

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Most Kind



April 11, 2015

Peace Talks without Conditions?

National Unity Government (NUG), since its inception, has strived to give the peace talks with Taliban a new momentum. President Ashraf Ghani is trying to rebuild ties with Pakistan so as to be able to have successful negotiations; however the task has not been accomplished yet and there is a long way to go.

President Ashraf Ghani, in a meeting with the members of Grand Ulema Council on Friday, April 10, promised to help establish durable peace in the country even if it costs him his life. He also mentioned that sincere efforts were underway to remove obstacles in the way to peace. Though Pakistani and Afghan governments have been very positive about the developments in the process, there have not been evident achievement in this regard and there has not been direct and open talks with Taliban so far. Taliban, as well, have not clearly announced that they are ready for the peace talks.

Afghan government has many times mentioned that the peace talks with Taliban will be based on the conditions that they accept Afghan constitution, lay down arms and respect human rights, particularly women rights; nonetheless, Taliban have never given the indication that they are ready to accept these conditions. They, on the other hand, given their own conditions for the peace talks; the first and foremost being the withdrawal of all the US forces from Afghanistan. However, for Afghan government it is really imperative that they make Taliban ready to accept these conditions before peace talks.

Apart from Taliban, there are many factions and individuals, even in Afghan government, who believe that there must not be any precondition to peace talks as setting conditions hamper the efforts to start negotiations. On Thursday, April 09, a gathering of some influential individuals, religious leaders and former Jihadis, arranged by Qutbuddin Helal - a member of Hezb-i-Islami non-violent faction, at the Loya Jirga in capital Kabul, called for the long-anticipated peace talks to be started soon without preconditions. Helal, during his speech, said, "The only way to achieve peace is flexibility and agreeing with each other. Peace talks must be started without any condition because peace will be the biggest achievement." Former Vice-President Mohammad Yunus Qanuni also mentioned that peace is the demand of every Afghan, we need peace, we should win it, and we want an end to the armed struggle. Fortunately, more opportunities are available today for peace negotiations.

Though, peace negotiation is urgently required and there must be sincere efforts to make them successful, but following it without right conditions may prove to be fruitless for Afghanistan. Afghan constitution must always be safeguarded and there must not be any compromise in this regard. Moreover, the achievements, though not very comprehensive, regarding human rights and the rights of women must never be compromised, as well. Peace at the sake of these conditions would mean a loss, not a true peace.

It is correct that the prospects of peace and tranquility do not seem very much clear; yet, there are possibilities to start afresh from this point and reach to a somewhat reputable position in the times to come and save the nation from another age of instability and misery. There is no doubt that for its journey to stability, Afghanistan would require a great deal of assistance from the regional countries and Western allies. However, the most dominant role has to be played by Afghanistan itself. Afghan authorities in contribution with Afghan people can really change the destiny and can guarantee a promising future for the generations to come; all it needs to do is to focus on certain considerations.

Sincerity and the consideration for national interest, in this regard, must be pursued with full zeal and enthusiasm. The influential individuals and factions must stand with Afghan government and support a democratic political system. They must not side with Taliban and support their type of Shariah-based system, which will lead to instability and disorder, once again.

The peace process depends largely on how Afghan authorities will deal with the circumstances ahead. At this crucial juncture when the Western allies do not have many options but to leave the country and the regional countries are very much interested in pursuing their own interests, the Afghan government does not have any other option but to be more responsible and deal with the situation on its own. Currently there are many concerns about the Afghan government; addressing them is in its total control if other things are out of it. Afghan government can listen to the different voices in the country that are peace-loving and want a better future for Afghanistan in the form of better political system, not to the ones that are determined to take Afghanistan towards extremism and terrorism. At the same time they can work on developing the political institutions and make them as much strong as possible as it is the institutions that make the evolution of political system towards stability and prosperity possible. This is possible if the government is ready to adopt a flexible and democratic attitude towards different opinions regarding the political amendments in the country.



What the Taliban Say by Releasing Mullah Omar Biography

By Abdul Ahad Bahrami

In an unprecedented move, the Taliban released biography of their Supreme Leader, Mullah Mohammad Omar, last Sunday. In the biography, the group asserts that the Mullah Omar is still in control of the whole leadership of the Taliban. The biography reads that "his deputy, the leading council, judiciary, nine executive commissions and three other administration organs are active under his leadership". The biography says that despite being pursued by the 'enemy', Mullah Omar still leads the day to day leadership of the jihadi activities of the Taliban as Amir-ul Momineen or the 'leader of the faithful'. The biography is released for the first time as there is no credible information on his whereabouts, and even there are widely spread speculations on his death or ailing condition.

The release of the biography of the Taliban leader seems to be an attempt by the Taliban to show strength and unity and that its leadership is still in control of the group and the affiliated groups. The Taliban have explicitly asserted in the biography that all hierarchy of the group is under the grip of their elusive leader. It is probably direct answer to doubts, skepticisms and speculations over the life and death and whereabouts of Mullah Omar. According to reports, there are increasing doubts and disappointment among the Taliban ranks over lack of leadership from Mullah Muhammad Omar. As the mid-level commanders and ordinary militant fighters had been battling against the US-led coalition and now Afghan security forces, there has been no direct command from Mullah Omar over the group's war machine. This led to rise of questions among the Taliban fighters and ground commanders whether Taliban's Supreme Leader is or not really commanding the Quetta Shura.

With the Afghan government's efforts to bring Taliban leaders to negotiations for reaching peace deal with the militants, there have speculations of deep differences among the members of Quetta Shura regarding peace negotiations with the United States and the government of Afghanistan. Previously it was reported that due to differences between some senior figures of the Taliban including Abdul Qayoum Zakir and Akhtar Mohammad Mansoor, the Taliban were split over whether or not to negotiate with the government of Afghanistan. There were also reports of possible divisions among the Taliban leadership over the peace negotiations with the United States and later the Afghan government. All these speculations, however, were not sufficient to conclude that Omar is not leading the Taliban.

What was clear is that there have been clearly visible factions among the Taliban leaders and this has resulted to shifting positions among the group members on the peace negotiations with the United States and the Afghan government. Agha Jan Motasim, once a close aide to Mullah Muhammad Omar, who reportedly was attacked by hard-line elements of the Taliban in Karachi city in 2011, had been an influential fig-

ure among the core group of the so-called 'Quetta Shura' before he was ousted from the council. He announced last year that he and a number of other seniors of the Taliban were going to establish a political front to start a new era of political struggle. This showed that there may other senior Taliban members who may be willing to separate from the Taliban leadership and lead a separate political course. It is believed that Motasim and some other senior members still remains influential on certain Taliban members and field commanders who are favoring negotiations with the Afghan government. The move was seen as a blow to the status of the Taliban leadership and led to questions over authority and power of the Taliban leader as he remained out of touch.

The release of Omar's biography is clearing all the questions and assumptions in this regard. If he is really alive and actively controlling the Taliban, any serious divisions or splits among the Taliban senior leadership is highly unlikely. The move by the Taliban to release his biography suggests the Taliban's recognition of their need to end all the speculations of lack of leadership from their leader.

The biography is released at a time when the Taliban are increasingly facing pressures not only from the government of Afghanistan and the US Afghan mission, but also face new challenges from the rise of the Islamic State group and divergence of the groups formerly allied to the Taliban. With the IS group rising to the scene, the Taliban seem to be gradually recognizing the fact that it may not be the sole and dominant player in Afghanistan's jihadi activities in the future. Given that the Islamic State group has openly criticized the leadership of the Taliban, the Afghan militant group knows very well that IS group is not going to ally with it and neither it is going to follow the shared objectives of the Taliban and its affiliated groups.

The release of biography is also seen as a move against the increasing influence of the Islamic State in Afghanistan. As the IS group is in finding foothold in Afghanistan, the Taliban leadership sees themselves direly vulnerable. The Taliban would quickly lose ground in some areas to the IS if the Islamic State manages to recruit Taliban members and fighters to its ranks. In parts of the country, Taliban members have reportedly joined the Islamic State. Also, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, which was allied to the Taliban, has announced its allegiance to the Islamic State group. All these have come as an alarm for the Taliban leadership which has openly expressed opposition to the Islamic State. It is reported that some offshoots of the Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan have also joined the Islamic State.

The Taliban see them in direct collusion with the Islamic State in Afghanistan in the future. Therefore, the group seems to be consolidating its rank and leadership against the new menace, and the release of the biography seems to be in line with Taliban's efforts in this regard.

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A Sad Joke!

By Muhammad Rasool Shah

This interesting conversation happened many years ago. After the democracy was established and country became stable, a person opened a school. He had left his established school in Pakistan and sacrificed a lucrative source of income just for the sake of equipping new Afghan generation with quality education. As he was honest in his mission and dedicated his full energy and efforts for this, soon his school was successful and increased rush made him to open numerous other branches of the school in different parts of the city. He was successful because, contrary to majority of the other private schools, he was not running it as business and for earning money. One day, when he was sitting in his office, some important people came to meet him. He greeted them warmly and served them with tea. They looked very decent members of the society and most of them were bearded. They were the members of a local organization that worked for the promotion of Islam. After a brief routine discussion, one of the group members, who appeared like the head of the group, started telling about the purpose of their visit: 'Mashallah, we have become delighted to hear that your school is doing very well and you are doing a noble job of serving the coming generations'

'Thank you very much for this. I have just tried to impart what I had learnt.'

'This gives you a golden opportunity to serve your community' 'Yes, I think we are all trying our best to serve as much as possible' 'But with this, you can also serve your religion as it also requires that every member of society should work in this regard.'

'Yes my respected fellow, you are right. It is the reason why we have established new branches in many different parts of the city'

'I think you did not understand me. Opening new branches is merely good for the community but how can this be any service to the religion of Islam?'

'Sorry my respected friend, I have not understood what you are intending to say'

'I am saying that you should utilize this opportunity to promote Islam in our coming generations.'

'So what do you think how I can do so?' 'Now you have come to the point' a light of success was shone on the face of the man 'We have come here to guide you in this regard'.

'So what do you suggest me to do?' 'First of all, you should work about the uniform of your students. All the female students should wear veil and male students should also have a proper Islamic dress code.'

'That is good. And how would you define the proper Islamic dress code for the male?'

'Hmm, well I think...'

'You think or is there any specific rule in this regard?'

'No. There is definitely a rule in this regard. As far as I know, it should be decent enough.'

'So don't you think that our uniform is decent?'

'It is decent but it would be a proud matter when they will have the proper Arabic dress. They would appear like a true Muslim in that dress'

'Now, is this your idea or there is any specific order in this regard?'

'There is not present any specific order but just try to imagine what a great feeling it would be when all your male students would be in a typical Arabic dress. You would thus form an environment as if they are in the blessed city of Medina.'

'Okay, if I accept this, what about the dress of ladies? Do you suggest anything in this regard?'

'Yes, I see that your female students are wearing pants and their faces are not covered. This is again not Islamic.'

'So is this forbidden in our book that they should not wear the pants?'

'No, there is not. But you should try to understand. We live in an Islamic country and we have our own cultural values. How can they wear pants in this society?'

'I can understand your concerns. So what do you suggest for them?'

'They should not wear pants and they should have a complete Islamic dress code in which only their eyes should be open and whole body should be covered'. 'I agree with you, my respected friend. But I could not find in any of our religious books that female should cover their faces'.

'You are right, it is not in any of our books but you know, we live in a corrupt society so this step must be taken as a precaution and girls should cover themselves completely, otherwise, immoral and evil deeds and thoughts would prevail in our society'.

'That is so nice of you. I would try my best to follow your guidelines'.

'And in this way, you would be able to win great blessings in both the With these words, these respectable people left the school, leaving my friend lost in thoughts.'

Almost two years ago, two boys in our neighborhood graduated from a Madrasa. Their father was very happy and I also congratulated him, like other neighbors. Usually, women are active in transmitting small issues from one house to the other. A month had not passed that every day; I heard new news about these late teenage boys. First, they banned the ladies of their house from going outside. Then they forced their father to sell the television set. Then, they demanded from some of their relatives to keep beard and not to wear the Western dress (pants and shirts) and wear the Islamic dress. I knew these kids and many others like them who were the fresh graduates of Madrasas. They knew a little Arabic, memorized some of the verses of the Holy Koran, and had heard the sayings of the Prophet (PBUH) chosen by their teachers. Beyond this point, they had no actual knowledge of religion. They had not studied the true sources of religion called Ahadith and Tafseer of Holy Koran. It is almost impossible to expect that they should have studied something modern like psychology, or other modern sciences.

Because of this, our society is facing two drastic and frightening circumstances. First, anyone, who has the incomplete and slight access to religious studies, thinks that he has the duty to work for the betterment of society and the religion. But as it is shown, majority of them don't know what to do in this regard as their knowledge is very limited so they think that by bringing external change, they would be able to change the society. Secondly, when they do not have knowledge, they also do not know how to do so and usually; they resort to extreme measures which give birth to so many other complications. It is the reason why, there are many who support ISIS morally because it is doing what they were also dreaming of doing. Their limited knowledge and study make them ignore the fact that the cruelty and extremism of ISIS has no place in Islam and changes brought by ISIS add will only add to the miseries of region. However, it is real miserable that Islam has been limited for some external changes only and it is the reason why, it is not serving what it aimed to serve.

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