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CHADIAN REGIME AND REBELS ALIKE WELCOME TALK OF ENDING FRENCH MILITARY PRESENCE

Indications from Paris that France may be ready to bring an end to Opération Épervier, its 25-year-old military mission in Chad, have been welcomed by both the government of President Idriss Déby and General Mahamat Nouri, commander of one of Chad's leading rebel movements. The French mission has both a land and air component and is based in two places; the airport at the capital of N'Djamena in the west and Abéché (former capital of the Sultanate of Wadai) in the east. Three Mirage 2000 jet fighters form part of the mission as do roughly 1,000 troops, mostly of the French Foreign Legion.

During talks with Chad in Paris on July 5, French Foreign Minister Alain Juppe suggested that there was no longer any reason for France to continue keeping roughly 1,000 French troops in Chad. A senior official of the Chadian Foreign Ministry said N'Djamena had no objections: "Chad is prepared to begin negotiations with French authorities as early as next week... Épervier has been in Chad for 25 years. It is time to review this structure to adapt to the current context" (AFP, July 6).

General Mahamat Nouri, the leader of the rebel Alliance nationale pour le changement démocratique (ANCD) said he was "very pleased" with the remarks of the French Foreign Minister, acknowledging that the rebels "would probably be in power were it not for the French troops." The general also hailed what he described as the French "determination to pursue a transparent, credible foreign policy in line with its historical and cultural values" (AFP, July 6). Nouri,

along with other Chadian rebel leaders living in Sudan, was expelled to Doha last year after the rapprochement between N'Djamena and Khartoum.

Chad was formed as a territory of France after the conquest of a number of small sultanates and the expulsion of the Libyan Sanusis in the early years of the 20th century. The territory eventually gained independence in 1960, though economic and security ties with France remained strong.

Opération Épervier (Sparrowhawk) began in 1986 to supply French military assistance to the regime of Hissène Habré when the Libyan army tried to seize the uranium-rich Aouzou Strip in northern Chad. When General Déby overthrew the increasingly brutal Habré in 1990 the French mission did not interfere. Habré fled to Senegal where he remained safe since Senegal had no law regarding “crimes against humanity” on its books and also wanted to avoid the considerable cost involved in trying a former head-of-state for the murders of over 40,000 individuals. Senegal recently decided to extradite Habré to Chad but reversed itself at the urging of UN human rights chief Navi Pillay, who warned Habré could be tortured if returned to Chad. Belgium has now offered to try Habré under its “universal competence” law (Reuters, July 11; AFP, July 11).

Much has changed in Chad since 2008, when Déby and his loyalists fought off a Sudanese-supported rebel invasion in the streets of N'Djamena with intelligence and logistical assistance from the French military. Déby's new confidence no doubt arises from the pact he signed with Sudan's Omar al-Bashir, in which both sides pledged to end their proxy war along the Chad-Sudan border. Though such pacts have collapsed in the past, this time Sudan is likely to be consumed by its own internal problems for a considerable time following the independence of South Sudan. Déby has also worked to fortify N'Djamena to prevent a repeat of the 2008 rebel assault. A three-meter deep trench has been built around the city to force all traffic to enter through fortified gateways. Many of N'Djamena's trees have also been cut down to prevent rebels from using them to block roads (Reuters, March 3, 2008; BBC, March 4, 2008).

During last August's celebration of 50 years of Chadian independence, Déby suggested it was time to begin charging France for maintaining a military presence in Chad. According to the President, Operation Épervier no longer played a role in Chad aside from “providing some healthcare for the sick and logistical support in case of

an attack somewhere... We have no defense accord with France. And the presence of Épervier has nothing to do with our independence or our sovereignty. Épervier is not here to help or support a government or a regime.” (*Le Figaro*, August 26, 2010).

Déby may face new security challenges in northern Chad, where a trade system based on supplies from Libya has broken down, causing severe shortages of many commodities in the region (*Le Monde*, July 7). There are some 70,000 Chadian workers who have been expelled from Libya due to the civil war as well as fears of arms reaching Chadian insurgents and criminals from uncontrolled weapons depots in Libya.

There is also speculation that Déby is seeking to replace the historical relationship with France with a less intrusive economic partnership with China. Ties with China have been steadily increasing since 2006 and the China National Petroleum Corporation has just started operations at a joint venture oil refinery outside of N'Djamena (Xinhua, July 1).

In a related development, a French court has found four men guilty of “robbery leading to death without intention to kill” in the death of Déby's son, Brahim Déby. A resident of Paris with previous convictions for drugs and weapons possession, Brahim Déby was attacked with a taser gun and covered in fire extinguisher foam in a 2007 robbery that prosecutors said had no political connection (*Le Monde*, July 7; Radio France Internationale, July 8).

TALIBAN HAIL END OF CANADIAN COMBAT MISSION IN AFGHANISTAN BUT PREDICT DISASTER FOR NEW TRAINING MISSION

The Afghan Taliban have released a statement on the Canadian military mission in Afghanistan following the scheduled withdrawal of Canadian troops from combat operations on July 7. Entitled “Remarks of the Spokesman of the Islamic Emirate Regarding the Withdrawal of the Canadian Invading Forces from Afghanistan,” the statement by Qari Mohammad Yusuf Ahmadi appeared on numerous jihadi website forums (Ansar1.info, July 8).

Since the arrival in Afghanistan of special operations forces in December 2001, the Canadian contingent has fought numerous battles against Taliban forces, losing 157 soldiers during their deployment, the majority to improvised explosive devices. The current force of 2,850 soldiers will be replaced by a team of 950 troops assigned

to train the Afghanistan National Army (ANA).

According to the Taliban spokesman, the Canadians “sustained heavy casualties in various attacks at the hands of mujahideen, compelling them to withdraw their troops from Afghanistan... In addition to the life loss, the heavy economic burden of the war dawned on the people and members of the Parliament of Canada to press the ruling regime in Canada to withdraw their forces.”

Contrary to Qari Yusuf’s claims, there was majority support in Parliament for the mission, which started under a Liberal Party government and continued under the current Conservative Party government. Opposition did come from the separatist Bloc Québécois and the socialist New Democratic Party of Canada, which has called for immediate withdrawal of Canadian troops from Afghanistan since 2006.

Qari Yusuf suggests Canadians ask their government and military just what has been accomplished in Afghanistan other than immense loss of life and equipment. If a satisfactory answer cannot be provided, Canadians should intervene to prevent the deployment of the new training mission. The Taliban spokesman warns that “the new mission of Canada under the name of military training will bring in only losses and bitter outcome like the precedent of their war mission...”

Several days after the statement, the deputy commander of the new Canadian training mission, Colonel Peter Dawe, appeared to dampen expectations of the mission in an interview with Canadian state television: “I have concerns. Nobody in the mission is naive. We’re optimistic but not naive. ...We’re not in the business of making guarantees. We certainly won’t guarantee success... Afghans don’t need to be taught how to fight. They just need to be given the critical enablers” (CBC, July 10).

The Canadian contribution to the Afghanistan campaign began with the deployment in October, 2001 of some 40 members of the highly secretive Joint Task Force 2 special operations group as part of the American-led Task-Force KBAR. In 2004, the Canadian unit was awarded the Presidential Unit Citation by the United States for its work in Afghanistan. It was the second time the award was given to a Canadian unit, having been won in the Korean War at the Battle of Kapyong by the 2nd Battalion of the Princess Patricia’s Canadian Light Infantry (PPCLI).

Over the last ten years, the Canadian military has deployed artillery, armor, special operations units and (in rotation) all three infantry regiments of the regular army, supported by volunteers from Canada’s reserve units. The air arm of the Canadian military mission (Task Force Silver Dart) provided support with helicopters, Heron unmanned aerial vehicles and CC-130 Hercules tactical airlift transports. In a deployment originally scheduled to last only until October 2003, Canadian troops were stationed at Kabul from 2002 until 2006, when they redeployed to the volatile Kandahar Province of Afghanistan. On July 7, command of their sector was handed over to the U.S. military.

Al-Qaeda Uses Pakistani Intelligence Course to Train International Operatives

By Abdul Hameed Bakier

Possibly recognizing that intelligence breakdowns played a major role in the elimination of Osama bin Laden and other al-Qaeda leaders, the al-Qaeda’s Global Islamic Media Front (GIMF) recently released a training tool entitled “The Security and Intelligence Course.” Many jihadi internet forums posted the course’s download links, ensuring widespread distribution (see ansar1.info, June 15).

According to its translator and editor, jihadi activist Obaida Abdullah al-Adam, the security and intelligence training material originally consisted of Urdu language documents obtained from Pakistan’s Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), known for its close ties to various jihadi movements. Al-Adam has previously contributed other jihadi training material in various jihadi internet forums. These works include *Sinaat al-Irahah* (“The Making of Terrorism”) and *Tariq al-Tamkeen* (“The Road of Enabling”) (as-ansar.com, March 3; muslm.net, June 22, 2010). The training course is broken down into four main parts.

Basic intelligence training

The course starts with basic security and intelligence definitions used by the internal and external security apparatus of a given state and the different responsibilities of various state security services. To emphasize the importance of external intelligence, al-Adam claims the ISI was able to deter a joint Israeli-Indian air assault on its nuclear installations after receiving intelligence from a Pakistani agent who had succeeded in penetrating the enemy's security structure. No further details are given by al-Adam on the alleged air attack plan but the claim could be an attempt to prove the training course was taken from Pakistani intelligence.

The next training block concentrates on mujahideen group operations and the criteria used to select group members. The mujahideen group members should be Muslims, enjoy a certain degree of education and be religiously motivated and "non-mundane," the latter meaning the jihadi's pure purpose must be the elevation of the Islamic nation. Al-Adam warns that intelligence services' attempts to penetrate mujahideen cells are serious as they use the same assets they use to penetrate other state intelligence agencies. Therefore, a jihadi on a mission should be fully briefed beforehand on the area of operation. The briefing must include pictures taken of the area during earlier jihadi reconnaissance operations. The photos should indicate the security measures employed around sensitive buildings and any other security details implemented by the enemy.

Al-Adam says the most likely cover story for a state intelligence agent is posing as a journalist. Other cover stories vary from posing as taxi drivers to shop owners. Al-Adam gives the example of the late Daniel Pearl, claiming Pearl was a U.S. intelligence agent posing as a journalist (Pearl was the South Asia bureau chief of *The Wall Street Journal* when he was kidnapped and killed by the mujahideen in 2002). The personal characteristics of a cell member and the security procedures of each cell are also discussed at length in the training course. Other training includes the secure exchange of classified documents between the mujahideen. Mujahideen are cautioned not to carry their original passports when going on a mission; instead, passports with false personal information must be used by travelling mujahideen.

On communications, the course suggests the internet and mobile phones are preferred for fast and frequent connections between the mujahideen. Earlier jihadi forums have posted technical material containing

more detailed training on secure mobile phone communications (see *Terrorism Monitor*, September 8, 2006). Any exchange of highly classified information between mujahideen leaders should be done through handwritten letters conveyed by carriers trained in concealment methods. Some concealment methods are discussed in the course, as well as the personal security steps the travelling mujahideen should implement. Methods suggested to conceal a letter include hiding it inside a pen, a toothpaste tube, a book, or a child's milk bottle.

The course recommends going to a pre-designated area where the letter will be handed to the recipient after anti-surveillance procedures have been applied. The letter should be passed on through a handshake, inside a newspaper or in what is known as "brush contact" in intelligence parlance.

The course offers other basic and essential training for intelligence gathering operations such as conducting successful clandestine meetings in safe houses, different types of surveillance, communicating through dead drops and face-to-face intelligence gathering techniques using proper elicitation, questioning and interrogation methods.

Propaganda

Although the counter-propaganda measures suggested in the course are basic, the course seeks to raise mujahideen awareness to the existence of such operations by counterterrorism forces to reduce the effectiveness of such efforts by security forces against the mujahideen. Suggested counter-measures to propaganda include:

- Keeping the group busy with operations and training.
- Immediately informing the mujahideen of any propaganda and refuting it.
- Punishing anyone spreading the propaganda among the mujahideen.
- Increasing the mujahideen's religious awareness.
- Ensuring full obedience to the group's Amir (leader).

The effectiveness of anti-extremism campaigns such as Saudi Arabia's *assakina* ("tranquility from God"),

launched in 2003 to refute the Salafi-Jihadi ideology and deter possible al-Qaeda recruits, would be much reduced if the mujahideen can be made to believe that any religious argument against extremism made by moderate Islamic entities or individuals is a lie (see assakina.com, July 17, 2010).

Deep cover operations

Almost all training blocks in the course can be classed as conventional intelligence and security training except for the section on deep cover operations. Such operations are considered advanced intelligence and are practiced mostly by sophisticated intelligence agencies against priority targets in high risk areas. The training course implies that deep cover operations require more time and effort than conventional intelligence operations. Deep cover training enhances the ability of the mujahideen to plant sleeper cells in target countries that possess advanced intelligence and security forces. The fact that the mujahideen training course was translated from Urdu to English for the benefit of mujahideen in America and Europe, as al-Adam says at the prelude, is an indication of where the mujahideen are planning their future terror attacks.

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Pakistan's Jamaat-ud-Dawa Steps Up Campaign of Anti-American Rhetoric

By Animesh Roul

Despite the Pakistan government's proscription, the Islamic charity Jamaat-ud-Dawa (JuD) has stepped up its overt anti-Indian and anti-Western rhetoric, holding mass protest rallies across Pakistan as its leaders continue to give provocative speeches in various public forums to fuel Jihadi sentiments and

threaten Indian and Western interests in the region. The JuD is believed to act as a front organization for the Lashkar-e-Taiba terrorist group, responsible for the 2008 assault on Mumbai.

Following the death of al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden, hundreds of JuD activists descended into the streets of Pakistan's main cities, including Karachi and Lahore, to offer special "funerary prayers in absentia" (*ghaibana namaz-e-janaza*) in early May and to pronounce Bin Laden a martyr (*The News* (Islamabad) May 4). Days later, scores of JuD activists joined members of other Islamic radical groups to organize a rally in Karachi of the *Tahaffuz-e-Harmain Sharfain* ("Defense of the Two Noble Sanctuaries," i.e. Mecca and Madinah), a movement in defense of holy mosques in Saudi Arabia led by a group of radical Pakistani clerics. The rally was intended to support the government of Saudi Arabia against "conspiracies" hatched against the Kingdom by the United States and its allies (*Daily Times* [Lahore], May 7).

On June 20, JuD organized a similar campaign under the auspices of a radical pressure group known as the Dafaye Pakistan Forum (Defense of Pakistan Forum), bringing out a ten-point declaration at an event held in the Jamia al-Dirasat Islamia seminary in Karachi. The declaration described the United States as an enemy of Pakistan and warned India against any military adventures that would threaten Pakistan. During this event, JuD leaders Amir Hamza and Abdul Rhaman Makki joined leaders of Ahle Sunnat wa'l-Jamaat and Jamaat-e-Islami in calling for the imposition of an "Islamic system" in Pakistan. The JuD leaders also asked India to hand over Hindu radicals suspected in the 2007 India-Pakistan Samjhauta Express train bombing, in which nearly 70 people (mostly of Pakistan origin) were killed (*Express Tribune* [Karachi], June 22).

The JuD (formerly known as Markaz Dawa wa'l-Irshad) was founded in Lahore, Pakistan in the mid-1980s with an Ahle Hadith (Wahhabi) orientation. JuD has long been known to be a front for the terrorist group Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), the perpetrator of numerous attacks against India, including the November 2008 Mumbai episode. The Islamabad government launched a brief military operation against JuD/LeT hideouts and training camps in the early weeks of December 2008 under pressure from the United States and India, arresting many top operatives, including Hafiz Saeed and Zaki-ur-Rehman Lakhvi, the masterminds of the November 2008 Mumbai attacks (for more on Saeed see

Militant Leadership Monitor, June 2010). Hafiz Saeed was later released from detention for lack of evidence and continues to make incendiary high-profile speeches with apparent impunity.

Pakistani Interior Minister Rehman Malik recently told Indian journalists that Pakistan is willing to arrest Saeed if India can provide proof of his involvement in the Mumbai attacks: “We detained him but the court asked us to let him go. Law does not go by statements but evidence. If we are provided actionable evidence, we will act against him” (*The Hindu*, June 29).

In a recent Urdu-language interview, Hafiz Saeed questioned the sincerity of India in solving the Kashmir issue (*Khabrain* [Islamabad], June 24). To mark Kashmir Solidarity Day last February, Saeed openly threatened to launch a *ghazwa-e-hind* (battle against India) unless India quits Jammu and Kashmir. He also described the UN as a “slave to the United States.”

In early July, Saeed raised the issue of India’s dam building efforts on the Himalayan rivers that are expected to create massive environmental, economic and cultural change as well as displace hundreds of thousands of people. At the same time, Saeed accused India of using dialogue with Pakistan as a weapon to consolidate military occupation in Kashmir (*Nawa-i Waqt* [Rawalpindi], July 1). India has been linking the resumption of the dialogue process with the prosecution of the perpetrators of the 2008 Mumbai attacks, including Hafiz Saeed.

While continuing his tirades against India, Israel and the United States, Hafiz Saeed has also attempted to use Pakistan’s legal system to halt U.S. drone attacks in Pakistan’s tribal areas, ostensibly riding on a wave of anti-American sentiment across Pakistan. In June, Saeed filed a petition in the Lahore High Court (LHC) requesting the implementation of the parliamentary resolution passed on May 14 against drone strikes (*Express Tribune*, June 21). According to the resolution, the United States is to be warned that unless drone strikes cease, supplies to Afghanistan-based NATO forces passing through Pakistan will be cut (*The Nation* [Lahore], June 25). The government remains tight lipped about the matter so far, but in the meantime, the LHC extended the deadline for the Pakistan government to reply to the petition until July 13 (*The News* [Islamabad], July 8).

The LHC has also sought a reply from the government’s

Foreign Ministry about another petition moved by Saeed in January this year, seeking government assistance to defend himself in the Mumbai attack case in an American court. Saeed has been named in a lawsuit brought by the son of two U.S. nationals who were killed in the Mumbai assault, Rabbi Gabriel Noah Holtzberg and his wife Rivka Holtzberg. Also named in the suit are current ISI chief Lieutenant General Ahmed Shuja Pasha, former ISI chief Nadeem Taj, and two other men alleged to be current or former ISI officers, Major Iqbal and Major Sameer Ali. While the ISI personnel have received legal support from Islamabad, Saeed has been denied the same assistance. Saeed argued in his petition that all citizens are considered equal under the Pakistani constitution and he should receive the same assistance as the ISI officers (*The News*, July 1; *The Express Tribune*, July 1). The JuD has alleged the case against Hafiz Saeed is part of a political conspiracy with no legal credibility. The LHC has directed the Foreign Ministry to file a response in this regard by September 20 (*The News*, July 1).

The JuD’s firebrand chief Hafiz Saeed and his close associate Amir Hamza often dare the Pakistani establishment to take action against them, touting their public support base and the lack of terrorist evidence against them in either Pakistan or in India. Despite the JuD being placed on the U.S. list of terrorist groups in 2006 and the United Nations’ list of terrorist organizations in 2008, the JuD sees no impact from these designations on their operations. Amir Hamza has pointed out several times that Pakistan’s legal system has cleared their names time and time again while emphasizing the support the JuD still garners in Pakistan for their humanitarian works, such as disaster relief. Interestingly, the Pakistan government continues to ignore the JuD’s provocations, giving no indication that further moves against the group are pending.

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From Islamic Emirate to Nationalist Insurgency: Reckoning with Afghanistan's Taliban Irreconcilables

By Derek Henry Flood

Though the concept of Afghan and Western reconciliation with the Mullah Mohammad Omar-led Taliban has gained much momentum, the consequences of some kind of *ad hoc* settlement between the Islamists and the government of President Hamid Karzai have not been clearly defined. Opposition is growing within some quarters in Afghanistan to a settlement that would give the Taliban access to power. Much of this opposition is being led by heirs to the late anti-Taliban leader Ahmad Shah Massoud, particularly former Foreign Minister Dr. Abdullah Abdullah and the former head of the Afghan National Directorate of Security Amrullah Saleh. As Saleh recently told a rally in Kabul: “We have not forgotten the burning of our homeland and the humiliation of the men and women of Afghanistan...But you [Karzai] are still calling these people [the Taliban] ‘brother’” (AP, May 5).

A Bitter Legacy

Since the Taliban were ejected from central Kabul in November 2001, the movement has transformed itself from a mostly unrecognized government to a Pashtun ethno-nationalist insurgency with its roots in the anti-Soviet jihad that consumed the country throughout the 1980s.

In Dr. Abdullah's recent open letter to President Karzai, the former foreign minister states emphatically, “In the reconciliation process, one of the clear red-lines for any negotiated settlement has been that the reconcilable Taliban must accept the Constitution.” [1] Abdullah, by drawing such a red-line, has been interpreted by many as rejecting the very notion of reconciling with a movement whose *raison d'être* is the implementation of a brutal interpretation of Islamic law at any cost.

Dr. Abdullah's colleague, Amrullah Saleh, is one of the most ardent anti-Taliban figures in Afghanistan and is outraged by Karzai's overtures to senior Taliban leaders, making no effort to hide his disdain after serving alongside the President for years. Saleh, now in opposition to Karzai after an abrupt departure from

his post in June 2010, has formed a nascent movement based on his Panjshiri Tajik power-base calling itself the Basij-e-Melli (BeM). Saleh is keen to insist that his movement is not solely a Tajik one as it also contains a number of Hazaras and anti-Taliban Pashtuns from eastern Afghanistan. The bedrock belief of BeM, according to Saleh, is that the Taliban are not simply misguided Afghan “brothers” (as Karzai has been known to term them), but a nefarious group directly controlled by the Pakistani state, with which it seeks to control Afghanistan by proxy when NATO-ISAF forces finally depart.

Together, Abdullah and Saleh represent a sector of the Afghan population that does not want to see a decline in the gains made by women and ethnic and religious minorities since the Taliban's ouster. While there has been much made of the idea of bringing Taliban leaders in from the cold, Afghans directly affected by the former regime's vengeful ethnic cleansing of Tajiks in the Shomali Plain and Hazaras in Mazar-e-Sharif have no desire to see these men brought back to power in even the most modest fashion. In a June 2011 op-ed, Amrullah Saleh countered Karzai's dubious overtures to the Taliban's Quetta *shura* [consultative council], stating that Karzai risks creating a “Hezbollah-type entity” out of the Taliban if they are not entirely disarmed in southern Afghanistan (Bloomberg, June 15). Skeptics of American and British intentions for the future of Afghanistan suggest that the delayed drawdown of a large-scale foreign troop presence coupled with the co-opting of certain amenable Taliban elements is part of a convoluted ruse to establish permanent military installations in Afghanistan (*Pakistan Observer*, July 7; see also *Terrorism Monitor* Brief, June 30). With the killing of Osama bin Laden and the decoupling of the UN's al-Qaeda and Taliban sanctions list, some in Afghanistan believe the Western powers want to get out of the business of war-fighting and into the business of energy, using a rump occupation force as a hammer-like guarantor of their interests.

The Role of Energy in Reconciliation

The Taliban have once again become an important player in the seemingly unending regional competition between two large-scale natural gas pipeline proposals. The competing projects, known as the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India pipeline (TAPI) and the Iran-Pakistan-India pipeline (IPI), have been the topic of much speculation in this fitfully integrating mega-region for years. Both proposals are fraught with

inherent security dilemmas. TAPI has been affected by a resurgent Taliban throughout much of its planned route in Afghanistan while IPI is plagued by the unending Balochi nationalist rebellion in the Pakistan section of its route. The transit countries that would be involved are experiencing constant energy shortages in their major urban centers and both TAPI and IPI have promised to relieve these fuel gaps. Recently, a rapprochement of sorts has taken place between Kabul and Islamabad with the signing of the Afghanistan-Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement, which one commentary described as holding “great promise for the prosperity of the whole region” (*The Frontier Post* [Peshawar], June 30).

Though enthusiasm for TAPI has appeared to be outpacing that for IPI concurrently with the talk of Taliban reconciliation, Tehran is far from leaving the playing field. Iranian officials told their Indian counterparts that their plan only runs into one insurgency; that of Pakistan’s restive Balochis, and that TAPI, beginning in Turkmenistan’s Dauletabad gas fields and terminating in the Indian state of Punjab, is much more vulnerable to attacks by non-state actors. Iranian government officials have tried to sell IPI as the less dangerous of the two projects, stating that Balochistan will, over time, reap the benefits of transit fees which will eventually calm the insurrection there as the local inhabitants see improvements in their quality of life (*The Hindu*, June 17). The role of Pakistan as the swing state between the two proposals is both critical and complex. The government of President Asif Ali Zardari is viewed domestically as being under immense pressure to implement TAPI and abandon IPI, thereby further isolating their neighbors on the Iranian plateau. Taut bilateral relations already exist between Pakistan and Iran from years of sectarian Sunni-Shi’a proxy conflict and the anti-Shi’a pogroms conducted by the Sunni-chauvinist Taliban during their five years in power in Afghanistan.

A retired Pakistani army brigadier suggested that for TAPI to leave the drawing board and become a ground reality, the project’s planners would require the “cooperation and support of the Afghan Taliban” to secure a route through the volatile provinces of Helmand and Kandahar (*The Nation* [Islamabad], December 19, 2010). Though Islamabad is officially supportive of TAPI, it has not entirely abandoned IPI as an option should the former project collapse (*Khabrain*, July 4). At times, Islamabad’s precise position can appear ambiguous; Prime Minister Syed Yusuf Raza Gillani said that both TAPI and “joint gas and electricity

projects with Iran were in [the] pipeline” (Geo TV, July 4). The elusive notion of Afghanistan becoming an energy corridor began in the mid-1990s, as interest in Turkmenistan’s natural gas reserves set off a largely unrealistic competition among Western companies to court the Taliban led by the reclusive Mullah Omar in Kandahar. Today, the natural gas dream has been set alight once again by a host of indigenous political actors across the region.

Deep Divisions over the American Military Presence

In a joint March press conference with former Interior Minister Mohammed Hanif Atmar, Amrullah Saleh stated that the Taliban were an unrepentant organization that, if given the chance, would renew its scorched earth policy without hesitation. Saleh said that if the West were to pull out of Afghanistan entirely following some kind of settlement with the Taliban, Afghanistan would once again suffer in the throes of a proxy war (Mandegar.com, March 5). Saleh’s rhetoric is seen as increasingly divisive by the pro-talks camp in Kabul which views his opposition to all things Taliban as a stumbling block on the road to a cessation of hostilities.

Those allies of Karzai who are pushing for increased contacts with the Taliban leadership believe that former Afghan government officials now embittered with the president are purposefully sabotaging the very concept of peace talks because they are unfavorable to their personal agendas (*Hewad* [Kabul], March 5). Saleh and Atmar stressed the need for a continued U.S. military mission in Afghanistan beyond the scope of Operation Enduring Freedom, likely as a means of keeping meddling neighbors at bay (*Weesa* [Kabul], March 5). Atmar believes that Kabul would do better to keep the U.S. military in the country guiding it towards an Afghans-first policy rather than have them abandon the country altogether, thereby turning it into a regional battleground (Pajhwok Afghan News, March 5).

There has been intense debate in recent months in the Afghan media over the future role of the United States inside Afghanistan contrasted against what some see as the overwhelming leverage of the Pakistani state among both the Afghan polity and the Afghan Taliban. The Saleh-Atmar narrative paints the continued U.S. presence, if carried out with increasing sensitivity to local desires, as a means of emancipating Afghanistan from the influence of neighboring states that seek to dominate it while delicately avoiding being subsumed by an American agenda. If Afghans can get Washington

to commit to certain obligations that will guarantee a balance between sovereignty and security in their country, then many believe that the benefits of an entrenched U.S. presence there would far outweigh its potential negative impact domestically (*Hasht-e-Sobh*, March 5).

Conclusion

As the ill-defined concept of Taliban reconciliation moves forward in fits and starts, those who were once part of a comparatively hopeful, if ineffective, unity government in Kabul are now disaffected with one another in a terribly unproductive fashion.

All the elements of the web of interlocking and competing interests at work in Afghanistan today will be impossible to satisfy simultaneously. Domestic political and economic pressures within the United States are making a never-ending military commitment in Afghanistan unsustainable while a host of Coalition allies are looking for the exit, such as Canada, which formally declared an end to its combat mission on July 7 (*Globe and Mail* [Toronto], July 6). Pakistan seeks to hold a tether on the Afghan Taliban even as the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and other domestic insurgent groups are shredding the social fabric of Pakistani society with each suicide attack. Iran is loath to see the re-emergence of the Deobandi Sunni Taliban in any form that may threaten its Shi'a and Persian-speaking Afghan clients even though it has been asserted Tehran provides military assistance to some Taliban elements along its border in southwestern Afghanistan to act as an irritant to foreign troops there (AP, March 9).

The Taliban continue to vigorously deny claims that they have entered into direct talks with either the United States or the United Kingdom as doing so would contravene their oft-stated condition that negotiations may only take place once all foreign troops have departed. As a Taliban spokesman said, "It is clear as the broad daylight that we consider negotiation in [the] presence of foreign forces as a war stratagem of the Americans and their futile efforts" (Reuters, July 6). President Karzai has created a series of initiatives aimed at courting or co-opting the "reconcilable" Afghan Taliban. Karzai, along with former Afghan President Burhanuddin Rabbani, has established a Joint Peace Commission with the Pakistani government. Pakistani Prime Minister Gilani stated, "I fully endorse that statement [in which Zardari] said that a war in

Afghanistan can destabilize Pakistan and it is vice versa so the war on terrorism is directly affecting Pakistan not only in [the] form of casualties but in [the] form of economy as well" (Tolo News, April 17).

Karzai has also formed the High Council of Peace as a multi-ethnic mechanism to facilitate talks with his adversaries. The council has become a controversial effort for including several notorious Taliban figures, including Maulvi Mohammed Qalamuddin, the former head of the Islamic Emirates religious police (see *Militant Leadership Monitor*, June 2011). Other reviled officials in the Taliban regime have been included in the peace building body by Karzai in order to lend credibility to those still following Mullah Omar and the original *shura* leaders. Over the course of the last several years, talks between the Karzai government and the Afghan Taliban have been reported in various locales including Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and somewhat incongruously, a stunning holiday resort in the Maldives (AP, February 17, 2010). In each instance, Taliban spokesmen consistently deny they have made such contacts, perhaps for fear of losing the confidence of active guerillas engaging in contact with Afghan security forces and ISAF troops. When former Finance Minister Ashraf Ghani confirmed that talks were indeed taking place with certain Taliban factions, Taliban commander Doran Safi shot back, "I confirm that none of us will lay down arms even if he is paid mountains of money; none of us would abandon the right path" (al-Jazeera, January 30, 2010).

The earlier strategy of a hammer-and-anvil approach of defeating the Taliban - with the U.S. military and the Afghan National Army as the hammer and the Pakistani Army on the other side of the Durand Line as the anvil - was a failure. Pakistani village-flattening military incursions in the tribal regions led to the further Talibanization of large swathes of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and Khyber-Pukhtoonkhwa Province, resulting in a series of suicide attacks in many of Pakistan's major urban centers. The current strategy of assassinating mid-level Taliban field commanders while reaching out to those willing to talk to Kabul and Washington was promulgated by now former Defense Secretary Robert Gates as the only means of ending the war (*The News*, July 5; *USA Today*, June 27). However, defining the "end of the war" as the withdrawal of Western troops ignores the fact several very prominent Karzai opponents do not appear ready to accept the return of the Taliban in any form. This may take the war in a new direction, one in which

ethnic and religious factions are reconstituted along barely dormant fault lines, leaving no end in sight to this decades-long power struggle in the heart of Asia.

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Notes:

1. Dr. Abdullah Abdullah, "Upholding Constitutional Principles and Rule of Law in Afghanistan," Open Letter to President Hamid Karzai, July 5, 2011.