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His View on Peace in Afghanistan

Translator's Note:

For many years, the people of Afghanistan have experienced and endured a life full of various events due to the oppression of authoritarian and dependent governments. After 1979 and the end of despotic regimes of the past two centuries, Afghanistan faced the rivalry of the superpowers, United States and the former USSR and their allies. From that time until now, the words of war, peace and reconciliation are familiar to our people. But it has not been very promising. It has not yet been achieved for various reasons. Considerable efforts to secure peace, however, have been made in all periods by pro-Eastern and pro-Western governments during numerous meetings, conferences, gatherings, and declarations. Governments and officials for the past 40 years have spoken of peace in a variety of ways. Peace talks are often raised seriously, symbolically, and ostentatiously. But it has not any tangible accomplishment for our people, except blinking like a mirage. Because the management of the war and peace has been in the hands of foreign intelligence, especially the United States and Pakistan.

Also, despite the unpleasant experiences of the past, some Afghan politicians and experts have not so far been able to get out of the restricted circles of their past ideological perceptions and inclinations to put them aside, even living for many years abroad as refugees. They are not using as such the telecommunication and internet facilities to present their constructive views, plans, proposals collectively for ending the war. However, they can lobby and suggest to the international community and the world leaders involved in Afghanistan how to resolve the issue of Afghanistan for the interest of all those who have been somehow implicated in Afghanistan situation.

Now that peace is being played again, the Afghan people are still dying every day in the fires of engineered warfare. The consequences of this tragedy are felt by the people of Afghanistan more than ever in all areas of their lives.

His Excellency Sultan Ali Keshmand, former Prime Minister of Afghanistan, is one of the prominent figures in the contemporary history of Afghanistan. During his official career, he has gained vast theoretical and practical scientific experience in administration and ruling the country. Mr. Keshmand has been able to reach the highest levels of the government position. He has attained valuable experience and insights. His recent views published in Ariaye internet site, on establishing a Federal System of Government in Afghanistan is interesting. This can lead to end up one of the crucial obstacles for peace in Afghanistan. He has expressed his vision logically and debated reasonably for his suggestion. In a Federal System people can somehow participate fairly and democratically in decision-making process which ensures durable peace and progress for all. It is especially important for the countries who participate in peace conference in Istanbul in mid- April or after to consider his views as a key issue to pave the ground for a permanent peace in Afghanistan.

The views of experience personalities like Mr. Keshmand needs to be incorporated in any peace deal. It is, otherwise, likely that the peace conference will plunge the country to the period after the Second Bonn conference, which was imposed by Zalmay Khalilzad, who is ignoring all other residents of Afghanistan based on his tribal propensity.

There are also very many people in favour of Federal System in Afghanistan, like Dr. Latif Pedram who have been pointing the major problem in Afghanistan attributed to the vertical system of government structure. Therefore, it is necessary to consider in the new constitution of Afghanistan the federalism for participation of all people, from the village to the province in any decision-making process to ensure justice, fairness, and equality. The peace based on the contribution of all residents of Afghanistan will certainly bring peace which is for the benefit of all neighbouring countries, the region, and the world.

It is noteworthy that Dr. Dastgir Rezaei writes in his Facebook on April the 8th 2021, “Based on historical evidence and injustices many justice-seeking elites have found the centralized political system incompatible and opposing with the characteristics, structure, and realities of Afghan society. Thus, they have been actively struggling and arguing in favour of it for the last two decades. The National Congress Party and its leader Dr. Abdul Latif Pedram times and again reflected on and considered the federal democratic system as the most appropriate option in comparison with the other type of decentralized system for Afghanistan. He diligently carried on his efforts to enlighten its benefits and create a positive mentality about it in society. Today, though the federal system and the subject of federalism is no longer a taboo, it is an accepted subject in political discourse.

Dr Pedram, his proponents, and many other justice seeking activists in the country were able to bring the federal system into a political discourse as one of the options for a decentralized system. Consequently, despite confronting many challenges and threats today decentralised system is looked at an option to establish a broad-based system. It paves the ground for participation of all citizens based on equality and justice. However, the authoritarian and monopolistic circles oppose it but as the persistent struggle continues it will ultimately be realised.

Undoubtedly, the decentralized system facilitates public participation in decision-making and facilitates the conditions for balanced growth and development in all areas of economic, health, educational, cultural, and social life in the country and throughout Afghanistan.

A decentralized system mobilizes people and gives them a sense of responsibility so that people from villages to cities and provinces can influence their own destiny. Participation in all matters is based on the collective will of the citizens. The only system that can facilitate social justice and national participation in the country, and put an end to dictatorial regimes, self-centeredness, and the systems of medieval sultans, coercion, is a decentralized system. But bearing in mind that as Dr. Lazard mentioned in his face book, "But the Bonn mistake should not be repeated.

"Distribution of power" should be based on "structure" (not on "ethnicity"); horizontal distribution of power, namely, the independence and balance of all three powers (not, as now, under the command of one person).

Vertical distribution of power, that is, the election of governors and district governors (self-government). «All" officials "must be" elected and accountable ". The basic unit of society should be the "citizen" (persons of equal rights in the country), not ethnicity, tribe, language, religion, etc. (i.e., no privilege and discrimination on any basis.)

But if the "distribution of power" is still done under the name of "ethnic participation" or "ethnic share", etc.; The same "wrong foundation" and "vicious circle" of "Bonn conference" will be repeated after and spending billions of dollars which left hundreds of thousands of people killed and wounded.

Decentralized order is not the dream of one person, but the urgent need of our society today to stabilize from the crisis stage. Otherwise, the struggle to consolidate power by force and the imposition of the will of several imported and unidentified individuals will continue, and the continuation of the crisis will lead to the mass destruction of the nation in the interests of foreigners and will have no other consequences. Many people think that the centralized structure should be decentralized now. It does not matter what they call it. Mayors, governors should be elected, flags, anthems and other symbols of government should be nationalized, and local security should be ensured by the people. Then all people of the country can see and protect themselves in the mirror of power. Insisting on the continuation of a centralized system will be the continuation of destruction, crises, and regress.

But surprisingly at this time, some people inclined to the right and to the left forces, without seriously and scientifically criticizing it, consider it the cause of disintegration of Afghanistan. They knowingly and unknowingly oppose it. Some blindly and prematurely regard it, even the cause of the disintegration of Afghanistan. How ridiculous it sounds? But fortunately, today, several political forces, personalities have realized the nature and incompatibility of the centralized system and consider it necessary to be changed to a decentralized system, some also emphasize the federal option.

situation. As everyone is well-aware, the news on peace talks on Afghanistan is widespread these days. It is the editorial of many media outlets and news networks. On March 18, 2021, a meeting was held in Moscow by the troika (Russia, the United States, China including Pakistan) along with delegations composed from representatives of various Afghan and Taliban groups. Likewise, the "Heart of Asia Summit" was held on March 29-30, 2021. The next meeting is scheduled to commence in Istanbul, Turkey, in mid-April 2021. It will be referred to as the "Second Bonn Conference" by some observers.

This time, the United Nations chair the "conference", therefore, its name and credibility are also associated. Whatever might be the outcome, various thoughts and opinions will be expressed on the issue. Moreover, many speculations and assumptions are underway. In this meeting, numerous agendas, plans and programs may be presented and discussed by different groups.

If the meeting, is like the Bonn Conference, little hope can be expected of its success in the long run. Likewise, this time the credibility of the United Nations will be in question. Because the Bonn Conference was held in the absence of the Afghan people, without the participation of representatives of all major agreeable and incompatible teams, without representatives of the grassroots, population, true progressive and justice-seeking forces, and without any plan and scheme to maintain and institutionalize peace in the country.

Involvement of all layers of masses in decision making:

In the Istanbul gathering, conference or any other destiny – making meeting to decide on the future fate of public, on the state sovereignty and peace, in my view, it should be held by participation of representatives of all sections of population including men and women. Alternatively, at least their basic ideas, suggestions and demands should be collected, evaluated, and reflected clearly and openly in such gatherings. The demands, suggestions of people can only be reflected in the existence of democratic and popular institutions and organizations, which are listed as hereunder:

- Popular, progressive, and just parties, movements, and political organizations,
- Civic and media institutions,
- Organizations for the defence of human rights and the rights of women, children, and youth,

- Women and youth organizations,
- Institutions for the protection of the rights of disabled and incapacitated,
- Institutions to protect the rights of survivors and families of war victims,
- Representatives of charities and non-governmental aid organizations,
- Intellectuals, cultural and artistic institutions,
- Unions of teachers, doctors, lawyers, students, staff, and other layers of professionals,
- Trade unions, peasant unions and crafts,
- Institutions of small and medium-sized artisans, merchants and petty financiers and investors who are interested to invest and ready to work within the country,
- Influential organizations of Afghan refugees abroad dispersed in five continents,
- Other non-governmental organizations, social, economic, and cultural institutions that are dependent on millions of people and attached to their interests.
- **The most prominent issue:** the comprehensive and active participation of special representatives of the country's tribes and ethnic groups, especially the four major ethnic groups: Pashtuns, Tajiks, Hazaras and Uzbeks - Turkmen. They must participate in equal numbers, according to the universally accepted standards used in many countries with multi-national population, (one example in many countries is the government officials and the Senate).
- Representatives of popular movements and uprisings and self-defence groups who are directly involved in the crisis.
- **At the end, and in particular:** the participation of delegates with the authority of their factions being involved in the crises of "war and peace" in Afghanistan.

With such a large and inclusive physical company, or at least with a clear reflection of ideas, demands and suggestions of representatives of different ethnicities and factions, political and social figures, representatives of institutions and non-governmental organizations, we can draw a "consensus" that many talks about it. In addition, a credible document will be made available to be presented in peace negotiations.

Durable peace can be achieved by going to the polls:

We must consider a fundamental principle, which is crucial to be cited in this respect:

Prior to taking any decision on the adoption of the future political system of the country we must refer to the direct votes of the people through launching a "referendum". It is no longer possible to be content with the old ways and institutions whose participants are not all elected by direct popular vote. It is not hard to set up a referendum in the present-day digital age with astounding technical advances. In Switzerland, for example, every year important national issues are referred to popular vote by holding referendums. In addition, at present world has made tremendous progress by using the results of sampling methods, statistical surveys, charts, and verifications, and by using the operational and working experiences of their affiliates. In Afghanistan, too, it will be feasible to apply such technologies, and methods (translator added: through certain environmental and essential adjustments, training cadres and building relevant capacities and enhancing public awareness for such an operation). It may be exclaimed where we are, going to the polls and doing things like that is impractical and unrealistic in the context of Afghanistan. Nevertheless, I believe it can be possible today or tomorrow in the current era of great technological and computer enhancements with the cooperation of international community, like the United Nations and others; only if such cooperation is delivered genuinely.

Federalism is an option for a political system centred on democracy and social justice. Alternatively, it can pave the ground for achieving and safeguarding a lasting peace.

At the Istanbul Summit or after, if Afghanistan's future political system is restricted under the guise of "Republic" or "Emirate", like the Bonn conference, the prospect of a lasting peace in the country seems bleak. From my perspective, a political system that can provide the proper foundation for the convergence, solidarity, and ensure unity of all peoples in the presence of different ethnic groups in Afghanistan, in a single and united country and to establish a lasting peace and justice, is a federal system. The true and elected representatives of people from the villages to the cities can establish it. Obviously, this is not the first time that such an idea has been expressed. There is a lot of writings arguments and debate about this matter. However, the option of federalism has many proponents and opponents.

The history of the political and social struggle with the characteristic of thought and writing for the federalization of Afghanistan against the centralized presidential system dates to Mohammad Daud presidency in 1973. At that time, there was a tough struggle between the pro-presidential forces, the pro-parliamentary and the pro-federal forces in Afghanistan. As the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) drafted a parallel parliamentary democratic constitution by electing a federal government over the draft of centralized presidential constitution. Eventually, a highly centralized republican system in which the president assumed all power was imposed on the country.

In the sixties (eighties), the government had in its plans the issue of federalization of the country's political system, and as a background and example, raised the question of autonomy for Hazaristan. Why in the first place for the Hazara Ethnicity? For the following reasons:

- 1- The grounds for doing so were provided as an example and,
- 2- To eliminate discrimination and historical injustice against the Hazaras, which was their long-standing and fundamental desire. They made great sacrifices for their autonomy.
- 3- The formation of several new provinces (Nuristan, Khost and Sar-e-Pul) and forecasts for five more provinces were planned. In two rounds, two social and cultural institutions, namely the "Hazara National Council" and the "Hazara National Cohesion Centre", were organized alongside other similar institutions.
- 4- The "Ministry of Nationalities" was created in addition to the "Ministry of Tribal Affairs".
- 5- Eight zones were also set up across the country to better handle administrative and security matters. Following this, the "Law on Local Authorities and Government Administration" was passed and implemented, which implemented a stable system of people's councils in the country from the bottom to the top, from villages to municipalities, cities, and provinces, based on direct elections by the people.

At that time if a system based on popularly elected councils was established, which in a part of that decade was tested and had good outcomes, it would continue up to the end and there were no shortcomings in relation to the national issue and dealing with tribal sensitivities in the country. That system

would not collapse. Also, whenever the "Mujaheddin" governments have been dealing with the national issue and at least tribal relations properly since 1992, they would not have "expropriated" and dismantled the progressive and patriotic forces in the civil and military affairs with all their patriotic preparations. Perhaps the devastating civil wars among various factions would not have occurred so devastatingly in the seventies and nineties.

Also, if at the Bonn Conference in 2001, a system was established based on decentralized local and parliamentary elected councils as a replacement for a centralized presidential system, and part of the government and security power was transferred to local elected bodies, possibly the war, would not inflame so widespread and pervasive. In any case, we leave the judgment of the past to history, and now I express my thoughts on the present situation as follows:

Afghanistan is a polyethnic or multiethnic country:

Evidently, Afghanistan is a multi-ethnic or multiracial country consisting of several large tribes and clans, known as tribal subdivisions. There were several nationalities in terms of population and geographical area, and among them, the main ones are: Pashtuns, Tajiks, Hazaras and Uzbeks - Turkmen. Although I do not like the term "national and religious minorities" as it is used in Afghanistan because some see many ethnic groups as insignificant and unequal. But if I accept the term of minority, it applies to everyone. The existence of ethnicities in Afghanistan are true in terms of population composition, both relatively large and small. None of the races in Afghanistan are the majority alone. Therefore, each one can be considered a "national minority". Thus, for many years, among all others, some has sought to portray themselves deceptively as "big brother" and underestimate the others as minor ones and insignificant.

Federalism provides the grounds for popular solidarity, not disintegration:

As the antagonists and opponents of the federal system think or publicise the federalism does not lead to disintegration and fragmentation. Contrarily, numerous tests around the world have shown that a federal government can provide the broad and real grounds for convergence, peaceful coexistence, solidarity, cooperation, and economic and social development among various sectors and lineages of the country based on equality of national rights and citizenship. In the federal system new and sustainable opportunities emerge for self-defence and for upholding of public peace. Because each lineage and ethnicity find their place in a federal or union system and self-government with

equal rights in society. They protect and defend their rights and interests along with the public interest of the country. Thus, the people can ultimately achieve the preconditions for a lasting peace which is their fundamental desire.

Requirement to Replace Presidential System with the Federal Parliamentary Government:

It is necessary now to choose new solutions within the framework of a federal government to prevent the recurrence of abhorrent events that can happen in the central government. Therefore, a new strategy should be selected in the framework of federal state for administration of the central and local governments in the country. The basic solution which is needed to acquire the right to determine one's own destiny with the unity and collaboration of various nationalities and tribes of the country. Within the framework of a federal government, the grounds can be provided for freedom and interests of all nationalities of the country. Consequently, a new Afghanistan can develop in a peaceful condition with the conscious and voluntary union of all nationalities, ethnicities, and localities.

Now that we are talking about achieving peace and forming a coalition government for today or tomorrow, and we are faced with a big test, we need to propose a political system in which people can attain to "exercise their right to self-determination." I believe that this desire can be fulfilled in the existence of a federal government and that people can achieve their national rights and citizenship in an equitable way.

Therefore, the time has come to end the practice and idea of centralism in the government structure. The central governments based on experience and tests have exercised and demonstrated their authoritarianism and inefficiency in Afghanistan for at least a century. Now a crucial stage is under discussion for the future of the country to achieve a lasting peace. Therefore, fundamentally tested realities in the state structure must be sought. The tests results and validations attest that in countries like Afghanistan, it is possible to fulfill the national rights of the people in the framework of a just and democratic federal political system.

The federal systems have been tested in many countries around the world in large and small, advanced, and developing. Based on democracy and social justice people of all races and castes, large and small, can participate in popular councils from villages to districts, from municipalities and cities, states, and

provinces in the constituencies by electing their representatives. Through elections they can participate actively and equally in the formation of the central government. In this way, the people can determine their own destiny in their own hands in accordance with the national laws, public treaties, and decrees of the country.

Federalism paves the way for lasting peace and its protection.

There is a lot of talk about the need to establish a federal system, its advantages, and ways of establishing it to overcome the current chaotic and disorganized society of Afghanistan. In my opinion, the proposal to establish a federal system in Afghanistan is not just an ideal, a speculation, a desire for the distant future of Afghanistan. But it is an urgent need of the present time and life of the country. Federal system is needed in the current situation that is crucial for the future of the country. At present, the destiny of the country, regarding the war and peace is ahead and to choose the federal system is of great importance. It should not be, like the failed Bonn Conference in 2001, to get entangled in an abrupt and a hasty decision. Numerous tests have shown that the centralized governments are dysfunctional, and it could not be the key for solving the great difficulties facing the Afghan people and not the way for resolving the issue of war and peace in the country.

Now that the question of peace inside and outside the country is seriously raised, it must be said: whenever the negotiations for peace in Afghanistan are to reach universally acceptable results, it will be good news. For lasting peace to be achieved, it must be realised now. At present, a solid foundation should be laid on the ground to build a peaceful future for the people. This is the cornerstone of a system in which all ethnic groups and sections of Afghanistan can consciously and voluntarily participate. This political system can be federalism based on social justice, which paves the way for a peaceful future for Afghanistan.

Whenever a decision is to be made based on the separation of the three branches of government (executive, legislative and judicial) to draft the future constitution of Afghanistan, they must be elected: the executive or the government (headed by the Prime Minister), the legislature (parliament) and the judiciary (tribunals and courts). The methods of selection and the structural classification of each, their duties and powers will be clearly stated in the constitution and its subsidiary laws.

Once it is accepted that the people can directly control their own destiny and the right condition are provided for ending wars and interferences in each other's affairs and hence respecting human rights in society, afterwards it is necessary to establish a centrally elected parliamentary government (headed by the president- the prime minister, the Parliament, and the Judiciary). Also elected people's councils from villages to towns and municipalities, states, and provinces (governorates and district rulers) are formed within the framework of a federal government. Initially, all government institutions from the top (central government) to the bottom (local governments) can be elected by the people. The limits of the powers and responsibilities of each can be determined in the constitution and supplementary laws. If there is a need for example in relation to the division of power in the central and local governments in terms of lineage or nationality it can be referred to the example of Switzerland (federal system) or lots of other examples in dozens of countries with federal systems and to the countries with systems based on councils, selected locations can be visited.

In the end, it should be expressed that if lasting peace is to be ensured in Afghanistan and a new constitution needs to be drafted, there must be a broad debate in advance to determine the future political system for the country. I believe that accepting a democratic federal system for Afghanistan, which is fragmented from within in nature, can provide the grounds for the conscious and voluntary unity and solidarity of all nationalities, ethnicities in different parts of a single country of Afghanistan. Federalism is tantamount to convergence and democracy. It does not deny or violate the nationwide right to citizenship. Federalism allows the implementation of religious beliefs and rituals, indigenous traditions, and cultures without violation of others right in any part of the country. It is opposed to dictatorship and tyranny, especially the national system, and with national rights and equal citizenship based on human rights. Self-government and autonomy in the federal system pave the way for the election of all popular and governmental institutions from the bottom up to the top of the system. It also creates dual legal accountability, contrary to the baseless, irrational, and inconsequential statements of some, which claim the federal system like the sectarian monarchy:

Accountable to the electorate - the people and accountable to the higher elected institutions.

In the federal system, the basic grounds for the participation of people's representatives in governmental, economic, social, and cultural institutions in

the central government and in local organs of government power and administration from among different nationalities and ethnicities can be legally provided. Equality between nationalities and ethnicities can be ensure. The diversity of the country, whether small or large, was related to the population and the constituency, and the possibilities for the equitable distribution of public property among each sector appear. Consequently, an atmosphere of true brotherhood could emerge between various tribes and nationalities of the country based on equality and fraternity.

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