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Upcoming Presidential Election and the critical situations in the country



Preface

Campaign for the Afghan presidential election was kicked off on Sunday in which 18 candidates, including President Ashraf Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah, are running for president. Afghanistan's president marked the official start of the country's election season Sunday by insisting "peace is coming" and that pivotal talks with the Taliban would take place. Ashraf Ghani is hoping to fend off challenges from 17 other candidates to score a second term at twice-postponed presidential elections now slated for September 28. "Peace is coming, and the negotiations will take place," Ghani said at a rally marking the start of two months of campaigning. His comments come a day after his peace minister, Abdul Salam Rahimi, said direct talks would take place with the Taliban within two weeks as part of a larger, US-led push for peace. Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah began his election campaign on Sunday, saying the existence of two mainstream political parties in his team, including Jamiat-e-Islami and Junbish-e-Milli party (the National Islamic Movement of Afghanistan), will help him to

achieve a landslide victory in the September poll. Abdullah concluded that the National Unity Government had setbacks and achievements in the past five years, adding that there were also some issues during this period which harmed Afghanistan's governance, the Afghan politics, national unity and the pride and dignity of the Afghan people. Another candidate Enayatullah Hafiz the campaign started with cleaning the streets, and the reconciled leader of Hizb-e-Islami, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, on Thursday, launched his election campaign in Kabul where he said that the war will not have a winner and that the election was the only solution to bring the nation out of the current crisis.

Upcoming elections and possible results

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.

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 Islami 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 Islami party, Salahuddin Rabbani announced Abdullah as the only official candidate of the party. If the division and support of Jamiate Islami 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.

Difficult elections and critical situations

1- Election problems

a-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.

b-The Electoral System

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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.

Country status

1-Taliban talks with America

Talks between the United States and the Taliban have continued over the past few months to end the continuing war in Afghanistan. There have been seven meetings between the United States and the Taliban so far, with both sides talking about progress, saying that there is consensus in many areas, and we hope that by the end of September there will be some results. In these peace talks, if the United States and the Taliban reach an agreement to end the war, elections may not be held, so far the Taliban have rejected face-to-face talks with the Afghan government last week. The statement said they spoke with the United States not as a government but as a joke after talking to the Americans.

[Secretary Pompeo](#) also said in a speech on Washington on July 31 that Trump has ordered the withdrawal US troops in Afghanistan before 2020 election in America. "Trump has no doubt about it, and he has told me to end this war," he said. When President Trump announced his strategy for Afghanistan, he said, "It depends on the situation, not on the partition times," but today ordered the secretary of state to deploy troops before the election. Withdrawal from Afghanistan suggests that

the White House also gives priority to peace, not to elections, so there is a possibility that the elections will not take place.

2-Impaired Security status

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 under the control is also not completely peaceful which can question the transparency of the elections.

3- Financial Problems

The total cost of election fraud is estimated at 150 \$ million. Initially, the government's effort and desire was to obtain election spending from foreign donor countries, but only in the US Embassy in Afghanistan, the UN and The World Development Bank has accepted the same 60 \$ million remaining. The 90 \$ million government allocated the budget for the 154 development projects that were allocated to these projects in the solar year 1398, but the Wolesi Jirga rejected the mid-year budget of 1398. The finance ministry asked for clarification on the matter, so in the financial sector, the government also held elections accelerate the problems faced could be

4- Lack of coordination

The lack of coordination between the government, the electoral groups, the National Assembly and the public is something that may hinder the elections, said the Electoral Complaints Commission of Afghanistan, a state-run electoral group led by President Mohammad Ashraf and acting chairman Abdullah Abdullah. Leaders of the Stability and Coordination Election have taken advantage of government resources and prospects in their campaign meetings, which they say is a clear violation of electoral principles. Attending campaign meetings by state-building and cooperative election groups If they continue to exploit government resources and prospects, they will announce a decision with the election.

In the meeting with Wolesi Jirga Chairman Mir Rehman Rahmani, Khalilzad said that peace is necessary for the Afghan people at present and that the American

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talks with Khalilzad expressed optimism with the Taliban and assured that the Wolesi Jirga Fully supports this point.

Afghans all over the country are happy to see the past fate of elections, the escalation of war and the start of a face-to-face dialogue with the US; many are of the view that peace is a pre-election step and all sides should take concrete steps in this regard.

Conclusion

Both the US and the Taliban are more interested in peace talks than ever before. The US President wants the end of Afghanistan's war to be the reason for the 7th election, and the Taliban, however, have a three-day ceasefire over Eid. The Taliban, however, point out that the group is still the most powerful force and the most important factor in the ongoing conflict; however, it is the ongoing change in the region and the campaign for ISIS, which has a widespread presence in Afghanistan. So the Taliban are afraid of losing their role on the battlefield. The month of Timber has set the first dates to come to an end. At the same time, presidential election campaigns have begun. The ruling teams have begun their campaigns expeditiously and are committed to securing elections, and see peace as belonging to the next government. The war is gaining momentum, according to a UNAMA report released on Assad's eight that said six civilians were killed and wounded in the first six months of the current year. UNAMA says civilian casualties by the Taliban in the first half of the year 8 percent decreased by 5 percent compared to the first half of the year, but civilian casualties by pro-government forces increased by 5 percent. Is due to airstrikes.

Given all these circumstances, it seems that the priority of Afghanistan at present is peace, not elections. Hopefully, the ruling party will hold on to the truth and not use the election as a tool for peace.

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