Twitter Thread by A.W Kakar



A.W Kakar
@awsanzar

THREAD.

In analysing the Afghan political spectrum something becomes obvious: Kabul's base is far more diverse than the Taliban's. For simplicity's sake, I'll count stronger opposition toward the Taliban than Kabul as 'pro Kabul'.

Let's assess these generally. Exceptions apply.

A diverse base isn't necessarily, however, a good thing. Appealing to everyone ensures you appeal to no one, or that your support base is so fractured that it actually becomes a liability. Think of Clinton losing the Democrat majority in Congress being a blessing in disguise.

Some pro-Kabul groupings:

1) ethnonationalists of all ethnicities. Whilst the non-Pashtuns amongst them aren't pro-Ghani, they're pro-Kabul as an institution; they see it as far more representative and amenable to their interests than the Taliban.

Some Pashtun nationalists do support the Taliban (majority Pashtun) but these are a minority. The biggest blemishes on the Taliban's Pashtun credentials:

a) The Taliban/Pakistan relationship
b) their overt Islam, which many Pashtun nationalists are hostile toward.

2) The enlightened 'roshan-fikr' demographic

Liberals/seculars. Not much intro needed: progress, freedom, spectacular gains of the last 19 years, women's rights et cetera. You generally notice quite an anti-Islam, wholesale adoption of War on Terror rhetoric in their rationale.

3) The ex-communist

Again, not much intro needed: the Taliban are Pakistani proxies just like the Mujahideen were. Pakistan is to blame, Islam is bad/needs to be de-emphasised as it is exploited.

Noticeable that whilst distinct, they share a large overlap with groups 1) and 2).

4) The religious

Generally pro-Mujahideen who consider Kabul a legitimate Islamic authority, strongly condemn the Taliban on Islamic grounds, consider their jihad void and focus on perceived unIslamic nature of the Taliban's method of war.

Massive tension between 4) and 1/2/3.

5) The partisans

Nominally pro-Kabul but not from a moral/ideological perspective, but because their favourite politicians/warlords are currently represented in Kabul's team. Willing to cut separate deals with the Taliban as long as their party's interests are upheld.

This isn't at all a coincidence. Kabul, like other regional governments, markets itself differently based on audience. It justifies its existence on ethnic, Islamic, anti-Islamic, secular, feminist grounds and as protector of minorities simultaneously, against the daunting Talib.

Having a broad base isn't inherently a liability, but as we're in the process of negotiations we can ask of Kabul the same question that is asked of the Taliban: can it retain its unity whilst its base is comprised of elements undoubtedly hostile to one another?

4) may agree with the Taliban in making Afghanistan 'Islamic'. 2&3 would object to this. Vociferously.

Many across all groups see peace as a sham. Almost all ethnicities in 1) see their existence as mortally threatened in the event of a peace deal.

How do you reconcile these?

This thread ignores a large demographic of the Taliban base, whose fractures could appear between leadership and rank and file, but aren't as glaringly ideological.

Worth noting groups 1,2&3 comprise fringe elements, yet enjoy healthy representation, for whichever reason.

There is the massive, ignored demographic: ethnically diverse whose priority is peace, aren't fond of either side, generally indifferent as to which side 'wins'.

For them, how much worse can it get? They haven't seen 'gains' Kabul boasts of, so their preservation is unimportant.

These fault-lines will become glaringly obvious as breakthroughs are achieved in the Doha talks, especially because these factions within Kabul are well connected and represented internationally. They amplify abroad what has become tiring rhetoric and sloganeering in Afghanistan.

Anyways, I wrote something similar in my first @AfgEye article on the eve of the US-Taliban deal, critiquing whether the Taliban, in the event of peace, could maintain their movement and unity in Afghanistan.

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