

افغانستان آزاد – آزاد افغانستان

AA-AA

چو کشور نباشد تن من مباد بدین بوم ویر زنده یک تن مباد
همه سر به سر تن به کشتن دهیم از آن به که کشور به دشمن دهیم

www.afgazad.com

afgazad@gmail.com

European Languages

زبان های اروپایی

<http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/spiegel-interview-with-afghan-president-ashraf-ghani-a-1064978-druck.html>

Interview with Afghan President Ghani 'I Have To Hold Our Country Together'

12/2/2015

Interview Conducted by Susanne Koelbl in Kabul, Afghanistan



Afghan President Ashraf Ghani is calling for greater support for Afghanistan, where the Taliban's strength is growing. The fact that tens of thousands are fleeing his country to Europe is likely to be a major topic of his meeting with Chancellor Merkel on Thursday.

For over a year now, Ashraf Ghani, 66, has served as Afghanistan's president. Allegations by rival candidate Abdullah Abdullah of election falsification overshadowed Ghani's victory in September 2014. Ghani studied anthropology in the United States and also spent time living abroad. He worked stints at the World Bank and also as chancellor of the University of Kabul. In addition, he served as Afghan finance minister from 2002 to 2004 under former President Hamid Karzai.

SPIEGEL recently sat down with Ghani for an interview at the Presidential Palace in Kabul, in the same office where Hamid Karzai governed for 12 years. The furniture may still be the same, but the spirit is an altogether different one. Whereas Karzai was considered to be a man of the people, Ghani is viewed as more reserved, almost shy. During his interview, he ran the pearls of his prayer beads through his hands. He also interrupted our discussion in order to conduct his prayers.

SPIEGEL: Mr. President, the attacks in Paris show that militant fundamentalists also intend to turn Europe into a battlefield. Your country has been fighting against Taliban terror for more than a decade. What can we learn from Afghanistan?

Ghani: Terrorism attacks peoples' trust in the system of their state. There is protection, but only if there is collective action and collective understanding about how to really deal with this phenomenon.

SPIEGEL: What does that mean in concrete terms?

Ghani: We are organized by territories, whereas terrorists are organized into networks. States are very slow and terrorists are extremely fast. Intelligence sharing needs to expand beyond the regional and become global and not country-focused. We need to acquire speed and agility. The bureaucratic culture that we have inherited is an obstacle. Hierarchies may be extremely efficient for dealing with certain events, but they are not quick in responding to global, flexible networks.

SPIEGEL: Is this the beginning of the end of our civil liberties?

Ghani: The commitment to civil liberty is going to be reasserted strongly. But the concept of liberty is under attack, and our definition of insecurity, security and threats will change fundamentally. The depth of the attack on liberty will be felt painfully. People are easily shocked when their routine is disrupted and their ease of travel is restricted. We are dealing with a complete new face of terrorism -- killing for the sake of killing. When I first raised the issue of the so-called Islamic State at the Munich Security Conference in February, speaking about its economy, its flexibility and pathology, people thought I was trying to scare them. But now we have experienced just that. If al-Qaida was version 2.0 of terror, then the Islamic State is version 5.0.

SPIEGEL: Islamic State is a global movement, whereas the Afghan Taliban pursues primarily local objectives. Do you believe there are similarities between the two?

Ghani: What is common among all of these groups is the intent to destroy. The majority of terrorists who come to Afghanistan are from China, Russia, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan or North Africa. They were expelled from their countries and pushed to ours -- this is their battlefield -- and all of them, be it the Taliban or others, are interlinked with the criminal economy. None these organizations could continue operating without the narcotics networks, human-trafficking and oil smuggling. Addressing it requires a truly creative global response similar to that used to stand up against Germany's aggression in World War II.

SPIEGEL: But the problems your country faces aren't simply the product of global terrorism, they are also the consequence of the failure of your government and army. On Sept. 28, Afghan forces failed to defend Kunduz against a few hundred Taliban fighters. The Taliban burned down the buildings of almost all the institutions that had been built up carefully over many years. How could this have happened?

Ghani: It happened because intelligence, leadership and police failures made it possible.

SPIEGEL: How was it possible for 700 or 800 Taliban to take by surprise a well-equipped security force of about 7,000 troops in the area?

Ghani: How can a few individuals bring the French government to a standstill?

SPIEGEL: The French government is far from being paralyzed! People in Kunduz say that the intelligence service had planned a comprehensive operation against the Taliban, but that the government didn't allow it to be carried out.

Ghani: This is not accurate. We were in the process of cleaning up the government when these attacks happened in the north -- not only in Kunduz, but also in other provinces. Our special forces are limited -- we cannot be everywhere at the same time and we had to defend every district regardless of how insignificant it might be, because of the very social and political makeup of this country. We sent a new commander for the northern region who first informed us of the depth of the problem. We are constantly dealing with situations in which we must ensure that provinces or major cities do not fall into enemy hands. People need to understand that we don't have an air force and the forces that we do have used to get air support from NATO, which is no longer available. Our pilots have done wonders, but they are stretched thin. We are dealing with resources that have been spread thin.

SPIEGEL: This year, you spent six months negotiating with Pakistan, the Taliban's closest ally, even as Pakistan's ISI secret service reportedly was simultaneously planning a series of attacks in Kabul and the military campaign against Kunduz. Do you feel deceived?

Ghani: As the leader of a country, you are not free to enjoy the luxury of such feelings. The Afghan people want peace, which requires persistence. We are determined to defend our country, and the whole region and the entire world understands the justice of our cause and the principled way in which we have engaged in it.

SPIEGEL: Your predecessor Hamid Karzai tried to do the same, but without yielding any results. Your critics say it would have been better for you to invest your time in improving your government.

Ghani: You need to understand the reality. It is extraordinarily easy to judge us from the outside. Please do understand what we have inherited. All German forces are very familiar with Kunduz. You should ask them how they judge the capabilities and resources of our armed forces.

SPIEGEL: What do you need in order to prevent another defeat like the one experienced in the provincial capital of Kunduz?

Ghani: I assigned an independent commission of inquiry to determine the key lessons. Now we need to make sure those lessons are translated into action. What we need is air support. The Americans made the decision out of principle to buy Russian equipment for us because our pilots and mechanics were trained on Russian aircraft. But, then, as a result of the Ukraine crisis, the US Congress imposed sanctions on Russia and the equipment could no longer be delivered to us. I am proud of our security and defense forces. We have sacrificed and we have endured extreme hardship, but we have maintained the key goal -- we have denied the enemy its main objective of creating two political geographies in this country through the all-out war which has been unleashed against us. If we had a first-rate air force, the nature of the conflict would be completely different.

SPIEGEL: It is an open secret that the national unity government is anything but united, particularly when it comes to the allocation of influential posts. Why is it so difficult for you to work together with Abdullah Abdullah?

Ghani: First of all, it's not difficult. The national unity government is a necessity in this country and I am happy to serve it. We have negotiated for months to create a government, but Belgium also went for a year without one. Abdullah and I have much to debate and to convince each other of, but we have also managed more than one significant crisis together. We are coming out of a very tough year, one of the most difficult in the last four decades.

SPIEGEL: Many Afghans are afraid the government will not survive the next year because there is an agreement in the coalition contract stipulating that a constitutional loya jirga must be convened before Sept. 21. The traditional grand council, a gathering of tribal representatives and elected district councilors, is expected to decide on the future role of Abdullah Abdullah and whether his position as "executive prime minister" will be made permanent.

Ghani: Don't worry, the loya jirga will take place as scheduled.

SPIEGEL: Hamid Karzai governed Afghanistan from the period after the US invasion until 2014. What kind of country did you inherit from him?

Ghani: I inherited one of the most difficult economic situations on earth and, on top of it, a war that intensified. The war had previously largely been confined to the south and the east, but now it is an all-out war. NATO's ISAF force, with more than 140,000 European and American troops

in the country, was not only decisive for security -- it was also the largest economic actor. When they left, the country went into a deep depression. The international community didn't anticipate the severity of the economic impact.

SPIEGEL: What kind of effects has this crisis had?

Ghani: Hundreds of thousands of people lost their jobs as a result of the troop withdrawals. In the transport sector alone, which constituted roughly 22 percent of GDP, at least 100,000 jobs were lost. Construction of the military facilities was a major driver, with the service sector connected with it comprising an amazing 40 percent of gross domestic product. In addition, the large sum of funds that were provided in annual assistance did little to alleviate poverty, because the government did not focus on the poor. Today, 70 percent of the population still live on less than \$1.75 a day.

SPIEGEL: You just announced a short-term labor program that aims to put 100,000 Afghans to work for a few months cleaning up cities, building roads and setting up irrigation systems for agriculture. Can that stop people from leaving the country en masse?

Ghani: There won't be some overnight miracle cure. But the measures I take will be sustainable. Our goal is to cease food imports within four years. This will create a minimum of 2 million jobs in agriculture. Yesterday, I reviewed 17 small dam projects. One of these dams alone would increase the irrigated land in a province by 80,000 hectares. In addition, groundbreaking is going to take place on the TAPI pipeline project in December, which will transport natural gas from Turkmenistan through Afghanistan and Pakistan to India. The first byproduct will be a railway. Both will fundamentally change our economic interaction with Central Asia. And next year alone, we will produce more electricity than we did in all of the past 40 years taken together.

SPIEGEL: You have stated in the past that you wanted to do everything differently from your predecessor Karzai, that you wanted to fight corruption and adhere to the standards of good governance. But then you made Abdul Rashid Dostum your vice president, even though he is considered by many to be a war criminal. You also appointed a former finance minister suspected of corruption as an advisor.

Ghani: I want to highlight the fact that Dostum issued a letter of apology to the victims and the people for his possible role in the conflict before joining my ticket in the election. Besides, did Germany prosecute its Nazis after World War II? No, you hired them. You should take a look at your own history before pointing the finger. What do you expect of a country that is still in conflict? I have to hold our country together, and the imperatives of what we are sacrificing in order to create hope and stability need to be viewed in this context.

SPIEGEL: On Thursday, you are scheduled to visit Chancellor Angela Merkel. How will you answer when she asks why, after 14 years of international military deployment in Afghanistan, there is such an exodus of Afghans to Germany?

Ghani: First, let me express a big thank you. Germany and Afghanistan just celebrated 100 years of friendship. This means something to me in particular, because my grandfather was the first

ambassador to Germany. In addition, Germany, like US President Barack Obama, just made a commitment to remain at our side. This has been of great importance to us. Ms. Merkel and I will talk about creative ways to solve the regional problem and that of growth in Afghanistan.

SPIEGEL: During this reconstruction, will you not miss all the highly educated Afghans who have left the country as part of the massive brain drain?

Ghani: We live in an interconnected world, and you cannot prevent people from leaving. What you need to do is to create opportunities. At the same time, people are also coming back. Just take the remarkable example of Mohammad Qayoumi, who was president of San Jose State University in California. He stepped down and became my national advisor for infrastructure and technology. He returned in order to serve his country. Migration is a global phenomenon, and it goes in both directions. We will do our part; and Germany, I'm sure, will also do its part.

SPIEGEL: Mr. President, we thank you for this interview.