



Taliban Set Conditions before Serious Negotiations

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By Mohammed Al Shafey

London, Asharq al-Awsat -- Mohammad Siddiq Tashakkuri, the former Afghan information minister, confirmed in a telephone interview with Asharq Al-Awsat that Afghan President Hamed Karzai did indeed send a letter to the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Abdullah Bin-Abdulaziz two months ago asking him to intervene to end the violence in Afghanistan.

Tashakkuri expressed to Asharq Al-Awsat his belief that trusted clerics from the Taliban visited Saudi Arabia to perform the minor pilgrimage during the month of Ramadan and said that Kabul is in discussions regarding 11 conditions stressed by Taliban movement before holding serious negotiations, most notably the foreign forces' withdrawal from Afghanistan, appointment of ministers from the fundamentalist movement in the principal ministries, and drawing up a new constitution for the country which underlines the importance of establishing an Islamic state on the land of Afghanistan. Asharq Al-Awsat has learned that one of Arab Afghans' leaders during the years of jihad against the Russians is leading the ongoing negotiations between the Taliban and the Kabul government.

On his part, a former commander of Afghan mujahidin in the capital Kabul asserted when Asharq Al-Awsat telephoned him that there are negotiations at present between the Taliban and President Karzai's Government and said that national reconciliation aims to open up to the moderate elements among the Taliban's leaders.

He pointed out that some of Taliban's clerics and imams have been in Saudi Arabia for some days and stressed that one of the Arab Afghans' leaders who is in Britain and is a jurisprudence expert known for his strong relations with the brothers of leader Ahmad Shah Masud, the lion of Panjsher assassinated by Al-Qaeda two days before 9/11, is the official architect who opened the channels of dialogue with the Taliban for ending the violence in Afghanistan.

He said the Taliban's official announcement that there are such negotiations would weaken the fundamentalist movement's image in the media because these reports come at a time when Mullah Omar took a more hard-line stand in his recent statement on the occasion of Al-Fitr feast.

On their part, government sources close to 10 Downing Street, the British cabinet office, said "our policy is to support the Afghan elements which renounce violence and terrorism" and pointed out that the armed insurgency in Afghanistan cannot be defeated by military action alone but by dialogue and reconciliation with the moderate elements." They added that Gordon Brown's Government had repeatedly stressed in the past the importance of reconciliation in Afghanistan in order to end the insurgency and violence in the Afghan street and said reconciliation with the Taliban elements "should concentrate on renunciation of violence, not having any contacts with Al-Qaeda, and total acceptance of the Afghan constitution.

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