TOLOnews Exclusive: Mutasem Agha Jan Interview Transcript

Kakar:
Salaam, the prospect of renewed negotiations with the Taliban is a hot-button issue in the Afghan and international media at the moment. That is why we took a trip to Ankara, capital of Turkey, in order to have an interview with Mr. Mutasem Agha, the Political Relations’ Representative of Taliban. First of all welcome and thank you very much for accepting our invitation to have an interview with you, dear Mutasem Agha.

Mutasem Agha:
I want to say welcome to you as well. I hope you had a safe trip to Ankara. You have done well to come here for an interview in order to help convey our voice and our message to our dear nation and people, so I thank you for that.

Kakar:
You are welcome. Mr. Mutasem Agha, currently peace talks are a hot issue in Afghanistan. In your opinion how difficult is this issue?

Mutasem Agha:
In the name of Almighty Allah, the Most Merciful and Gracious! Your question is a very good and important question, and there are many aspects to it. If I give you a detailed answer then it might take a long time, so I want to say more briefly that Afghans’ problems and difficulties will be solved if everyone decides to believe in and strive for - with honesty and truthfulness – reconciliation. I think we would then have national peace and unity in Afghanistan soon, and we can have stability.

Kakar:
Among local and international media there is the concern that the Taliban doesn’t want peace and whenever the Afghan Government or foreigners talk about peace they denounce it. In the past, the Taliban refused to negotiate with the government. In your opinion, if the Taliban denounced such negotiations then, how can there be development in this case?

Mutasem Agha:
First of all, I believe that talks should happen with the Afghans and Afghan national figures, and with all the relevant sides of the Afghan problem, so that trust may be built and there can be a good-faith environment. Talks with foreigners will happen in good-faith once there is trust among Afghans. If there is no trust among Afghans, one side will try to talk with the foreigners while the other will also try to have ties with the foreigners, foreign forces or some important foreign government so they can have power in Afghanistan. They want to gain power with the help and support of foreigners. I don’t think this is the solution. The only solution to the problem is if the Afghan sides can gather on one platform
and shake hands as brothers and create a trusting space, on the basis that there could be joint talks with the foreigners, talks, where the nation and the people of Afghanistan are fully represented. These kinds of talks would be for the good and the benefit of the whole nation. If every side holds separate talks with the foreigners for their own benefit, and in hopes of getting the support of foreigners, then I think the problems in Afghanistan would not be solved. Instead, there would be more anarchy, chaos and an environment of distrust.

Secondly, I will simply tell you that we, the Taliban, have studied books on politics. Teachers use to tell us that if a person wants to succeed in politics then there are three conditions that must be met. The first is self-modification; the second is having no problems at home; and the third is civil politics participation. Self-modification means that, if a person wants to be a politician, then he should modify himself accordingly first. He should cleanse himself and he should not be engaged in any kind of corruption. The second condition is that he should have a proper family and shouldn’t have any problems at home. Afghanistan is every Afghan’s home. We shouldn’t have problems in Afghanistan. We should solve internal problems in Afghanistan. The third condition that must be met is the participation in global politics, which is, according to us, called civil politics. This means that a party, a group or a political figure should talk only once it has modified itself and all the problems at home have been solved; in the third step, it can engage foreign politics with success. When one hasn’t modified oneself and has problems at home, we now have lots of internal problems in Afghanistan. Afghanistan is every Afghan’s home. We should try to create a space of trust, we should have an environment of brotherhood, and then with national unity we can face a foreign government and have relations.

Kakar:

I want to ask that about the steps you just told us about: On the basis of these steps, how willing is the Taliban to talk with the Afghan government about ending the conflict?

Mutaseem Agha:

I believe in those steps and rules - we should first solve the internal problems. The Taliban, the Afghan government and all the important sides involved in the current issues of Afghanistan should create a space of trust, and then there should be talks with the foreigners. If the Taliban doesn’t talk with the Afghan government, the High Peace Council, and other important national stakeholders, we have lots of important people in Afghanistan, who are currently silent and can be counted as representative of a majority of the people. We have national and academic personalities in Afghanistan who should be part of this process, and then only with complete trust and belief can this process prosper.

Kakar:

Mr. Mutaseem Agha, there could be seen a slight change in what you have said now and what Taliban spokespeople have traditionally told the media in so far as they have called the Afghan government the puppet of foreigners. Do you think what you have shared today is a commonly held view within the Taliban right now?
Mutasem Agha:

What you referred to are the war-time messages that hostile groups in Afghanistan broadcast against each other. The Taliban says the Afghan government is a puppet government, and in return, the Afghan government calls the Taliban the mercenaries of foreigners, and similar messages come from other groups. I think these messages should end because they promote hatred, disharmony and only create more problems. If Afghans really want to reach an agreement and national reconciliation, and have peace and a stable Afghanistan, then first the hostile groups should stop messaging that promotes hatred and disharmony amongst each other.

Kakar:

Okay! I want to ask, what is the stance of the Taliban’s leader Mullah Mohammad Omar on the negotiations?

Mutasem Agha:

Mullah Mohammad Omar Mujahid is a peaceful person. When he started the Taliban’s Islamic movement, he did so in order to have peace, stability and happiness in Afghanistan. He still wants peace, stability and happiness in his country.

Kakar:

Sometimes the media claims that there are both extremist and moderate groups amongst the Taliban, if this is true, then who are the leaders of these groups?

Mutasem Agha:

I shall say that for all Taliban there is a specific leader, and that is Mullah Mohammad Omar Mujahid. As you said, the Taliban can be divided into two different groups or ideas. One group, according to us, can be called moderate. They are the Taliban who, beside military efforts, believe in peaceful aspects as well. They believe that war has been imposed on us; we are fighting to defend ourselves. The second group is the Taliban who we call extremists. This group wants the war to continue in Afghanistan and their views don’t match with those of the current government so they want to continue the war until they it is defeated. I can also define these groups in a simple way, which is that the moderate Taliban are the ones who act according to what the people want. First, they emerged by doing what the nation wanted in that the nation told them “we are fed up of the situation, life is horrible, and we can’t pursue our lifestyle in a proper manner.” So there were problems, and that is why they started their movement according to what people wanted. With the support of people they quickly became successful to a certain extent. The second group, which is extremists, wants to implement Islamic law in Afghanistan and they won’t stop until they have fulfilled that quest. The moderate Taliban just wants the people to decide. This Taliban can be understood in this way.

Kakar:
Can you explain to the viewers, which of the two groups you have discussed does the Taliban’s leader Mullah Mohammad Omar support?

Mutasem Agha:

Mullah Mohammad Omar Mujahid currently is in a situation where his position is indeterminable. Although, we can say that Mullah Mohammad Omar is a nationalist and he supports the people’s decision.

Kakar:

To which group do you personally relate Mr. Mutasem Agha?

Mutasem Agha:

I am a part of the moderate group. It is my opinion that we should determine our position according to what our nation wants.

Kakar:

Many people wonder, which one of these two groups is more powerful? What are relations like between them? How can the two groups work together to bring about peace and stability in Afghanistan? Is this possible?

Mutasem Agha:

As you know, these two groups originate from the same source, although their ideologies differ. They have close relations and Mohammad Omar is the ultimate leader. We can first talk with the group that is mentally ready to bring peace and stability in Afghanistan, and is ready to talk with Afghans and international community, then through them the problems and difficulties in Afghanistan can be solved.

Kakar:

When you showed a readiness for peace talks, Mr Mutasem Agha, the Islamic Emirates of the Taliban announced that you could not represent the Islamic Republic anymore. Do you still have relations with the Islamic Emirates? What is your role in the Islamic Emirates?

Mutasem Agha:

As I said earlier, the Taliban can be divided into two groups. The statement that was made against me was the work of the extremists, or radicals. I don’t want to follow their ideology and they don’t want me to be their leader. I don’t emphasize the idea of an Islamic Emirates in Afghanistan. I believe we should create a government in Afghanistan that is based on the will of our Muslim people. The announcement wasn’t made by the moderate Taliban; I am in contact with all the leaders of the moderate Taliban. We consult with each other through mobile, Skype or sometimes we even meet in Saudi or Dubai.
Kakar:

How much of the moderate Taliban is in the battle field Mr. Mutasem Agha?

Mutasem Agha:

Moderate Taliban have a lot of power and force because they are in favor of what the nation wants. They act according to what people want and they want to have a government in Afghanistan which is a national government and that is why people support them. Unfortunately, the problem in Afghanistan is that those who emphasize war are being given more attention than those that are peaceful and desire stability, development, calmness, and a good life for Afghans. Currently, in Afghanistan there is instability and they care a lot about the sides involved in war. Peaceful and moderate Taliban haven’t begun their work and haven’t organized their groups. They don’t have explicit offices and spokespeople. So far they have remained silent because the international community didn’t care about them and the Afghan government has also only focused on talking with the militant Taliban. I think the peace talks should first be held with people who want peace.

Kakar:

Currently, who is leader of the extremist Taliban? Can you tell us Mr. Mutasem Agha?

Mutasem Agha:

As I said earlier, both of these two groups are lead by Mullah Mohammad Omar Mujahid. But I don’t want to. If you want analyze this issue then these sides are really explicit and clear cut. I don’t want to name people.

Kakar:

Okay. Of the most recent attacks in Afghanistan, the UN says that military, sorry, civilians, make up 70% of fatalities. According to the statistics of the UN, 70% of those killed in attacks are civilians, meaning mostly civilians are being killed. What do you think about these attacks?

Mutasem Agha:

We strictly condemn all the attacks in Afghanistan where unguarded civilians are killed or hurt, whether these attacks are made by Americans, the Afghanistan National Army or Police or by the Taliban. These attacks are against the nation and it hurts the people. These attacks don’t have a good and peaceful message. We can’t accept these attacks as legitimate or lawful from any side.

Kakar:

Last year the Imam of Kabba said that suicide attacks are not legitimate, what do you think about this?
Mutasem Agha:

Yes, suicide attacks are the killing of yourself and others, which isn’t allowed in Islam. There are suicide attacks, but attacks by the Taliban are called sacrificial attacks, which we can’t say are suicide attacks. The war has been imposed on the Taliban and they are obliged to defend themselves. Sometimes they do sacrificial attacks on the enemy because they don’t give them the right to live, don’t count them as a part of the nation and don’t let them live in Afghanistan. So they do sacrificial attacks to defend themselves.

Kakar:

What is the difference between suicide and sacrificial attacks in your opinion?

Mutasem Agha:

Suicide attacks are the ones where people kill themselves because of a personal problem or sorrow, and that attack isn’t on the basis of an ideology. A sacrificial attack is one you do in order to achieve your objectives through an attack on the enemy. Your goal is not only to kill yourself, but instead, you kill yourself in order to harm the enemy.

Kakar:

Don’t you think that there is a difference between what you say and what the Imam of Kabba says, because he says that the ones where someone ties a bomb to their body and detonates it are called suicide attacks? In this kind of attack both the attacker and other people are killed.

Mutasem Agha:

This statement has lots of potential interpretations. If the Imam of Kabba had explained in detail, then he would have said that those where a bomb is tied to one’s body and is detonated to kill Muslims can be called suicide attacks. But if someone does a suicide attack in order to defend Islam, his country and his rights by exploding himself among the enemy and the foreigners then it is allowed. I don’t think the Imam of Kabba had spoke in such detail.

Kakar:

What is your opinion on the legitimacy of suicide attacks being done against Afghan forces and men who serve in ANA or ANP?

Mutasem Agha:

I think that if Afghans really want peace and stability in Afghanistan, and want brotherhood and national unity among Afghans, then all the hostile Afghan sides should not use violence against each other and avoid bloodshed amongst each other. They should avoid making statements against each other in the media. These would be the initial steps for national peace, unity and stability. If such things continue then we can never reach a solution; that is, if the Taliban attacks Afghan forces and Afghan forces attack
the Taliban who are both our people. If we weaken the ANA and ANP today then tomorrow we again need to reinforce these organizations for stability in Afghanistan and in order to defend it. The Taliban are the real sons of this country who love the country. If someone is arrested by the name of Talib, or is beaten or teased, then these things bring instability and insecurity in the country.

Kakar:

Mr Mutasem Agha, besides being a political figure you are also a religious figure to our knowledge. In your opinion, when some people say that the ANA and ANP forces are infidels and they should be killed, is that a legitimate claim?

Mutasem Agha:

No one can claim under any circumstances that they are infidels. Imam Abu Hanifa Rahmatullah Alahe believed that the one who is Muslim and recites the Kalima Taiba can never be called an infidel. The ANA and ANP soldiers, as we can see, pray five times a day, recite the Kalima Taiba, and are Muslims and Afghans. We can see that they really love the Afghans and they are striving to serve the people. I think sometimes when the Taliban kill these soldiers or attack them that the Taliban doesn’t have a personal enmity with them, but the Taliban is actually trying to reach their real enemies, which are the foreigners who have come to Afghanistan. So these forces are standing to support them or to defend them - that is why they are being targeted, as the Taliban does not have any grudge against the ANA, ANP or any Afghans. We are all Muslims and residents of the same country. If we have hatred and discrimination against other groups then we can’t have a happy, developed, calm and good life.

Kakar:

Currently in Afghanistan, officially more than 60% of territory is under the control of Afghan forces. Afghan forces are providing security for that 60% of the country. In your opinion, in the regions where there are Afghan forces, should there be fewer attacks?

Mutasem Agha:

I think that in such situations Afghanistan should become awake and conscious because the wars we are fighting against foreigners and their rule in order to defend our nation shouldn’t be turned into civil war. If national, academic and experienced figures of Afghanistan aren’t awaken by these wars, if we can’t have peace and stability, if all the involved sides don’t let go of their personal benefits and fail to give priority to high national benefits, then I think this would be advantageous for our enemies. They can take us out of this religious war and involve us in a domestic war that would lack all legitimacy. Such a war would create a lot of problems, hatred and misery for Afghans.

Kakar:
You said earlier that the sides involved shouldn’t blame each other, well it is often said that the Taliban are the puppets of foreigners or they act according to what the intelligence circle of Pakistan tells them. How much of this is true and how does the Taliban take note of these issues?

Mutasem Agha:

I want to say that Afghans should avoid doing such things. If such things are said about the Taliban then visa versa the Taliban will claim that other sides are also puppets of foreigners and have gained power due to their support. I think these fruitless claims will not be effective in Afghanistan. All sides should stop from doing such things, and instead of promoting messages that create hatred and conflict, we should promote ones that can create love, brotherhood and national unity in Afghanistan.

Kakar:

In Afghanistan, people think that the government is promoting peace, and the foreigners have said that they will leave Afghanistan by 2014, but a common viewpoint is that only the Taliban are pursuing war so most people blame them for the unrest. I want you to tell me your opinion about this, and also the second question is that if the Taliban is not being supported by Pakistan then how can its activities continue?

Mutasem Agha:

I don’t think just the Afghan government is emphasising peace. In 2009, when I was the leader of the Taliban’s Political Council, we heard the Americans say that the Taliban could become a part of the Afghan government and the president of Afghanistan, his excellency Hamid Karzai, also announced that the Taliban are our brothers. As a result, we announced that our doors are open for any kind of negotiation with any side. We then exchanged ideas with different Afghan sides and we sent some delegations and accepted their delegations. We started negotiations. The Taliban isn’t against negotiation, but rather believes that the only way to solve the problem is negotiation.

Kakar:

Who are the people which oppose these negotiations? Why haven’t these negotiations had any developments yet?

Mutasem Agha:

I think there are lots of factors which can pave the way for unrest in Afghanistan, and as a result they could gain illegitimate benefit and they want to reach their one-sided goals. They want Afghanistan to be insecure. If Afghanistan has national unity, stability and peace and there is brotherhood, cooperation and unity among Afghans, then no side, whether foreign or domestic, can abuse their power or meet illegitimate goals.

Kakar:
I want to know how the Taliban’s relations with Al-Qaida are now. Are there relations or have the ties been cut?

Mutasem Agha:

Relations between the Taliban and Al-Qaida were on the basis of host and guest. Now Taliban are not the hosts, and Al-Qaida isn’t the guest - that is why I think relations have become weak. Secondly, Al-Qaida’s most influential figures were people who had come from Arab countries and were living in Afghanistan as political exiles or immigrants. Currently, there have been lots of revolutions in the Arab world and they have returned to their countries. I don’t think Al-Qaida needs to stay in Afghanistan any further in order to pursue its political activities.

Kakar:

Okay. I want to ask a question which might be intriguing for viewers. The question is: Was the Taliban under the influence of Al-Qaida or Al-Qaida under the influence of Taliban, religiously or ideology speaking?

Mutasem Agha:

The Taliban was created long before Al-Qaida, its movement was established long before Al-Qaida’s creation. When the Taliban’s movement got control of most of Afghanistan, the leader of Al-Qaida, Osama Bin Laden, was living in Nangarhar province and came to Kandahar. I don’t think their principles and ideas were similar. Although, they later worked together—some of the Al-Qaida leaders might have been influenced by the Taliban and some leaders of the Taliban might have been influenced by Al-Qaida. We are Afghans, and all Afghan groups are not extremists. But the Taliban who are very extremists I think are the ones who have been influenced by Al-Qaida.

Kakar:

In your opinion, during Taliban’s time in Afghanistan, how were relations between Osama Bin Laden and Mullah Mohammad Omar?

Mutasem Agha:

As I said earlier, their relationship was just like a host and guest. The political ideologies of Mullah Mohammad Omar and Osama Bin Laden were very different. Mullah Mohammad Omar’s agenda consists of having stability, peace, security and calmness for Afghans in Afghanistan and Osama’s agenda consisted of international issues. He had his own ideas upon which we can differentiate the Taliban and Al-Qaida.
Okay. On September 11th Al-Qaeda attacked the twin towers in the United States. In your opinion, did Al-Qaeda consult about this with the Taliban, or did the Taliban, its cabinet or leader Mullah Mohammad Omar Mujahid know about this?

Mutasem Agha:

They didn’t consult with the Taliban about this and the Taliban didn’t have any kind of information about this.

Kakar:

Did you commend their attacks at that time and if so do you still commend their attacks?

Mutasem Agha:

We haven’t found any kind of proof and we don’t actually know who committed these attacks. We still don’t know about the complete information and details of these attacks. When we don’t have absolute or enough information, then we can’t commend or condemn it.

Kakar:

Al-Qaeda’s leader Osama Bin Laden commended the people who committed these attacks during his lifetime. There is proof that he commended and prayed for the people who did these attacks. In your opinion isn’t that proof enough?

Mutasem Agha:

No, one thing is that Osama Bin Laden can’t represent our policy or position. Secondly, praying or commending the attacks doesn’t mean that he accepted responsibility for the attacks or claimed that we were responsible for them. We have collected different information about this issue. We even have information that suggests MOSAD prepared these attacks. They used Muslims so they could create conflict and hatred between the West and Muslims, and create chaos so they could gain benefit.

Kakar:

Okay. In your opinion, when America asked the Taliban to surrender Osama Bin Laden and the Taliban refused, was this the right decision?

Mutasem Agha:

Afghans, on the basis of their culture and tradition, have made many decisions throughout history and some of them have backfired and some have been beneficial. This was one of those decisions that backfired.
Kakar:

How much has there been a change in the ideas of the Taliban from the time when they were ruling?

Mutaseem Agha:

The Taliban has changed as it is natural that with the passage of time people gain different kinds of experiences and information. Many stages have passed in the life of the Taliban since its government. Because of those experiences, compared to the past, the Taliban has changed a lot and those changes are positive ones. The Taliban’s love for its country and people has grown and now the focus is on how Afghanistan and our people can compete with people of other nations, especially with people of our neighboring nations, so that we can have development and stability like other countries in the world.

Kakar:

Okay. In your opinion, have there been any changes in the Taliban’s position about allowing women and girls to study and work?

Mutaseem Agha:

I don’t think there is any problem about women because we can see that in most Islamic countries women participate in a lot of social activities. The Taliban now also believes that we should have an Islamic country according to Islamic rules, the same as other Islamic countries, defending the rights of the nation’s people whether they are women or men.

Kakar:

In your opinion should women study and also work?

Mutaseem Agha:

I think in our Islamic Sharia, according to how much I have studied, it is the duty of both men and women to gain knowledge and study. Women in Islam—if we study the era of Hazrat Mohammad (PBUH) and his holy character, as well if we study the characters of the Caliphs, then we would know that they didn’t prevent women from studying and most women in the early years of Islam were literate. We have known about most of the religion from our holy mother Ayesha Taiba, who is the Mother of all Muslim and was responsible for the transference of a lot of information about the religion. Women could study and also did many social works at that time in business and in other ways. Women should have rights to participate and work in different social fields.

Kakar:

Later there was seen a lot of violence against women in Afghanistan and in many cases their ears and noses were cut. How do you perceive these kinds of acts, are they legitimate and how can we prevent such acts?
Mutasem Agha:

Unfortunately, these are the cruel acts of Afghans, which doesn’t have a similar equivalent in other countries or societies. Cutting a human’s ears or nose, even if the person is infidel, is not legitimate in any religion. Cutting a person’s ears and nose who is a Muslim, because of a fault or mistake, is rejected by Islam and such acts are illegal and unprecedented in the history of human beings. These kinds of acts could only have been seen in some wild, savage and ruthless societies.

Kakar:

Some cases where women have been beaten up can also be seen, some were even burned. I want to know your opinion about this?

Mutasem Agha:

These acts are completely illegal according to Islam.

Kakar:

Even beating?

Mutasem Agha:

If someone beats up somebody so she can learn a lesson or repent then it is illegal, but burning someone or spraying acid so as to destroy their face is a thing that is not allowed in any case. Not for Muslim, foreigner or infidel - every human according to Allah (J) is blessed. Allah (J) has implicitly told us in the Holy Quran that Allah (J) has blessed every human being. Even if human beings are our enemies, even if they are infidels, there are some principles in enmity as well. There are rules in enmity. Anything the transgressions those principles or rules are illegitimate in Islam. Burning an infidel’s face or spraying acid on someone’s face is not legitimate. For example when one is arrested and has acid sprayed on their face and their ears and nose cut. This is not legitimate for Muslims or even for infidels.

Kakar:

Okay. Lately in Afghanistan it is said that the Taliban has closed some schools in the places where it has control. What do you think about this? The Afghan government has always claimed that these schools should be reopened so children aren’t kept away from education and also in case of polio (without schools the government can’t send people the vaccination and if it isn’t applied then children could become paralyzed). What do you think about this?

Mutasem Agha:

This is something that moderate and extremist Taliban have been discussing. We always have conflict about this issue. We moderate Taliban want things that are for the benefit of human beings and our nation. We don’t want even one person of our country to lack education facilities, whether they are men
or women. We never want health care not to be implemented properly, which is why we have tried and have sent messages continuously to Mullah Mohammad Omar and he has stated that no one should close schools. Anyone who closes schools doesn’t share our ideas. We can’t fight in places where common people get killed or harmed. Now we can see in some crowded bazaars or such places suicide attacks happen and they prevent our children from going to school, which is something that neither Mullah Mohammad Omar nor our moderate Taliban want. If someone promotes these things then they don’t share our national values and they can’t represent our nation. Those are the ideas that are being imposed on us by the foreigners who want our country deteriorate so they can gain more benefit. These ideas are imposed on us, or in other words, I can say that these are extremist ideas that our moderate Taliban and Mullah Mohammad Omar have continuously reject.

Kakar:

My next question is what kind of a government does the Taliban want in Afghanistan? Would they agree to have a partnership with other parties and interests?

Mutasem Agha:

The Taliban supports their people and nation’s decision. Any kind of decision or system that our nation counts beneficial for the country and its future, we also support that.

Kakar:

How can we know the decision of the nation? Is the current election system acceptable for you?

Mutasem Agha:

People’s viewpoints or decisions can be known when the Taliban has independent political power in Afghanistan and the international community removes the obstacles impeding the Taliban’s path so that it can consult through conferences and meetings with the nation. Then the people’s decisions and viewpoints can be known. The system or government that the professors, literate people and experienced personalities of our nation consider will also receive our support.

Kakar:

The international community has continuously told the Afghan government that if the Taliban ends the war and puts down their weapons then they can independently conduct their activities. Isn’t this an assuring statement?

Mutasem Agha:

The Afghan government and the international community don’t always fulfill their promises, which is unfortunately what has caused this problem and conflict in Afghanistan to be prolonged. We have
requested that the Afghan government and the international community free our innocent children who have been rotting in jails and without any case against them – their crimes haven’t been determined yet. They don’t have lawyers to defend them and they have been put in jails in an illegal way. They should be released. Our important figures can’t work in the open because there are rewards for their heads and their names have been put on black lists. We have said that they should remove these obstacles so we can independently continue our activities and we can work with our people in a political way in Afghanistan.

Kakar:

If the Peace Talks continue in a good way and the Taliban reaches an agreement with the Afghan government and the international community, is there any possibility that they would take part in the 2014 elections?

Mutasem Agha:

Well, I don’t have the kind of optimism that you have because I have not seen steps taken by the international community to provide the opportunity and conditions for the Taliban to take part in the 2014 elections. The Afghan Government has not shown interest in this either. I also believe that if it was the same as I said previously, then the 2014 elections’ result will be a government that all Afghans do not agree upon and it won’t be a national system because it wouldn’t cover all sections and classes of Afghan people. Then I think the situation will be the same as now. We witnessed three past governments which consisted of one transitional and two elective, all full of unrest. The next government will also be the same because the Taliban and Islamic party are important parts of the Afghan nation. If they aren’t given a part in the system and they aren’t mixed in, then they will be opposing the government. The unrest will continue for another five years until we could have another system. During the five years, the Taliban wouldn’t go along with the opposition because they wouldn’t be able to take part in the government. It is not allowable by the government of Afghanistan so I think through this election a national government or a government which doesn’t cover all the sides of the Afghan problem will be established and the problems will continue.

Kakar:

If this situation as you explained plays out, and the international community and Afghan government fulfill their promises and an opportunity is be provided for the Taliban, then is there any chance of the Taliban participating in this election?

Mutasem Agha:

Yes, the Taliban supports things that are for the benefit of our people and country. The coming elections will be held when foreign forces will be leaving Afghanistan, and the formation of a chosen government is something I think Taliban is really interested in taking part in if the obstacles are removed. The Taliban will change the war tactics to political tactics as we can see has happened in other Islamic
countries where all Islamic groups and parties reach their goals through politics, democracy and goodwill. The Taliban will also want to reach its goals through goodwill and politics. As a result, our nation wouldn’t face misery anymore, our country wouldn’t be destroyed further and we would have peace and stability.

Kakar:

During the Taliban’s era there were some sides that you were fighting against. Those groups are currently more in control of Afghanistan, they have participated in the elections and they have put their arms down—what do you think about relations with them?

Mutasem Agha:

In Afghanistan, not only the Taliban is a hostile side. In Afghanistan, 35 years war has created many hostile sides and groups. It has created lots of hatred and conflicts, but we can see that most hostile sides have now joined together. They are sitting in one parliament, with one platform, on one dining table, and discuss one issue because the time requires this. Similarly, the Taliban feels it is important for past hatred, conflict, enmities and discriminations to be forgotten for benefit of the people.

Kakar:

It is said that most Taliban are Pashtuns and it is said that they want a government where always Pashtuns have control. How much of this is true according to you?

Mutasem Agha:

This is not true because in the government of the Taliban there were representatives of every ethnicity. There were representatives of Tajiks, Uzbeks, Hazara and Turkmen. You know that the Taliban’s emergence started from the Pashtun areas and it started from the Kandahar province. So at first the members of the Taliban’s council or important figures of the Taliban were Pashtuns. When the Taliban reached the central government of Kabul there was instability, war and unrest. The Taliban couldn’t create a national government. The Taliban doesn’t have a tribal, regional or ethnical ideology - the Taliban has an Islamic ideology. In an Islamic ideology we can include all the ethnicities and tribes and classes of Afghanistan.

Kakar:

I want to talk more about the Taliban’s rule with you. During the Taliban’s era they destroyed the statue of Buddha in Bamyan. In Bamyan there was no one who would worship the statue. In your opinion, was this the right decision?

Mutasem Agha:

You know that Statute of Buddha in Bamyan was destroyed long ago. The face of Buddha’s statue was destroyed in the previous eras. When the Taliban destroyed the Buddha of Bamyan it wasn’t considered
a statue but it had a historical significance and value. It didn’t have significance as a statue because no one worshipped it and it was completely ruined. Such decisions and mistakes happen in every group. I think this was a waste for the Taliban because they had many more important things to do that they should have done, and they shouldn’t have made themselves busy with this. They shouldn’t have created conflict with the international community or worshippers of Buddha at that time. They shouldn’t have created problems for minorities of Muslims in non-Muslim countries.

Kakar:

In your opinion that was a mistake?

Mutasem Agha:

I think that was a waste of time.

Kakar:

During wars that were happening during the Taliban’s era it is said that, specifically in the northern region of Kabul in a war between you and Ahmad Shah Masood, the orchards of farmers were burned. Those people are still resentful and say that the Taliban didn’t have mercy for humans or nature. What do you want to say about this?

Mutasem Agha:

I shall say that even at that time we had differences about this issue. The moderate Taliban was against this but the extremist Taliban commended and executed this action. I can only say that the Taliban’s government actions were completely mistaken. We ask for forgiveness from those people whose orchards were destroyed or those who were hurt by the Taliban. It was completely a mistake and we ask for forgiveness from Allah (J) because we have been cruel to the creations of Allah (J). If we can have the opportunity we will survey all those people, register their names and we will compensate them for the losses they suffered.

Kakar:

I want you to say more about the Mullah Mohammad Omar, the leader of the Taliban. Most discussions of him are like stories and fantasies; during the Taliban’s era what was your relationship like with Mullah Mohammad Omar Mujahid? Tell us about his character.

Mutasem Agha:

I had really a friendly and good relationship with Mullah Mohammad Omar until the fall of the Taliban, because I was in the office of Mullah Mohammad Omar during the seven year reign. He was a Mujahid, peaceful and kind person.
When was the last time you met with Mullah Mohammad Omar?

Mutasem Agha:

The last I saw him was during the fall of the Taliban in Kandahar city. I haven’t met him since.

Kakar:

Have you ever talked with him, I mean after the fall of the Taliban government?

Mutasem Agha:

No, and it’s not just that I haven’t met with him or seen him, but other leaders the Taliban haven’t either. We have exchanged messages among us through his messengers. Mohammad Omar currently has two messengers through whom we have sent our messages to him and we have received his messages. We have sent written and oral messages and he has also sent us written and oral messages.

Kakar:

Sometimes through the media we hear news that he has died, or grown old or sick. Are these rumors true or what? Sometimes people ask whether or not Mullah Mohammad Omar has ever broadcasted a radio message.

Mutasem Agha:

Yes, earlier his voice messages were broadcasted and the Taliban would listen to them.

Kakar:

Were those only for the Taliban or for the whole nation?

Mutasem Agha:

No, it was for the Taliban. It has been three years since the Taliban has received any written or oral messages from him. It is because the situation is not good and that is why the media says different things. He is not dead, I am sure, but about his health I don’t have any exact information. I don’t know why the media broadcast such claims. If I don’t have information then media wouldn’t know at all. I think these are all false claims.

Kakar:

Now, I want to talk about the post Taliban era. When the Americans started to attack Afghanistan, when did you realize that maintaining the government would be impossible and when did you decide to leave the country? 1:20:00
Mutasem Agha:

On the very first day that they launched their attacks on the Taliban I was convinced that we couldn’t defend the government. Actually before the war started, when the Americans had only sent their navy and announced that they would attack, I was convinced that the Americans’ and our military were very different. The American forces have defeated very big and powerful governments in the world. Powerful governments and forces couldn’t face them. The Taliban was very weak in terms of resources and couldn’t defend or fight against them. I had discussions with my leader Mullah Mohammad Omar at that time and suggested that we negotiate. We could never face the Americans or fight them in a way that could harm them. Any kind of attack by the Americans would result in big losses for the Afghan government, the people and especially for the Taliban. I had some really intense discussions with Mullah Mohammad Omar. When the war started, in their very first attack, the Americans destroyed our air defense system named Pichor, which could target planes anywhere from Kabul to Kandahar. They destroyed our air defense systems in the very first day. I told Mullah Mohammad Omar at the time that we should forget the problems with our people. If people want us to take part in the government, want to take the government from us, or something else, we should negotiate with our opposition. If we continued with war then we wouldn’t harm the enemy but only our country, the people and ourselves. I was 100% sure that we couldn’t face the Americans and I still believe only emphasizing military efforts and continuing the war is not a good message for our country and the Taliban. We are fighting in order to defend ourselves and our people - war has been imposed on us. If the Americans, the Afghan government and other Afghan parties want to negotiate with us - they are our brothers - we will talk with them. We want to have a friendly relation with the Americans, and with Afghans we want to have brotherhood.

Kakar:

Why do you think Mullah Mohammad Omar did not accept your idea at the time?

Mutasem Agha:

We believe that all that happens in the world is God’s will. Secondly, Mullah Mohammad Omar’s thought that the conflict between us and America in Afghanistan would not be that difficult. He thought that the Americans would bombard some areas of Afghanistan but that they wouldn’t bring their troops in.

Kakar:

During the war, how did you coordinate amongst yourselves? Who was leading the war? How were your meetings conducted? How did you talk? People know very little about all of this.
Mutasem Agha:

During the war we faced a lot of hardships. Our communication and governance system was destroyed. Briefly some people and the ministers gathered in Kabul and we had a meeting in a common house and the same thing happened in Kandahar. We used to talk and discuss things through wireless radio systems. We couldn’t properly conduct our meetings.

Kakar:

Did the Taliban’s leader Mullah Mohammad Omar participate in these meetings himself?

Mutasem Agha:

Once the war started with the Americans, Mullah Mohammad Omar didn’t participate in any organized meetings or session, although, important persons had meetings with him individually. But he didn’t take part in an organized meeting.

Kakar:

You have worked closely with Mullah Mohammad Omar Mujahid for a long time. Why did he not want to appear in public places and why didn’t people have access to him? I mean this even in regard to the time before the Americans invaded.

Mutasem Agha:

Mullah Mohammad Omar was a Jihadi personality and he didn’t have much expertise in the political field. In other words, he didn’t have much political intelligence, which is why he wanted Taliban who had political backgrounds or who were good with people to be in contact with people instead of himself.

Kakar:

Meaning this is how he wanted it to be.

Mutasem Agha:

Yes.

Kakar:
I want to discuss another issue related to your role as the Taliban’s finance minister previously. How did you organize the financial affairs during this time since the government wasn’t supported by foreign countries? What problems did you face?

Mutasem Agha:

Before our government many problems existed in Afghanistan. There was a lot of misery, hardship and anarchy, which challenged all aspects of life. The economic was in poor shape as well when our government was established as four kinds of banknotes were being printed. One banknote was the official banknote, which was created by the late Ustad Rabbani’s government, and they had a contract with the Da Afghanistan Bank and the Ministry of Finance. Banknotes were being printed illegally as well. There was a law stated how much money should be injected into the economy through the Da Afghanistan Bank per month. But the illegal printing of money disorganized the system and it hurt the value of official bank notes. When we reached the capital Kabul, the late Ustad Rabbani announced that his government would move to Mazar-e-Sharif, and he took his government and Afghan banknotes there with him and continued to distribute it, but we didn’t get it in Kabul. When we conquered Mazar-e-Sharif, he moved his government to Taloqan, and there in the Takhar province he established his government and continued to print banknotes. When we conquered the Takhar province I don’t know to which district or place they moved the government since it was designated to a specific place. This was the first kind. The second kind of banknotes, similar to the first ones, was being printed by the Shorai Nizar. They had also signed a contract with the same company. They had asked the company to print money for them and they used to exchange Afghani with Dollars which resulted in the Afghani currency’s value to decrease. They pocketed a lot of profit because they would spend 20 million dollars to print Afghani but gain 500 million dollars from the market. It was a big problem for the country. The third currency was printed by General Abdul Rashid Dostom. I think he used to print it in Uzbekistan, and called them Junbishi banknotes. It was traded two for one in the northern region. The fourth currency came from Mr. Hikmatyar, and was used from the Char Asyab area to Logar.

When I became the Finance Minister, the first thing I did was to change the different currencies, which had damaged our economy, and print an official currency. I signed a contract with a company and I gave them 5 million dollars, but that contract hadn’t even been put into action when our government fell. Secondly, the Taliban provided security for international NGOs so they could come help poor Afghans in different in matters such as education, health, and agriculture. Prior to our government, there was no security and aid from international NGOs couldn’t be distributed in an effective way.

Kakar:

In your opinion, why did the international community not support the Taliban government?
Mutasem Agha:

The international community didn’t just neglect support for the Taliban’s government, they didn’t help the Mujahidin’s government as well, because the international community supports stable and peaceful countries and they want to deal with official and legal governments. The Mujahidin’s government wasn’t a stable government and it didn’t cover all ethnicities of the country, and similarly the Taliban’s government was also unstable and it wasn’t a national government that encompassed the whole nation.

Kakar:

As Finance Minister of the Taliban, what important work do you think you did?

Mutasem Agha:

We were surrounded by economic limitations and other problems. The important work that I did was to sign a contract for printing Afghani currency while attempting to collect all other currencies from the market that caused a great deal of financial problems for Afghans. I did this so we could have and promote an official and legal currency in Afghanistan. Unfortunately, due to the international community’s opposition we were unable to execute our contract.

Kakar:

It is said that the plan you designed for the Afghani currency was later implemented after the fall of the Taliban by the Afghan government. Is this true or not?

Mutasem Agha:

Yes, this was the case. The design that we had asked for, the historical monuments and places of Afghanistan that we had told them to include in the designs, and size of banknotes like the 1000 banknote, 10 banknote, and 5 banknote, and the colors, were all the same as we had asked the company to make and what we paid them 5 million dollars for.

Kakar:

During the Taliban’s era, while you were the Finance Minister, what kind of financial system did you think should have been practiced in Afghanistan?

Mutasem Agha:

First I’ll tell you that in order to have happiness in all aspects of our life we need stability and peace. War and instability is the mother of all miseries and depression. So first of all we Afghans need peace
and stability then we can make financial plans and implement them in order to develop our country so we can compete with other countries.

Kakar:

During the Taliban’s era, in your opinion, was there a decision you now regret making?

Mutasem Agha:

The Taliban’s government, from start to end, existed for seven years. During these seven years, firstly we had many different wars against different commanders that had some good achievements. The commanders were very different and didn’t want to surrender their heavy weaponry like tanks or even jets, even basing them in villages. They kept their lines and were ready for war. In every district, area and village, when we finished these wars and we disarmed those commanders, we took their heavy weaponry - some through negotiation and some through force - and moved them to military bases. This was an important endeavor and the nation wanted this. But war continued and the opposition proposed negotiating with us. First we had a meeting in Pakistan and then one in Ishqabad, Turkmenistan.

Kakar:

With whom did you meet?

Mutasem Agha:

We met with allies of Ustad Rabbani’s government, which included Ustad Sayaf, Shorai Nizar and most of the northern alliance. At that time, we decided to pursue peace since it was a good opportunity for us. Bringing those people back through dialogue, compromise and talks would have been a good opportunity for Afghanistan and we could have had peace, security and stability and we could have prevented extremism and radicalism as well. But unfortunately those chances and opportunities slipped through our fingers. It was a seven year era during which many good and bad things happened. We did some good things—I can’t tell you everything and we want Allah (J) to reward us. We also did some bad things, and if we hurt someone, then we ask for forgiveness from Allah (J) and Allah’s worshippers. In the future we wouldn’t commit those mistakes again.

Kakar:

In your opinion, what is the difference between the current Taliban and the Taliban of ten years ago?

Mutasem Agha:
I think I have answered this question earlier. I will briefly tell you that the Taliban has had a lot of good and bad experiences so far and the Taliban has progressed through many stages. Now, the Taliban has got knowledge, experience and expertise so they can play an important role in the Afghan society.

Kakar:

If the Taliban again gain power, what kind of a government will they have?

Mutaseem Agha:

If there is a Taliban government, or any other government in Afghanistan, it shouldn’t be an ethnical or partial government. In Afghanistan, all ethnicities, parties, people and groups have equal rights and they should be given their rights. In Afghanistan, we need to have an inclusive government so our people will support and defend it.

Kakar:

Recently, the Taliban’s Islamic Emirates sent representatives to Iran for talks. During your era, you didn’t have a good relationship with Iran. In one incident Iranian diplomats were arrested by the Taliban and killed. In your opinion, if you didn’t have good relations at that time, why do you close relations with them now?

Mutaseem Agha:

Iran is our neighboring country and our friend. Iran is a very close neighbor. We want Iran to play a role in bringing peace and stability in Afghanistan. During the Taliban’s rule in Afghanistan it was the group’s political weakness that impeded friendly relations with the neighboring country. Maybe some sides didn’t want the Taliban and Iran to have a friendly relationship so they used to create problems and do false messaging. I think the murder of the Iranian diplomats was a conspiracy through which the Taliban became infamous. I think those diplomats were killed by a side - May Allah (J) forgive them - that didn’t want the Taliban to have a friendly and good relationship with Iran.

Kakar:

Who were these sides? Were they people inside the Taliban or were they people outside of the Taliban?

Mutaseem Agha:
Unfortunately, in Afghanistan the situation is very bad, and it is continuing the same way. Now, there is the same situation where some sides can’t be differentiated. Although, I can say that these sides were enemies of the Afghan people.

Kakar:

In the media I have heard that the Taliban has opened offices in two or three places. One in Turkey, one in Qatar and they are also saying that talks are ongoing in Dubai and Saudi Arabia as well. Why are there so many offices?

Mutasem Agha:

I think our country and people seriously needs peace and stability. The more offices we have and the more sides show initiative then the better it will be. Anywhere efforts are being led for peace in Afghanistan, either in Qatar or in other countries, I completely commend them, and I expect Afghans to continue peace and stability talks with every side so we can have a positive result. If we start working on one thing from many sides then we will have success faster. Peace and stability is a very important for our country and people and we need it more than anything else. If these efforts are weak then the result will also be weak. The more offices we have the better it will be for Afghans.

Kakar:

We have heard that the Taliban’s office that was opened in Qatar is related to the extremist Taliban. Is this true?

Mutasem Agha:

Yes, the Qatar office’s position shows that they are extremists because so far they haven’t proposed a clear door for talks with Afghans and instead are busy talking with the foreigners like the Americans, Germans, English, etc. As I said earlier, until they become united with Afghans—if any kind of group or party gains power with the support of foreigners - then they won’t be successful. For example, Mr. Karzai’s government isn’t a successful government because it was initially imposed forcefully on Afghans by the foreigners. For instance, in the past, the presidents that were forcefully dominating Afghans didn’t enjoy any kind of success. Whether it is the Taliban or any other group, if they gain power with the help of the Americans, English or Russians, and dominate Afghans, they won’t ever enjoy success. It is better for Afghans to become united and have the foreign policies that other countries have. People who are inside the government or even the opposition in the US or England, whenever they come to Afghanistan, would commend the foreign policies of the government. They would have support it. Whenever delegates of the US opposition or congressmen come to Afghanistan, they support their country’s foreign policy in Afghanistan. If there is a problem then they will solve it in their own country,
among themselves. We Afghans also need to create one foreign policy; the foreign policy that our national and official government makes should be respected by both the government and the opposition. If there are any problems then they should solve those problems inside Afghanistan through the related organizations.

Kakar:

How would you evaluate President Karzai’s role in the peace process and how honest do you think he has been?

Mutaseem Agha:

So far I have had an interview with Aljazera TV, but in that interview my face wasn’t shown.

Kakar:

I think that was a while ago when you were…

Mutaseem Agha:

I was the Political Committee’s leader at that time…

Kakar:

I can remember that…

Mutaseem Agha:

I did just one interview. I never had an interview with any other television station.

Kakar:

It doesn’t seem like your first interview… My question is how do you evaluate President Karzai’s role in the peace process and how honest do you think he has been?

Mutaseem Agha:

President Hamid Karzai has made some mistakes just as previous governments and regimes made some mistakes. If Hamid Karzai, in his first term, had shown the interest in national peace and stability that he
now shows, then I think Afghanistan would be stable. There is a proverb which says when you are losing then it is for your benefit. Now, we have an opportunity to work for peace and stability in Afghanistan. If there is more misery and anarchy then Afghans will waste their lives in misery and desolation. I think President Karzai is interested in negotiating, although, current statements show a conflict between him and the international community because he will say one thing at one time and then the next time say something different. Karzai prepared a Loya Jirga by bringing in important Afghan figures. As a result, the High Peace Council was created. This was a very good step, although, Afghans have a problem—any time when someone mentions peace they say that I want peace, but it should benefit me. These steps are really good in theory but instead of being a government measure, it should have been the people’s measure. The High Peace Council should have been created as a national council.

Kakar:

You don’t think it is a national council?

Mutaseem Agha:

No, in my opinion this is a council which is pro-government because all members of the council and their formation have been approved by the government. National figures that are a part of the country which weren’t pro-government or Taliban personalities should have been involved. If such people were given a part in the council then every side’s members should have been appointed according to a balance so every side could defend itself in the council. This council should have included the same amount of government, Taliban, and Islamic Party people so they could have presented their ideas and reasons to the council and the world. Or this council should have included completely neutral people which weren’t pro-government or Taliban - people who were national personalities. We have some very kind and national personalities who think about the country and our people’s benefit, and work for the greater good. They wouldn’t have been pro-government or Taliban or any other group. Most of the time, war and conflicts are solved by neutral, literate, academic, tribal leaders and knowledgeable people. If a council or Jirga is made of those people then our country’s problems can be solved. This is a very big problem for the country and the people, and in this council, without a doubt, some neutral personalities should have been included.

Kakar:

Another thing that is sometimes mentioned in the media is that the Taliban wants some areas of Afghanistan or provinces to be given to them where they can create their own government. Is this true?
Mutasem Agha:

No, the Taliban hasn’t mentioned in our announcements that we want a specific area whether it is a province or zone in Afghanistan, because this would mean that Afghanistan would be divided. The Taliban’s movement and uprising happened in order to keep this country united. When the Taliban’s movement started in Afghanistan there were efforts for dissolution because there were different currencies in different parts of the country; there was one currency in Kabul, one in the south and one in the north. Every commander and regional leader had established a government for himself and they were under the influence of neighboring countries, which was practically dissolution in itself. The Taliban’s main goal was to save Afghanistan from dissolution and bring stability to the country by creating a national government. These were the highest objectives of the Taliban’s government. The Taliban would never do anything that could result - god forbid – in the dissolution of the country, hatred of different ethnicities, or discrimination among the people in the country.

Kakar:

It is said that, currently, the Taliban that is fighting against the Afghan government and foreign forces is accompanied by foreigners as well. People talk about people from Chechnya and Pakistanis fighting alongside the Taliban against Afghan forces. What do you think about this? Some people think that these people are sent alongside the Taliban by the intelligence agency of Pakistan, which proves that the ISI has a very close relationship with the Taliban. What do you want to say about this?

Mutasem Agha:

Many famous scholars in Afghanistan have issued the Fatwa that fighting against foreigners is Jihad, and when a war is counted as Jihad, then people of any place, whether from Chechnya, Arab countries, Pakistan, Iran, Turkey, etc, if they are interested in Jihad, come to Afghanistan and fight against the foreigners. These people are very few and they aren’t part of big groups. These people have come individually from one place or another to fight alongside the Afghan Taliban. They are not part of a group or party that was organized or trained by a side or something. I think these are the claims that hostile Afghan sides promote as propaganda.

Kakar:

The former Chief of the High Peace Council, Ustad Rabbani, sent peace messages to the Taliban and talked about peace with them. The representative that is said to have come through the Kuwaita Council
in order to transfer peace messages to Ustad Rabbani did a suicide attack and Ustad Rabbani was killed. In your opinion, did this cause distrust in peace talks and was it a proper measure?

Mutasem Agha:

The late Ustad Rabbani was a Mujahid personality, and he experienced a lot of misery and difficulty during the 35 years of war. Finally, he wanted peace, unity and stability in Afghanistan and he was working for those goals. His work was to some extent very honest and truthful. The claim that the Taliban planned that attack and killed him is one that I think isn’t accepted by the Taliban yet. If the Taliban didn’t accept responsibility then we can’t claim it was the Taliban’s deed. But we should count it as the deed of the side which is the enemy of peace, stability, security and unity in Afghanistan.

Kakar:

Do you mean to say that the Afghan government’s claim is untrue? Because the peace council and the Afghan government claimed this attack was done by the person who had come to bring peace messages from the Kuwaita Council.

Mutasem Agha:

The Kuwaita Council is a fabrication. The Taliban doesn’t have a council by the name of the “Kuwaita Council.” Secondly, the Afghan government is the opposition of the Taliban, so we can’t accept everything that the Afghan government says about the Taliban. I can say that it is not legitimate in Islam to send a messenger for peace and negotiation and then the messenger harms the opposite side, and the opposite side shouldn’t harm the messenger. This is not Islamic. I can only say that Ustad Rabbani’s murder was a big blow to our country and people. Such a national personality like the late Ustad Rabbani, who loved his nation and people, helped them as he had reached the conclusion that the continuation of war wasn’t beneficial for any side. Killing such a person was a big blow for our nation and country. Any side which has done this we condemn.

Kakar:

I want to ask the last question in Dari and I want you to answer this question in Dari for people who speak it.

Mutasem Agha:

Yes, please.
Kakar:

Are you, or is the Taliban, ready to sit around a table with the members of the opposition they once fought against, like Ustad Sayaf, General Dostom, Ustad Muhaqiq and associates of Ustad Rabbani or Ahmad Shah Masood?

Mutasem Agha:

Currently, from what I see, many different groups in Afghanistan that had conflicts, enmities and confrontations in the past, have come together around a table and sit in one parliament to work together. The Taliban are also a part of Afghanistan and they have come to the conclusion that if they don’t join hands with the groups they fought against in the past and don’t end past enmities then there can’t be unity in our country and among our people. That is why the Taliban wants to forget all enmities, conflicts and problems that they had with different Afghan groups in the past and work for the greater interests of the people.

Kakar:

Finally, I want to ask, in your opinion, what kind of role can the aforementioned groups have in peace talks? Have you ever contacted them?

Mutasem Agha:

Yes, I believe that all groups existing in Afghanistan, including all political and Jihadi parties and civil society groups, are all Muslims and have a lot of common ground. They have the same culture, tradition and religion. In the past, when they fought against each other, I think it was the result of foreign influence. Now, Afghans should think and become personalities, create parties and groups. Is war good or bad in our country? If Afghans don’t become united, don’t join forces and don’t stand united against the enemy whoever it is, near or far, then there can’t be peace, development, stability and happiness in their country. I think we have reached this conclusion: Afghans should use brotherhood and unity and forget past differences.

Kakar:

What kind of a role could Pakistan have in peace talks?

Mutasem Agha:

Pakistan is a neighboring and friendly country. During the 35 years of war, relationships between Afghans and Pakistanis became very strong and close because millions of Afghans left and immigrated
to Pakistan. It created a close relationship among Afghans and Pakistanis. Many Afghans are very happy that during such hardships and difficulties they resided in Pakistan and had a better, secure and calm life. I think Pakistan plays an important role in Afghanistan’s affairs. There are lots of factors. One is that the Pakistani tribes who live on that side of the border are united with Pashtuns who live on this side, and they have very close relationships. Afghanistan and Pakistan share a very large border which is around 2000 KMs, which is partly why Afghanistan and Pakistan have a good relationship. People from Afghanistan go to Pakistan and people from Pakistan come to Afghanistan. During the times of jihad, immigration and adversity, aid from the international community was transferred to the Mujahidin, and Afghan people through Pakistan. That is why Pakistan has a very important role in Afghanistan’s issues. I hope and expect the Pakistani nation and government to play a large role in the Afghan peace process. If there is peace and stability in Afghanistan then Pakistan will also benefit. When there is instability in Afghanistan then Pakistan is also unstable. That is why if there is instability in Afghanistan, it will affect Pakistan, Iran, and even other sides as well. If there is stability in Afghanistan then there will be stability everywhere else. Definitely, I can say that Afghanistan’s stability will benefit all of its neighbors. I ask that all neighboring countries of Afghanistan support the Afghan people and government in the pursuit of stability.

Kakar:

I want to ask two more questions. Last year in Karachi you were attacked and injured. Who attacked you and why?

Mutasem Agha:

There are different tribes living in Karachi. Among tribes there are sometimes conflicts, and these conflicts end up in civilians being targeted. I think I was a victim of such conflicts.

Kakar:

Don’t you think some extremist Taliban might have attacked you? Don’t you think so?

Mutasem Agha:

As I said, there is the possibility I was the victim of these conflicts. People interpret it in different ways. I don’t want to name a specific side.

Kakar:

After the fall of the Taliban, did you try to contact the Americans or President Karzai’s government?
Mutasem Agha:

Yes, when I was Chief of the Taliban’s Political Committee it was my duty to cultivate good relationships with the international community and our own people. Secondly, at that time I tried to send a delegation to Qatar. I want to say that the first effort of the Qatar process, which is now still being carried out, was made by me. I initiated it. When I wasn’t in that position, the process of the Taliban’s Qatar office was completed. I also tried to contact Afghan groups and political parties. I contacted Ustad Rabbani at that time and we had a trusting relationship. I sent delegations and representatives to other groups as well so we could foster trust amongst Afghans and the Taliban. I also tried to contact important Afghan figures who had important roles in the government and among the Afghan people. I did this work in places like Saudi Arabia and Dubai.

Kakar:

Mr. Mutasem Agha, thank you very much for having this interview with us!

Mutasem Agha:

I am also very thankful. Thank you for coming to Turkey and conveying my message to my people. Thanks a lot!

The End