

Purging the Afghan government will not build the consensus necessary for peace

This paper argues that the resignation of a host of pro-Western, anti-Taliban, and anti-Pakistan officials from the Afghan government bodes badly for peace talks with the Taliban.

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In recent months, there has been a trend of forced resignations of anti-Taliban, anti-Pakistan and pro-Western officials in the government of Afghanistan. In 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 to his government's peace feelers with the Taliban. The resignations of Interior Minister [Hanif Atmar](#), Intelligence Chief [Amrullah Saleh](#), Afghan Ambassador [Sayed Taib 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 officials who oppose the government's peace approach.

Aside from the sacking of Afghan officials, the Afghan government's approach is unlikely to achieve peace due to a host of other factors: 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 compromise the peace efforts of the Afghan government, but also encourage the Taliban to fight on rather than joining the peace talks.

First, in spite of removing a number of anti-Taliban and 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. Regardless of the attempts of the Afghan government, the Taliban has continued their violent battle against Afghan and international troops rather than laying down their arms and joining the peace talks.

Meanwhile, the international community, which militarily, politically and financially supports the Afghan government, has announced that 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 recognised the legitimacy of the government of President Karzai as a negotiating partner. The forced resignations of anti-Taliban and pro-Western officials will not contribute to a lasting peace in Afghanistan so long as the Taliban's aims remain wholly at odds with those of the Afghan government or the international community.

In addition to the different terms of peace 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 a further barrier obstructing the government's peace efforts. In particular Tajiks, Hazaras, and Uzbeks, as the major non-Pashtun ethnic groups, are broadly against any peace deal with the Taliban that might increase Pashtun dominance of the political administration of the country. Thus, the dismissal of anti-Taliban figures is unlikely to convince the Afghan Taliban and their Pakistani supporters of the viability of Kabul's offer of concessions as they are well aware that the government's peace approach would lack the support of non-Pashtun ethnic groups in Afghanistan.

No peace deal with the Taliban can be reached unless there is a national consensus on the terms and conditions of such a deal. If this consensus is not achieved, non-Pashtun ethnic groups have the potential to launch political movements across the country with the intention of opposing the peace talks with the Taliban. This would effect a new political crisis in Afghanistan which would not only undermine peace efforts with the Taliban but also create the potential for further conflict on the lines of ethnicity, language and religion.

Furthermore, Karzai underestimates the potential of the [newly elected Afghan parliament](#) to obstruct peace talks with the Taliban. This is because, in spite of government efforts, President Karzai's favourite candidates failed to

achieve a majority in the new Parliament, and as such, the new Parliament of Afghanistan is dominated by anti-Taliban and anti-Pakistan figures. If President Karzai ignores parliamentary discontent with the terms of peace, parliament will no longer approve related legislation. Whatever the composition of government and senior ministries, the disagreement of the Afghan parliament with the government's peace approach will remain a major challenge, significantly undermining Karzai's peace efforts.

Finally, the government's peace approach is further undermined by the deteriorating 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 vocal critic of Nato policy. This has soured relations between the government of President Karzai and its Western allies, significantly decreasing support for the government's peace approach with the Taliban. The mistrust between President Karzai and his Western allies has provided the Taliban and their Pakistani allies with an exceptional opportunity to gain ground in their fight against the government's forces and international troops rather than joining peace talks. By sacking anti-Taliban and pro-Western officials and spouting nationalist rhetoric, Karzai intends to present himself as an independent national figure rather than a Western puppet, but ignores the fact that without support from the West, the government would soon be overthrown, either at the hands of the Taliban or Afghan warlords.

To reach a peace agreement with the Taliban, Karzai needs to overcome the opposition of parliament, non-Pashtun ethnic groups, and Kabul's Western backers, as well as the support provided to the Taliban from Pakistan. On top of dealing with such significant challenges, the forced resignations of senior anti-Taliban officials compound the obstacles to achieving lasting peace in Afghanistan. National consensus and a transparent agenda must be the cornerstones of any peace talks with the Taliban. A deal with the Taliban that is supported by Karzai and his clique alone will not bring the country any closer to peace.

About the author

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