**Engaging Taliban for Inclusive Government**

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Admittedly, Pakistan has played a pivotal role in the conclusion of a peace deal between the US and Taliban, which eventually paved the way for the exit of US and NATO forces from Afghanistan and getting the intra-Afghan dialogue started. It remained inconclusive due to the flurry of developments that have again catapulted the Taliban as rulers of Afghanistan.

However, the situation in Afghanistan is much more complicated at the moment than when the Taliban ruled the roost previously. Afghanistan is faced with a debilitating humanitarian crisis. Its economy is completely devastated. There is also a threat of some militant groups within Afghanistan, as is evident from three bomb blasts in Jalalabad on Saturday; one of which targeted a Taliban vehicle.

Even in the Panjshir valley, which has ostensibly been taken over by the Taliban, things are not stable as yet. According to a report in New York Times, a spokesman for the National Resistance Front, Ali Maisam Nazary, maintained that the fight was far from over, saying, “Our forces are stationed throughout the valley. The Soviets also claimed victory when they would enter Panjshir and see no fighting for days or weeks. But the mujahedeen in the ’80s would wait and then attack at the right time.”

To cope with the foregoing behemoth challenges, the Taliban need the support and assistance of the international community. That support is not likely to come forth without the Taliban fulfilling their promises to form an inclusive government, respect for human rights, particularly women and banishing the terrorist outfits from Afghan soil. Although the UN and some other countries, including Pakistan, are providing humanitarian assistance to the Taliban, the challenges are so enormous that they cannot be tackled without extensive international support. The interim government that the Taliban have formed is not believed to be inclusive by the global community.

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It is in the backdrop of the permeating situation that Pakistan is playing a pro-active role to muster the support of the international community and the regional countries to remain engaged with the Taliban and help them overcome the challenges and fulfil their promises. Ever since the Taliban takeover, Pakistan has been emphasising the need for an inclusive government in Afghanistan. It rightly believes that abandoning the people of Afghanistan at this critical juncture could destroy all the gains that have been thrown open by the developments in Afghanistan to establish peace there and the entire region.

Addressing the SCO Summit, Prime Minister Imran Khan reiterated the need for an inclusive government in Afghanistan. He was right on the money to reiterate, “The Taliban must fulfil the pledges made for an inclusive political structure where all ethnic groups are represented. This is vital for Afghanistan’s stability. It is also important to ensure respect for the rights of all Afghans while making certain that the country will never again be made a safe haven for terrorists.” He also cautioned the world regarding leaving Afghanistan on its own and rightly stressing support to overcome the crisis.

On the sidelines of the SCO summit, he also met heads of the member states and exchanged views on the permeating situation in Afghanistan and the way forward. There was a consensus among all the member states on the position taken by Pakistan. Encouraged by the positive response by the SCO members, particularly discussions with the president of Tajikistan Emomali Rahmon, Prime Minister Imran Khan has initiated a dialogue with the Taliban government for the formation of an inclusive Afghan government in which all the ethnic groups including Tajiks, Hazaras and Uzbeks are represented. While Prime Minister Imran Khan will talk with the Taliban the Tajik President will engage the leaders of the Tajik community in Afghanistan.

It is pertinent to point out that Chinese State Councillor and foreign minister Wang Yi; Russian foreign minister Sergei Lavrov; Pakistani foreign minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi, Assistant to Iranian foreign minister Seyed Rasoul Mousavi and a representative of Tajikistan also had an informal meeting on Afghanistan in which they agreed on stepping up communication and coordination on the Afghan issue. Chinese foreign minister Wang said “Countries in the region expect the new Afghan government to be broad-based, inclusive, anti0terrorist and friendly to neighbours. It is necessary for the four countries to strengthen communication and coordination, make unanimous voices, exert positive influence and play a constructive role in stabilizing the situation in Afghanistan”

The foregoing developments happening as a consequence of the initiative taken by Pakistan, are indeed very encouraging in regards to bringing peace and stability in Afghanistan which is not only in the supreme interest of the war-ravaged country but also the entire region.

Hopefully, the Taliban will respond positively to these efforts realizing the irrefutable reality that they cannot alone overcome the challenges faced by the country, particularly ending the bitterness created among different communities as a result of the four-decade-old conflict in the country. Forming an inclusive government and fulfilling other promises made by them was the only way forward.

It is encouraging that they have assured the world community to fulfil the promises that they have made and also to have good relations with all the countries, including the US. The sooner they start delivering on their promises the better. Regional countries, including Pakistan, are more than willing to help the Taliban grapple with the confronting challenges. They must grab this historic opportunity, which has come their way to establish peace in their country. They also owe it to the Afghan people. Afghanistan is not an island. It is a part of the global community and its engagement is crucial for the future of Afghanistan.

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