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Democracy: One Scary Voter Registration at a Time

Abstract: Those who thought they had seen a light at the end of the tunnel seven years ago and who nurtured the hope for a new and prosperous Afghanistan are finding it difficult to accept that the light was only a mirage. It seems that while they were waiting for the bright of the day, they placed their chips in the wrong places. They find it also difficult to justify their waiting. They had hoped that a new and democratic Afghanistan would emerge from the ashes of long years of war and despair. They had placed their hopes in the untested navigational skills of a man, who was chosen by a haphazard meeting in Bonn to lead the broken ship of Afghan politics to the shore of hope. They even voted him in as the leader to shape their destiny in the hard task of nation building. Now not only the Afghans, but also the Western supporters of that leader are questioning his abilities to lead the country out of its present predicament.

It is once again time for Afghans to register and or reregister for another round of the so-called democratic election for sometime later next year. Elections in a war torn, insurgency and warlord infested Afghanistan sounds like a joke, but it might happen because the world that has invested heavily in money and lives in Afghanistan is keen that Afghanistan should succeed. But will it?

The skipper in whom the Afghans and the West placed their hopes is increasingly losing popularity and is getting accused of indecision, inability to tame the warlords or to reconcile the insurgency. Nor has he been able to show any sustainable progress in areas of reconstruction, economic and social rehabilitation or for improving the lots of the people. He has failed to reduce unemployment, which is as high as sixty percent in some instances or control corruption, which plagues his administration to the corp. And even now that he has rearranged the players in his cabinet people are wondering if anything would change in the short period of a year ahead to give them hope to go to the polls and vote him in for another term.

But before they could vote for him or any other of the many candidates they must register or reregister. It has been announced that to make the process of registration of voters a

little easier, registration cards issued to voters last time would be accepted for the new elections and only new voters or those who have lost their cards need to be registered. For the Western democracies this process seems to be easy, not for Afghanistan where already insurgents have started scaring off people from getting registered. Afghanistan is a relatively large country and a large part of it is off limits to the weak central government. Billions of dollars pumped into developing of the national police, for the most part has not produced a police force to be able to maintain security even in the so-called normal times, let alone the issue of election. There are many instances that the police need to be policed themselves for being corrupt and ineffective.

Now the United States Secretary of Defense has asked NATO allies to temporarily increase the number of foreign troops in Afghanistan so that security could be maintained during elections. That unfortunately would add another dilemma to the already complicated situation regarding elections. Opponents would consider an enlarged number of foreign troops as foreign intervention in national elections and therefore it would weaken the status of the next elected president claiming that he or she was elected in the shadow of the military power of the “Big Brother” countries. Even within the population, people have been given reason to question whether democracy or voting for politicians who take office but cannot lead the country out of its misery is a feasible solution. Even a ranking foreign diplomat was reported to have stated that perhaps rather than a weak president may be a dictator would be more effective.

But democracy is by far the best solution to life and liberty. However, democracy is easily said than practiced. Democracy strongly requires prerequisites in order to succeed. Democracy requires a society that is blessed with education, broadminded citizens and a will to honor peoples’ wishes and not those of warlords or those with military power of leaders with selfish designs. It requires peace and tranquility among the masses. It needs an environment where hope is stronger than despair, and where love is stronger than hate and where peace is more powerful than war. Does that sound like Afghanistan?

Democracy, especially Western style democracy, is not something that you supplant in societies that are fundamentally different in their historical and cultural settings compared to the prevalent ideologies of the West. For democracy to work in any society you should work to prepare the grounds first. In the past seven years Afghanistan was provided with some tools. These include a progressive constitution, three branches of government including a central congress consisting of the lower and upper houses as well as provincial representative bodies. But none of these institutions has worked appropriately. The reason may or may not be their design on paper, but in the application, where a weak executive tries to control a weaker parliament sequestered by divisions based on education, gender, ethnicity, personal ambitions and above all not understanding in full the workings of democracy. Also a weak government that has taken over an even weaker judiciary in its grips has contributed to the worsening of the prospects for Afghanistan. And to make things worse, we are talking about a country that is required to welcome more than sixty thousand foreign military troops on its soil to fight terror with no clear cut definition of tasks, terms, timetables, coordination or cooperation. The enemy is illusive and is based for the most part in a neighboring country that itself has had ill designs for Afghanistan.

And we talk of democracy. So let all concerned including the national government, supporters of the national government, the UN, the European Union, and the world at large work closely to provide the grounds for true and real democracy and more important a

truly functioning government in Afghanistan and then let the Afghans solve their own problems. The resilient Afghans might then show the world that with a little help from the world community, they are able to fight the worlds' war on terror as they fought the free worlds war against communism and succeeded. Help them establish democracy in their county one vote at a time, but make sure that that vote is the true and informed vote of the Afghan nation delivered freely and without any form of intervention from any source anywhere in the world. 10/12/2008