
Interview: Dr. A. Abdallah



Crisis in Afghanistan: To Fight Terrorism Is a Matter for Mankind

Dr. Abdallah is the Acting Minister of Foreign Affairs of the government of Afghanistan. He was interviewed in New York on Sept. 19, by Muriel Mirak-Weissbach.

EIR: Your Excellency, can you describe the situation on the ground in Afghanistan? The Taliban claims it controls 90% of the territory, an estimate which Pakistan's Chief Executive, Gen. Pervez Musharraf, shares. What is the reality?

Dr. Abdallah: The reality of the situation is, there is no doubt that Taliban do control most of the country. It has never been 80-90%, as Pakistan and Taliban claim, because they are mainly in control of the cities and the main roads, and their control is in southern and eastern Afghanistan. These are less-populated areas than in northern Afghanistan. They have less control over rural areas, districts, and mountainous areas, which have been liberated over the past years, liberated from the Taliban occupation, because the people resisted there, despite the hard situation.

Recently, Taliban made an advance to one of the cities in northeastern Afghanistan, Taloqan, which they will consider a breakthrough in their military activities, while my assumption has been, and the experience in Afghanistan has shown, the consequence will be negative, it will be a reversal for the Taliban. Because, once again, they have captured an area by force, with the support of Pakistan and other terrorist groups which are coordinating with Taliban, the people are all against them. This is the situation in most parts of the country.

This was *not* the situation at the beginning, when Taliban started the attack, because they were claiming, at that time, that they would bring peace and stability and prosperity. And it was welcomed by the population. Gradually, they started to lose their popularity, because of their attitude, their agenda, and the presence of thousands of Pakistanis and other armed groups with them, because of the atrocities they committed against the civilian population. Their whole program was not accepted. So, now, we consider the areas under Taliban control as occupied areas, and the people consider them as such. Now, even in southern Afghanistan, there have been reactions, rebellions against Taliban, especially against conscription. They rely on foreign support as well as forced conscript soldiers. So, this is the situation.

EIR: How do you evaluate the correlation of forces, considering the activities of the Shanghai Five? Do you think the Taliban could be defeated militarily?

Dr. Abdallah: Stopping Taliban militarily? I wouldn't say it could be done through what was discussed by the Shanghai Five. I think international conferences, and the more attention paid to the situation in Afghanistan, would be helpful, and the Shanghai Five was a significant gathering in that regard. But the situation in Afghanistan is such, that it requires a much more comprehensive program, in order to tackle the problem.

What is the situation in Afghanistan?

Terrorists groups and organizations, plus the drug mafia, drug traffickers, plus religious extremists, have made a coalition, and come from all Central Asian countries, as well as from the Middle East, northern Africa, the Gulf area. They are being indoctrinated—the ordinary fighters are being indoctrinated, with their serving Islam. This is the perception of ordinary fighters in that part of the world; but it is the program—Pakistan's program plus those terrorist organizations'—to create turmoil in the region, for regional ambitions.

This is the situation.

To fight against terrorism, is a matter for mankind, rather than for the region or one part of the world. And so far, the Afghan people have been left alone, although we have sympathizers in the region and some sympathizers in the international community. But they have been limited to nice words, not deeds.

This is not good news for the future of the region. The Afghan situation concerns the whole region's stability and peace. A coordinated move, a comprehensive international effort is required in order to find ways to stop it, and prevent it from further escalating and expanding, and then, to find a permanent solution.

EIR: Pakistan has denied any involvement, although other Central Asian governments have also identified them. What proof is there?

Dr. Abdallah: I'll give you an example which might be helpful. I was part of the resistance to the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, and even in ten years of Soviet occupation and, later, our fight against the communist regime, Pakistan never

admitted that they had made any interference in Afghanistan, or that they had extended any support to the resistance during those times. While, of course, all the assistance which was provided to the Afghan resistance was coming through Pakistan; the training was from there, the depots of ammunition were there, it is not a secret—it was not a secret at that time. So, a country which can deny such a big involvement, such a big game, you shouldn't expect them to admit it.

There are dozens of Pakistani prisoners, who were caught, armed, fighting our people, in our presence, in our cities. And other proof: documents which we have captured from the bodies of those soldiers who were killed, and radio intercepts, of their communications. And from time to time, they admit it, although they won't admit it in front of the international community.

What they have expressed about Afghanistan is a clear reminder of their intentions. For example, recently, General Musharraf told a press conference, that it was for national security interests that they wanted to support Taliban, that they needed to support an ethnic group, the Pushtoons, because it was a matter of their national security interests, and they will not give it up. So this is another part of it. But they can still deny it, as, once, they were able to deny their involvement during the Cold War.

EIR: Regarding the international community, why do you think there is not a bigger hue and cry about a country, being militarily besieged and occupied?

Dr. Abdallah: This is our question. There were even times, when there were sympathies for a movement like Taliban, in Western capitals.

EIR: Yes, they have offices in London and the United States.

Dr. Abdallah: Not long ago, there were sympathies for Taliban in Western capitals. Still now, in some cases, they deal with Taliban as if they were dealing with a normal group, while nothing that Taliban is doing, is normal—neither their involvement in terrorist activities, nor their drug-trafficking program, nor their abuses of human rights and women's rights, not to mention other things.

Still, on some occasions, they are being treated like a normal group. And some think that they can modify such a group, whereas the reality of the matter is, that the mentality on which the creation of such groups is based, is not open to modification. It is rather for a harder attitude, than modification.

This is our question. There is no doubt that, as far as the views of Western countries are concerned, especially in the United States, after they saw the consequences, and they were affected by the consequences of the Taliban in Afghanistan, this has changed. Now there is no sympathy for the Taliban. But there is little action, except some measures taken in the UN Security Council. And as far as Pakistan is concerned, it, being the core of the problem in that part of the world, has

been able to get away with what they have done so far, despite their denials. But I think Pakistan was given a green light, after the Cold War, after the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan; it was Pakistan which was the player in Afghan policy. No one objected to what Pakistan was doing.

It was our cry from the beginning: "Look, this is the situation and these will be the consequences." We had anticipated the present situation, years ago, because of the way things were evolving, and we knew the programs and intentions of Pakistan. We anticipated the present situation, but we didn't find any sympathy for our cause.

Now, we are in a different situation. If it is not too late, it is a bit late; it is certainly late. There is still little action. Taliban have got an office here [in the United States], they have representatives, which means some groups believe they can get some good out of a devil.

EIR: There were meetings last week of the 6+2, the United States and Russia, plus the six neighboring countries of Afghanistan. What came out of those meetings?

Dr. Abdallah: So far, nothing concrete is coming out. Last time, when the 6+2 held a high-level meeting, it was in Tashkent, last year, in July. I participated as the representative of Afghanistan, and Taliban also participated. There was a Tashkent declaration, as a result of that meeting, but just eight days later, Taliban launched their major offensive. Since then, the 6+2 have decided to concentrate more on the drug problem, which is an easier problem, rather than the wider aspect of the situation in Afghanistan.

Then, there was the highest-level meeting so far, at the foreign ministers' level. They expressed their concerns, but there isn't a consensus, because of Pakistan's position, because Pakistan still tries to justify Taliban by saying, to isolate one group, to support another group, is not a healthy attitude. Then they keep denying their involvement, so they are just encouraging engagement with the Taliban, rather than a real solution. And Turkmenistan's position has not been so healthy, as far as a solution is concerned. There's no comparison of their position to that of Pakistan, of course. These differences do have an impact on the decisions we take, but still we consider the 6+2 meetings important, because at least there is a forum where the issue is being discussed at a higher level, among those people who are interested, as they are affected.

EIR: Several speakers from the region proposed at the UN Millennium Summit, that a special session be convened to deal with Afghanistan. What is your view of this? And what is the solution that you envision?

Dr. Abdallah: First of all, Afghanistan has been treated like what is called a forgotten war by the international community. Anything which brings it to the scene, so that people hear about it, see things happening, is good. But the success of any conference will depend, first of all, on the program which they

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have, the plan, the principles which they think will help bring about a peaceful settlement. In our view, in general terms, anything which will bring about a peaceful settlement to the conflict, and then provide a mechanism for the representation of the people, for a future representative government, with guarantees—these will be the two main principles in any settlement: peaceful solution and representation of the people. As far as different options are concerned, we will be flexible, of course. We believe that once the representatives of the people are given the chance—through traditional assemblies, which in Afghanistan is called *loya jirgah* [grand assembly], or by any other means—then they will ask, first of all, for sovereignty, independence, and an end to interventions in Afghanistan.

You might be aware, that there is a tradition of neutrality in Afghanistan. In the past, Afghanistan has been an active member of the Non-Aligned Movement, but then, the Soviets occupied Afghanistan, and later there were interferences by neighboring countries, which led to this situation. Any international conference, with the presence of our neighboring countries and also the parties involved—we should force Pakistan to put pressure on Taliban to get ready for serious talks. If there is real pressure on Pakistan, then there will be hope for a solution. Otherwise, Pakistan's policy has been that, while sending troops on the ground, to help Taliban in their military campaign, then they call for negotiations or talks, like a cover-up for their real intentions—this will not work.

EIR: One reason the settlement to the conflict is so urgent, is that Afghanistan is a crucial part of the new Silk Road, being built across Eurasia. The country needs a national railway system, and links to the Eurasian network, it needs pipelines, other infrastructure. Have there been discussions with other governments involved in this, with Russia, China, or Iran, about it?

Dr. Abdallah: There is discussion among ourselves, first of all, of the role Afghanistan used to play as the crossroads, from north to south and west to east. The idea is in the interests of Afghanistan and the region. Pakistan utilized this idea; they were talking about pipelines for gas and oil, in order to give the perception to the world, that a force like Taliban would bring stability to Afghanistan, and that this would provide a unique opportunity, for Pakistan, Afghanistan, as well as the

whole region, for prosperity, development, transit and trade, cultural interactions—I think that's why the idea was not rejected by some countries at the beginning, because it seemed to be a good idea.

EIR: The U.S. oil group Unocal was behind this.

Dr. Abdallah: Unocal was one. But you cannot do it by imposing a terrorist group upon a country, which will import and export drugs, extremism, terrorism—this is not normal trade. Now, instead of normal production and trade, it is illegal and abnormal. So, this situation has prevented any practical decision taking place between Afghanistan and the neighboring countries. We have mentioned our concern in that respect at ECO [Economic Cooperation Organization] conferences, because the idea of ECO was to promote this Silk Road, and trade among the countries of the region. Now Afghanistan is in turmoil, and it has spilled over to the neighboring countries. One cannot expect that these ideas could materialize, but if the world supports Afghanistan in its struggle against those evils, then I think it could work in the longer term, because it is to the benefit of all the countries.

EIR: While President Burhanuddin Rabbani and you have been here in New York, I assume you have had talks with representatives of the U.S. government. Do you have the sense that there is understanding on the part of the U.S. government of what is at stake in the entire region?

Dr. Abdallah: I think the understanding is there. It's different from what it was some years ago. There is an understanding of the situation, but what should be done, is not clear. At this moment, when the military situation is at a critical point, one would not expect a big move here in Washington, because of the elections. But I have no doubt, that there is a much better understanding of the situation.

EIR: There has been talk of the participation of the former king, in such group assemblies as you mentioned.

Dr. Abdallah: We haven't seen a serious attempt by the king, though he has expressed his concerns and his willingness to play a role in bringing about a peaceful settlement. But I haven't come to the conclusion that a serious attempt is going on, by the king, to mobilize the Afghans abroad, first of all, and then, to influence the situation in Afghanistan in a positive way.