

AN ASSESSMENT OF THE INTERNATIONAL AID CONFERENCE IN KABUL, AFGHANISTAN,

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Q How do you evaluate the recent conference in Kabul?

A In the present situation of security in Afghanistan, it can be called a certain success that more than 70 nations and international organizations gathered in Kabul, the capital of Afghanistan without any serious attacks by Taliban, although the Haqqani network, an al-Qaida ally, is said to have planned to target the conference.

But in the more general context of peace-building process in Afghanistan, this conference coincides with the most crucial turning-point, as the fate of President Obama's new strategy on Afghanistan will be made clear in the following several months before the next winter.

President Obama declared that he is planning to start withdrawing the US army from mid-2011. He is also stressing the importance of coordination between the military operations and the civilian programs. If the operations will succeed in changing the people's general supporting toward Taliban in Afghanistan, the Karzai government will be allowed to negotiate with Taliban more favorably. But if it fails, the fate of Afghanistan will inevitably fall into the hands of Taliban and its allies in the matter of 5 years or so.

Q What is Karzai trying to achieve with the reconciliation program, and why isn't it working?

A Briefly looking back on its history, when the President Bush declared the war with Iraq under Saddam in the 20th of March 2003, the main focus of international interest shifted away from Afghanistan.

From then on, Taliban has managed to regain its ability to enter again into the Afghanistan territory, and to expand its influences in almost every region in the country.

Now the real political power-balance inside Afghanistan is such that Karzai government cannot afford not to make every effort to negotiate with several factions of Taliban and its allies.

But regarding the reconciliation program, for the people in Afghanistan, it is not a matter of short-term gain, but a very important choice about their children's future.

So, it is very hard to make people believe that the Karzai government is strong enough, and the international commitment is sustainable for decades.

Q What is needed to accelerate reconciliation with the Taliban and the re-integration of its soldiers into society?

A The most important point in this respect is that the ordinary citizens of Afghanistan are never willing to go into the government of Taliban. In fact, even most part of the so-called Taliban militia seems to be forced and obliged to be so, either from the incredibility of the present government, or the hatred towards the foreign militant forces.

So in my personal view, the ISAF and US army should refrain from any operation which would possibly increase the casualties of Afghanistan's citizenship. Their strategy should shift drastically from military operations to civil re-construction activities.

In this way the weary people of Afghanistan who suffered much from 30 years-long warfare will slowly but steadily turn to the good-will and the efforts of international community, and they will eventually find their own new political representatives other than the Taliban leaders.

Q For those young people in Afghanistan who are so desperate to help rebuild their own homeland, is there any possibility of their dreams being realized?

A I think this is a very hard question to answer, because the main political message of Taliban which is confronting with ISAF and US armies is strongly against the idea itself of re-constructing the nation with the help of international community. So the question must be this: How could we possibly support those young generation in Afghanistan to re-construct their own nation and society by themselves?

It is also a heavy question, but by keeping this question in mind, I think the international community would eventually win over the extremist idea of Taliban. We must encourage Afghanistan's young generation to re-construct their own nation and society by themselves, with the warm support from international community when it is needed.

It is of course a long and very tough work, not only for the President Karzai and Afghanistan's people, but also for the international community.

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