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# Interview with Abdul Hakim Mujahid

OCTOBER 25, 2000

ABDUL HAKIM MUJAHID IS THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE DESIGNATE OF THE ISLAMIC EMIRATE OF AFGHANISTAN TO THE UNITED NATIONS AND ONE OF THE FOUNDING MEMBERS OF THE TALIBAN RELIGIOUS MOVEMENT IN AFGHANISTAN. PRIOR TO ASSUMING HIS PRESENT POST IN 1998, MR. MUJAHID SERVED AS THE TALIBAN REPRESENTATIVE TO PAKISTAN. THIS INTERVIEW WAS CONDUCTED ON OCTOBER 25, 2000 AT THE FLETCHER SCHOOL OF LAW AND DIPLOMACY BY VASHTI VAN WYKE AND MUSTAFA POPAL OF *The Fletcher Forum of World Affairs*.

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**FORUM:** It seems that Afghanistan under Taliban control is quickly becoming "Public Enemy Number One" on the international scene, under attack for its treatment of women, human rights record, opium cultivation, and the harboring of terrorists. And yet, it also seems that the Taliban is trying to gain legitimacy internationally. What is your government's international strategy and does it believe it can gain legitimacy with the record that it has?

**MUJAHID:** Actually, our strategy in this regard is prioritized according to our immediate concerns. First and foremost, we do want to have legitimacy from the people of Afghanistan; and we are very proud that we are recognized and supported by the people of Afghanistan. We have proved and practiced that legitimacy. More importantly, accomplishing international legitimacy is secondary to our goal of gaining the full support of the Afghan people.

About the issue of human rights, I wish the U.S. government itself had a good human rights record. I wish there was no violation of human rights. But the very worst record in the history of Afghanistan belongs to the previous government. Unfortunately, on this issue of human rights, negative and false propaganda is being instigated against the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan<sup>1</sup> by the Russian Federation and the Iranian government. They are spending millions of dollars on false propaganda campaigns against the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan through such channels as Dr. Abdullah<sup>2</sup> himself.

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I wish Dr. Abdullah had personally fought against the Soviets in Afghanistan or made his struggle against the Soviet invasion for the freedom of Afghanistan. He was one of the elements working with the communist government and is now working with of our opposition to take revenge for the past communist government on the present Islamic government of Afghanistan.

We don't agree with Dr. Abdullah on a number of issues. We know him very well. The policies of the Taliban Islamic Movement and the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan are not aimed against any single political organization, ethnicity, or religious group in Afghanistan. We have three clear goals and objectives. First, we want national unity. It did not exist under the previous government where there were fiefdoms and different independent governments functioning across the country. In the east of the country there was Qadir's empire, in the north there was the communist General Dostum's empire, in the west and southwest there was Ismail Khan, and in the central part there was Mazari, Khalili, Akbari, and many others. We want national unity, which was previously torn apart.

Second, we want national security. National security was also nonexistent in the previous government. My own party, the Harakut-ul Inqilab-e-Islami (Revolutionary Islamic Movement) was a member of the coalition government of this previous regime. I was working as a diplomat for this government in the foreign ministry. National security was nonexistent and we have provided it now.

Our third objective is to establish a strong central government capable of ruling and representing the different ethnicities of the country. We do believe that Afghanistan consists of micro-societies including Pashtuns, Tajiks, Uzbeks, Hazaras, and many others. If these ethnicities are not fully represented in the central government it will be very hard for us to run a government. Furthermore, many of our ethnic groups have ties with our neighboring states including Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Pakistan, and Iran. Our policy is concerned with addressing the needs of the different ethnicities for the sake of Afghanistan. This is why many of the governors of Pashtun-populated areas are Tajiks or Uzbeks.

So we have very simple goals: national unity, national security, and a strong central government; and by the grace of God we have achieved these goals in almost 95 percent of the country.

**FORUM:** To clarify, then, gaining international legitimacy is not one of the Taliban government's primary goals?

**MUJAHID:** Sure, we have our priorities and we have our needs. The whole world is becoming one village, one city. We also need to work and interact with the world community. But first, we have our own priorities. At this stage in the game the well-being of the people of Afghanistan is very important to us, especially now when we don't have a permanent army, a permanent police force, or a well-paid administration or bureaucracy. If we ignore public opinion and the people of Afghanistan, and

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accept international concerns for gaining international legitimacy, we will lose control like the previous rulers. This would be our fate in the future.

Only after we have gained full control of the country and established a strong central government will we be in a position to effectively address the concerns of our neighboring states and the world's great powers.

**FORUM:** Returning to the issue of human rights, you said that the previous government had a much worse human rights record. What is the Taliban's understanding of human rights? Do you accept them as they have been defined by international bodies and agreed to by most states?

**MUJAHID:** I can give you a very good example to answer your question. According to U.N. statistics, more than 60,000 innocent people were killed in Kabul under the previous government's rule.<sup>3</sup> Since the time the Taliban entered Kabul in September 1996, no one has been killed except by missiles fired by the opposition or at the time from aircrafts bombarding the city. No innocent people have been killed in the city. All but 10 percent of the beautiful city of Kabul has been destroyed and the Taliban government has tried its best to rebuild the country. No further damage has been done to the city since it has been under our control. Also according to U.N. reports, an average of two hundred people were being killed, raped, or robbed by the warlords and self-proclaimed commandants under the previous government. Today, there is full security in the city at a level that far exceeds those present in Paris, London, or New York.

**FORUM:** How do you explain past U.S. State Department and Amnesty International reports? Are these reports' criticisms of the Taliban's human rights policies correct or incorrect?

**MUJAHID:** We admit and we accept the role of the media as a powerful tool. I wish the U.S. government could have spoken out about all these issues when the Soviet troops had invaded. They did not do so and are now using the media for false reports against the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan.

**FORUM:** So then these reports, you would say, are generally false?

**MUJAHID:** Yes, they're generally false. I can give some examples. For instance, these reports state that women are not allowed to leave their homes. This is 200 percent untrue and falsified propaganda. These reports state that women are not allowed to go to male doctors, which is completely false. They say that women are not allowed to go to the hospitals. Yes, our initial fault was that we provided extra facilities for women; established more than 20 hospitals and health centers for women according to Afghan culture, but the women are still allowed to go to any of the hospitals and private clinics including visits to male doctors. The lines of patients at these facilities are evident for all to see. But unfortunately no one hears about these things because they are not made public here in America.

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**FORUM:** Do you see any hope for the peace process through the Six Plus Two Group, or the Loya Jirga (Grand National Assembly), or do you think the only solution is a military solution?<sup>4</sup>

**MUJAHID:** We do believe that a military solution is not a desirable solution. We believe that a peaceful solution is an excellent solution. But at the same time, we know there is some kind of conspiracy and pressure on the entire process. Also, how can you describe the Six Plus Two forum as a friendly forum for Afghanistan while the Russian Federation is allowed to participate as one of its members? The Russian Federation is responsible for killing one and a half million Afghans and occupying the country for an entire decade. How can you describe this forum as a friendly forum? The Afghans are demanding their war compensation from the Russians. How can you describe this as a friendly forum when you have Iran represented in this organization, a country that almost went to war with Afghanistan by massing 270,000 of its troops on our border?

**FORUM:** So what would be a fairer forum for negotiation? Is the Loya Jirga a good route?

**MUJAHID:** We have better ways in mind than the ones you've just mentioned. As far as the Loya Jirga is concerned, we have expressed several times that this is our national institution and we respect that. However, we have to be cautious and practical in its application. We didn't reject or refuse the Loya Jirga process. We will not, however, allow certain elements responsible for sabotaging the present peace and security in Afghanistan to use the Loya Jirga as their instrument of compromise. You know that there were many Loya Jirgas held inside and outside Afghanistan. This will take too much time to explain, so I will not do so. But the good news I have from my leadership inside Afghanistan is that the U.N. Special Envoy Frances Vendrell is in Afghanistan and there will be direct or indirect negotiations between the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan and the opposition. Our government has accepted unconditional terms of negotiation with the opposition. When we settle the matter with our opposition, I think you will still find elements in the media voicing their discontent by calling for a Loya Jirga to benefit their own political agendas. There are a lot of people sitting in Italy<sup>5</sup> pushing such an agenda thinking that they will be reinstated as ministers and governors and so on. The problem will continue.

**FORUM:** Can you briefly explain the governing philosophy of the Taliban and what it is that guides you in terms of governing the people of Afghanistan?

**MUJAHID:** Yes, the people of Afghanistan, you know, are freedom-loving people. Our opposition uses ethnic differentiation to refer to Afghans. About 99 percent of Afghans are Muslims and the remaining one percent are non-Muslim Afghans whose rights are also protected under law. Islamic law has been the law

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of the country for more than a thousand years. The Taliban Islamic Movement only implemented and enforces Islamic laws that have historic precedence in Afghanistan. We have not introduced anything new. We will work within the cultural traditions and Islamic teachings and principles of the country.

It is important to keep three things in mind. First, justice is to be provided for all the people of Afghanistan. Second, security is to be guaranteed for all the people. Third, a strong central government with full representation of the population is a necessity. If we provide all these things we will not be in need of any proposals from abroad to be imposed on the people of Afghanistan.

**FORUM:** Thank you very much. ■

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Official term used in reference to the Taliban as a political entity.

<sup>2</sup> Dr. Abdullah is foreign minister of the Islamic State of Afghanistan, which currently holds the U.N. seat as the officially recognized government of Afghanistan. See the interview with him in this issue of *The Forum*.

<sup>3</sup> In reference to the coalition government formed in 1992-1996, under the leadership of Borhanudin Rabbani.

<sup>4</sup> The Loya Jirga is an Afghan decision-making council that has historically been used in tribal and governmental processes aimed at reaching a consensus on important matters of local and state affairs. The Six Plus Two Group refers to the six neighboring countries of Afghanistan (Pakistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Iran, and China) plus the United States and Russia currently promoting a peaceful settlement to the conflict.

<sup>5</sup> In reference to the exiled former Afghan monarch, Mohammed Zahir, and his attempts to coordinate a Loya Jirga inside Afghanistan as a means of ending the conflict.

