

INSTITUTE FOR DEFENCE STUDIES AND ANALYSES (IDSA)

Biweekly Review *of*

Dari/Persian and Pashto Media from Afghanistan

October 17-31, 2001

Translations by Mirwais Balkhi

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**BI-WEEKLY REVIEW OF
THE DARI/PERSIAN AND PASHTO MEDIA
FROM AFGHANISTAN**

October 17-31, 2011

IDSA is starting a bi-weekly review of the Persian/Dari and Pashto Media on Afghanistan from this month (November 2011). Given the importance of the transition process in Afghanistan, it is hoped that such periodic review spanning the print, electronic and audio-visual media will acquaint the readers with the perceptions/ views/analyses from the Afghan media and help them in understanding the political dynamics in Afghanistan.

During the course of the last two weeks two prominent Tajik leaders from Afghanistan— Marshal Mohammad Qasim Fahim who is the current Vice President of Afghanistan, and Younis Qanooni, who is the leader of Afghanistan e Naween (New Afghanistan) political party and former Speaker of the House of the People— have come out with their views in Television interviews on the evolving political dynamics in Afghanistan. We are carrying out English translation of these two interviews in this edition of the biweekly, we are starting from this month. This is particularly useful to understand the future course of events as these leaders are preparing themselves for the post-withdrawal scenario in Afghanistan.

Interview with Marshal Fahim in BBC Persian

Date: October 18, 2011

Time:2:41

Interviewer: Daud Qarizada

Webpage: http://www.bbc.co.uk/persian/tv/2011/04/000001_ptv_page2_gel.shtml

Q: Why are you concerned about the future of Afghanistan and why have you suddenly started talking about the danger of the re-emergence of Taliban?

In the last one decade Afghanistan has passed through many ups and downs. There was relative stability during the interim government in Afghanistan and national unity was maintained. Several governmental institutions were established. ***During the Taliban rule everything was destroyed. In fact, we started a new life in this country (after the overthrow of the Taliban).***

Q. Could you please focus on the present developments?

Many political efforts are going on in Afghanistan. On one side there is war; there is terror, there is assassination. On the other side, many people are impatient; they have very narrow views about these things and would want the government to fall.

Q. *Who are these people?*

There are many political figures, intellectuals and youths. The young ones want immediate results. ***My worry is that when the communist regime was overthrown, there was an alternative in the shape of the mujahideen, who came and filled in the void.***

When the Taliban government fell, there was an alternative too. God forbid, if this government falls today, I say with confidence, there is no organised group which can come and replace the government in Kabul.

Q. *If political opposition means Dr Abdullah or any other figure, they are not behind the overthrowing of the government. They want political reforms inside the government. Reform is one thing. Working for overthrowing of the government is another. We want political reforms, and so do our brothers. In fact, we are attempting reforms....*

Well, I do not mean Dr Abdullah alone but the whole political opposition. Dr Abdullah has that much political understanding.

Q. *Do you mean they are trying to overthrow the government?*

Dr Abdullah is the leader of the Change and Hope Coalition; by God's grace he has some experience in the government; he has been the foreign minister; he knows how difficult it is to establish and run the government. He knows what are the challenges confronting Afghanistan and all other political figures also know this. But there are some elements, who want to weaken the pillars of the government.

Q. *How is your relationship with the political opposition in Afghanistan?*

Very close and brotherly relations. Very friendly. There is no problem between us. We have regular informal meetings together.

Q. *Are you participating regularly in their meetings?*

We go to their homes. We have telephonic conversations. There is no problem.

Q. *Do you mean to say you are the vice president of Afghanistan, a representative of the government and at the same time you are also an ally of the political opposition?*

True I am the Vice President of Afghanistan. There is also no doubt that I am part of the government and I want my friends to understand the plans and

programmes of the government. In fact, the rumours of hostility between us (me and the opposition) are baseless. We are not opponents.

Q. Ten years after the assassination of Ahmad Shah Massoud, you were leading the front. You promised that you will follow the path of Massoud. But today there is a criticism about you that you have your own line of action and your friends are on their own separate ways.

It is not like that. There is no doubt that throughout the years of Jihad and resistance from the valley of Panjshir, ***I had been with Ahmad Shah Massoud until he was martyred. I had my share in whatever Massoud planned.*** After his martyrdom, the situation became such that Afghanistan became independent. I implemented his plans step by step. The interim government was established. Then came the transitional government. We paved the way for the national elections. All the weapons that we had were submitted to the government in a lawful manner. ***This is what Ahmad Shah Massoud would have wanted to happen. After the elections, Hamid Karzai became the president of Afghanistan; Ahmad Shah Massoud did not have any strategy about how to go about during this phase. It was all my initiative.*** Those who complain that I have not followed the path of Ahmad Shah Massoud are doing so because they are not in government. Earlier, we were a homogenous group (during the resistance movement). But when there was a government in Kabul, we had to share power at the centre with all other groups. The power had to be distributed equally. Our presence in the government has never been weak.

Q. It is true that when you are in the government you talk like a representative of the government. But when you are out of it you criticise the government.

It will be foolishness on my part as a Marshall to speak against the government. I have never been against the system. Five years I stayed calmly in my home. But I was playing my normal political role. I was invited by the Karzai government to be part of the government because of my approach to politics and my calmness. They understood their past mistakes and invited me many times. I accepted the invitation and continue to work for Afghanistan. ***Even if I will not be part of the government today, I will not be against it. I will be doing a disservice to the title which has been given to me (Marshall), if I go against the government.***

Q. During the past ten years, there have been many ups and downs in your relations with Hamid Karzai. You have been the defence minister and vice president. But after the 2004 elections, you were compelled to leave the government. How is your relationship with Karzai today?

It is a very intimate and friendly relationship. We have similar views on all issues. We are trying to overcome the natural challenges in Afghanistan as it happens in any other country in the world.

Q. Do you have share in all the important political decisions in Afghanistan?

Absolutely. We analyse all the important issues with all the details together reach some kind of an agreement before we decide what to do.

Q. Ahmad Wali Massoud (Brother of Ahmad Shah Massoud) told us in an interview that the Jihadi leaders, and especially he named you, do not have any role in political decision making and their roles are symbolic?

That is the view of those brothers. This is not possible at all. A person who is a political figure, a prominent personality and a leader, cannot be a symbol, especially when he is the vice president and mind you the vice president is also elected by the people. How can it be symbolic. This might be their individual opinion. I never accept my position as symbolic. I have my own role to play in every issue affecting the country. I feel responsible for Afghanistan and its people.

Q. Then you also reject the criticism that Jihadi leaders are not given position in Karzai government to play their role?

No. In this regard I have my own different view about ***the government demobilised the organized army of the Mujahideen which played an active role in the defeat of Taliban, at a moment when there was no regular army in Afghanistan. That is why Afghanistan became a home with open doors. When Mujahideen leaders and their active army were rejected, the Taliban found themselves in an open (and unguarded) space. They came out of their hidden places. They gradually entered the Afghan war theatre and since last eight years we have witnessed war and conflicts.*** Still, the process of building a regular army for defending Afghanistan is not complete. My worry is this that at the time when there was a need for the Mujahideen army why the transitional government of Afghanistan and international community pressurised us to disband this army. I am still critical about this. ***If the army of Muhahideen would have been around and it would have been demobilised in a gradual manner until the formation of a national army, there would not have been this situation today.***

Q. But what about the leadership and cabinet?

As far as the leadership of Afghanistan is concerned, all the representatives of the political parties share power. ***The nature of Afghan society demands that power will have to be shared with all groups and parties. All the Jihadi leaders and political figures have participated at the level of the top leadership, the***

cabinet; many of them are governors, zonal police officers and zonal commanders. Although they are not in the army-- because it has its own law-- they are in all other political institutions. But here I should reiterate, I have my own differences with the way the Mujahideen army was disbanded, which stabilized Afghanistan further.

Q. *Does it mean you are demanding an army in which the Mujahideen should have participated and it could have led to stability in the country?*

I personally believe that the present army should be equipped well. Better weapon should be given to them. Logistic is very vital today and it is based on contracts. They have to have air power, artillery etc. This army along with police and security forces can then maintain stability in Afghanistan. ***The idea of revival of Northern Alliance forces should also be given a serious thought. If these things do not happen (the army is not well-equipped to provide security to the people), then for sure, the Mujahideen who have defended their land, are now ready to be commanded to action to defend the country once more.***

Q. *Years back when the international forces led by the US overthrew the Taliban regime, the people were very hopeful about their future. But now these hopes have led to hopelessness. How do you look at it? Where is the problem? Is it because of the weakness of the government, the leadership or the administration?*

Absolutely as you have said, you can have corruption, shortcomings and many other problems. But rather than fighting them we take these problems as natural which has led to this kind of situation in Afghanistan.

Q. *People are critical about Hamid Karzai's role as the president of Afghanistan. Do you think he is a perfect leader for Afghanistan?*

For now, ***Hamid Karzai has been elected as the president of Afghanistan and has a specific tenure. He is an enthusiastic and sympathetic leader. One cannot question his credentials. He does not have a magic wand to fulfil all the expectations of the people. He cannot produce miracles;*** Afghanistan has its own problems as I said before.

Q. *Which means he is not capable of resolving these problems?*

Many of these issues are so complex that it is beyond the capacity of one person to resolve them. The Afghan issue is very complicated. You can see the interventions of the neighbouring countries which is quite visible. There is no political, economic and security stability in this country. More importantly there is the presence of the international community in Afghanistan; every actor has

his own approach for addressing these problems. They move on the basis of their own interests. That is uncontrollable.

Q. Afghanistan is likely to sign strategic partnership agreement with the US. Part of this document is about the permanent bases of the US in Afghanistan as Washington is trying to have bases in here. What is your view?

Signing strategic agreement with the US is not a problem. But there is only one condition; it should be guided by the national interests of Afghanistan. Our national sovereignty should not be compromised and the international community should continue to support us in building infrastructure and the state of Afghanistan. This is the common aspiration of people in the world. Afghanistan can have strategic agreement with the US, with England, with India or with any other country, if these basic conditions are met.

Q. But what about the tensions of the neighbouring countries, especially Iran and Pakistan who are guided by their own interests?

That is why we are trying to remove these tensions. It is for the good of the US also to remove these tensions. ***Both Afghanistan and the US will have to build trust with the neighbouring countries so that they would not be worried about developments within Afghanistan. They (neighbouring countries) might feel that this agreement (between the US and Afghanistan) is not in their interests and the territory of Afghanistan is likely to be used against them.*** Otherwise, there is no problem at all with this agreement. If the neighbours see it in negative light then they would work against such agreement.

Q. As your western partners claim there is documentary evidence of neighbouring countries providing support to the insurgents. They condemn Iran for example.

We don't have such documentary evidence with us as yet. Iran still supports the government of Afghanistan. And since ten years it has had good diplomatic relations with Afghanistan. These relations are intimate and friendly. ***We don't believe in the Western countries' claims about Iranian support to Afghan insurgents, because we do not have any documentary evidence.*** Iran has only expressed its concerns about its interests and problems it has had with the US. ***But Pakistan's intervention in Afghanistan is very much visible.***

Q. The reconciliation process with Taliban is also different now as Hamid Karzai said that the president of the reconciliation himself has been sacrificed for the peace process. What do you think about the future of this process?

We will never leave the path of peace. We are all for peace in this country. This time, with our past experiences of the last one year, we may

evolve some other mechanism to continue with this process. It is our duty to continue with this invitation to the Taliban, and we are not bothered whether it is accepted or rejected by them. You better know that in a country, peace can be established in two ways; either by the use of force to compel the other side to accept peace or through mutual understanding. Use of force will no doubt result in continuation of the war. But ***we are discouraged by the fact that the Taliban rejects our proposals. It shows that the Taliban are not independent as they allow themselves to be used as assets of the intelligence agencies of a neighbouring country who do not allow them to participate in our initiative for peace. But we will continue with our efforts until we draw them into the process.***

Q. *Even Hamid Karzai himself has stated, "Peace with whom?". With Taliban assassinating the members of the peace council, there is an alternative idea to talk directly to Pakistan. What is your view?*

I want to say something else. ***Taliban was once a power with an organization of its own. But now I believe that Taliban are not a strong force anymore; they do not have any organization and do not have any military power. They do not have the characteristics of a political party. They are not working as a group but as different individuals dependent on external agencies and they are not working in the interests of Afghanistan. They are being used as instruments in the hands of the ISI of Pakistan.*** Therefore, the Taliban do not have a strong political position and therefore the government of Afghanistan has frankly announced that it would continue peace process with Pakistan. They can talk with Pakistan to finish its instruments in Afghanistan.

Q. *Do you think peace with Pakistan will give you positive results, as you have the experience of Dr. Najibullah period in the past?*

Absolutely, ***if Pakistan wants; there will be positive results for all of us, if Pakistan will be convinced that it can pursue its interests in Afghanistan on the basis of mutual understanding.*** Naturally, Pakistan has its interests in Afghanistan and if we can settle all issues through a constructive dialogue which will enable Pakistan to pursue its interests in a peaceful manner. You know that when a state talks to another state, there is scope for give and take. These are the realities which many people in Afghanistan are unwilling to accept. ***If we reach an honest agreement and if international community manages to pressurize Pakistan, then positive reconciliation with Pakistan will be possible. Pakistanis will then leave its support for the insurgent groups.***

Q. *On the basis of the problems that you have mentioned, how do you see post-2014 Afghanistan shaping up? As you say that Taliban should not take control of Afghanistan, what should be done to ensure that?*

Afghanistan has had to pass through two phases; the first one was the formation of the institutions of the government and the rule of law in the country. ***The first phase will come to an end in 2014. The second phase will begin after 2014 which would be the phase of 'development' for Afghanistan.*** Economic development, extraction of the mines and formation of other things with international support will be possible after 2014. ***If the international community does not support us then, we will find Afghanistan in as bad a situation as we are in today.***

Interview with Mohammad Younis Qanooni in Tolo TV

Date: October 15, 2011,

Time: 7:30pm

Interviewer: Mujahid Kakar

Webpage address: <http://jawedan.com/>

Q. *The first question is about the change of your government's policy towards reconciliation as Hamid Karzai has said that now the peace process will be directly with Pakistan. To what extent do you think it will be successful?*

See the change in the president's reconciliation policy (from talking to Taliban to talking to Pakistan) has not drawn much reaction in the intellectual circles. This was not taken seriously because in the past the presidency has gone back on its statements. But if we take this change seriously, then no doubt it can be a turning point in the policies of the government. ***For a long time, it was clear to us to differentiate between the real decision makers (Pakistan) and people who have acted as their instruments (Taliban). During the last seven or eight years, all attempts made by the government to make peace with Taliban have failed. If today, thanks to these changes, the attention of the government is diverted towards the source of the problems, then it can result in effective policy changes. However, all we have been witness to till now is that the present government has gone back on all statements it has made.***

Q. *Mr. Qanooni please tell us, why you cannot trust the president?*

It is based on our past experience. Several times he has made statements and withdrawn them soon afterwards. Many a time, he has made strong statements on Pakistan and then gone back on them. These somersaults have led to distrust among the people. If our policy is based on these short-term realizations (about Pakistani behaviour) then, in my view, it could

have led to something positive. The policies of Afghanistan should be devised by the Executive and then passed by the parliament of Afghanistan. ***Then only we can trust that policy. But I still maintain that if we were to take our reconciliation with Pakistan seriously then for sure it will shorten the peace process (and make it more effective).***

Q. Mr. Qanooni, when a state is making its policy towards another state, it should ideally be backed by a political consensus. But the opposition forces in Afghanistan have not supported the reconciliation process and called it negotiation from a very weak position. What can you do to evolve a consensus for policy making in the country?

We have to differentiate between two things here; no one specifically opposed reconciliation. ***There are some differences over the approach that the government of Afghanistan has been following. This approach has failed. The government attempted reconciliation from a weak position. It is a kind of begging from an enemy (Pakistan and Taliban) who has been constantly targeting us.*** This approach is wrong. Our criticism is not about reconciliation but about the way in which it is being attempted. I think if we want to reach consensus on this issue then different individual approaches should be discussed openly and we should evolve a national policy after that. ***It is true that the constitution of Afghanistan has given powers to the president to frame national policies and then present them before the Parliament to pass it. It would have been lot better if the reconciliation policy was discussed in the parliament and shared with the representative of the people.*** In that case, this would have been acceptable to all..

Q. The government claims that its reconciliation policy was approved by the Jirga in which many senior leaders and different people from all parts of Afghanistan participated and thus there was a national consensus on this. Don't you accept it as a legitimate assembly?

From the legal viewpoint these kinds of Jirga have their own problems. Such a council can only give advices. The parliament of Afghanistan has the legitimate authority to frame national laws. ***In the Peace Jirga the participants only advised to go for peace and reconciliation. They said they wanted peace. Actually all the people of Afghanistan want peace. What I am concerned with here is the process through which the policy framework would have been evolved to implement this*** [suggestion of the Jirga for reconciliation]. No step was taken to strengthen the hands of Rabbani the as the chairman of the reconciliation process and in fact the father of Afghanistan was martyred and sacrificed for these wrong policies.

Q. So now do you think there is a change in policy and is it according to your expectations?

It is business as usual and there is no change of policy so far. Recently again a statement has been made that, since we don't know the exact address of Taliban we will have reconciliation talks with Pakistan. ***If the government is serious about it then it should pressurize Pakistan and the insurgent groups to join talks. If they show their interest in peace, then all attacks on Afghanistan should stop and talks should begin under the supervision of the UN with Afghan initiatives.***

Q. Ok. This dialogue should be with Pakistan or Taliban?

Pressure on Pakistan means pressure on Taliban. Taliban is the product of the strategy of Pakistan. If we cannot change Pakistan's strategy towards Taliban, there is no use talking to the Taliban. If we finish Taliban, which is nothing but an instrument of Pakistan's policy, today, another instrument will come out tomorrow.

Q. Are you ready to support the government as the representative of the opposition parties in these policies?

If we are convinced that the new policy is clear in its objectives, and the peace talk is directly with Pakistan then the opposition would accept that and support the government.

Q. One main problem has been the approach of the international community, as the outsiders have always taken a soft approach towards Pakistan. So if the international community does not support Afghan government in its efforts to put pressure on Pakistan then what should be our approach?

I also believe that unfortunately Afghanistan does not have the ability to pressurize Pakistan; rather Pakistan has enough leverages to pressurize Afghanistan. Today the presence of international community is one of the leverages Afghanistan can use for this purpose [to pressurize Pakistan]. But the leadership in Afghanistan has not been able to take due advantage of this. See like the killing of Osama bin Laden and the operations of terrorist groups inside Pakistan had created a space for us to pressurize Pakistan but we could not make use of it.

Q. Mr. Qanooni, in the meanwhile, the government of Afghanistan has announced its change of policy, and before that the defence minister of the US also criticised Pakistan strongly after terrorist attack on the US embassy in Kabul. However, once the Afghan government announced its policy [to talk to Pakistan and not Taliban] the US foreign ministry announced that US was not closing down its reconciliation talks

with Taliban, and even with the Haqqani network which has been recognized as the planners of the attack on the US embassy. Don't you think that these kinds of confused policies [of the US] created problems for the government of Afghanistan?

No doubt Afghanistan is in a critical situation. The foreign ministry of the US [the State Department] has its own tensions with Pakistan. It is worried about popular reaction in an Islamic state despite the existence of terrorist's networks inside Pakistan. That is why they have always taken a conservative position vis-à-vis Pakistan. But the Afghan government should have its own policy and make use of opportunities available to it. The government of Afghanistan should have made full use of the international pressures on Pakistan after the Osama episode and adopted a pro-active policy towards **Pakistan. Afghanistan could have suggest to the international community that there were specific people and organizations in Pakistan who supported Taliban. It could have urged the international community to boycott these people, impose economic sanctions on them, so that of these people would not be able to travel anywhere. Afghanistan could also have demanded war compensation from Pakistan, and many other options were there to pressurise Pakistan to change its Afghan policy.**

Q. Ok. There is also news that the attack on US embassy was discussed in the American Senate and it was stated that the US had proof that Haqqani network was working with the ISI of Pakistan. But still there are many who believe that they cannot put more pressure on Islamabad because if Pakistan collapses then the extremists may come to power and then in that case the world may face a nuclear threat. So that is why the US and UK cannot put sufficient pressure on Pakistan. Do you think that US can take this risk because of Afghanistan?

Mr. Kakar I still say no. I believe that despite our cordial relations with international community and especially with the US, Afghanistan cannot replace Pakistan in their scheme of things. **The US has its own interests and tensions as far as Pakistan is concerned. No doubt what you mentioned is correct. They will not use Afghanistan to put pressure on Islamabad, not because of the Haqqani network or any other reasons. Pakistan is important for the US. The only new thing we see in the American policy towards the region is the strategic relationships the US now has with India.**

Q. Mr. Qanooni, in this case would you agree that government of Afghanistan is under the pressure from the international community and specially the US, while shaping its Pakistan policy?

Pressure is natural. But here it is up to the government of Afghanistan and its leaders to take initiatives to convince the international community. This is an important issue. **The US has a legitimate right to frame its own Pakistan policy. But what about the government of Afghanistan? Unfortunately, we get so**

embroiled in paradoxes and we have never been able to adopt a pro-active policy. It is the responsibility of the government of Afghanistan to define our national interests despite all these paradoxes and contradictions. But unfortunately, like in many other issues, the government has acted in a pusillanimous way.

Q. Do you think that the government should refer to the people about these issues and seek the support of people to pressurize Pakistan as well as to pressurize the international community to re-think its Afghanistan policy?

We are a great nation. Our people are very capable and have played their role in all the turning points of the history. However, we have always had weak governments which could never use their capabilities. In the first place, the government of Afghanistan needs to evolve a long-term policy. Ad hoc policies (made on everyday basis) cannot be accepted by the people of Afghanistan. ***We have to have a defined and clear policy guided by the constitution of Afghanistan. Recently, you have seen the reactions of the Afghan civil society (in the wake of Rabbani's assassination) and intellectuals on the streets, which shows that people are ready for sacrifice.*** But unfortunately we don't have any clear-cut policy yet. Otherwise Afghan people are always ready to play their role.

Q. Mr. Qanooni. There is a view among the people that the government has got away with its wrong policies because of the lack of a strong political opposition in Afghanistan. Do you think we have a strong opposition?

Not yet. This is because of many reasons; first of all the experience of the democratic politics (and role of opposition in it) is new in Afghanistan. ***A strong opposition is a prerequisite for democracy. A weak government should not be scared of a strong opposition. Today the opposition has its own position in the democratic power structure. I don't mean the opposition should share power with the government. But our government does not brook a strong opposition.*** On the other hand, I also say that the oppositions should play its due role in shaping the policies of the government. An opposition which can represent the whole country consisting of all sections of the people will be a healthy opposition. Fortunately this thinking is there today and all local political groups are expressing their readiness to come together and form a strong and big coalition which is welcome.

Q. Mr. Qanooni, people want to know from you whether you are still a member of the "Change and Hope coalition" or have you left it?

Yes. I have cordial relations with this front and I support them too, but at the same time, I feel we should go beyond Change and Hope coalition and form a bigger coalition which can play its role in Afghan democracy. ***God willing, we will have one common and larger front in which we will have all the analysts, scholars and***

intellectuals, and we can provide policy alternatives to resolve our internal and external problems.

Q. In your recent address you have said that opposition is weak because it is divided. Half of them have joined the government while and the rest have chosen to stay out. What do you think, how you can finish this tradition?

See. It is for the people to study how the members of the opposition are conducting themselves today. The common policy the opposition has followed so far is that all the members of opposition should stay out of the government. We are part of a (democratic) system; the system is ours. We created this system. The point I am making is that all of us, whether in the government or out of it, have to follow common strategies. Fortunately this consensus is there. ***For reforms, we can take advantage from the government both from inside as well as outside. Whether we are in the government or out of it, it does not mean we are any different.***

Q. But don't you think that there is confusion among the people as many of your friends have been in the government since the resistance? They seem happy when they are in power but once they are out of government, they start criticising the government.

Sometimes it is like this. But it is not always the case. Opposition is like a big open house where all the dissenters, all those who differ with the government can enter. This is the strategy of the opposition in any country. ***Some people have joined the government, seen the problem from inside and left the government; the opposition cannot reject them. Whosoever believes in an alternative programme can join the opposition. In some exceptional cases, some friends have lost their positions and then begun to criticize the government. If they are in agreement with the strategies of the opposition they can be a part of that.***

Q. Let's turn back to the internal issue once again. There have been demonstrations on the streets and the government reacted with brutality to break Mrs. Simin Barakzai's hunger strike. They have destroyed the tents. What do you think about this? Do you agree that government could have adopted some other strategy?

No Mr. Kakar. We can never agree with the reaction of the government to the hunger strike by Mrs. Barakzai who is a citizen of Afghanistan and a lady. ***This shows that our government is so weak that it could not even tolerate the civic hunger strike of a lady and confronted it with brutality. No Afghan can accept this.*** It could have been addressed in so many ways. Mrs. Barakzai could have been persuaded in a peaceful manner. Unfortunately, what Barakzai did was perfectly logical and constitutional. The government has violated the law, rigged the election and has done many illegal things and reached this position. This reaction was not right at all and unacceptable to us.

Q. Ok. What is your opinion about the role of Parliament to solve this issue or any other issues?

Parliament could have played its due role if the government would have had respect for the house. Unfortunately, according to my understanding, there is an attempt in this country to weaken the parliament (*Shura-e-Milli*). Through this, they want to weaken the role of the parliament. As you can see, if the law is passed by the government, they respect it, otherwise they reject it. If the parliament dismisses a minister then he continues his position as the acting head. This naturally shows that ***the executive in Afghanistan system is weakening the parliament and has no respect for it. So I think the parliament is marginalized and will face many problems. And I also guess that in the coming two years the present executive will not allow the parliament to be effective.***

Q. Mr. Qanooni, what can you do as the last speaker of the parliament and as an effective political figure to revive the role of parliament?

See, I can only have my influence which will be limited by my position that is as the Member of Parliament. But to strengthen the parliament's role we need to gather speed. The first step has to be taken by the president of Afghanistan. ***If the president of Afghanistan respects law, respect the parliament (house of nation) and its representatives then naturally the parliament becomes strong. If he does anything to the contrary, then nothing will happen.*** We do have this experience in the past that the parliament has taken decisions but since there was no respect for it nothing happened. If they want law and democracy to work in this country then they should have respect for democratic institutions (like the parliament).

Q. Mr. Qanooni, there is also a criticism in this regard. People say that after election, Dr. Abdullah claimed that ninety MPs of the opposition were elected to the parliament. This created an impression that there would be a strong opposition front inside the parliament. But it didn't happen. Where was the weakness?

The claimed number was correct and this many MPs entered the parliament but these friends do not necessarily have the same approach. They have a shared and a common goal but have different approaches. Moreover, the problems created by the executive add to the existing challenges. Still some of the MPs are exchanging their ideas with each other. But the overall culture of the disrespecting the parliament has led to weak position of these people, who are in the oppositions.

Q. Yes. But do you accept the view that the opposition itself did not play its role well which led to their weak position in Afghan politics?

I never say that there is no weakness in the opposition. There are weaknesses and I hope that we can study these problems and resolve them soon.

Q. There is another criticism about the opposition members that they are all from the same group which was there in the past and that they have come together for their own revival. They don't have any big policy for Afghanistan. How do you look at these criticisms?

I don't think these criticisms are relevant. Look at it objectively. If Dr. Abdullah is from our front, there are people like Dr. Hamyoon Shah Asifi who was never part of the so called Northern Alliance. He does not come from northern Afghanistan. The same is true of Dr. Chiragh. You can find dozens of such people whose background is different from ours. ***If we are thinking in terms of a small group limited to one particular geographical area of Afghanistan, then this coalition will not be useful for the opposition and Afghanistan. What we are looking at is a stronger coalition in which people participate from all parts of Afghanistan that can show itself in the election of 2014.***

Q. Is it different from the Change and Hope coalition?

It will consist of the 'Change and Hope'. However, this will be a bigger umbrella in which Change and Hope can play a better and more effective role. Then only we can claim that we can do something in Afghanistan.

Q. Another question is that most of the members of the Change and Hope are basically from Jamiat led by the Late Burhanuddin Rabbani, who was pro-government. The other members also such as the minister of Power and Energy, and Atta Mohammad Noor are in the government. Except these people, who are there in the Change and hope?

There are many others. The policy of the opposition is not that those friends, who are in the system, should leave the system. There are many other brothers and sisters who are members of this coalition and there would be many more people in the next coalition which will be created soon in Afghanistan.

Q. What would be the name of this new coalition?

This will be finalized by the general body meeting of the coalition.

Q. What will be its leadership like?

We prefer to have a collective leadership in the form of a council and then appoint a spokesperson who will announce our policies to the media.

Q. So Mr. Qanooni, you said that you would not have any problem to be in the government. Many of your friends are there at the moment. If the government is weak, your friends and you also have your share in that. Do you accept this?

No Mr. Kakar. **The problems which are there are because of the lack of the macro- management in the system. The government could not take advantage of the golden opportunities available to it. For last ten days, the president of Afghanistan has been confessing that Afghanistan could not achieve anything during the past ten years. This shows that the problems are there because of the mismanagement of the government and its leadership.**

Q. You mean that 50% of the problems is because of your friends and you yourself?

This is the problem of the entire team. It is primarily the President and his cronies who are to be blamed.

Q. And your friends are also there in this team. I want to ask another question that, recently Marshal Fahim said in an interview with BBC that his role is not symbolic. He has a role to play in the policy making. Even he also said that he was a Marshal and his role cannot be symbolic. What do you have to say about this?

No doubt that he is the Marshal of Afghanistan. But the real question here is how much power the vice president of Afghanistan has to shape the policy of the country?

Q. That means you have your doubts about his share in the decision making?

I do not have any doubt about that. He does not have any share. In fact, presence in the government structure is one thing and it is quite another thing to have a share in the decision making process. The presence of these people (like Fahim) is merely for decorating the government with representatives from various ethnic groups. But none of these leaders plays an important role in decision making, Decision making is a personalized affair in Afghanistan today.

Q. After the assassination of Burhanuddin Rabbani there has been a vacuum in Jamiat party. Many questions are being raised about who will replace Rabbani as the leader and some names are in the reckoning. You are a member of the party. Are you interested in its leadership?

After the martyrdom of Ustad Burhanuddin Rabbani, his son Salahuddin Rabbani has become the provisional leader till the general body meeting of the party. Therefore, for now, this vacuum is filled. **We are supposed to hold our congress soon and then we will hold the election for the next leader. Till that time the**

acting president will manage everything. No doubt that most of my life passed in Jamiat but I am not interested in the presidency of the party.

Q. *You never want to be president of Jamiat?*

No. Never.

Q. *But whom do you support?*

This will depend on the congress.

Q. *Do you have any favourite candidate of your own?*

Support for personalities is one thing and for the congress is something else. That would be according to the constitution of the party. I respect all the personalities who are now in the queue to be president; for example persons like Atta Mohammad Noor the governor of Balkh, can be the next president. He has that capability and energy. But again it is up to the Jamiat Congress.

Q. *Mr. Qanooni, the party of New Afghanistan is supposed to be your party, where it stands now?*

The party was formed seven or eight years back. In an agreement with the martyred Ustad Rabbani we promised not to have any political action outside the Jamiat. But when today our martyred leader is not there, there is a need to revive all other parties to play their roles. I hope in the coming days, we will restart the activities of the New Afghanistan Party too.

Q. *Do you want to be the leader of this party?*

This also depends on collective decisions. There is a constitution of the party according to which the party will form its own council and elect its leader.

Q. *Mr. Qanooni, there is a criticism against you that you rejected the presence of political opposition in the first Bonn Conference. As it has been covered in the media reports recently the Taliban and the Hizb-e-Islami were marginalized in the conference. This is regarded as a mistake. What do you think?*

I have a different understanding on this subject. Firstly in the Bonn Conference we were not the sole decision makers. Three other groups from Afghanistan also participated in which Hamyoon Jarir, son-in-law of Gulbiddin Hekmatiyar from Hizb-e-Islami was present. But let's come to Taliban. Some people say it was a mistake; we did not let their representative to be there. Let me say, where was Taliban that time? There was no question of Taliban that time. They were

all in Pakistan as fugitives. ***The revival of Taliban is the new US-Pak policy in the region. Pakistan was feeling disarmed in the region, after (the defeat of) Taliban. This had provoked the wrath of Pakistan. Subsequently, Islamabad convinced Washington that the Afghani Taliban was not a threat for them, (only a section of Taliban allied to external forces like Al Qaeda was a threat).*** The Pakistanis told the US that they were ready to arrest the entire non-Afghan Al Qaeda leadership only if the US government does not come in the way of Pakistan's game/strategy of reviving the Taliban in Afghanistan. ***This is why we are suffering since a decade. This is not because of Bonn Conference. This is because of the (loopholes in the) US-Pak strategy after the rout of Taliban.***

Q. Mr. Qanooni, then why did Hizb-e-Islami stand against the government of Afghanistan if they were represented in Bonn?

This should be answered by the Hizb-e-Islami itself why they are against the government. I do not see any clear reason for that. There are many brothers from Hizb-e-Islami who are in the government and in the parliament. Otherwise there is no logical reason why they would fight against the government. They have to answer this themselves.

Q. Mr. Qanooni, my next question is about the Bonn Second Conference. What would be your role in that conference and how do you look at this conference?

See, Bonn II is again an opportunity for the people and government of Afghanistan. ***The international community once again (hopefully, perhaps) wants to promise a change for the people of Afghanistan at least for next ten years.*** This again depends on how the leaders of Afghanistan plan out to take advantage of it. Since I know the government has no clear agenda on Bonn II until now, as we can see from Kabul and Istanbul Conferences.

Q. In an interview you have expressed your worry about some groups inside and outside Afghanistan who are behind the assassination of the various Afghan leaders. This worry must have intensified after the assassination of Rabbani. Are you seeing any hand from inside the government?

I have mentioned before the martyrdom of Ustad that ***ISI is behind the assassination of the personalities in Afghanistan. My perception is that ISI is looking for a post-2014 Afghanistan after the withdrawal of the international forces. By then, Afghanistan will face an economic and military crisis, where the army of Afghanistan will not be in a position to defeat the enemy. There will be a long (internal civil) war after 2014.*** Pakistan thinks it can impose its own system on Afghanistan. The only challenge that Pakistan can foresee is the presence of important personalities with the experience of jihad and resistance because they have the ability to gather people around them. That is why some were eliminated

before Rabbani and some will be targeted after him. However, these incidents prove that ISI could not have carried out these operations without collaborators inside the Afghan government structure.

Q. Do you mean it is the strategy of the government as a whole or is it the strategy of some individuals inside the government?

What I mean to say is that ISI has infiltrated the Afghan government. Take for instance, the use of rockets by terrorists (during the attack on the US embassy). These rockets are coming to Afghanistan from Pakistan, and attacks on US embassy and many other targets are impossible without cooperation from inside.

Q. Mr. Qanooni, now I have some questions about you. You were the speaker of the house in the last parliament. In brief, how do you look at that period? Were you a successful speaker?

May be no one says I was successful. That was my first experience of parliament when the 'decade of democracy' started in Afghanistan. ***The most important achievement during this phase was the culture of tolerance that we promoted. One of the objectives that I stated in the beginning was also to break ethnic boundaries and come together as one body.*** So you have seen that people from different ethnic background were sitting under one roof. They passed many laws.

Q. Mr. Qanooni, one more criticism against you is that you were very conservative in your approach (that you did not react to acts of indiscretion by the executive). On some occasions, you were deciding something with Hamid Karzai and then you were betrayed that decision was not taken to the parliament. How do you react to this criticism?

I say honestly to you Mr. Kakar, if it was true then Hamid Karzai would have stood by me in the current parliament. He would have supported my candidature for the next speaker. But in both 16th and 17th parliament he stood against me. He supported specific candidates and also used the government apparatus against me.

Q. Another criticism is that you postponed the date of election which helped Hamid Karzai win the election once again. If the election would have taken place on the stipulated date then he would have lost it. What you say?

This also is a wrong allegation. I was one of the few people who was constantly emphasizing on the provisions of the constitution.

Q. people say that you said in one of your speech in parliament that constitution has given a fix date for election but if people of Afghanistan or their representatives want then this date can be changed?

That is not true at all. If they can prove this then I will accept my responsibility for this. On the contrary, we decided that the election should be on time as defined in the constitution.

Q. But in the media there was a news from your address that if the Jihadi leaders, the people and the MPs wanted then changes could be made in the constitution?

I never used the word 'Jihadi Leaders'. I still remember that I told in parliament that we had talked to the president and the result of the talks was presented before House; the MPs were asked to cast their vote. This is the duty of speaker to uphold the constitutional process. I defended constitution till the end. Unfortunately president himself changed the date according the wishes of the MPs.

Q. People say you are rarely present in the parliament these days. Especially when the parliament is discussing critical issues these days and the presence of personalities is vital, you are not there.

In fact these days I remained absent from the proceedings of the parliament because I was not keeping well. Today also the doctor came to me and told me that my health has not improved much. This is the only reason.

Q. The other criticism is that when you were home minister, you signed a document with foreign minister (Dr. Abdullah) in which ISAF was given free hand to operate in Afghanistan?

Unfortunately, I have seen myself that media gives a broad brush treatment to such news and says that there was an agreement between two individual ministers and ISAF. I want to make it clear to you and to the people of Afghanistan that this is nothing but distortion of the realities. No agreement was signed between the home minister, the foreign minister and the ISAF. The agreement which was signed during the interim government was under the command of President Hamid Karzai and in his presence. That meeting was conducted by Karzai himself. The agreement was supposed to be signed by the president of interim government but someone said that president for now cannot sign this document. Instead two ministers (Home Minister and Foreign Minister) can represent the interim government and sign the agreement. Therefore, if anybody will take credit for this agreement, it is the president and if there is any responsibility attached to this then also it is up to him. Moreover, this agreement was signed because at that time there were some insurgent groups at the outskirts of Kabul who were getting increasingly active. Based on the past experience of the 1990s we were afraid that there may be

a repeat of the situation (of the 1990s) in Kabul. Secondly, this agreement was between NATO and ISAF in a limited place, from Bagram to Kabul; it was not between Afghan government and ISAF. Thirdly this agreement was time-bound and only for six months. This agreement came to an end with the termination of the interim government. In transitional government, we also concluded other agreements. Many other agreements were also signed after that but some people use this particular agreement to malign us.

Q. Some people say that the leaders of the Northern Alliance have entered into business and become millionaires but many others who fought against the enemy were forgotten?

It is not correct to say that. You have seen that during all the turning points in Afghan history, the leaders of Northern Alliance have showed their courage and offered many sacrifices. In the interim, transitional and elected governments they have played their due role. Why could not they retain their hold on power is something we must reflect on. We know that there are many others who did not have any connection with the Resistance but now they are billionaires. Who has the monopoly of the financial mafia? No doubt many of the Mujahidin leaders are in economic distress. This is the shortcomings of the system. I always criticize this. In parliament, we passed a law to provide financial support to the families of martyrs and the handicapped. But until now the executive has not implemented it to support even one Afghan.

Q. The last question, how do you see post-2014 Afghanistan shaping up especially after the Afghan security forces take the control of Afghanistan?

I see 2014 presenting before us a challenge and an opportunity. Until now, Afghan government could not take advantage of the opportunities. If the international forces leave us before time (before the Afghan security forces are duly enabled and empowered) then it would be a challenge. You know that if we have a relatively functioning government today, it is because of the presence of the international forces, otherwise with the gap which is there between people and government today, this government cannot survive for few days. ***But it could also be an opportunity from now onwards if all the intellectuals and political leaders reach a conclusion, hold elections in time, and create a consensual political platform to deal with national issues then we can have bright future ahead. Otherwise, we will head for a disaster in Afghanistan.***

[Translated by Mirwais Balkhi, Intern in South Asia Cluster at IDSA]