

Pakistan's election fraud

Your assertions in the article "Pakistanis grow weary of religious parties' sway" (Feb. 14) are confirmed by new evidence on the ground.

Numerous sources from the Pakistan People's Party's monitoring unit, with information collected from every region, confirm that systematic election rigging is already under way by President Pervez Musharraf's party workers. Already 25 million voters have disappeared from the electoral rolls. Perhaps as many as half the polling booths have been closed in key areas, making it almost impossible to vote. So it certainly is an uneven playing field.

How Musharraf could tell world leaders to their faces that there would be "free and fair" elections on his recent charm offensive to Europe, is amazing. It tells us a lot about the man.

Wajid Shamsul Hasan,

Former Pakistan high commissioner to London

McCain and the Persians

John McCain's recent remarks at a panel discussion ("Bush's choice," Feb. 9-10) in which the Arizona senator expressed concern about Iranian ambitions, "which are as old as history: a Persian domination of the region" was to me heart-breaking.

Having had the privilege of working closely from 1959 to 1979 with several U.S. presidents from both parties, I never came across a similar remark by any of them to the effect that my country, at any time in its two-and-half-thousand years of history, had an eye on dominating its neighbors. On the contrary, Iran has been invaded by foreign adventurers — Alexander the Great, the Arabs, the Mongols, the Afghans, the British and the Russians.

From World War II up to 1979 the ex-

istence of a powerful Iran was U.S. policy by various administrations that saw the country as a vital source of peace and stability in the Middle East and Western Asia. The 1979 revolution may temporarily have had adverse consequences, but surely these did not originate from "historical ambition."

Having had the bitter experience of past invasions, the sole choice for Iranians to deter aggressors is to become powerful enough to defend their sovereignty. This was proved in the 1980s invasion of Iran by Saddam Hussein's army.

Ardeshir Zahedi,

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Former ambassador to Washington and Iran's foreign affairs minister from 1967 to 1970.

NATO and Afghan elections

Regarding the column "A growing rift" by William Pfaff (Views, Feb. 12): NATO's internal strife over Afghanistan might spell disaster for the credibility and future of the Atlantic Alliance. However, that's not what the Afghan people are most worried about.

Infighting between those countries bearing the brunt of counterinsurgency operations against the Taliban and those focusing on development and reconstruction in Afghanistan's quieter areas might put at risk the prospects of organizing presidential elections in 2009.

NATO's current inability to guarantee security in the southern parts of the country will preclude these elections, turning the promise of democracy into an empty shell.

If NATO cannot come to grips with the situation, the matter should be referred back to the UN Security Council to make sure the Afghans are not abandoned once more by the international community.

Jorrit Kamminga, Paris