

افغانستان آزاد – آزاد افغانستان

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چو کشور نياشد تن من مباد
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Mr. Karzai Visits Paris

As a practicing Moslem, Afghanistan's President Hamid Karzai, must have gotten up before sunrise on June 12, 2008. Coming from his dilapidated presidential palace, he must have been surprised of the extravagance of accommodation his host, French President Nicolas Sarkozy, had put at his disposal.

What did he think, when he opened his eyes? Did he worry about what he would say at the donors' conference later that day. Did he feel empty, worn-out, even ashamed at his gigantic failure to serve his people and the community of nations that had entrusted him with the task of pacifying his country, of rehabilitating its infrastructure, of jumpstarting its economy, of ridding the country of extremists?

If he didn't he should have for he is unable to show anything of consequence for the money he has received in the last six years. The roads in Kabul, his capital city, are as potholed as they were when he was flown into the city in a military transport plane.

The inhabitants of Kabul didn't have running water; they still don't. They had no electricity; they still don't—of course, unless we agree that two to three hours twice a week is enough for a household in the 21st Century. Has his minister responsible for the supply of water to residential customers ever submitted a proposal as to how and when he wishes to work on the problem.

Ask Mr. Karzai about electricity. Yes, they do have electricity—if we agree that an average of two to three hours twice or three times a week is enough electricity for a household in the Twenty-First Century. Has he ever asked his minister responsible for the supply of energy what he has done to serve the Afghan people. I can assure you he has not. He feels that his minister, His Excellency Ismail Khan, is beyond reproach. And if

the rest of the world does not understand it, it—the rest of the world—better observe the man long and hard and then they will see a light, a bright light shining down upon His Excellency Ismail Khan, and then they will know that Ismail Khan can never be questioned for his actions.

When Mr. Karzai³ hours thugs encyclopedic He no longer sensed the elation he had felt in January 2002 when the world's rich and powerful had assembled in Tokyo to bank role his newly formed government. After an initial hesitation, giants, such as Colin Powell, then U.S. Secretary of State, had looked at him with admiration. The smiles he had observed all around seemed genuine. He felt they had accepted him as one of their own; they truly cared for him; they wanted him to succeed.

In Tokyo, the press had praised his silk *Chapan* and fine karakul hat, calling him elegance personified. Some went so far as to describe him as bigger than life; yet others depicted him as the darling of the West. Over the years, he had been celebrated as a champion of peace in a neighborhood of thugs and criminals. He was the local hero in the fight against the Taliban and al Qaeda. Reportedly, he had even been considered for the Nobel peace price.

Now, six years later, it all had turned differently. No one seemed to notice Mr. Karzai's unique attire. It hurt him deeply to sense that much of the friendliness directed at him, seemed forced, the hugs superficial, the civility—well, just that, good manners that members of modern societies display even at a court of law, when two deadly enemies come face to face.

What in God's name had happened, Mr. Karzai asked himself. No one could make him responsible for resurgence of the Taliban. That is Pakistan's doing, a ghastly place with a crooked government, a country that should have never been.

And the Americans! What an unreliable bunch they are. They've always had a preference for Pakistan. No matter who was at fault, they always came down on the side of Pakistan.

Mr. Karzai shook his head and sat up abruptly. He couldn't afford to display anger. The only thing he had going for himself was his smiling face and good humor. These were qualities, the Americans and Europeans loved. Anger, coming especially from his corner of the world, was a deadly sin. Once the West had turned away from you, it would never ever give you a friendly nod.

Mr. Karzai couldn't afford that. How would he pay his bills, if he angered the West?

Besides, not everything was lost. Thanks to President W. Bush, Mr. Karzai's mentor and powerful backer, he'd had another shot at salvaging his position and perhaps even persuading the Americans to let him be president for another term.

Yes, thank God, he wasn't facing complete disaster at the donor conference later that day. President W. Bush had leaned heavily on his coalition partners, persuading the rich

industrialized nations to step up to the plate—one more time, at least. While total disaster had been prevented, the fifty billion dollars Mr. Karzai had come to ask for would be slashed and slashed deeply.

He knew that; he wasn't that dumb. The question was by how much. Anything below twenty billion would look to those Mujaheddin leaders Mr. Karzai looked up to appear as a sign of weakness and abandonment by the West.

Mr. Karzai couldn't afford that either.

The Mujahedding leaders, all religious personalities with thousands of armed men at their command, would fletch their teeth and jump at his throat once they realized that America and NATO no longer stood behind him.

Mr. Karzai simply couldn't understand why his erstwhile benevolent donors had become so damned picky. He should fight corruption, they now demanded. Who cared about corruption? In was done everywhere, even in the West. There they had refined the system and coined better sounding words for it. They called it donation, political contribution, or an investigative trip to some far-off sunny place to examine the impact of child labor among the local populace.

It was frivolous and outright unfair to ask him to rein in his brothers. Someone had to make money to care for the family. His brothers had abandoned their lucrative restaurants in America to help him with his presidential duties. They had to live off something.

Besides, once he had lost his job as president, they had to take care of him. He couldn't stay in the country once he no longer was president. He would have to settle somewhere and feed his own family. He couldn't return to Pakistan where he could live comparatively inexpensively. The Pakistanis would refuse to have him there. He would have to move to the West where living is complicated and expensive. As a former president of a country, he would be required to maintain an appropriate lifestyle, a condition that would demand a good amount of money. And, after having flown in his own plane—never mind that it was a thirty-year old Airbus, a gift from India—did they really think he could fly coach again? Traveling first class is expensive.

Mr. Karzai rubbed his eyes wearily. So much had changed within the short six-year period since Tokyo. No one seemed to be happy with him any more.

The first time he sat opposite the representative of the rich nations of the West and Asia who had come to Tokyo to decide how much money they would give him to rebuild his destroyed country, they initially had looked at him with curiosity. They probably were

not quite sure who he was and what he would do with the money they were willing to hand him over.

A smile rushed through Mr. Karzai's troubled face. Whatever those men with their bags full of money knew or didn't know about him, they certainly didn't realize what an excellent performer he was. When he entered the crowded conference hall, he wore his green silk *chapan* and black karakul-pelt hat. The result was as he had expected. His unusual attire had fascinated the politicians in their dark, pinstriped suits. Half way through his presentation, he was pretty sure he had won them over. He had detected an appreciative glimpse in their eyes. And when he made the eradication of al Qaeda and the Taliban a central theme of his speech, the politicians had been greatly pleased. Their faces radiated trust, and they seemed to appreciate what he was proposing to do. It appeared as if he actually wasn't at the receiving end. It looked more as though he were doing the assembled representatives of the rich and powerful nations an enormous favor in accepting their money.

Once the papers had been signed, he had shut his eyes for a second and took a deep breath. His joy had been so intense that he felt slightly tipsy. On the way out of the conference room, he had stopped by every acquaintance he happened to meet, shaking their hands and saying, "I'm rich. I'm rich."

In contrast to the euphoria, he had felt in Tokyo in 2002, he now felt outright miserable.

Mr. Karzai got up and walked over to the large window overlooking a jumble of buildings and dark empty streets. The horizon began lighting up ever so gently. He turned away from the window and walked toward the bathroom. It was time to do his ablutions and prepare for morning prayers.