

Does the sacking of anti-Taliban and pro-Western officials pave the way for ...

This paper aims to evaluate the removal of anti-Taliban/anti-Pakistan and pro-Western officials from the government of Afghanistan.

Does the sacking of anti-Taliban and pro-Western officials pave the way for peace in Afghanistan?

By Farhad Arian

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In the last couple of months, there has been a trend of forced resignations of anti-Taliban/anti-Pakistan and pro-Western officials in the government of Afghanistan. With such a pattern that is deeply worrying because of its negative implications for the democratization process of the country, President Karzai sees anti-Taliban and pro-Western officials as the major barriers, undermining his government's peace approach with the Taliban. The forced resignations of Interior Minister Hanif Atmar, Intelligence Chief Amrullah Saleh, Afghan Ambassador Sayed Tayeb Jawad, and Davood Moradian, a senior policy advisor at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs are four obvious examples, indicating that the Afghan government no longer tolerates those officials who oppose the government's peace approach.

Despite the sacking of Afghan officials, the Afghan government's peace approach would no longer contribute to the peace because of the disagreement of non-Pashtun ethnic groups and the Afghan Parliament with the conditions of the peace approach, the mistrust between President Karzai and his Western allies, the concerns of the international community regarding a peace deal with the Taliban, and the continuous support of the Taliban by Pakistan. Such factors not only undermine peace efforts of the Afghan government, but also encourage the Taliban to fight the government rather than joining the peace talks.

First, In spite of removing a number of anti-Taliban/anti-Pakistan officials from the government, the Taliban has repeatedly pointed out that their first political priority is neither joining the government-led peace talks nor reaching an agreement on power-sharing with President Karzai. As such, regardless of the attempts of the Afghan government, the Taliban has regularly continued their violent battle against the Afghan and international troops rather than laying down their arms and joining the peace talks.

Meanwhile, the international community, that militarily, politically and financially supports the Afghan government, has announced that the respect for the Afghan Constitution is a central pre-condition for any reconciliation with the Taliban. However, the Taliban have never accepted the Constitution of Afghanistan as a pre-condition for the peace talks nor recognized the legitimacy of the government of President Karzai. The forced resignations of anti-Taliban and pro-Western officials do not necessarily contribute to achieve the lasting peace in Afghanistan because the priorities of the Taliban for the peace are wholly at odds that of the Afghan government or the international community.

In addition to the different peace approaches of the Afghan government, the international community and the Taliban, the disagreement of non-Pashtun ethnic groups with the conditions of reconciliation with the Taliban is another barrier, undermining the government's peace efforts. In particular Tajiks, Hazaras, and Uzbeks, as the major non-Pashtun ethnic groups, are entirely against any peace deal with the Taliban that might increase the dominance of ethnic Pashtun over the political administration of the country. Thus, the dismissal of anti Taliban figures no longer paves the way for achieving the lasting peace in Afghanistan because the Taliban and their Pakistani supporters are well aware that the government's peace approach lacks the potential support of non-Pashtun ethnic groups in Afghanistan.

However, if President Karzai pays no attention to the concerns of non-Pashtun ethnic groups concerning the government's peace approach, he fails to provide the ground for achieving peace due to the lack of national consensus on the conditions of any peace deal with the Taliban. Additionally, if the disagreement of non-Pashtuns with the conditions of the peace deal is ignored by the Afghan government, non-Pashtun ethnic groups have the potential to launch political movements across the country for the intention of widely opposing any reconciliation

deal with the Taliban. Therefore, while the sacking of anti-Taliban and pro-Western officials does not necessarily result in the lasting peace, the agreement of non-Pashtun ethnic groups with the Afghan government's peace approach is a central issue of importance in achieving peace in Afghanistan.

Furthermore, despite the removal of anti-Taliban/anti-Pakistan and pro-Western figures from the government, the government of President Karzai underestimates the potential of the newly elected Parliament to oppose the peace talks with the Taliban. This is because, apart from the attempts of the government, President Karzai's favourite candidates largely failed to have a majority in the new Parliament, and as such, the new Parliament of Afghanistan is dominated by anti-Taliban and anti-Pakistan figures.

However, if President Karzai ignores the disagreement of the Afghan Parliament with the conditions of peace with the Taliban, the Parliament will no longer approve any legislation concerning the government's peace approach with the Taliban. Therefore, while the main challenge towards achieving the lasting peace in Afghanistan is not those officials who oppose the peace talks with the Taliban, the disagreement of the Afghan Parliament with the government's peace approach is a major challenge, significantly undermining any peace efforts of President Karzai.

Finally, another major barrier that undermines the government's peace approach is the relationship between the government of President Karzai and his Western allies. In the aftermath of the fraud-tarnished 2009 Afghan Presidential Election, President Karzai has become a critic of the West. As such, the mistrust between the government of President Karzai and its Western allies significantly decreases the support of the West from the government's peace approach with the Taliban. Therefore, the mistrust between President Karzai and his Western allies has provided the Taliban and their Pakistani allies with an exceptional opportunity to continue their fight against the government's forces and international troops rather than joining the peace talks.

While the mistrust between President Karzai and his Western allies encourages the Taliban to fight the Afghan government rather than joining the peace talks, President Karzai, ironically, thinks that the sacking of pro-Western and anti-Taliban officials would pave the way for reaching an agreement on power-sharing with the Taliban. Additionally, President Karzai, with the sacking of anti-Taliban and pro-Western officials, intends to appear as an independent national figure rather than a Western puppet. He, however, ignores the fact that no support from the West would soon result in the collapse of the Afghan government by the Taliban or other Afghan warlords. Therefore, the dismissal of pro-Western and anti-Taliban officials neither paves the way for achieving the lasting peace in Afghanistan nor encourages the Taliban to join the peace talks.

To conclude, the sacking of anti-Taliban and pro-Western officials from the government of President Karzai no longer provides the ground for achieving the lasting peace in Afghanistan. Instead, the very pre-conditions for the peace in Afghanistan are dealing with the challenges of the fear of non-Pashtun ethnic groups from a Karzai-Taliban deal, the disagreement of the Afghan Parliament with the conditions of the peace with the Taliban, the mistrust between President Karzai and his Western allies, the concerns of the international community regarding the government's peace approach, and the continuous support of the Taliban by Pakistan. Therefore, it is important for the government of Afghanistan to convince non-Pashtun ethnic groups, the Afghan Parliament, and the international community that its peace approach with the Taliban is a transparent national agenda rather than a Karzai-Taliban deal for power-sharing in their own.

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