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## The Growing Discontents among Afghan Political Class

4/2/2016

A spate of resignations of high-ranking officials from their government posts in recently seems to be appearing as a new challenge for the National Unity Government (NUG). The resignations have further compounded the trend of influential political figures including jihadi leaders and former ministers coming out opposing NUG and calling it as incompetent for leading the country in a difficult period of time. A number of MPs in the upper house of the parliament expressed concerns on Tuesday March 29, 2016 over the recent trend resignations of government officials, demanding explanations to the National Assembly. Many of the officials resigned have expressed exhaustions with pressures and interferences in their works.

The increasing resignations of government officials seem to put pressures on government that have been facing growing discontents from a broad spectrum of politicians in the country. In recent months, a number of weighty government officials including the head of National Directorate for Security (NDS), Minister of Mines and Petroleum and Minister of Interior affairs resigned from their posts. However, the resignation of the Minister of Mines is not confirmed yet by the government. Explaining the reasons for quitting his job, the head of the NDS had complained of differences over issues and enormous pressures from within the government. This is while the Minister of Mines is said to have been unhappy with his restriction of authorities and powerful people meddling the works of the ministry and ‘plundering’ Afghanistan’s natural resources.

There have also been unconfirmed reports in recent days suggesting resignations of some provincial governors and heads of independent directorates. Yousof Nuristani, the chairman of

Independent Election Commission resigned a few days ago, though his resignation was expected after the President Ghani issued a presidential decree opening the way for bringing reforms to the two key election commissions. These high-profile resignations have further put the internal divisions in NUG under spotlight with questions hovering why the officials are quitting their jobs at a difficult time when the government is unable to fill some key ministries that are already vacant.

The recent resignations are particularly signaling a stalemate within the government where the NUG leaders are unable to make consensus over key appointments and other issues. The stalemate seems to have had far-reaching impacts on key activities and plans of the ministries and virtually crippled many decision making processes within the ministries. In recent months, there have growing opposition to the government over its inability to make key appointments and bring reforms as pledged. Even some top advisors and other serving authorities have come out in criticizing the government for its inability to run the administration effectively. It is said that even the weekly cabinet meetings have been lackluster and dull as officials tend to be disinterested in regularly participating the meetings. Perhaps the most notable of the cases were the resignations of the authorities of the key security ministries. While NUG leaders unable to reach a consensus over a minister for the defense ministry, the resignations of the NDS director and the minister of interior were another blow. After the resignations, now the security agencies are all led by caretaker officials at a time when they need robust leadership in order to effectively deal with the deteriorating security situation and confront the upcoming seasonal offensive of the Taliban. While the Taliban are bracing to launch their springtime offensive, there is a major gap in leadership of the Afghan security agencies to lead this year's fight against the Taliban.

The government has been facing growing oppositions since its formation and the height of the power struggle between the two key stakeholders of the national unity government. However, discontents both among politicians within the government and others in the political spectrum have been on the rise in recent months. Many supporters of one of the two electoral camps in the 2014 presidential elections joined the critics of the national unity government in openly criticizing the government and its leaders. Maybe it is true that some of election-time supporters of one of the electoral camps are now unhappy for not receiving their expected posts. However, the discontents over the NUG performance are far beyond the election dealings and expectations. In recent months, some key political alliances and parties were formed with the main aim of pressurizing the government for bringing changes and making political reforms or being an opposition. Some politicians even have been labeling the unity government as incompetent, calling for snap presidential elections to be held for a new government. The growing discontents signify an eroding political cohesion while the country is going to face the challenge of the Taliban insurgency and a shrinking economy that would increase the burdens on the government. Very recently a top UN official called the lack of political cohesion as one of the most daunting challenges for Afghanistan in 2016.

NUG leaders need to realize that they would not be able to afford unforeseen and unexpected challenges as result of the fragile political environment in the country. NUG need to demonstrate that is well functional and headed to the right direction in order to have support from the public and the political community. For this, the leaders need to end the deadlock of the administration by making consensus over leadership and management of key government ministries and issues

of national importance such as the electoral reforms, fighting corruption and implementing the agreement that led to formation of the unity government.

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