



Middle East Studies

at the Marine Corps University

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Can Democracy in Afghanistan Survive the Growing Pains?

by Amin Tarzi

On January 26, 2011, the newly elected Afghan National Assembly held its opening session, albeit not without controversy. The September parliamentary election results, announced by the Independent Election Commission (IEC) on November 24, were marred with allegations of fraud and foreign manipulation; however, there were also signs of progress, as more women and minorities claimed seats. The combination of setback and progress is not an uncommon occurrence in post-Taliban Afghanistan elections. As the country advances on the road to democracy, there will be some growing pains, some challenges. These are to be expected. However, the most recent performance by Afghan President Hamid Karzai at the January 26th opening session causes concern.

After threatening to delay the opening of the Afghan National Assembly, Mr. Karzai finally reluctantly agreed to open the session. Because his presence is a requirement to legitimize the opening session, his threats to delay were thwarting the nascent democratic process's advancement and calling into question his commitment to democracy. His rationale? He did not like the election results and was seeking time for a special tribunal established by the Afghan Supreme Court through presidential intervention to rule on allegations of fraud by losing candidates, many of whom were his supporters. And while Mr. Karzai permitted the session to open, he took to the floor and decried the involvement of "unnamed" forces – read Western – in the failure of the electoral process to yield legitimate results.

Not legitimate or not favorable to Mr. Karzai? Yes, there were varying degrees of fraud; however, after a thorough review of the results, the IEC called the election and announced the results. The results did not work in favor of Mr. Karzai.

GROWING PAINS... (CONTINUED ON PG 2)

MES Notes

MES Iran Lecture Series

MES at MCU is hosting an Iran Lecture Series throughout the 2010-2011 Academic Year entitled "Framing the Iranian Challenge".

The next Lecture in the series will be presented by Ambassador John Limbert on 28 February from 1400-1530 at the Gray Research Center, Quantico, VA.

Further information and resources pertaining to the MES Iran Lecture Series, as well as the 2010 MES AfPak Lecture Series, are available at : <http://www.mcu.usmc.mil>, under the Middle East Studies tab.

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He not only lost a fair number of his supporters in the already hostile lower house (Wolesi Jirga or People's Council), but also partially due to security concerns in the Pashtun dominated areas of Afghanistan, the current configuration of the 249-member chamber ended up with only 96 Pashtun members compared to 115 in the previous Wolesi Jirga elected in 2005. He claimed fraud and brought in the judicial branch to force a more favorable outcome. In his speech opening the National Assembly, Mr. Karzai alleged that unnamed hands had interfered in the September 2010 polls, saying that "the main question is which forces want to cause the crisis of legitimacy" for Afghanistan's nascent governing system.

That is a good question. Which forces are they? Mr. Karzai's no-so-subtle inference pointed squarely at foreign manipulation by his Western backers. However, Mr. Karzai himself took care of this problem after the fallout from the 2009 presidential election. According to the Afghan election law, the IEC and the Electoral Complaints Commission (ECC) are responsible for organizing elections and investigating any allegations of fraud or error. The 2009 presidential election was also marred with fraud and errors, and the IEC and ECC were questioning the legitimacy of the results. However, this time the electoral results were favorable to the President. Mr. Karzai took special aim at the ECC for having foreigners at its helm, calling into question the legitimacy of their positions and motivations. After being declared the winner amid controversy, President Karzai called for the Afghanization of the ECC. The current makeup of both the IEC and ECC are the result of post-2009 election adjustments.. And it is this IEC that announced the election results in November. And it was those unnamed forces that pressured Mr. Karzai to allow those results to stand and the National Assembly to open, despite the on-going judicial case. In Afghanistan's bumpy road to representative democracy, the opening of the second National Assembly is a bittersweet compromise and a reminder both that the institutions of democracy are fragile and easily manipulated by personality until mature and that until institutions overcome individual influence they may need tending through foreign assistance and, at times, foreign pressure.

Since 2001, the Afghan electoral process has been progressing. Yes, there have been challenges with violence and irregularities. However, the very act of holding elections to transfer power is a laudable achievement for both Afghans and their foreign supporters. As recently as the 1990s power was sought and fought over through violent means and at times by some of the same people who are now parliamentarians. Indeed, Mr. Karzai acknowledged in his speech that "Afghans have proved that they want to embrace democracy." Additionally, the fact that 69 women were elected in September to the Wolesi Jirga is a victory not only for Afghan women, but also for the budding civil society in Afghanistan. The Afghan Constitution allocates a quarter of the seats in the Wolesi Jirga to women. The number of women now slightly exceeds the 25 percent mark, meaning women have won seats not through affirmative action but in open competition. This is a substantial step forward for the democratic process....

MES Past Events and Publications

3 November 2010

Dr. Amin Tarzi presented a lecture entitled "Beyond Façades: Democratization in Afghanistan," at a conference entitled "Electoral Politics and Democratization in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq and Iran," organized by University of South Florida, Tampa, FL.

16 November 2010

Dr. Amin Tarzi presented a talk entitled "Iran's Policies and Options in the "AfPak" Region," to AfPak Hands Great Books elective at Industrial College of the Armed Forces, National Defense University, Ft. McNair, Washington.

Recent Publication

Dr. Amin Tarzi contributed the entry "Abd al-Rahman Khan" published in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Three (Leiden and Boston: Brill)

...Similarly, the fact that all major ethnic groups in Afghanistan are represented in the Wolesi Jirga in significant numbers is a milestone along Afghanistan's road to becoming a truly multiethnic democracy. Ironically, the latter point may not rest well with Mr. Karzai, as he may view this as an unfair redistribution of seats in the newly elected Wolesi Jirga away from the Pashtuns, who he believes are the majority. Of course, Afghanistan's last census, albeit an incomplete exercise, was conducted more than three decades ago and leaves the current numbers of people and ethnic groups to the imagination of each community. Should such a dispute arise, the budding system could be jeopardized – without referees from the outside.

However, during his speech on January 26th, Mr. Karzai bluntly stated, "We should put an end to foreign intervention and ambiguity in our democracy, elections and affairs" and called for the Afghanization of not only the electioneering but also the state-building process. The Afghan President referred to the Provincial Reconstruction Teams and other "unnecessary offices" as "serious obstacles ahead of state building process" in this country.

The course of action regarding Afghanistan's future poses a dilemma both for Afghans and for countries, such as the United States, which have supported the Afghan state-building process with their blood, treasure and political capital over the last decade. On the face of it, the agreement by the Afghan President to assume responsibility for his country's security and the handling of its state structures without foreign involvement and, therefore, presence, is a welcome message. Most troop-contributing states within NATO's International Security Assistance Force are facing increasingly difficult political climates at home and are ready for a phased withdrawal from Afghanistan that leaves a viable system behind that does not collapse under the pressure from the ongoing insurgency, does not allow terrorists with international reach such as al-Qaeda to incubate inside Afghan territory, and adheres to at least a measure of the democratic principles currently being respected in Afghanistan. While minimalistic, after a decade of fighting, most of the states involved in Afghanistan would accept such an outcome as a success.

However, is it feasible right now? Honestly, there is no telling what would occur if Afghanistan's security and state-building management were to be fully turned over to the Afghans right now. The last time a foreign-backed Afghan government was facing a stiff and determined resistance and that foreign support withdrew, the government, the unpopular regime of Najibullah, lasted only two years. That said there should not be a comparison drawn between the Afghan system of today, a budding democracy with an elected parliament, to the authoritarian regime of Najibullah. The key to success is ensuring the institutionalization of the democratic process. This takes time and requires a cooperative synergy among Afghanistan's three branches of government. If this occurs, there is every indication that Afghanistan stands a fair chance to stand on its own with the support of its foreign allies through agreements based on Afghan realities and needs. However, if personality and individual influence remain key drivers in the political process, especially if the executive branch continues to work with the legislative bodies only when it serves personal interests, Afghanistan faces a grim future without foreign supervision and direct support.

Growing pains. Afghanistan's democratic process is in the throes of adolescence, yearning for independence but not quite mature enough to stand alone. Afghanistan's leadership has the choice to embrace democracy, as the people have, and encourage the institutionalization of Afghanistan's remarkable democratic achievements and move forward to meet the challenges of statehood on its own and with support of its friends and allies.

MES Iran Lecture Series

by Adam C Seitz

In October 2010 the Middle East Studies (MES) program at Marine Corps University launched a lecture series entitled “Framing the Iranian Challenge”. In the four proceeding months MES has hosted four presentations by regional experts as part of an effort to broaden the Marine Corps’ understanding of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The first two lectures in the series presented by Dr. Kenneth Katzman of the Congressional Research Service and Mr. Simon Shercliff of the British Foreign Office have been highlighted in *MES Insights Volume 1, Issue 5*.

In his December 2010 presentation on U.S. and Israeli perceptions, Dr. Anthony Cordesman, Burke Chair in Strategy at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, discussed how Iran’s military doctrine which has placed great emphasis on the use of its asymmetric capabilities due to its lack of conventional strength poses a serious threat to the regional balance and have created a new set of regional and international security concerns.

Mr. Michael Eisenstadt of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, speaking in January 2011 continued on the theme of Iran’s asymmetric strategy, focusing on its buildup of “niche” capabilities, as well as its use of proxies and psychological operations to lever its influence. Mr. Eisenstadt laid out what he regards as Iran’s “strategic and political culture” of “patience, indirection, resistance, and demoralization.”

The presentations discussed above, as well as more information about the lecture series, are available online at <http://www.mcu.usmc.mil> under the Middle East Studies tab. For further information on the series or how to obtain copies of the lectures, please contact MES of MCU at MCU_MES@grc.usmcu.edu.



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