

AFGHAN CABINET: NOMINATE FIRST, SCREEN LATER

Just under two weeks ago, it appeared that one of the final hurdles in getting the Afghan government functioning after the disputed election may have been cleared, as a full slate for the cabinet was announced. Sadly, even though Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah took over three months to come up with the list of nominees to run their "Unity Government", it is clear that no screening of these candidates took place, as many are now falling by the wayside. One turns out to have an Interpol red notice, as many as eleven may have dual citizenship (a direct violation of the Afghan constitution) and one may not meet the minimum age requirement.

Rod Nordland describes some of the problems that have been encountered:

Choosing the Afghan cabinet is to government what the national sport of buzkashi is to polo: a wild and woolly version with uniquely local characteristics and notably more carnage.

President Ashraf Ghani's presentation of new cabinet nominees to Parliament on Tuesday was a case in point. One proposed nominee had just pulled out after revelations of an Interpol warrant for his arrest. Another dropped out, complaining that he did not have enough money and jobs to bribe Parliament into approving him. A third was subject to a social media smear campaign alleging that she had just gotten a new identity card so she could add a few years to her age to qualify for the job.

Several other would-be ministers were reportedly headed to the exits before Parliament got a chance to vote on them,

as revelations tumbled out about dual citizenships, frowned on by the Afghan Constitution, or even, in one case, allegedly not being fluent in any national language.

It's impossible to make this stuff up. Nordland continues:

"The candidate for rural development studied urban development, and the candidate for urban development studied rural development," said Ramazan Bashardost, an anticorruption crusader and member of Parliament, famous for his outspokenness.

Corruption is running rampant in the confirmation process:

A more prominent nominee, Jilani Popal, a well-regarded former government official, withdrew his name from nomination as finance minister. While he is believed to have dual United States and Afghan citizenship, Mr. Popal told friends that he had pulled out when members of Parliament asked him for a total of 400 jobs in exchange for their votes, most of them in the lucrative customs service, leaving him with no slots for unstained candidates.

We get more on bribes from ToloNews:

However, a number of MPs have told TOLONews that presidential advisor Mohammad Akram Akhpalwak has made promises of gifts to lawmakers if they vote in favor of the nominees. MPs said they had been promised IPHONE 6 mobile sets and 5-10,000 USD. Mr. Akhpalwak has meanwhile rejected the allegations.

That same ToloNews article informs us that seven of the nominees believed to have dual

citizenship have been rejected by the Foreign Affairs Commission of Parliament. But over at Khaama Press, we learn that the rejection was quite the event:

The Lower House of the Parliament – Wolesi Jirga on Thursday witnessed brawl among the lawmakers over the issue of cabinet nominees holding dual citizenship.

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In the meantime, a number of the lawmakers insisted that the nominees holding dual citizenship should also be called in the session so that they can present their plans.

The lawmakers said the cabinet nominees have signed documents to surrender their second citizenship and the decision to reject the nominees with dual citizenship was not taken by the house of representatives.

Brawl among the Afghan lawmakers started after MP Shukria Barekzai criticized the recent decision by joint parliamentary commission to reject the nominees insisting that the Parliament House is not authorized to deprive the rights of an Afghan national from election and voting.

The article goes on to describe a pathway through which the nominees might be brought back into eligibility. Given the slow, argument-filled route that has brought the Afghan “government” to its present state, I wouldn’t expect these questions about potential cabinet ministers to be resolved any time soon.