Is the National Front In Afghan National Interest?

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It looks as though Afghanistan is the land of political miracles. Who would have thought that Mr. Burhanuddin Rabbani, Mr. Qazi Amin Weqad, Mr. Mohammad Ismail, Mr. Mohammad Akbari, and Mr. Mohammad Yonus Qanuni would one day form a "national front" with Mr. Said Mohammad Gulabzoy, and Mr. Noorul Haq Ulloomi, and that too against a state order that they or most of them had played key roles in establishing? Who would have thought that the grandson of the former King, Mr. Mustafa Zahir, would join them as well?

Except for the latter, these persons belonged to such diametrically opposed political groupings whose members did not hesitate in killing the other. Members of one side also called the other "infidels" and "atheists" while their counterparts accused them of being "devil's brethren", "reactionaries", and "bandits." The pertinent question is why they joined together now?

According to Mr. Ramazan Bashar Dost, a member of Afghan Parliament and and ghulam Jailani Zhwauk, a political commentator, fear might have prompted them to do so. This interpretation seems true, because members of these parties had been responsible for the killing of hundreds of thousands of Afghans, the destruction of a large part of Afghanistan, and the loss of Afghan national sovereignty, due to their subservience to foreign powers. They also fear that one day they might be dragged to a national or international court, and that the descendants of victims might take revenge on them.

According to this view the driving force for this alliance becomes personal safety, not national interest. If Mr. Rabbani really believed in national front he should have formed it with Najibullah who, during his presidency, tried hard for it but failed in his efforts due to the intransigence of Mr. Rabbani and people like him. Had they formed a coalition with President Najibullah, Afghanistan would have been spared the agony of the civil war, the Taliban would not have come out of their mosques, and foreign forces would not have been stationed in Afghanistan. At the time he did not do that which was in the interest of the country, and now he does that which harms it. This "national front" harms the country because it is still in turmoil, and in many of its parts a low intensity war is raging. During such a period of disturbance the demand for a parliamentary system weakens the present system, divides the Afghans still further, and creates obstacles for efforts to establish peace and stability in the land.

These excellencies do not realize that the parliamentary system works in a country that has credible national
political parties. Such political parties do not exist in Afghanistan where both the Islamic and leftist parties especially the Khaleq and Parcham parties have permanently lost credit because of the irreparable damages that they had caused the people and the country when they were in power. In spite of all this it would not have been irrelevant if at the time of deliberation for the constitution the office of the prime minister would have been instituted under a very strong popularly elected president. Raising this question now when Afghanistan is under extreme pressure harms it in a fundamental way, and as Mr. Zhwauck has suggested creates opportunities for others to unduly influence the government.

The other demand of the "national front" – the election of provincial governors – would lead to instability even during peaceful times. Currently, such elections can not be held anyway. The election of provincial governors would certainly give greater opportunities for Afghanistan's six neighboring and other regional countries to interfere in the affairs of Afghanistan. As everybody knows Pakistan and Iran had not hesitated to do so in the past when Afghanistan had been disturbed for one or other reasons. Today even though provincial governors are appointed by Kabul all of them do not follow the central government. Many do not deliver all the revenue to it which they collect in its name. In the beginning nearly all of them didn't deliver revenue. That the government in Afghanistan is still unable to function as it should throughout the land is mainly due to this hard fact. In some provinces, newly appointed governors were not allowed to take their positions, and the present governor of the province of Balkh even makes statements on national issues contrary to the policy of the central government. Who will guarantee that the elected governors would not rise against the government or even against the state? Who will guarantee that the ill-intentioned neighbors would not provide them with weapons and assistance in such a case? Therefore in the current situation of the country the election of provincial councils and the appointment of provincial governors as stipulated by the constitution is a sensible arrangement. Afghanistan's existence as a country depends on a strong but democratic government, not on weakening it or making it federal which the election of governors can become a first step toward it. A democratic system by which state institutions are elected is an evolutionary process. Let the current elective system take roots before embarking on reforming it.

The other point about the "national front" is whether it has been initiated by its members or foreigners? In Afghanistan not only fronts made up by groups with diametrically opposed views have no history, in fact the politics of united front has no history. It was due to the lack of such a political culture that the Islamic Tanzimat did nor stand by the agreements that their leaders had made among themselves in Peshawar in April 1992, in Islamabad in March 1993, and Jalalabad in April 1993. They even did not honor the solemn pledges that they had undertaken in Mecca to honor them. The heads of these parties, including Mr. Rabbani, were never willing to even talk with their opponents, whom they condemned as "communists" and "atheists." How is it that they have now set up a united front with them? Is it because they all have abandoned their former ideologies and have now become new
persons? This is doubtful.

What is not doubtful is the fact that Mr. Gulabzoy played a leading role in assisting the Soviet aggressive forces in violently overthrowing the Afghan government in 1979. Afterward, like Mr. Ulloomi, he tried to subdue the Afghans though unsuccessfully in serving the same aggressive forces for almost ten years. During this long period of foreign occupation of the country he never for a moment showed willingness to forge an alliance with the Islamic Tanzimat to end the occupation and the fighting. Mr. Rabbani's record is not dimmer than that of Mr. Gulabzoy on this point. He is one of those Islamic leaders who invited Pakistan in 1975 to meddle in Afghan affairs. As such he is one of the founders of the involvement of Pakistan in Afghan affairs. It was since then that the race among Rabbani-like Afghans began in trying to come to power with the help of foreign governments with dire consequences to Afghans and their country. Mr. Rabbani again, as the leader of the Islamic Association visited Russian leaders in Moscow, and later during the civil war, especially during the Taliban period received financial and military assistance from the same Russia which had committed aggression against Afghanistan. More recently, he announced that he would not oppose the Taliban if they came forward, that is, those whom he had opposed when they were in power.

Two things follow from these facts. One is that these excellencies are extremely fond of state power. The other is that since they have in the past obtained assistance from foreign powers in empowering themselves it is more than probable that they have now received their support. That President Karzai declared that "We have information that some foreign embassies have a hand in it [the front]" seems to be true. Mr. Rabbani instead of trying to refute the allegation has actually strengthened it by stating that Mr. Karzai's statement was sentimental. Seemingly, Mr. Rabbani was unable to respond to it as he stated that President Karzai is sentimental whereas in fact he had expressed a fact as he knew it. Apparently, the so-called "national front" has a foreign dimension, and Russia and Iran are involved in it.

Currently with the presence of international troops in Afghanistan, Russia as well as Iran can not extend their influence therein in a fundamental way. In such a situation they all try to support the "national front" and help it to power so that they can influence events in a war-torn and weak Afghanistan as they please. Time is needed for them to do that as the Soviet Union extended its influence in Afghanistan through the People's Democratic Party. Russia is still trying to extend its influence in countries it calls "near abroad." Iran's influence with the "front" is even now apparent in its charter in a way. The charter of the "front" uses the word "astan" instead of "wilayat" for province in its charter while the former is used in Iran not in Afghanistan. We find the word "wilayat" in Afghan constitution, not "astan". Here the founders of the "front" have adopted an anti-constitutional line to please the Iranians because it is their language policy to substitute vernacular languages with their kind of Persian in Afghanistan especially and in the region generally.
But President Karzai's declaration reveals a far more important issue. It is about those senior officials who have become members of the "front." As mentioned, President Karzai has opposed the "front" as a matter of policy. As a state policy his officials are obliged to follow suit, but vice-president, Mr. Zia Massod, minister of Water and Energy, Mr. Mohammad Ismail, and assistant commander-in-chief, Mr. Abdul Rashid Dostum have entered the "front". Now which policy they are going to follow, the policy of their government or that of the "front"? Since these policies are contradictory to each other they can not act on both at the same time. They have to choose one and reject the other as dictated by their conscience. On the other hand if President Karzai is certain about the truth of his statement then he is obliged to rid himself and his government of officials who are opposed to his declared policy. No head of government can tolerate officials who oppose their own government on fundamental issues especially in countries like Afghanistan with a discontented population and a disturbed state of the situation. In such a situation only a central government can effectively perform its duties whose officials are united in words and deeds, and themselves are men of principle, qualification and dynamism.

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