

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

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The Taliban Obstinacy in Persistence of Violence in Afghanistan

On the eve of holding the Loya peace consultative Jirga which aims to build consensus amongst Afghan nation in preparation with hoped-for peace talks between Afghan government and the Taliban, the group has stated in its latest stance that they do not participate in the national-wide Peace Consultative Loya Jirga, and has firmly asked its supporters not to participate in the consultative meeting. The group has called the Consultative Peace Loya Jirga as a conspiracy plotted by its foreign enemies and its internal mercenaries. The Taliban issued two English language statements on its official website, Voice of Jihad, denouncing the upcoming peace council, which is scheduled to take place on April 29 and will be attended by thousands of Afghans from all aspects of society. This Taliban position is taking place against a large consultative meeting, in which more than 2,500 social and political figures are to participate from all over the country.

The Taliban decried the upcoming Afghan Loya Jirga for Peace labeling as a tool of "the invaders and their stooges" using "for their own malicious objectives". "The superficial 'Grand Consultative Jirga' will be no different than the Jirgas and resolutions passed by the supposed 'Loya Jirgas' during the end years of the communist regime or that of the year 2013 which approved the extension of occupation and auctioning of Afghanistan under the security agreement," Zabihullah Mujahid writes.

Meanwhile, the Taliban have banned the World Health Organization (WHO) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) from operating in Afghanistan, citing "suspicious" activity. Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid was cited by Reuters as saying on Thursday that the militant group was no longer guaranteeing the security of the workers enlisted with some organizations, including the United Nations health body and the Red Cross. Mujahid claimed the organizations had stopped complying with their agreements with the militants, while he alleged irregularities during the vaccination processes carried out by them. With Such Obstinate position, Taliban illustrates a number of issues:

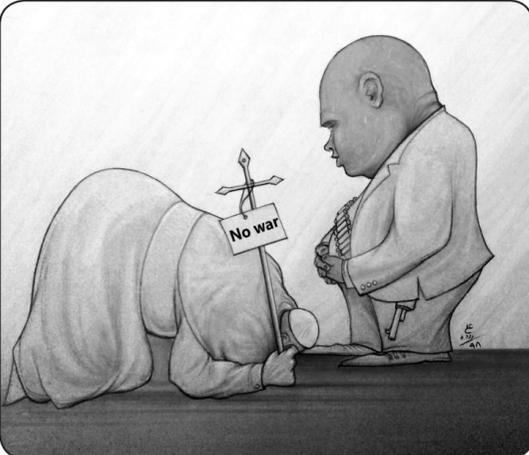
First, they are aware of their weak logic in the peace process, and so they do not want to participate in a public discourse which divulges their weakness. From one hand, they show their readiness for peace talks but on the other hand, they fight against people and government victimizing dozens of Afghan youths every day. Using bomb and suicide attacks against their land and people become their logic and intellectuality. It seems that they do not satiate except with bloodshed and terror. It is natural that the consultative Loya Jirga is to explain the thoughts and views of the people of Afghanistan. The views of the Afghan people are undoubtedly the end of the war and reaching to a peaceful and security. No one in this country wants war and violence. Therefore, the group knows that they will be scandalized if they participate in the Jirga and explain their warlike views.

The second point is that this group with this stance has, once again, emphasized that it does not believe in peace in Afghanistan. If this group really believed in peace, they would have to send their representatives to the general Jirga that would come from all parts of the country. It was a good opportunity for them to participate and give their views to the people if they really had a plan for a peaceful and humane life. But, of course, neither they have a plan for a peaceful and human life, and nor believe in such a thing. Unfortunately, when they do not have belief in peace and dialogue all efforts would become useless.

The third remarkable point is that the Taliban is really Uncorrectable. The Taliban's refusal to attend the Peace Consultative Loya Jirga, as well as the emphasis on not talking with the Afghan government, shows that the Taliban are Uncorrectable. The Taliban has repeatedly shown that they do not believe in peace and is essentially uncorrectable. Until now, each time their representatives have participated in the peace talks, the group has intensified its brutal and horrifying attacks that killed thousands of civilians and security forces. Each time their supporters have spoken about the Taliban's presence before the negotiating table, or the Afghan government has shown a flexible response to this group, they have responded with suicide attacks and killing more people.

So, given that fact that Taliban is an uncorrectable group, what can be done about it? Unfortunately, the Afghan government, especially during the second round of Karzai administration tried to seek peace with imploring the Taliban. Unhappily, this tragic and devastating tradition caused the Taliban to re-establish its existence and strengthen its military positions.

However, over the past several years, many lessons learned from the Taliban which help how to face the group, and so the members of Afghan government leadership have noticed that peace is not obtained through begging and it has been proclaimed repeatedly. But this experience should become a single strategy and a decisive policy against the enemy. Therefore, the Afghan government, while sitting at the negotiating table with the Taliban, must suppress the group in the fighting fronts. Only with using such approaches the enemy may compel to accept a fair peace talks. Retreating against a bloodthirsty group and killers of thousands of people which repeated showed obstinacy which will never leads to real reconciliation and even has adverse consequences.



A Need for 'Inclusive Transition' in Sudan after Bashir's Downfall

By: Hujjatullah Zia

Sudanese military removed President Omar Hassan al-Bashir from power on Thursday after months of protests against his 30-year rule, and Sudan's Vice President and Defense Minister Awad Ibn Aul declared a transitional government for two years, suspension of Transitional Constitution, and state of emergency for three months.

However, demonstrators took to the streets to warn against imposing army rule and called for establishing a civilian government. Meanwhile, the European Union, Britain and the United States, said they supported a peaceful and democratic transition sooner than two years. Antonio Guterres, the United Nations Secretary General, is cited as saying that a military takeover was not the "appropriate response" to Sudan's challenges calling for "inclusive transition" to bear the dream for "democratic aspirations".

In response to the public backlash, Sudan's ruling military council promised the next day that Sudan would have a new civilian-led government.

In a personal interview, a Sudanese journalist Mohammad Abdalla said, "There is a very big change, Sudan has entered a new era. We entered a transitional period. The last regime has been ousted and the minister of defense handed over the power." He said that there would be a transitional government for two years and "after two years, there will be a general election. The rule of the military is now to arrange and monitor the situation and to prepare a conducive atmosphere for the political parties to exercise their rights". Abdalla went on to say that presidential institution, parliament and cabinet of Bashir's administration would be dissolved. Political parties held a meeting on Friday to establish a new cabinet with the participation of political factions and civil organizations without the military, he continued. Abdalla's statement suggests that political parties had played essential role in the demonstration as they seek to have their share in the government.

The Sudanese Professionals' Association (SPA) initially signaled for dialogue with the military about the transition, but later remained adamantly opposed to negotiation with the regime chanting "must go, full stop" slogan. Hence, the demonstrators' intransigent attitude on the one hand, and regime's suppressive deal on the other hand left no room for peaceful transition.

The so-called "Troika", the UK, US, and Norway which have become the de facto sponsors of the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement, called on the

government, through issuing a statement, to "release all political detainees, stop the use of violence against peaceful protestors, remove all restrictions to freedoms, lift the state of emergency and allow for a credible political dialogue in a conducive environment with all key Sudanese actors that has its basis the goal of a political and economic transition to a new type of Sudan". It is believed that Bashir's administration made a terrible mistake as it refused to hold a dialogue with demonstrators. The issue could be resolved peacefully if the government showed flexibility and promised to tackle the challenges. The question is that what was the reason behind Bashir's hasty decision to resort to violence?

African leaders and the Middle East are most likely to fear the emergence of Arab spring in their states. With a demonstration, those countries resort to violence aiming to disperse the crowd, but pay no consideration to the fact that use of force has constantly backfired.

It is evident that Sudan had been afflicted by poverty, corruption, and civil unrest under three decades of Bashir's rule, which led to the secession of South Sudan. The mass violence against citizens in Darfur is one of the worst example in the history of Sudan. Allegedly committing genocide in Darfur region during an insurgency that began in 2003 and led to the death of an estimated 300,000 people, Bashir was indicted by the International Criminal Court (ICC), which also issued a warrant for his arrest. But Sudan's ruling military council has said that it would not extradite Bashir to face allegations of genocide at the ICC; instead he would go on trial in Sudan.

Now as the demonstration has led to the downfall of Bashir's regime, Sudanese people and political parties should be cautious enough not to fall in civil unrest. They have to control the situation and leave no stone unturned for establishing a democratic community, where all citizens could exercise their rights and freedoms regardless of their caste, creed, or color. In other words, a country which has removed the president is highly vulnerable to civil unrest and each political party may seek to have a greater share in the next government. The people have to pay careful attention to the fact that the vacuum emerged in the wake of regime's downfall should not be filled with negative elements, which may undo the public sacrifices and successful demonstrations. Thus, an "inclusive transition" is the very need in Sudan.

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The Belt and Road Initiative Help Afghanistan Regain Its Glories in Silk Road

By: Liu Jinsong

Over the past year, the treasures of the Afghan National Museum were on exhibition in major cities in China. The visitors for the exhibition were crowded and the event was unprecedented. People were shocked and impressed by the glorious civilization of ancient Afghanistan.

The time span of these cultural relics was from the 2nd century BC to the 12th century AD. According to archaeological discoveries and Chinese ancient books, Afghanistan was the center of commodity distribution in the Eurasian continent at that period, during which the Afghan people were rich, well-organized and relatively peaceful. So when the Chinese envoy Zhang Qiang invited the then Afghan king to jointly fight against their common rivals, the Afghan side said they had no intention of fighting anymore and would like to enjoy their peaceful lives.

Over more than 1,500 years since the 1st century AD, Afghanistan had been the pearl of the ancient Silk Road. Many historians pointed out that the fate of Afghanistan and many Asian countries were closely related to the rise and fall of the Silk Road. This is also supported by economic theory.

The British philosopher Francis Bacon has a famous saying "There be three things which make a nation great and prosperous: a fertile soil, busy workshops, easy conveyance for men and goods from place to place." He pointed out three major elements of a country's economic surge: agriculture, industry and transportation.

A strong and stable country cannot live without its own agriculture as foundation. The rice bowl must be firmly held in its own hands. The farmers must be rich and have extra grain for sale. The spared labor could make living in other ways. This is the primary source of capitals and manpower needed for urban economic and industrialization.

Both Afghanistan and China were agricultural powers in their early stage, and our agricultural tools and irrigation system were the most advanced across the world. The main products China exported to Afghanistan were silk and tea. The most important products China imported from Afghanistan and Central Asian countries were war horse. These commodities were all agricultural and livestock products. The state organized water projects, supported farming, protected the small peasant economy, and regulated food prices to balance the interests of farmers and urban strata. Such national governance was always strong and delicate.

Without agriculture, there would be no political stability of the big powers. Without sustainable trade, there will be no Silk Road and the prosperity of countries along the Silk Road.

Talking to the industry. There is a Chinese proverb, "Without industry, you could not be rich". In not only the ancient but also the present Silk Road, the best-selling and most profitable commodities were often not the agricultural products and raw materials, but fine processed products and industrial products. In ancient times, it was Chinese silk, porcelain and Afghan glaze. At present, it's mobile phones and airplanes.

The price for one iPhone 7 smart phone is \$650, equivalent to an Afghan farmer's annual income. The Chinese makes only \$8.46 by assembling the phone. Japan and South Korea get \$68 and \$17 each through specialized materials and designs. About \$283 goes directly into Apple's pocket because of their monopolized patents, technology and sales channels. This is the harsh reality of modern industry and its benefit distribution.

A Boeing plane costs an average of 100 million U.S. dollars, equivalent to 120 thousand Afghan farmers' annual income, equivalent to 10 million shirts made by the Chinese. This is what President Ghani called the "scissors gap" caused by the "position gap" in the global value chain.

Finally, Let's talk about transportation. Generally speaking, if agricultural products are carried by people and livestock, as long as the distance exceeds 100 kilometers, the transportation cost will often exceed its own value, and the products will not be competitive. The land transportation of the ancient Silk Road mainly relied on camels and horses. A camel could carry 200 kilograms of goods to 1000 miles away, but its own and human consumption often surpasses the half value of the goods.

Shipping is different. A 1000-ton sailing boat can carry as much as 5000 camels at a cost of only a dozen dollars per ton. This is also an important background

for the fading of silk roads on land after The Age of European Navigation.

Even today, the disadvantage of land transportation is obvious compared with that of sea transportation. The distance from Kabul to Urumqi is 3000 kilometer away, but the transport of a standard container requiring Road + Rail transportation, which costs a total of 7100 U.S. dollars, while a container shipped from Karachi to Tianjin, with a distance of thousands of miles away, costs only 1000 U.S. dollars. But if the container was transported to China from Kabul via Karachi, the total cost will increase to 6000 U.S. Dollars, with the land transportation costs and transfer costs in Karachi included.

A container costs will be more than 10 thousand U.S. Dollars, if you add the 6000 to 7000 U.S. Dollars transportation fee to an average tax of 3000 U.S. dollars depending on the type of goods. This will exceed the value of many goods, which is the main reason for why many Afghan specialties cannot be exported and competes with other countries and leave the farmers live in poverty.

It should also be noted, although it was very difficult for Marco Polo to travel from Venice through Afghanistan to China, but at that time the whole silk route was ruled by the Mongolian empire, the businessmen can travel without passports and visas, or too much tax, and were even provided with food, accommodation and security. So Marco Polo's team is profitable. Since modern times, the costs for customs clearance, transition and security among European and Asian countries have remained high, which has greatly affected the Afghan economy.

Afghanistan is a landlocked country without sea ports. From the perspective of factor endowment and economic development stage, if Afghanistan cannot develop its advanced manufacturing and financial industries as Switzerland and Luxembourg, nor has enough residence deposit or foreign investment, it must accumulate capitals from its own agriculture, mining, handicrafts, tourism and transit trade, and gradually realize its industrialization and modernization. This is why it is important, imperative and urgent for Afghanistan to participate in regional economic cooperation.

The glory of Afghanistan in the ancient Silk Road relies on its own distinctive products, national peace, adherence to openness, promoting the connectivity and good relations with its neighbors. Afghanistan can get illusion from the history. I believe, Afghanistan's efforts in advocating RECCA, participating in CAREC and SAAC, promoting CASA-1000, and TAPI, Lapis Lazuli Corridor and Air Corridor, are all based on the past achievements and lessons, and reflects the ancient Silk Road Spirit of opening up to the future, commitment of shaping comparative advantages, smooth flow of trade and reduction of transportation costs.

Today, there is an initiative or mechanism that can help Afghanistan achieve the goal of fully participating in regional economic cooperation, develop its country from landlocked into land-linked and from the economic lowland to highland, promote its agriculture, industry and trade. This is the BRI.

Early this year, Dr. Mariam Safi, founder and executive director of Afghan think-tank DROPS, published her research report Integrating Afghanistan into the BRI: Review, Analysis and Prospects. It is the first report by an Afghan scholar that systematically focuses on the BRI. Dr. Safi said that Afghan people from all walks of life appreciated the China's invitation to jointly build the BRI. While the Afghan situation is still not peaceful, the move gave Afghanistan a 'cardio tonic'. It is aligned with the fundamental interests of Afghanistan and its people and will be conducive to Afghanistan's fully tapping its development potentials and regain the glories as the Heart of Asia, Eurasian crossroads and a trade hub along the Silk Road.

The BRI is a general term of Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road, which were announced by Chinese President Xi Jinping during his respective visits to Kazakhstan and Indonesia in 2013. The BRI also got the support from H.E. President Ghani and all folks of Afghan people. Presently, it is the warmest project for people's well-being, the largest blue print for infrastructure, the best development plan and the most sincere idea for international cooperation in the world.

This magnificent Initiative may be briefly summarized from number "1" to number "8":

"1": Jointly build one community of shared future....(More on P4)

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