

## THE FAILURE OF THE USA-LED "NATION BUILDING"

### **Ali Aslan, International TV Presenter and journalist**

Let me turn to Mr. Al Zaabi here once more. We have more or less established the status quo about what is going on in Afghanistan and what the current situation is. I think the more important question is how it will evolve; what can we expect? What role do you foresee, if any, of your country? What role does the UAE have to play? What role can the region play in what the future holds for Afghanistan? I know it is a very tricky role there.

### **Salem Mohammed Al Zaabi, Director of the Department of International Security Cooperation at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, United Arab Emirates**

I think, Ali, first of all, we need to respect the will of the Afghans. That is a major issue. My colleagues here mentioned interventions. We had two clear major interventions, but unfortunately there are other interventions from neighboring countries, so we need to respect the will of the Afghans.

The other issue is that we need to look forward and stop looking back at history. We need to build on what we have now. There is now a regime in Afghanistan, whether we accept it or not. We need to assist that regime and call on it to let all the different ethnic groups and parties participate in that government. My friend from India just mentioned that the Taliban is Pashtuns, which is true. However, we need to make sure that the other minorities – the Hazara, the Tajiks, the rest of the different parties – they need to come and join and to be included in that government. Women as well, I am not sure that the current government has any women in it.

The country is currently going through a very catastrophic financial situation, some type of bankruptcy. I think we need to make sure that we support the Afghan people. That is why the UAE is giving a lot of aid and has assisted in tens of thousands of evacuation operations. At the moment, there are more than 10,000 people waiting for their final destination in the UAE.

### **Ali Aslan**

If I can just jump in and follow-up, you said we need to respect the will of the Afghan people. Do you think the current situation with the Taliban back in power adequately reflects the will of the Afghan people?

**Salem Mohammed Al Zaabi**

No, we need to call on the Taliban to include the different ethnic groups and tribes. We need to make sure of that by whatever means we have, whether it is pressure or carrot. Afghanistan has a very unique cultural situation. You cannot impose a different culture. We have tried, or some countries or international communities have tried other types of regimes. Unfortunately, it did not succeed, either in the 70s or in this millennium.

So, really, I think we need to make sure that they choose their own way but also tell them that there are some international concerns. They need to respect the international law and make sure that they do not work alone.

**Ali Aslan**

But your premise, of course, implies that the Taliban would agree to a free and fair election.

**Salem Mohammed Al Zaabi**

Well, there are so many approaches to convince. They say for example now that this is a transitional government. So, let us see what happens during this period. As you know, all of us are really monitoring and observing the situation.

**Ali Aslan**

Very interesting point, Mr. Al Zaabi, very much appreciated. Let us see if the Taliban sees itself as a transitional power – that remains to be seen.

But, Jim, coming back again to the US role here and the wound-licking, if you will, still continues in Washington. As a matter of fact, perhaps unprecedented, you have two Generals in front of Congress, disputing the accounts of Joe Biden, saying, “No, we advised them to keep at least 2,500 troops on the ground. He disagreed with us”, or, “He went forward without taking into account”. That is unprecedented.

**Jim Bittermann, CNN’s Senior European Correspondent in Paris**

Something I would just like to say to what M. K. said – he said they needed an organized retreat. I do not think any American, in the military or not, wanted to see what we saw. That was not the outcome that they were looking for and no-one knew that the Afghan military was going to collapse as fast as it did and the government was going to flee. You could not plan for that.

**Ali Aslan**

Twenty years of national intelligence and they could not foresee what was happening?

**Jim Bittermann**

Well, I will tell you what the Generals said what their failures were this last week. They said, “First, we Americanized the war”, meaning to say that they fought a war; they taught the Afghan army how to fight along the lines of what the US military does, and Renaud hinted at that.

They said that, “You have to have good visibility of the troops”, and three years before the end, the US withdrew its soldiers that were out in the field with the Afghan troops and could see what the hearts and minds were saying out there; what the Afghan troops were thinking and probably would have realized, to some extent, how corrupt the military had become.

They said that, “You have to train for the culture”, and this is something that the American military always makes a mistake at – and that is to teach them how to use our high-tech weapons and things like that; and then, when the infrastructure for the high-tech weapons goes away, they are at sea.

Finally, “Do not watch the calendar”, it is the idea that the calendar was ticking but everybody knew that, including the Taliban. So, they just set an end date.

I, as an observer, would like to point out that a mistake we have made – and Renaud hinted at that too – was that you do not rebuild societies, you do not reconstruct governments, you do not do nation-building from the top down, you do it from the bottom up. Unless the people of Afghanistan really want to create a democratic government – or whatever government they want to create and they now have that opportunity – you cannot impose something western on them and you have to watch out for mission creep, which is what happened. As Renaud said, we could have gotten out of Afghanistan at any point along the line of those 20 years, including once Osama bin Laden had been killed in 2011.

Barack Obama said in 2014 that we had finished our military mission and he almost declared an end to the war at that point. So, there were a number of stages along the line where the troops could have been withdrawn and probably in a much better fashion than what we saw.

### **Ali Aslan**

Is that one of the main lessons that both the US, the West, NATO, whatever you want to call it – that nation-building does not work? Is that one of the main lessons here?

### **Jim Bittermann**

It is hard to think of places and times when it has. I mean, a lot of people would say, “Well, there is the Marshall Plan after World War II”. Germany and France and the other victims of World War II were rebuilt, but it was a question of rebuilding a nation that already existed; as opposed to what we saw in Afghanistan, which was essentially trying to build some kind of a nation that did not exist before.

### **Ali Aslan**

Renaud, you have covered Afghanistan, as I said, extensively. You were there during the first run of the Taliban, if you will, from 1996 to 2000.

**Mayankote Kelath Narayanan, Executive Chairman of CyQureX Systems Pvt. Ltd., former Senior Advisor and National Security Advisor to the Prime Minister of India**

Could I just briefly intervene on what Jim just said so that I do not lose the thread?

### **Ali Aslan**



Just quickly, please, yes.

**Mayankote Kelath Narayanan**

Jim, you talked about imposition. The Americans decided to introduce the President of Afghanistan and Hamid Karzai was their first choice. Then there was the choice of changing Hamid Karzai for Mr. Ashraf Ghani, who he certainly is an outstanding individual. The changeover was certainly done because Hamid Karzai was not seen as an American puppet.

I think these are fundamental failures which you need to address when you talk about rebuilding. You went in blind and probably did not know, but we should now realize that. I just think that it needs to be mentioned when talking about “rebuilding”, you have to rebuild in many ways, particularly of a nation that did not exist.

**Jim Bittermann**

That is exactly what I said. We were trying to rebuild a nation that did not exist.

**Mayankote Kelath Narayanan**

I think you were spot-on, Jim. I want to raise that point here because if you are trying it the next time, please take note of this fact.