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Update on Afghanistan's Parliamentary Elections **By: Greg McBride**

It has been several weeks since the Afghan people went to the polls for the second time in as many years. The election, which saw 2,600 candidates running for office, including 400 women, was marred by the uncertainty and fear created by threats of violence by the Taliban on anyone involved in the voting.

Indeed, the Taliban endeavoured to make good on their threats. Seventeen people were killed in insurgent attacks the day of the election. Over 1000 of the 6800 polling stations did not open under credible threats of violence. Prior to election day 3 candidates were killed by the Taliban.

In spite of all of this, 3.6 million Afghans arrived at the ballot boxes, in a country of 10 million. Turnout was lower, as expected, in the more violent south. However, the attacks were relatively minor, largely uncoordinated and sporadic.

Nevertheless, there appears to be widespread electoral fraud, especially in the south eastern regions where the Taliban's presence is more entrenched. Afghan news agencies have reported young boys casting ballots, ballot box stuffing and election officials casting multiple ballots.

Recounts and audits have been ordered in almost 340 of the 5400 polling stations, with a further 227 polling stations having their votes completely thrown out. As a consequence, the preliminary results which were set to be published on October 9th have now been delayed until October 17th. Some insiders expect that it may not be until the 30th of October that the result will be made available.

But in all of this there is some hope. The issue of electoral fraud seems to be taken seriously, if only retroactively. Unlike, past elections, where the corruption seems to stem from highest levels, those involved with examining the election result argue that the instances of fraud appear to be local in nature.

Even so, there has been a strong resistance to this corruption by citizen journalists and activists, who took it upon themselves to document and publicize instances of abuse using cell phone cameras. Despite a lack of coverage in the west, local Afghan news agencies have proven relentless in their pursuit of electoral fraudsters.

At the governmental level, steps have also been taken in Khost province to deal with corruption; a senior election official was arrested in the south eastern border region. Furthermore, the additional time taken to assess the legitimacy of election results and ensure the votes are recorded as accurately as possible suggests that there is a systematic push to establish a legitimate democracy, despite the efforts of some local actors.

All of this suggests that a significant portion of the Afghan people are starting to take democratic reforms seriously and retroactively trying to bring to justice those who have attempted to sway the results. However, the eventual goal of free, peaceful and democratic elections is still a long way off.

Further Reading: [Afghans Get and Eyeeful of Election Fraud](#), [Afghan Election Official Arrested and Vote Tally Delayed](#), [Afghan Election Results Delayed after Fraud Concerns](#), [Afghan Election Official is Held Police Say](#).

The Bosnian Elections: A Storm on the Horizon?

By: Jonathan Preece

On October 3, Bosnia-Herzegovina held general elections to select representatives at the cantonal, regional and federal levels. Although Bosnia's civil war ended 15 years ago with the signing of the Dayton Accord, the results of this election indicate that ethnic rivalries continue to linger. With a population of 4.6 million, Bosnia is demographically divided between Bosniaks (Bosnian Muslims), ethnic Croats and ethnic Serbs. Reflecting this diversity, Bosnia's postwar political structure consists of two semi-autonomous regional entities – the Bosniak and Croat dominated Bosnia-Herzegovina Federation and the Serb controlled Republic Srpska – and a complex central government which includes a tripartite presidency, national parliament and other state institutions based out of the capital Sarajevo. This precarious political system, overseen by the European Union and NATO, has been in a state of deadlock since Bosnia's last general elections were held in 2006.

This time around, Bakir Izetbegovic of the Party of Democratic Action (SDA) won the race for the presidency's Muslim seat, while Zeljko Komsic of the Social Democratic Party (SDP) was elected to the Croat presidential seat. During the run up to these elections, both Mr. Izetbegovic and Mr. Komsic ran on politically moderate platforms emphasizing reconciliation and the importance of an autonomous and unified multi-ethnic Bosnian state. Following the announcement of his presidency, Mr. Izetbegovic reiterated his commitment to these ideals while stating, "we are going to stabilize the situation in Bosnia and bring a better future of the citizens of Bosnia."

There is little doubt that Bosnia is in need of economic reform and political consolidation. Following a period of relative dynamism, Bosnia has grown stagnant in recent years, as sluggish economic development and an ongoing political stalemate has contributed to social unrest and heightened regional grievances. Highlighting the gravity of Bosnia's economic woes, the Bosnia-Herzegovina Federation faces the distinct possibility of bankruptcy due in part to huge pension payments that are owed to Bosnian veterans of the 1992-1995 civil war. However despite the magnitude of Bosnia's economic challenges, progressive reform is not a priority for all those who were elected to office on October 3.

For example Milorad Dodik, a hard-line ethnic nationalist and leader of the Alliance of Independent Social Democrats, won the parliamentary vote in the Serb Republic. During his campaign, Mr. Dodik threatened secession from Bosnia, stated his unwillingness to cooperate with the Bosniak dominated Party of Democratic Action, and made the audacious claim that modern day Bosnia is an "impossible state." Mr. Dodik's antagonistic style is illustrated by a campaign video in which a monster truck adorned with his party's emblem runs over two cars displaying the names and logos of opposing parties ([watch video here](#)). With Bosnians consistently voting along ethnic lines and hard-line nationalists such as Mr. Dodik gaining popular support, there are fears that Bosnia's long term economic development will be stymied, and worse, that ethnic tensions will snowball into violence. As Tomas Valasek of the London-based Centre for European Reform has stated, while it is true that the Dayton Accord was signed 15 years ago the dynamics of Bosnia's civil war have continued through other means.

As is often the case with Bosnia, this untenable state of affairs will likely mean that change will have to come from outside the country. Since the 2006 elections the EU has been pushing Bosnia to strengthen its central government and undertake substantial economic reforms as a precondition for EU membership. Similar conditions have also been placed on Bosnia for membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. For its part, NATO has voiced concern that a relapse of ethnic violence or a breakdown of the Bosnian union would have serious repercussions for security in the Balkans as well as Europe as a whole. The inability of Bosnia's elected officials to agree on a way forward has not only undermined Bosnia's economic and political stability, it has made the prospects for membership in such organizations distant and remote. In an attempt to increase diplomatic pressure, Secretary of State Hilary Clinton traveled to Sarajevo on October 12 to make an impassioned plea for Bosnian unity. Secretary Clinton

stressed that Bosnia could not move forward unless Serbs, Muslims and Croats figure out a way to put their country ahead of ethnicity: “we cannot be dragged down by what was done to our grandparents and great-grandparents, or even in this case, our parents.”

Bosnia now faces months of political jostling as politicians and parties negotiate for cabinet seats and for control over Bosnia’s large state owned companies. When the dust settles, this could prove to have repercussions for Bosnia’s relations with the West as well as the long-term viability of peace and stability in the Balkans.

Further Reading: [Bosnia and Herzegovina still divided 15 years after war](#), [Early Results Indicate Split on Bosnia's Future](#), [Muslim Moderate and Hardline Serb set to share Bosnian Presidency](#), [Clinton, Citing Work with Obama, Urges Unity in Bosnia](#), [Bosnia Vote points to Deadlock on Ethnic Lines](#), [Bosnia's election: So this is Democracy](#), [EU Official Urges New Bosnia to do better on its path to EU Membership](#).

A Diminished Reliance on Nuclear Weapons? NATO’s New Strategic Concept

By: Chelsea Plante

At their last Summit in Strasbourg/Kehl on April 3 and 4 2009, NATO’s Heads of State and Government tasked the Secretary General to develop a new NATO Strategic Concept in order to effectively address the security concerns of the 21st century.

A sound transatlantic consensus on NATO’s strategy to deal with existing and emerging security threats is fundamental if NATO is to function at an optimum level. The Strategic Concept is the central NATO document that establishes and reflects this transatlantic consensus. As the international security environment changes, however, it is clear that the Alliance’s Strategic Concept has to be periodically updated as well. The current concept dates from 1999, a time when NATO had only 19 members compared to the 28 it has today. It also dates back to a time when NATO’s focus was on challenges within Europe or on Europe’s periphery.

The new Strategic Concept – which must be approved by all 28 member states – will outline the ways in which the Alliance must evolve to effectively address challenges such as failed and fragile states, maritime piracy, nuclear proliferation, energy security, terrorism, cyber crime and climate change. The original draft mission statement which was put forward in May by Madeline Albright after extensive consultation with other experts, was thought by some to be overly vague and lengthy, prompting Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen to revise this draft document.

On Thursday September 30, the 28 NATO member states received a preliminary version of an updated strategic concept. Preliminary reports state that this document is notable in its ardent support for nuclear disarmament. “So far, the nuclear issue has taken center stage,” said one high-level NATO diplomat. “The nuclear weapons issue has boiled down to this: Is NATO going to retain the status quo by keeping its weapons for deterrence, or is NATO finally going to give arms control and disarmament precedence?”

Germany and other European nations have called for the document to promote the elimination of nuclear weapons. Originally intended to counter the Warsaw Pact during the Cold War, German State Minister Werner Hoyer claims that NATO’s tactical atomic weapons today “no longer serve a military purpose and do not create security”. While this logic is consistent with President Barak Obama’s strategic goal of eventually eliminating nuclear weapons, it also reveals tension between some of NATO’s European allies. While nuclear disarmament is supported by many NATO states, others are reluctant to abandon their nuclear capabilities for reasons of national prestige, regional grievances, and as is the case with France, the belief that NATO involvement in nuclear matters could threaten the self-determination of a state.

Although it is clear there are differing positions when it comes to NATO's nuclear posture, the task at hand is to find the right balance and platform on which a consensus can be traced. As such, Alliance members are currently negotiating a consensus position on the status of tactical nuclear weapons in Europe in the lead-up to a NATO Summit of heads of state, to be held in Lisbon November 19-20. The goal of the Summit will not be to produce concrete numbers regarding nuclear disarmament, rather, as Rasmussen asserts, the goal will be "to adopt a new strategic concept which, in broad terms, will give direction...and then, it is for follow-up negotiations to produce more concrete facts and figures."

Further Reading: [NATO Nuclear Policy and Euro-Atlantic Security](#).

Operation Dragon Force

By: Chelsea Plante

NATO and Afghan force have begun a new push to force Taliban militants out of their stronghold around the southern city of Kandahar. Code-named "Dragon Strike", the operation is focusing on "clearing the Taliban from three districts to the west and south of the city", said Brig. Gen. Joseph Blotz, a NATO spokesperson for the International Security Assistance Force in Kabul. The aim is to destroy Taliban sanctuaries and staging areas for attacks around Kandahar so they will not have anywhere to hide, forcing the militants to leave the area, or to fight and be killed.

The operation is the first large-scale combat involving numerous objectives in Kandahar Province, where a military offensive was initially expected to begin in June. After encountering problems while trying to pacify the much smaller city of Maria, however, and because of resistance from Afghan leaders who worried about the possibility of high civilian casualties, the military downgraded that offensive to more of a joint civil-military effort, Operation Hamkari.

Throughout the last week of August, American troops supported a significant push into the Mehlaia area on the southwest side of Kandahar city at the instigation of Afghan authorities, which drove Taliban from the area with few casualties on either side. That was the beginning of what would be a major increase in active combat operations around Kandahar.

The combat phase of operation Dragon Strike started last week with a series of smaller maneuvers intended to soften enemy infrastructure and draw out insurgents ahead of the main attack. It is the first time in a major operation that more Afghan forces, over 10,000, were deployed than coalition ones.

On Saturday September 25, approximately 8,000 US troops along with Afghan and International Forces launched three simultaneous attacks along the Arghandab River Valley, which runs north and west of Kandahar City, to take and hold territory in places where neither the US nor Afghan government has ever had a presence. In bringing heavy security and governance where governance has not existed before, the operation will allow the Afghan government and coalition forces to control access and movement along the fertile Arghandab River Valley.

Militants use the River to move fighters, weapons, drugs, money, and supplies throughout southern Afghanistan, so gaining control over it is seen as a strategic necessity for taming the insurgency. As LTC Johnny Davis, Commander of the 1st Battalion, 502nd Infantry claims, "this is it...this is where you separate the enemy from the people". Although coalition commanders warn of more tough fighting ahead, the Kandahar offensive is crucial to its Afghanistan strategy, clearing the city of insurgents, breaking the Taliban hold in the south, and convincing civilians that the coalition troops are in control.

Further Reading: [NATO Afghan Forces Sweep Through](#), [NATO Forces Begin Operation Dragon Strike](#), [IEDs Show Troop Surge Working](#), [US Officers Say](#), [Troop Surge Moves into High Gear in Kandahar](#).



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