the Brennan's security clearance so troubling. The regulations governing clearances are straightforward: the president has the power to deny access to official secrets if someone is found to have compromised classified information or is at risk of doing so.

By all accounts, Brennan has done nothing of the sort. In fact, Trump admits that. Buried in the explanatory word salad that accompanied the revocation of Brennan's security clearance, the White House claimed that Brennan's "erratic" behavior was the cause. That accusation would be laughable if it wasn't so serious.

Trump has simply ignored the laws - including laws governing the US intelligence services - that he swore faithfully to execute. Eleven former CIA directors and deputy directors, as well

as 70 former senior CIA officers (including me), said as much last week, criticizing the unprecedented revocation as political coercion and accusing Trump of misusing presidential powers, damaging national security, and threatening current and former officials' right of free speech. As if to underscore the point, White House spokespeople say that Trump intends to order more revocations, including a former national security adviser and deputy attorney general, as well as former directors of national intelligence, the CIA and the National Security Agency.

The hit list is no coincidence. Those in the crosshairs have overseen intelligence collection and analysis that informed the intelligence community's conclusion that Russia interfered in the 2016 election, including possible collusion with Trump's presidential campaign. With attacks on the intelligence and law enforcement communities playing well among his supporters, Trump could well double down on this demagoguery. But his willingness to use his presidential powers as a blatantly partisan political weapon breaks ground that no American should want him to tread.

The damage that has resulted from the raid in Austria shows why. While Austrian courts ultimately will determine the raid's legality, the effects are already clear. By stripping Austria's spies of their files, the raid has essentially put the intelligence service out of operation and raised doubts among allied intelligence services about the Austrians' reliability. Internal operations are dead in the water, as is intelligence sharing with European counterparts.

Washington is not Vienna, but the parallels deserve close attention nonetheless. Trump's attacks on the intelligence community and its former leaders are unprecedented, and it would be naive not to consider their impact, not only on the current intelligence leadership but also on the rank-and-file officers that do the difficult and often dangerous work of intelligence gathering and analysis. That is why it is so important to adhere to the laws that empower (and constrain) intelligence agencies and that underpin the political independence and integrity of their officers.

Events in Austria should be a warning. For democracies to thrive, government must be transparent as well as publicly accountable. When it comes to overseeing intelligence agencies pledged to protect their sources and methods, the challenges are obvious. But so, too, are the threats, including to the democratic process itself, when politicians violate rather than respect the rules that govern their intelligence services' integrity.

In the final analysis, Brennan isn't the only victim of Trump's unwarranted and vindictive action. So are all Americans when national leaders put their own interests above those of the country and corrupt the political system they are sworn to defend.

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