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NATIONAL RECONCILIATION EFFORTS BY THE ISLAMIC EMIRATE; CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES



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Center for Strategic and Regional Studies (CSRS)



NATIONAL RECONCILIATION EFFORTS BY THE ISLAMIC EMIRATE; CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

INTRODUCTION

One of the basic tenets regarding Afghanistan's case over the last 20 years has been that a durable end to the war is only possible with the emergence of a system in which all Afghans see themselves and no one stands in opposition with it. Now that the system in the country has changed since the end of the US occupation, there are generally two views or scenarios for preventing recurrence of chaos and instability and for the success of the current experience. The first is that a single-party system be in power and some groups and peoples of the country be in opposition with it in different ways. The second is to create a system that is opposed by no one; instead, everyone considers oneself a part of it. If we glance over the experience of the last few decades, this second scenario can guarantee long term stability in the country.

As the people in power, in the last twenty years, not only failed in securing stability of the country but also most of them are accused of looting the property of the country, bringing them back to power cannot help the country to get rid of problems and miseries. But beside this, there is the belief that the policy of complete removal from the scene of all the previous political actors is a repetition of the past failed experiences and this is considered a key factor to sustain and further worsen the critical situation of the country. Since the establishment of the acting government of the Islamic Emirate in Afghanistan, it seems that the political players of the past few decades and the impartial politicians of the country have been completely removed from the scene.

As the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, the Taliban are currently in the position of a responsible government, their superficial attitude towards patriotic issues retains no good results for the country's future. Despite establishing the Commission for "Return and Communications with Former Afghan Officials and Political Figures" by the cabinet of the Islamic Emirate, it seems from the attitude of the previous few months that all political parties, civil society organizations, former officials, politicians and national figures are not given even the role of offering consultations and there are no any preparations for doing so. Also, the belief that, after the general amnesty, the former officials are given the right to live in the country but they have no rights of any other demands and there is no need of discussions with them regarding



patriotic issues. But if the situation continues, it is probable that they will make challenges and problems to the Islamic Emirate when the current opportunity of national reconciliation with them will be lost. Therefore, for the country's long-term stability, removal of the possible incentives for wars and many other reasons, an urgent and agile step towards national reconciliation is currently a vital and national priority and opportunity, the consequences of which are significant for the country's future stability.

Though, as there is the need for negotiations with and discussing the demands of the previous political actors, national reconciliation is also greatly bound to the nation and, currently, raising new scholastic and social figures from different parts of the society and making them part of the decision-making authorities and consultations regarding patriotic issues is needed.

In this paper, the need for a serious and urgent action for national reconciliation, the associated opportunities and challenges, the current steps taken by the Islamic Emirate, future actions roadmap, and its possible consequences in case of the success of national reconciliation process are discussed.

WHAT DOES NATIONAL RECONCILIATION MEAN?

National reconciliation and national understanding means the removal of the possible threats to the stability of the country by discontented Afghans or at least minimizing it. The focus, here, is not only on the people who have left the country, but inside the country, there are many political figures and parties and the entire Afghan nation whose no sign of any role can be felt in national issues of the country.

National reconciliation does not mean that the former corrupt officials should be brought back to power neither does it mean the distribution of the power like in the last twenty years with them. It means to consider the demands and concerns of all the Afghans about the future of the country, discussions should initiate regarding their concerns and demands with them, and the role of the nation should be defined in the system and regarding patriotic issues to prevent any conflicts and chaos. By eradicating the oppositions, the future political stability and security shall be guaranteed, something that is not only possible through the use of force and power.



THE NEED FOR INTRA-AFGHAN UNDERSTANDING

National reconciliation is a vital need of every society in general, and, in particular, the changes in Afghanistan over the past few decades have proved that whenever rulers have abandoned reconciliation with their political opponents, their power has not lasted; and over time, they have faced difficulties and challenges, which have ultimately led to the collapse of governments.

Following the collapse of the former government, the past few months showed that, currently, there is no political interaction with the political opponents of the system, even the sympathizing figures and parties of the system aren't given any role in the reconstruction and future of the system either. Although, apparently, the government's policy is that former officials can live in the country as ordinary Afghans, but it is believed that the politicians who have left the country will not return only to live in Afghanistan, and will not give up opposing the system, therefore, an understanding and discussion about their demands with them is required. That is why, concerns exist that ignoring political opponents will bear challenges in the short and medium terms for the system. Below, some of these challenges and the need for national understanding are pointed at as examples:

First: National understanding and reconciliation with the political opponents is the only way of preventing anomalies and interferences in Afghanistan that the experiences of the past few decades have highlighted its importance. The only tool in hand of the foreign intelligence agencies and the opposing countries of the ruling system to interfere in the internal affairs of the country are those discontented Afghans who have played a significant role in the previous politics of the country. If the current situation continues, intelligence agencies and enemy countries of Afghanistan will gradually strengthen the discontented politicians against the ruling system and that will be the time when the current golden opportunity for understanding will be lost. We must remember that damage is easier than reconstruction and if the current situation continues, it may provide opportunities of fighter-enlistment for the opponents of the system.

Second: Currently, the establishment of an inclusive government, according to the international community, is the only solution of Afghanistan's issue and is considered the first condition of international recognition of the current government. In absence of national understating and reconciliation, the ruling system will be considered limited to a party (the Taliban) and the problem of legitimacy will continue. Due to this, Afghanistan is facing the challenges of, politically, national and international recognition, economic dilemmas, and probable insecurities. The return of the Afghans who have left and the political figures will fill this gap to some extent. Meanwhile, the demand of inclusive system is not only demanded by



the opponents of the Islamic Emirate, but all the people wants to see themselves and ensure their dignity in the system.

Third: The politicians who have left the country, naturally have some sympathizers and supporters inside the country. If most of these politicians are reconciled, the level of public satisfaction will rise internally and will also be effective in preventing future oppositions and threats.

EXISTING OPPORTUNITIES FOR NATIONAL RECONCILIATION

Currently, there are many opportunities for national reconciliation, and these opportunities may be lost over time. Some of these opportunities are pointed at in the following lines:

- The first opportunity is that, currently, the war has stopped in the country and current relative peace and calm is a good opportunity for the success of long-term stability efforts. Afghans are tired of long wars and all Afghans will support national reconciliation efforts. Also, the stoppage of war in the country and the relative improved security situation can cause the return of the majority of political opponents to the country with little efforts. The truth is that a large number of Afghans have fled the country due to wars, insecurity and political restrictions and for saving their own lives.
- The announcement of general amnesty by the Islamic Emirate, and to a large extent, exercising this decree fostered the way to national reconciliation and this is considered a good start in the national reconciliation process. Therefore, now, the trust and opportunity to content the opponents have been built.
- Since the arrival of the Islamic Emirate, a number of senior politicians have remained in the country and their words have their weight and place in national and international levels. This is a great opportunity to give those the chance to facilitate reconciliation negotiations with other political opponents and use their credibility in this regard.
- Currently, the Islamic Emirate has full control on the entire territory of the country and most political figures are now in a state that accepting minimum of their demands may make them be willing to give up on opposition and return to the country. Also, full sovereignty and independence of the Islamic Emirate brought up the opportunity that the decisions regarding national issues can be taken without external pressures and with considering the national and Islamic interests.
- In addition to some exceptions, the policy of most countries in the region and the world is that they are not supporting armed opposition against the Islamic Emirate, but they want a complete inclusive and responsible system in Afghanistan. This way, through talks with



the authorities of the countries that have given political asylum to the political opponents of the current government, the opportunity of making those discontent Afghans to sit for negotiations with the Islamic Emirate and in case of understanding return to their own country should be made.

- Another important opportunity is that the present opponents of the Islamic Emirate have no a single central stand and front; therefore, discussions, now, can take place with them separately. Majority of the opponents of the Taliban are subsequently trying to create solidarity and understanding among themselves; in case of unity among them, the reconciliation and understanding process with them will get tough enough. Especially, if they gather as one and form, for instance, a resistance party or a government in exile, in that case, it would further make this process tough.

THE EXISTING CHALLENGES TO NATIONAL RECONCILIATION

At present, in addition to the many opportunities for national reconciliation, there are also a number of challenges that need to be identified because these challenges have now blocked the way for national reconciliation and is becoming the cause of spoiling this golden opportunity:

- Currently, the biggest challenge towards national reconciliation and understanding with the political opponents is the belief that the Islamic Emirate is the only dominant force now after the collapse of the former government; therefore, there is no need of talks with the political opponents, but if they want, they can have the residence permit inside Afghanistan. There is also the belief that the Taliban defeated more than 40 countries and there will be no such force in the future that will resist, but we must remember that the opponents of the Islamic Emirate may gain the ability of creating at least continued security chaos and instability.
- Uncertainty about the future of the system is a great challenge, including the opponents of the system, many Afghans still do not know what will be the nature and framework of the country's system and where will be the fate of this country headed. Beside this, currently, there is the gap of the lack of a single legislation and everything is decided through decrees and by attitudes. If, regarding this, descriptions are provided and, specifically, such roadmaps are provided that will expand power participation, most of the people will gladly return.
- The fall of the previous government and, through military force, the getting to power of the Islamic Emirate has also given birth to the belief that officials of the previous government have no rights to paly any role in the politics of the country because they have failed their



test. That is why, those political figures who can play a positive role in the reconciliation with the political opponents are also not given any chance of playing a role.

- After the arrival of the Islamic Emirate, in the system, without technical and lower rank posts, the positions up to directors and managers of all the government posts are given only to the members of the Taliban and this situation has given birth to the belief that even if the political opponents and discontent Afghans who fled the country return, they won't have the opportunity to work.
- A number of such cases has been occurred that some personalities are humiliated; that is why, others think that if they return, they too will be humiliated and insulted and would live under detainment in the country.
- The final and important challenge is that some recent decisions of the Islamic Emirate widely have given birth to frustration and lack of hope both inside and outside the country. Its important examples include the extension of ban on education for girls and some steps of the Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice that are like of the former Taliban's period. This practice has strengthened the mentality that living under the Taliban's regime is difficult and freedoms in the country are being limited day by day. At the same time, most of the Islamic Emirate officials do not seem pleased with these recent steps either, and it seems that, so far, there is no full understanding among them too about the politics of the country; therefore, those Afghans who fled their country, in such a situation, will not be willing to return to their country.

THE STEPS TAKEN REGARDING NATIONAL RECONCILIATION AND ITS EFFECTS

In general, the taken steps regarding national reconciliation after the collapse of the former government include, general amnesty, negotiations with the opponents of the Islamic Emirate and subsequently communications with Afghans who fled their country and establishment of the commission for bringing them back to the country.

During the collapse of the previous government, the leadership of the Islamic Emirate announcement general amnesty, which ensured the protection of all officials and personnel of the previous government. This attitude of the Taliban was appreciated at national and international levels and was in fact an unprecedented step in the country's history in terms of national reconciliation. Although, later, reports were published, that in some areas of the country, vengeance has been sought. But these reports were considered propaganda by the Taliban; and then the authorities of the Islamic Emirate insisted on its fighters not to disobey the announcement of general amnesty; in case of violation, they will be punished. Generally, this decree was implemented to a great extent, and especially the senior officials of former government were respected.



After the establishment of the acting government of the Islamic Emirate, the policy of the Taliban in the past approximately seven months was that all Afghans can live in their own country and especially the former government officials were generally invited to give up opposition and come to their country. Only a few days after the Taliban's entrance to Kabul, Muwlawi Amir Khan Muttaqi told the armed opponents of the Islamic Emirate in an audio message that if they give up armed opposition, they will be safe in Kabul and other provinces of the country like other officials of the government and there will be no stances of revenge or any problems for them. But the message, all the armed opponents of the Islamic Emirate interpreted as a surrender call; and as the Taliban in previous years interpreted government's calls for peace as a surrender notice, this time, those who chose to oppose the Taliban took every kind of giving up resistance as a surrender and they chose to fight to their strengths and are still making efforts of fighting.

The first step towards inter-Afghan reconciliation was first seen after four months of ruling of the Islamic Emirate. This action were the discussions of a delegation led by acting Foreign Minister Muwlawi Amir Khan Muttaqi with the opponents of the Islamic Emirate in Iran. The Taliban delivered the message to them that they can return to their country, but no positive reaction was seen in response to their demands.

As a result of these efforts, the first senior government official returned to the country. Abdul Salam Rahimi who was State Minister for Peace and the director of the president's office and who fled the country as the Islamic Emirate took control, he was back to Kabul and was warmly welcomed by the officials of the Taliban. The acting Foreign Minister Muwlawi Amir Khan Muttaqi said during meeting him: "twenty years ago, the Taliban had to choose death, prison or climbing the mountains while the current system invites its opponents to come here and live a peaceful life."

Meanwhile, the few trips of the officials of the Islamic Emirate revealed that there are worldwide efforts by some countries of negotiations of the Taliban with their opponents because the stance of most of the countries currently is that they do not support armed resistance against the Islamic Emirate. Even if this, on the one hand, is a great opportunity, on the other hand, if efforts for peace go well, this innovation of peace will again be in the hands of others and they will place their own conditions and demands.

In consideration of the above discussion, it becomes clear that the Islamic Emirate as a whole has realized the importance of national reconciliation for future stability; but, so far, there has been no organized roadmap and no systematic work has been done yet. Considering the urgency and importance of this issue, in the following section, the future essential steps are discussed.



ROADMAP AND FUTURE STEPS TOWARDS NATIONAL RECONCILIATION

The current stage is in serious demand of taking the following steps for reconciliation with the previous persons in power and politicians by the Islamic Emirate so that long-term stability and peace are secured before missing this opportunity and increase of doubts:

First: National reconciliation is the most important and urgent priority at this time for the country's future stability, and now that there are many opportunities for national reconciliation, the Islamic Emirate should recognize the vitality and importance of this priority and urge an action and internal talks and understanding regarding this.

There is no clear understanding among the Taliban regarding the demands of the opposite side about national reconciliation yet; therefore, a pressing need at this stage is that the Islamic Emirate should determine its red lines in the light of the national and Islamic interests, and clarify all that can be negotiated. The dominant view is that the points of disagreement are very little, because both of the sides want an Islamic system in the country in which all the ethnicities see themselves. Besides, an understanding internally and among the authorities of the Islamic Emirate regarding the ways of governing and ruling is required. It seems that there are differences of opinion within the system; the opposite Afghans can't trust until there is an understanding inside the system.

Second: Till now, the stand of the Islamic Emirate regarding national reconciliation is not entirely clear; although, from time to time, senior officials of the Islamic Emirate invite the former officials and the politicians who have left the country to return and the newly established Commission has been established for this purpose. But in general, it is necessary that a decree is officially issued by the leadership of the Islamic Emirate that contains a clear message and the policy and stand of the Islamic Emirate regarding national reconciliation.

The Taliban are not so far focusing on reconciliation reasoning that it may indicate that there is still a serious opposition; through this approach, it is shown that there is no serious threats and the opposition is completely down. But the concern is that current peace will be temporary; if, on the long run, no fundamental actions for downing the oppositions take place, it will pave the way towards future chaos and threats.

Third: For making the efforts of national reconciliation successful, a council of former senior politicians and neutral figures and leaders of the country should be given the job and necessities to negotiate with the Afghans who have left the country and pave the way to reconciliation and talks of the Islamic Emirate with them. Though, the senior officials of the



Islamic Emirate may have the authority to make decisions with their opponents, to a degree, and those Afghans may trust them, but at first, among them, building the trust and relationship does not seem so practical and there is a serious need of such fair Afghan figures who pave the way towards building trust and negotiations.

Fourth: Contacts should be made with various countries in the region and around the world who are in favor of peace in Afghanistan and through them negotiations with the concerned Afghans should take place to stop them from opposition. These countries may in some way play the role of an intermediary or third party.

Fifth: In case of negotiations, such messages which mean only surrender of the opposite side shouldn't be insisted on. The fact is that Afghans who oppose the Islamic Emirate have their legitimate and illegitimate demands. That is why, it is needed that, at least, the Islamic Emirate should pave the way for discussions and negotiations about their legitimate demands and listen to them.

One of the issues in the reconciliation process is that the Taliban do not currently recognize their opponents as an organized mass and think that doing so will create problems for them in the future. This issue should not be a challenge to national understanding and reconciliation, negotiations should take place with the other sides as Afghans, no matter what name they choose for themselves.

Sixth: The most important step among these steps is that a description about the type of future system be provided. In this regard, an important topic is providing the strategy and mechanism of internal and national legitimacy and participation. It is not important that the opposition should be given a part in the power of the Islamic Emirate, but at least providing such a framework and mechanism is needed that leads to political and social diversity. Therefore, the first step is coming up with, at least, a constitution that determines the type of future system because, in current cryptic situation, most of the Afghans will not be willing to return.

EXPECTED CONSEQUENCES OF NATIONAL RECONCILIATION EFFORTS

1. In case of successful national reconciliation efforts, interferences on regional and world levels of different countries and other self-interest parties will be prevented because, now for all the parties and countries, the only weapon to invest in are the discontented Afghans through whom they will pressurize the Islamic Emirate and achieve their goals.
2. Even though, there is no expectation that all discontented politicians will reconcile and return to the country; but at least, efforts of national reconciliation and the return of a



great number of politicians will have the effect of reducing the possibility of wars and disturbances in the future.

3. With the return of the opponents of the current system, the world will be presented with a good image of the Islamic Emirate and the issue of inclusiveness will be resolved to some extent that will directly and positively affect the attitude of the world towards the Islamic Emirate. These positive effects can include the possibility of international recognition and the betterment of economic situation, that its possibility can be seen with a positive change in the attitude of the world and an increase in assistances.
4. There is no doubt that making a country better needs much more efforts and returning of the Afghans who have left the country will help in the country's reconstruction and strengthening governance. Beside this, it will put a halt to the escape of educated Afghans meaning that it will prevent brain drain.
5. Also, if some of the legitimate expectations, those in favor of national interests, of the opposing sides are accepted, it will affect the future stability of the country positively. The change of attitudes and the rule of law instead of attitudes can be mentioned as examples.

The end

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