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Candidates and the fate of Afghan presidential elections



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Based on a recent announcement of Independent election commission, the next presidential elections will hold on 20th of July, 2019. The candidate nomination process was scheduled to start on 22nd December, 2018 and end on 20th January 2019.

Although around 70 people received the information packages from the election commission during the nomination period, but only 20 people went to the election commission for nomination and 18 eligible individuals were registered as candidates for the presidential elections.

Among the eighteen candidates, some of the team formations and alliances appeared against the expectations, since there are amalgamation between individuals who previously had immense political dissensions and have accused one another many times.

The CSRS weekly analysis comprises a discussion concerning Afghanistan's previous elections experiences, teams for upcoming elections and their formations, the current situation in the country and the fate of presidential election based on insight to the capacity of election commission.

Elections Late Experiences

After the collapse of the Taliban regime, the first presidential and parliamentary elections were held in 2004, and 2005 respectively. At the time, elections were organized by the Election Organizing Office with cooperation of the United Nation.

On 30 April 2004 based on former president Hameed Karzai 21st decree the Independent Election

Commission (IEC) was established. According to article 156 of the Constitution of Afghanistan, the commission is responsible to manage and supervise, and make decisions based on people.

The main purpose for establishing the IEC was to deal with the corruption and obstacles for upcoming elections since there were some complains of corruption and interference regarding the 2004 election. However, the presidential elections of 2009 and 2014 and the parliamentary elections of 2018 indicate that the problems, corruption and interferences have increased compared to the past.

The Independent Election Commission held presidential and provincial council elections in 2009. The election led to altercation between two leading candidates; Hamid Karzai and Dr. Abdullah Abdullah, which ended up with Hamid Karzai being selected as the president of Afghanistan.

The Independent Election Commission had led the 2010 parliamentary elections. In this election the issue of corruption was even more intense, to the point where a special court was established to investigate corruption.

During the 2014 presidential elections, the IEC faced serious allegations and accusations of corruption which were more than any other times. During the first round of elections, the leading parties were Ashraf Ghani and Dr. Abdullah Abdullah. None of the leading candidates had enough votes to succeed. The issue became more complicated during the second round because of the accusations of corruption. The conflicts finally ended with the arbitration of the foreign minister of the United States, John Kerry and establishment of Unity government.

Current Election Teams:

Among the eighteen individuals who registered themselves for the entry of presidential elections in Afghanistan, some teams seem powerful and it can be very competitive during the elections. However, some are considered weak due to lack of their influence and political power. Overall, the eighteen teams are divided into two parts:

First: Among the eighteen teams, there are candidates who consider themselves worthy of presidency and are truly trying to reach the presidential palace. This type of candidates include Dr. Ashraf Ghani, Dr. Abdullah Abdullah and Mohammad Hanif Atmar who are involved in a serious competition and contest with each other.

Second: Some candidates who neither have the hope of success nor a chance to win. They have nominated to gain Fame and political concession. A number of teams might give up prior to the election for the benefit of other teams. However some who ran for popularity may try their luck in elections.

Afghanistan Eighteen Teams for the Presidential Elections - 2019:

No	Candidate	First Vice President	Second vice president
1	M. Ashraf Ghani	Amrullah Saleh	M. Sarwar Danish
2	Abdullah Abdullah	Enayatullah Babar Farhamand	Said Sami Saadati
3	M. Hanif Atmar	M. Younus Qanuni	Haji M. Muhaqiq
4	Gulbaddin Hekmatyar	Fazal Hadi Wazin	Hafizurahman Naqi
5	Rahmatullah Nabil	Murad Ali Murad	Masooda Jalal
6	Shaida Abdali	Abdul Basir Salangi	Said Ali Akbar Kazimi
7	Ahmad Wali Masood	Farida Mohamand	Abdul Latif Nazari
8	M. Shahab Hakimi	Noorul Habib Hasir	Abdul Ali Surabi
9	Famarz Tamana	Said Qiyas Saidi	M Amin Rashadat
10	Noor Rahman Liwal	Abdul Hadi Zolhekmata	M. Yahya Weyar

11	Ghula Faruq Najrabi	Shareefullah	Babakarkhel
12	Noorul Haq Ulumi	Bashir Ahmad Bezhan	M Naeem Ghoyur
13	Zalma Rasool	Abdul Jabar Taqwa	Ghulam Ali Wahdat
14	Enayatullah Hafiz	Janat Khan Fahim	Abdul Jamil Sherani
15	Said Noorullah Jalili	Abdul Jamil Rouman	Cheragh Ali Cheragh
16	M Hakim Toorsan	M. Nadar Shah Ahmadzai	Shafiullah Qaisari
17	Abdul Latif Pedram	M Ehsad Haidari	M Sadiq Wardak
18	M Ibrahim Alkozai	Khadija Ghaznawi	Said Sami Kiyani

Strong Candidates teams:

Looking at the previous presidential elections in Afghanistan, it appears the competition will be very warm and strong. Overall in the previous elections, despite the number of the candidates, there were few strong teams. But this time there are many strong teams competing in the election, which none can win in the first round and the election will go to the second round.

- **Mohammad Ashraf Ghani and his team:** Ashraf Ghani who was previously leading “Change and permanence” team is now nominated himself for candidacy together with Amrullah Saleh and Mohammad Sarwar Danish as the team of “Government Builders”.

The Afghan president nominates himself at a time when most of his former associates and strong members of his team have left him and are no longer his supporters. General Dostum who apparently obtained most of the votes for his team is supporting the opposition now. Mohammad Hanif Atmar who was his close ally and a threat to the opposition during the unity government is no longer around him but his opposition and in the coming election a strong competitor to Ghani. In addition, Ashraf Ghani's other Allies and friends who were previously supporting him are now partners to other team which has made the competition more challenging for him.

During the previous elections, Ashraf Ghani obtained more votes from Pakhtun and Uzbek ethnicities. Since General Dostum is no longer on his side, Ghani has lost a huge share of Uzbek people. Moreover, the candidacies of Atmar and Gulbuddin Hekmatyar has reduced his share among Pakhtuns.

The former head of National Security, Amrullah Saleh who has previously seriously criticized unity government is now on Ghani's Side. However, the support of Amrullah Saleh might not bring Ghani enough votes due to the division of Jamiat Islami members and their support from different election teams. Likewise, Sarwar Danish who is one of the few people who has continuously supported Ghani. Even though Ghani has kept him on his side to have the votes of Hazara people, but the support of Mohammad Mugaqeq from Atmar and Karim Khalili' alliance with Dr. Abdullah has divided the votes of Hazara people.

Despite obstacles, the current position as the president gives Ashraf Ghani chances to win the elections. In addition, Ghani's stress on having central government in the political system and elimination of chief executive's position is a strategy which has attracted many followers.

- **Dr. Abdullah Abdullah and His Team:** Abdullah Abdullah who was leading (Reforms and Harmony) team in previously election has this time nominated himself under the slogan of "Stability and Harmony" for next presidential elections. He has nominated himself to presidential elections three times since 2001. Although He has lots of experience in elections and has competed extremely well during all elections, but didn't get opportunity to enter the presidential palace as a president.

Dr. Abdullah Abdullah is going to participate in the upcoming elections on behalf of Jamiat e Islami, Junbesh e Islami and Wahdat e Islami parties. His team has the support of famous political and national personalities such as Gen. Dostum, Mohammad Karim Khalili and Salahuddin Rabbani.

Besides Gen. Dostum and Karim Khalili, the support of Jamiat e Isami is another strength of Abdullah's team. Although some key members of the party are separately supporting other candidates, but the leader of Jamiat e Isami party, Salahuddin Rabbani announced Abdullah as the only official candidate of the party. If the division and support of Jamiate Isami members from different parties is a secret plan and the purpose is to divide the votes of Pakhtun people among Ashraf Ghani, Hanif Atmar and Gulbudeen Hikmatyar, then Abdullah can be a strong competitor to Ashraf Ghani. However, if it is not that and the Jamiat members honestly support their teams, then it would be tough for Abdullah to compete with Ashraf Ghani.

- **Mohammad Hanif Atmar and his team:** Among the 18 Candidate, Atmar's team formation and structure appears to be stronger.

With the slogan of "peace and moderation" Younus Qanuni, an important member of Jamiate Islami is first deputy and Mohammad Muhaqeq who is currently the second deputy chief executive's office as a second deputy, and a strong leader of Hazara people. Similarly, "peace and moderation" team has the support of other political personalities such as Ata Mohammad Noor, Ismail Khan, Sabawoon, Zakhilwal and Said Ahmad Gillani, which has strengthened the Atmar's team.

Atmar was an admired politician among the followers of Ashraf Ghani Durning unity government. However, after his disagreement with Ashraf Ghani and his speech in which he said "If I become a president, I will make adjustments in the Constitution, change the presidential system to partial presidential" have probably reduced his popularity among the people, especially Pakhtuns.

Although Hanif Atmar has the support of many well-known political, national and Jihadi characters, but the results of parliamentary elections exposed that people are no longer under the influence of these faces. They vote for candidates based on their personal decisions.

- **Gulbadin Hekmatyar and his team:** The leader of Hezbe Islami, Gubaddin Hekmatyar who had stopped the war against the government and the foreigners had made peace with government in 2017 is now a registered candidate for next Presidential elections. During 2014 elections, the party announced Qutbuddin Hilal as their candidate in elections who later obtained around two hundred thousand votes. However, Hekmatyar as an Islamist and a Jihadi leader has still many followers and can reduce the shares of votes from other candidates.

The Electoral System and the Election Commission:

Although After the controversial election of 2014, one of the promises the leaders of Unity Government made was to improve the electoral system and hire new personal to the IEC. After a while from the formation of the Unity Government, President Ghani order, some changes to be made to the IEC and it was done. The IEC has started their work. But by the passage of time it seems the system is still weak in management and has lack of capacity.

The commission managed to held the election after three years delay in 2018 and was poorly performed. Its Weak administration, corruption and extensive frauds are issues due to which the commission couldn't announced the final results of parliamentary election. Therefore, one of the huge obstacles for the upcoming presidential election are the Independent Election Commission itself and voting system.

The commission strived to use the biometric equipment for the Parliamentary elections, which however wasn't a successful attempt due to poor management. The technical issues of using biometric system and unfamiliarity of people with the system were reasons of the unsuccessful implementation. This is considered another obstacle in the way to the presidential election. If the commission can't successfully manage the biometric system for the next election, the results will be at least as controversial as the Parliamentary election results.

In addition, the paper identity cards which were used as valid document to participate in election had paved the way to corruptions. The use of thousands of fake identity cards during Parliamentary elections is an example of the corruption. Although the issue could be resolved with the distribution of electronic identity card, but the distribution process is slow and only a small number of people obtained the electronic identity card. Perhaps we can face similar problems and obstacles for coming presidential elections.

Besides all these problems, the security condition in Afghanistan is another challenge for the elections. Currently, around 45% of the region is not under the government control. The area which is under the control is also not completely peaceful which can question the transparency of the elections.

The Future of Elections:

Based on an insight to the political and security condition of the country and previous presidential election, the fate of the elections seems to be connected with the following issues:

Peace Negotiations: In order to end the current war, the United States and the Taliban are negotiating face to face since a few months. Although after the Abu Dhabi meeting, there was a disagreement over the agenda of negotiations and the meeting was postponed for a while, but after Khalilzad visited various countries, has started last week. It is said that the parties had once again begun discussion on disagreements.

If the Taliban and the US peace talks reach to an arrangement, the elections date might be delayed and time is needed in order for the Taliban to discuss the formation of a future government with the Afghan officials. It is also said that the delays in the schedule of the elections, nomination process and the commencement of the process are for pressurizing the Taliban for peace. Until the peace talks are ongoing with the Taliban and the discussion has a final positive or negative outcome, the elections might remain postponed.

Final Results of Election: The transparency of the final results are mostly criticized by the losing candidate in Afghanistan after the announcement. In 2009, Hamid Karzai and Abdullah Abdullah, the leading candidates discorded over the results of elections. Similarly, Ashraf Ghani had a dissension with Abdullah Abdullah over the results which ended with the establishment of Unity Government.

The former defense minister of the United States of America, Robert Gates in his book mentioned that: Obama's administration wanted to interfere in 2009 elections, postpone it and help the opposition to succeed. The writer says that the government of Obama wanted to cast out a president of an independent country.

The 2014's elections had similar results. Although the commission had dozens of foreign supervisors in every department, but the results were still criticized and led to discords and finally ended up with the arbitral of John Kerry.

The future of the presidential elections is again considered to be connected with similar issues. If the commission actually carry out the elections on the scheduled date, it would be better for the candidates teams to accept the votes of the people and not let the foreigners to corrupt or facilitate corruption in elections.
End

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