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Fireside Chat with **Ahmad Massoud** (VIRTUAL)

**Ahmad Massoud**, Leader of the National Resistance Front of Afghanistan

**Moderator: Fareed Zakaria**, Host, Global Public Square, CNN

Fareed Zakaria

Pleasure to have you on. Let me begin by asking you give us a sense of the state of the military operation that you are organizing. How many fighters do you have? Where are they? What is the scope? Of your military activity right now?

Ahmad Massoud

Thank you. Well, to answer that question, of course, I have to be careful with some of the information regarding the forces that we are currently having, due to the security and the internet. the confidentiality of the matter. After numerous times that we tried to talk to the Taliban negotiate with them, trying to find a way to make them realize that they need to focus on internal recognition before external recognition and trying to talk to the Afghan people they outright rejected it and because of that, and because of the brutality and everything which is following in and everyone knows about that. The resistance started currently, we are fighting the way that we fought in the time of the Soviets and guerrilla warfare tactic and we are 1000s But unfortunately, due to the lack of support, and lack of logistics, as going slowly but surely, it has started already.

Fareed Zakaria

So what I have heard is you have about 5000 fighters, mostly in the Panjshir Valley and you do not control any territory. So, so far, it looks like it's a pretty tough, uphill battle for you.

Ahmad Massoud

Of course, unfortunately, what has happened not just in the past two years, but in the past 20 is not just what the previous governance of some has done, and how conducted itself and controlled and managed the situation but also our international partners and friends how they dealt with this situation. And from negotiation to withdraw. Unfortunately, the situation is very dire. Probably this is the first time in the recent history of the world, that terrorist groups is currently controlling a geography the size of France which is Afghanistan of course, and as we are speaking, right now Afghanistan is ungoverned space and it just many groups of terrorists under the blanket of the safety of the Taliban, they were working and they are active.

Fareed Zakaria

What is your what is your strategy to take control? Can you take control of territory in the Panjshir Valley and compare this to the struggle during the Soviet era, when your father was leading that, that struggle, the Panjshir Valley never fell to the Soviets. Right now. The Taliban does largely control it

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Ahmad Massoud

well, of course and just to make it clear even at the time of this soviet soviet is so is managed to get inside Panjshir Valley. They were there for many years, but they never managed to actually capture the people and capture the soul and the heart of people that are part of something especially in the people in Panjshir and the surrounding area at that time. As we were speaking, the resistance is not only Panjshir, valley, actually in the past two years, due to the expansion of the taliban's brutality and their extremism, The resistance have increased to Bashar and two different provinces. because the total and brutality also expanded. Our strategy is very clear. We have said this many times. We do not believe that Afghanistan holds a military solution or effort in the struggle is the moral duty. That as part of the wholes society of Afghanistan the oneness and people that we are trying to fight against the tyranny and totalitarianism of the Taliban. However, we strongly believe the current situation that unfortunately the world on a wait and watch situation. It is our moral duty as a citizen of Afghanistan to fight for what we believe is right for our country and our freedom. And we believe that in Afghanistan the past 60 years, many governments they came and goes with it is the people of Afghanistan who has always been so successful, and we are sure and we are very much optimistic that taliban will also fade away and they will go away and the people will be successful. Unfortunately, we feel betrayed. We feel left alone, but we have each other in the people of afghanistan. I can say categorically, especially in the recent days, they showed that when it comes to dealing with the Taliban, engaging with the Taliban, even while watching the crimes of the Taliban, the people of Afghanistan are united in the standing together and this is our position, but unfortunately, of course, we are empty handed.

Fareed Zakaria

Why do you think, Mr. Massoud, why do you think the Americans after 20 years and hundreds of 1000s of troops were not able to succeed in Afghanistan?

Ahmad Massoud

Well, this is something that I believe they should answer, but personally, I have also my opinion and this regard. I believe that from the very beginning there has been some mistake in the strategy or wrong strategy which was being adopted to no to to work in afghanistan or somewhere And from building the government to building the army that was a copy of the American army with complete lack of resources and aerial support, and many other things which ignored the afghanistan geographic as long as somebody social structure and a person history and because of many mistakes like that, I believe that a strategic partner that could be sort of to to to create an appointment or to have a strategic partner understand and they like the beside and are having their own strategies and their own tactics and fighting against the terrorism. Of course, let's not forget that while afghanistan was hard to spot that Iraq was another place which completely diverted the attention, just the way that as we're speaking right now, the attention of the world as the beginning of this session, develop, very well centered Unfortunately, once again, attention from afghanitan us on has been diverted to ukraine and different areas. So this is another reason that after the Iraq the attention from upon us, diverted to Iraq, and they

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forgot to scale and Afghanistan, and downplay the situation upon which causes this catastrophe that we see today.

Fareed Zakaria

So, the question I was asking it another way of asking me it is why not? Why did the Americans fail? But why is the Taliban succeeded? And to me, the analogy with Ukraine is interesting because of course in Ukraine, what you have is Ukrainians fighting in large numbers. With extraordinary bravery and heroism, and all they are getting us Western material support, in your case, for the last 20 years in Afghanistan. There were American soldiers that were soldiers from other European NATO countries. When one can't help but wondering whether there were as many Afghans who wanted to fight against the Taliban, as there are Ukrainians who want to fight against the Russians. And is that part of the problem that the Taliban does have some substantial basis support? In Afghanistan, particularly among the Pashtun who are of course, the single largest ethnic group in Afghanistan. In other words, there is a there is a reality to department to the Taliban space that you cannot deny.

Ahmad Massoud

Well, in this regard let's not forget of war against the terrorism and the Taliban does not start after the 911 this is one of the misconceptions and one of the things that always are being stated. war in Afghanistan started after 2001. No, the war against the Taliban started ways before that. The people of Afghanistan stood against the taliban one with empty hand. Commander, Ahmad Massoud my father he fought against the taliban with empty hand and managed to actually ring a strategic stop to taliban ones advances across the country to the point that the Taliban were ready to talk in the slow disorder of the details of accepting an inclusive government. Unfortunately, one of the things was never listening to him. Another thing was even adapting his strategies for afghanistan even negotiation with the Taliban and also withdraw from our partners or friends especially in America, they never listen to the African side and to the to their partners and upon Listen, one of the things was in the listen to institute to my father when he mentioned about the situation of bronze and how dire serious it was. However, his solution was never for boots on the ground. It was exactly as you mentioned, that we are ready and we are going to fight and we are willing to fight for a country for freedom and for a dignified life and government. However, the support that currently Ukraine is receiving that he they never received no back in the days and this strategy of boots on the ground was something that used against him. He thought that he was going to be a wrong policy, the strategy and believes in that unfortunately, we saw the result of that. However, one thing let's not forget, one of the remarks that we have that I can say didn't have the essence of the bravery of Ukrainian for fighting against the Taliban. I want to some armed forces are probably the only group and that one that truly gave everything they had in fighting against terrorism. Let's not forget by the presence of NATO and afghanistan, afghanistan was not fighting only against the Taliban. But we were fighting against international terrorism, which did many even, maybe countries they were using them against the nation's prisons are honest. And so the bravery of soldiers and the people of Afghanistan. It is very well proven right now, even after the Taliban after the collapse upon the government and the Taliban takeover, you see that the people of Afghanistan would complete like an empty hand. They're still fighting in the mountains of Hindu Kush, and each corner ithe woman of

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Afghanistan. Let's not forget that. And hardest situation that's standing against the Taliban. But unfortunately, one thing is that always the policies and the strategy regarding all Assad was, was being shaped by the benefits. Of course and other world powers. But not that people have a wellness and otherwise we show the bravery and assume the people of Afghanistan are standing tall to fight, but they're all alone, unfortunately.

Fareed Zakaria

Let's talk about the women in Afghanistan because there are some women's groups and other Democratic groups that are trying to resist the Taliban and invade various risks, force them to already the policies or create a more inclusive government. Are you in contact with those groups? Are you trying to work together? You know, you putting some kind of military pressure on them? They putting some kind of political pressure on the Taliban?

Ahmad Massoud

Well, the thing is that we since the very first thing you have been always one thing about the current resistance when I speak of resistance. I'm not speaking only about myself or only about the religious resistance, but the resistance against the terrorism and upon us Afghan has been by different groups and different methods. And one of the major one was the woman of abundance and from the very first day they stood against the charity and against extremism. Unfortunately, they have been completely overlooked. When there was talks in Doha and also the donor agreement, which is something which is a complete different mindset and subject. However, they stood and they were speaking their voices and we started to supporting them to be an A with them, and any front that they were fighting. Unfortunately, one of the thing is that the parliament's behavior, they conducted themselves in a way that they dealt with the woman's protests and the most brutal way that in some cases when I personally was the woman went to the street when they killed the they mentioned that they were actually were hopeful, or they were praying for them to be dead than alive because of the taller one that's so horrible things to them that they are wishing to be dead than to be alive. However, all their message was that please continue and take basically a revenge from the Taliban. The women are in a very critical situation as we are speaking and then as a founder, so right now it's not governed by a constitution where government itself being governed by a set of degrees or degrees are a bunch of degrees. And this is a reality of our honest everyday which is going forward, these degrees are becoming more ethnocentric is becoming more religious centric, and also, it's creating the gender opportunities.

Fareed Zakaria

Do you think that the crucial error the United States made at the end was the deal that the Trump administration made with the Taliban in return for no attacks on Americans agreeing to draw down American troops, the deal that Mike Pompeo signed with the Taliban in the doghouse?

Ahmad Massoud

Let's go back a little back in the history just to deal with the Taliban. And my opinion after the 2001 and intervention that honestok there was a great deal of success in building a new government and also

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enjoying combination cooperation of the regional countries without basically the boots on the ground. And this was very effective in visa the effort the joint effort of the regional countries of MonoSol and the United States and the Western nation. This success was very immediate, and it was very rapid. However, later, slowly, slowly, this tension between the regional country and the presence of NATO and the policies and the strategy of fighting the Taliban, the force of war and many steps like that. It created a lot of problems and issues that arise later solely solely after the sorting of the talking with the Taliban. One of the things that many politicians have upon us and including myself in many events, we share our concerns with our friends in America that what you're doing this time with the Taliban is going to destroy every achievement of the past 20 years and as today. If you aren't willing to live in withdraw, just do it. No one invited you and no one is basically as a stopping this is your decision. We expect, however, by talking to the tower, the negotiation which was completely flawed, and we shared, we raise our voice and we talked about the time of the time that this is going to demoralize the soldiers. And this was meant to be the end of our government, which unfortunately was ignored and then to withdraw. All of it it was being happening without the consultation or without basically, the participation of the people of Afghanistan, even the government of Afghanistan and it resulted to the chaos that we see today. So therefore, it is I believe, both the government and also the Americans, they are at fault for the current situation that we are at. Because of this. I just don't say just negotiation was at was at fault. But actually this the whole process from talking to the toddler was away fighting against the Taliban, to withdraw from Afghanistan, all of that was catastrophic.

Fareed Zakaria

I finally I noticed in your, in your, in your biography. That you studied war studies at King's College in London. I'm wondering what is the biggest difference between studying a war and waging war in your view now that you got a chance to do both?

Ahmad Massoud

Well, it's a very different course of being in the battlefield. Yes, that's like 1000 universities and nowhere in the books that you read unless you find it's going to help you and the actual word this is something that I believe it might make, you know, the war and you know, the wind force happened, but of course, how to deal with it and how to manage it this complete different story.

Fareed Zakaria

Mr. Massoud, thank you for being on. It's a pleasure.

Ahmad Massoud

Thank you very much. Thank you very much. Thank you for having me.