

A reflection on peace talks with the Taliban

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2013V7N5P06.jpg "It is madness for sheep to talk peace with a wolf," said British historian and clergyman Thomas Fuller. In other words, we cannot change the nature of wild creatures. We cannot predict when snakes, lions, wolves or any other wild animals will attack, and without protecting ourselves we cannot sit calmly. In the context of Pakistan, the sheep is the government, and the wolf is the Taliban. It is madness on the part of the government to want peace talks with the Taliban, who only understand the language of weapons and violence.

On 9 September 2013, Pakistan's newly elected Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif called an All Parties Conference, in which state institutions had a discussion together with military officials regarding the peace situation in the country. All the parties at the conference agreed to have peace talks with the Taliban, and this decision is being criticized throughout the country. In its opposition to this decision, civil society noted that the newly elected government is confused and has no effective policies or strategies to fight terrorism, while being blind to the reality of the Taliban. Most ordinary Pakistanis will tell you that it is not a good idea to have talks with the Taliban as they have nothing to give, knowing only their weapons, not peace. In fact, peace means death for them.

The Taliban are a remnant of Zia's dictatorship, created to push out Russian forces from Afghanistan. Since the birth of Pakistan, it was at the hands of wolves like Zia and now his offspring, the Taliban, that Pakistan lost its image as a peaceful country on the world map. Glancing through history, not a single progressive development by the Taliban can be found, only suicide bomb attacks, illegal demands, brainwashing of youth, discrimination against women and minorities, killing of liberals.

Keeping this in mind, many questions arise and should be answered, before adhering to any talks with the wolves: Is it possible for a wolf who picked up weapons and killed dozens of people without any shame, to truly understand peace? Is it possible for a wolf to have peace talks with sheep, when he does not believe in the laws of the sheep? How will people for whom democracy is synonymous with infidels, live within a democratic government? How will they serve justice and compensation one week after the peace talks, for the thousands of innocents they have killed and the numerous families who are now suffering from grief and trauma? Will they have any positive demands from the government, apart from the releasing of their commandos, implementing Sharia laws, and so on?

The above questions will definitely meet with a lot of fear and distrust. Ordinary citizens are sure of the Taliban's intentions regarding peace talks, so why is the government closing its eyes? The recent bomb attacks in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa are proof of the mockery of the talks.

An emerging political party in Pakistan, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), and part of the coalition government in the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, demanded for the removal of the ban against the Taliban and the provision of offices for them to have talks with the government. PTI chairman (and former cricket captain) Imran Khan is apparently under the impression that the government and nation is his cricket playground, where the Taliban have performed three suicide bomb attacks within one week. The first attack occurred on September 22, in a church, with two bombs blowing up one after another, causing 84 people to die; the second attack was on a bus of government employees on September 26 near Gulbela area, causing the death of 18 persons; and the third bomb blast occurred on September 29 in the famous market known as Kisa Khawani Bazaar, in which 42 people were killed. Hundreds of people were also injured in these blasts. Despite these grave incidents, Imran Khan is still keen on giving space to his

opposite team to win the game. He should rather understand that providing the Taliban even a single room will soon lead it to control the entire house.

It seems to me that these three attacks by the Taliban, coming after a negotiation demand from the government, indicate that they see any peace talks as mere mockery. If the Taliban come for negotiations, their demands will be to restrict women from markets, keeping them limited to the four walls of their homes, ending relations with the USA, releasing of Taliban members from prisons and the implementation of Sharia laws. They will continue with their repression and violence; taking bribes from traders, brainwashing children, destroying girls' schools, murdering liberals and minorities in the name of blasphemy, and so forth.

The government should understand that talks with the Taliban mean the release of all terrorists from prison, no law and order in the country and more terrorism. Rather than talks with the wolves, unity between the sheep should be the government priority, which will lead towards the defeat of the wolves.

All parties should work towards collective actions in the government to stop militant operations in Pakistan for the restoration of peace. Any procrastination to this end can only lead to further dire consequences.