Before they vote, Libyans need to talk

On December 22, just two days before Libya's presidential election was scheduled to take place, the electoral board announced the postponement of the vote. The High National Electoral Commission (HNEC) suggested January 24, 2022, as a new date for the polls, after a parliamentary committee tasked with overseeing the elections deemed them "impossible" to conduct on December 24 as originally planned.

However, until now, there is no agreement about the new date or the electoral procedures, or on whether presidential and parliamentary elections should be held on the same day or not. But the lack of consensus on these logistical matters is by far not the biggest problem.

There are major unresolved issues polarising the country right now and, in the absence of an open dialogue to settle them, holding the elections on January 24 or any other future date risks plunging the country into a new cycle of violence.

Conducting elections amid severe political polarisation has already proven disastrous for peace in Libya. After longtime ruler Muammar Gaddafi was toppled in 2011, Libyan actors and foreign players rushed to elections in order to jumpstart the country's political transition. But instead of bringing stability, the polls only worsened political and social tensions, which resulted in repeated episodes of deadly violence.

On July 7, 2012, Libya held its first parliamentary vote since the collapse of Gaddafi's regime to elect the 200-member General National Congress (GNC). Although they were lauded as "free and fair" by major Western powers and the UN, the elections did not bring stability to the country.

Major social and political cleavages had not been addressed which led to unrest before and after the vote. Old grievances of eastern and southern regions re-emerged, as their residents saw the unequal geographic distribution of seats as a sign that their marginalisation by Tripoli would continue in post-Gaddafi Libya as well.

Furthermore, local political actors sought to weaken the GNC. Ahead of the vote, the legislative body was deprived of key powers, such as appointing a committee to draft the constitution and debating its provisions. Thus, the Tripoli-based GNC was born weak, suffering from limited powers and a lack of legitimacy. The cabinet it elected was similarly debilitated.

This allowed rogue political actors to take advantage of interregional tensions for their own political gain. In February 2014, General Khalifa Haftar, a senior officer in Gaddafi's army who had turned against him, launched his Operation Dignity, urging Libyans to rebel against the GNC. In May, his forces stormed the GNC building in Tripoli and launched an offensive against armed groups in Benghazi.

With its mandate having expired and the country slipping into war, the GNC was forced to schedule new parliamentary elections in June. Amid violence and record-low turnout, the House of Representatives was elected. Many GNC members, mainly from the west, contested the results and refused to hand over legislative power to the new body. Forces loyal to the GNC prevented the newly elected deputies from starting work. In November, the Libyan Supreme Court ruled that the June 25 elections were unconstitutional, but the House of Representatives, which had received UN recognition, ignored the resolution.

Thus, by the end of the year, the country was effectively divided between two camps: the General National Congress located in Tripoli, which acted as the executive and was eventually replaced in 2015 by the UN-recognised Government of National Accord (GNA), and the House of Representatives, which had moved from the capital to the eastern port city of Tobruk.

One of the main reasons elections failed to move the country forward was the absence of agreement between the different political actors in Libya and commitment to basic political principles of the democratic transition. Prior to undertaking these votes, no guarantees were put in place to ensure acceptance and compliance of all parties with the final results. There were no significant measures taken to resolve historic grievances of marginalised groups and safeguard their representation in the new state institutions. There was also no proper reconciliation between communities and tribes that had been involved in past violence.

The absence of these important elements of the transitional process led to its eventual collapse. Gradually, the division over legitimacy and state representation dragged the country into a civil war between rival camps supported by regional players.

It then took the international community and Libyan civilian forces several years to try to jump-start the transition process. In 2020, a ceasefire was negotiated to end Haftar's failed offensive on Tripoli. The Libya Political Dialogue Forum (LPDF) was then launched, supported by the UN Mission in Libya (UNSMI) and regional and international actors, such as Egypt, Turkey, Russia, France, the US, and Italy – each with their own interests in Libya.

In 2021, the Government of National Unity (GNU) was formed as a provisional institution to move forward the political process in the country, and presidential elections were scheduled for December 24. Despite initially approving the GNU, the House of Representatives eventually passed a no-confidence vote against it in September.

Well ahead of the vote, it was clear that old divisions continue to fester and undermine the transition. There have been several sticking points, which reflect the wide-raging polarisation in Libya and which have undermined the electoral process. First, the election law, which outlined electoral procedures and the post-election institutional setup, was not accepted by all parties. The provisions of the law were written and passed by the House of Representatives, which did not consult properly with other Libyan state institutions, such as the GNU, the Presidency Council and the High State Council (HSC).

The law was also drafted in a way that set up Libya's political system as a presidential one, endowing the presidency with significant powers. Provisions in the law also allow current office-holders to run in the elections and then return to their positions if they lose.

Second, no consensus candidates, who could unite a divided Libya, were put forward ahead of the election. In fact, the front-runners in the race were all divisive figures. Those included: GNU Prime Minister Abdul Hamid Dbeibeh who decided to run despite having promised not to; Aguila Saleh, the chairman of the House of Representatives and a close ally of Haftar; Haftar himself; and finally, Saif al-Islam Gaddafi, one of Gaddafi's sons, who is accused of crimes against humanity and is wanted by the International Criminal Court and the general prosecutor in Tripoli.

Saif al-Islam's candidacy, in particular, has caused much outrage among Libyans, who are appalled that an election meant to put the country back on its democratic transition path could bring the Gaddafi regime back. While he is the most controversial of these front-runners, the rest are also quite problematic. It is clear they all want to run in order to restore or protect their positions and privileges and would be unable to de-escalate tensions, bring the country together and find acceptance from all regional players.

Third, just like in 2012 and 2014, there appears to be no consensus on the "rules of the game" ahead of the presidential vote. The main political actors – backed by various armed groups – have clearly been in disagreement about what would happen after the election, how the transfer of power would occur and how the recognition of the results by all would be guaranteed.

Additionally, there are no neutral security forces or unified army that could guarantee the peacefulness of the vote, no neutral judiciary system that could tackle disputes, and no independent media that could keep the Libyan people properly informed. Most importantly, there is no reconciliation between Libyans, as old and new grievances continue to fester and various communities continue to face marginalisation. The UN, along with the international community, has tried to turn a blind eye to the internal divisions between main Libyan actors and pushed Libyans to hold elections at any cost, just as it has done in the past, to the detriment of the nation.

2021: The year of failed political leadership

2021 was the year of political leadership, or more importantly, lack of it, and an invitation to reflect on the social consequences of leadership failures. I think for many of us, it was the year that felt like when time slows down while you are witnessing an accident happen – two seconds that feel like two minutes – or in this case, twelve months that feel like a decade of closings, openings, lockdowns, mandates, curfews, hoarding and devastation.

In this year, in which millions of people lost everything, we are reminded that the purpose of leadership goes beyond telling people what to do. We are prompted to consider – in the spirit of recently departed philosopher bell hooks – how governance that has no love for the people it oversees is vulnerable to tyranny and failure.

Since the end of World War II, the dominant thinking in political science was that we were all stuck in a battle for ideas, that ideology was the most important thing to debate and that everything would flow from that. Communism versus capitalism was the thing, never mind the violence that proponents of both ideologies inflicted all around the world in the name of ideology.

Capitalist governments assassinated communist leaders in poor countries and funded shadow wars while ignoring the leadership vacuums they created, while communist governments sponsored never-ending conflicts while discounting their human cost.

From the so-called Third World, we watched as each side went to exactly the same extreme as the other, often in our countries, but tried to reassure us that when they enacted violence on us, it was out of love and when the other side did it, it was out of greed and hatred. There was only limited engagement with the moral claims that the various leaders made: what mattered was that they sang from the correct ideological hymnbook. 2021 has reminded us that governance guided only by ideology without any concern for moral outcomes is a dangerous and deadly trap. Around the world, countries of various political persuasion are making a mockery of the claim that ideology can be an accurate predictor of how a country will perform in the middle of a crisis. The main challenge is of course the COVID-19 pandemic, crashing into its third year and causing unprecedented upheaval and devastation. At the time of writing there were 280 million cases reported worldwide and up to 5.4 million deaths – i.e. the equivalent of a country the size of Slovakia being wiped out.

With the Omicron variant, countries like France and the United States are reporting their highest number of cases since the beginning of the pandemic, despite having vaccines in abundance. At the same time, there is a real anxiety in countries that have been denied access to vaccines through the complicity of the world's wealthiest nations that this is the wave that will break through their meagre defences and the cycle of lockdowns and travel bans they have been depending on.

But it is not just COVID-19 that has revealed the paucity of moral leadership in the world. The global refugee and migrant crisis continues, with an increasing number of people on the move all over the world because of conflict, economic collapse and climate change.

The return of the Taliban in Afghanistan left hundreds of thousands of Afghans scrambling for an exit, the vast majority ending up in neighbouring countries like Pakistan and Iran without a plan except to avoid the reprisals that have since been enacted against those considered to have collaborated with the US occupation.

Contracts for 98 projects worth...

From P1

According to another report, an agreement was signed between the Rural Rehabilitation and Development Directorate of Maidan Wardak province and Abdul Rahim Khail Rural Development Council of Jaghto district for a drinking water supply network in Abdul Rahim Khail village of the district, which will also be equipped with solar power.

During the ceremony, Director of the provincial Rural Rehabilitation and Development Directorate Mawlawi Wadullah Rashid said that the network is being implemented by National Water Supply and Sanitation Program of the MRRD.

The project, costing around 3.4 million Afghanis, is funded by UNICEF, with 10 percent provided by the Development Council.

The Kabul Times

Intensification of bilateral...

From P3

As a result, the potential for training scientific, pedagogical and translation staff in Afghan studies has increased year by year.

It is noteworthy that PhD and doctoral dissertations in Afghan literature, linguistics and political science on the current situation in the country were defended, textbooks and manuals were published. In particular, the Tashkent State University of Oriental Studies continues to study the literary and cultural processes in the neighboring country, the languages of the Afghan people, folklore, classical and modern literature, the translation of works of Afghan poets and writers into Uzbek.

Third, the literary ties between the Uzbek and Afghan peoples date back centuries. In particular, the works of the founder of the Afghan state (1747) poet Ahmad Shah Durrani and his son Temur Shah Durrani and dozens of other poets, calligraphers, historians, literary critics, philosophers, philosophers, philosophers and philosophers our literary relations have been uninterrupted since ancient times.

When it comes to these relations, first of all, it is worth noting that our great ancestor Zakhiriddin Muhammad Babur was a scholar in the sources of Uzbek Afghan studies.

A significant part of his work "Baburnama" contains important information about the life of the peoples living in the territory of modern Afghanistan, the customs and rituals that are part of their folklore.

Fourth, Uzbekistan continues to provide humanitarian assistance to the neighboring Afghan people. On September 14, 2021, a ceremony was held in the city of Hayraton, dedicated to the delivery of humanitarian aid to the people of Afghanistan. Speaking at the ceremony, Zabihullah Mujahid, spokesman for the Afghan interim government, on behalf of the entire Afghan people, thanked President Shavkat Mirziyoyev for the high attention, support and solidarity shown during the probationary period. Speaking at the event, the governor of Balkh province Qudratillo Abu Hamza stressed that humanitarian aid is not only timely, but also a special need, which is another proof of the centuries-old historical, cultural and spiritual ties between our peoples.

In general, cooperation between Uzbekistan and Afghanistan in the cultural, humanitarian and educational spheres has a good tradition. People's diplomacy of Uzbekistan also contributes to this. In the future, the Uzbek-Afghan Friendship Society plans to intensify contacts in this area.

In particular, further improvement of educational and methodological processes related to the training of future scholars of Afghan studies, training of specialists in the field of Afghan literature, history, domestic and foreign policy, economy, culture and further development of Uzbek-Afghan relations, creation of scientific articles and monographs and the issues of acquainting the Uzbek public with the life and work of poets, statesmen and public figures through transition.

Abdurakhim MANNONOV
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Elon Musk and all that was wrong with 2021

Time magazine recently chose Elon Musk – the "richest private citizen in history" and the CEO of rocket firm SpaceX and electric vehicle company Tesla – as its "2021 Person of the Year". In the first paragraph of the lengthy profile of Musk accompanying the accolade, we learn that the man "tosses satellites into orbit and harnesses the sun", sends the stock market soaring and swooning with a "flick of his finger", and also "likes to live-tweet his poops". The second paragraph of the profile is devoted to further exploring this last theme: "'Just dropping some friends off at the pool', the 50-year-old zillionaire informed his 66 million Twitter followers on the evening of Nov. 29, having previously advised that at least half his tweets were 'made on a porcelain throne'".

Presumably, the excremental intro is meant to project a down-to-earth, human dimension onto the tyrannical South African entrepreneur who wants to colonise Mars and has officially appointed himself "Technoking" of Tesla. Call it poop-washing, if you will. For the next zillion or so paragraphs of the profile, Time magazine proceeds with its grotesque apologetics on behalf of 2021's Chosen Person – explaining that, while Musk is "easily cast as a hubristic supervillain, lumped in with the tech bros and the space playboys", he is ultimately "different". This assessment appears directly after a discussion of Musk's downplaying of the coronavirus threat and violation of local pandemic regulations to keep his factories running – all of which, Time muses, suggests that "the vast expanse of human misery can seem an afterthought to a man with his eyes on Mars".

Might it not be more charming, then, to select a Person of the Year who is actually concerned with alleviating human misery – as opposed to someone chasing a dystopian vision of an exclusive future universe run by and for Elon Musk? Granted, this is the same magazine that named Adolf Hitler "Man of the Year" in 1938.

Marveling at "the man who aspires to save our planet and get us a new one to inhabit", Time asserts that Musk is "arguably the biggest private contributor to the fight against climate change". For a more grounded view of reality, consider the words of Max Ajl, author of the acclaimed book, A People's Green New Deal, who remarked in an email to me that: "if capitalist destruction of the ecology were to take on human form, it would look like the Afrikaner aspiring cosmonaut Elon Musk". Ajl went on to observe, "In true apartheid form, spaceship rides envisioned by the Tesla tycoon will emit more CO2 in a few minutes than poor people emit in their entire lives".

Capitalism, of course, is fundamentally anti-human – as, it seems, is Musk, whose own brother and business partner Kimbal acknowledges in the Time profile that Elon's "gift is not empathy with people".

Case in point: in October, a federal jury ordered Tesla to pay almost $137m to a Black ex-employee who, as the Washington Post notes, claimed workers were subjected to "a scene 'straight from the Jim Crow era'", characterised by rampant racist abuse and supervisors who refused to address the issue. Then in December, six women filed separate suits against Tesla for alleged sexual harassment in the workplace – with many of them contending that Musk's own frequent lewd behaviour on Twitter only encouraged sexual taunts and other abuse in a male-dominated work environment. Add to this Musk's willful endangerment of employees' lives during the pandemic and other violations of labour laws – including his underhanded machinations and threats against workers wishing to unionise – and one begins to worry about how that whole Mars idea will pan out. But anyway, why should workers bother trying to exert a modicum of control over their existences when the "brooding, blue-skinned man-god" – words courtesy of Time – already knows what is best for them? Again, it appears that Musk and only Musk knows what is good for everyone – like when he implied to Time that, were he to pay US government taxes proportionate to his astronomical wealth, this would "not result in, actually, the good of the people", because the US government is "inherently not a good steward of capital".

Never mind that this same government has also flung its capital at – what do you know? – Musk's own projects, including via a critical $465m federal loan to Tesla in 2009.

In fact, Musk and his companies have benefitted over the years from billions of dollars in public subsidies and government contracts. And yet, when US Senator Ron Wyden tweeted in November in favour of a Billionaires Income Tax, Musk tweeted back in Twitter shorthand with the mature and relevant suggestion that Wyden's profile picture looked like he had just had an orgasm. The Time tribute does mention these incidents, but manages to cast them as the fallout of a fascinatingly complex mind: that of a "clown, genius, edgelord, visionary, industrialist, showman, cad" as well as a "shy South African with Asperger's syndrome, who escaped a brutal childhood and overcame personal tragedy" to pursue "cosmic ambition". Muskian petulant tyranny is euphemised into a "hard-driving style" that takes a "legendary" toll on his staff. Tesla is said to maintain a "hard-charging approach".

But while Time's selection of Musk as its person of 2021 has rightfully generated controversy, he does perhaps appropriately embody what was an all-around sick year in terms of capitalism and the related maladies of coronavirus and climate change.